Foucault Studies

SYMPOSIUM

Preface to Symposium on
Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson's
Genealogies of Terrorism

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Readers of Foucault who admire the achievements of his histories of the present often wonder what would be involved in writing the genealogy of our present today. From whence have we been formed? In what do we find the differentiation of today from yesterday? And how do we find *our* present today different from the present about which *Foucault* wrote some decades ago?

Were Foucault with us today still writing (and interviewing and speaking), these questions would no doubt take a different form than they must for us, given the contingency of the cessation of his investigations. Foucault died at a comparatively young age in 1984, in the midst of a tragic and tragically-long health crisis which certainly also afflicted Foucault himself and hastened his death. At the heart of the A.I.D.S. crisis (not only in the 1980s but certainly most poignantly in that decade) were long-standing social exclusions and inequalities formed by intersecting trajectories of the politics of health and the politics of sexuality. Those trajectories formed a cross-hairs in which so many who suffered were directly targeted. Their targeting was, however, not necessarily (or at least not entirely) a result of direct intentions on the part of officials of the state who perpetrated a direct crime against them. Rather, their targeting was the result of an often-unintended concatenation of political technologies that levied the heaviest tolls on populations regularly situated as bearing the burden of all manner of political inequalities and subordinations. Foucault, in many different ways, fell into those cross-hairs. His early death was, at least in part, and certainly in some significant part, the not-innocent result of an assemblage of political technologies for which nobody in particular was particularly guilty. Something much more extensive, and much more insidious, was what drove and motivated the targeting which took a hold of Foucault and so many others in the 1980s.

It cannot but be regarded as one of those particularly cruel contingencies of history that Foucault's own death befell him in exactly the manner of the style of operation of power that most fascinated him throughout his life. If Foucault taught us to understand the

complicated and contingent operations of power in the present, his death exemplifies the very stakes of the necessity of that understanding. At the same time, Foucault's death also raises for us the related, yet surely quite separate, question of how to understand power after Foucault in *our* present. Foucault's death, as it recedes further and further into our past, increases the stakes of reanimating and revivifying his methods as means of understanding how power operates in our present. Those operations are, in some contexts, continuous with Foucault's own analyses of the biopolitics of sexuality, health, and medicine as well as his related analyses of the disciplinary anatomopolitics of criminalization, psychiatrization, and surveillance. In other contexts, however, the operations of power with which we are confronted today occur in ways that importantly depart from the sites of inquiry that animated Foucault's analyses almost fifty years ago.

When we consider those who, in our twenty-first century present, are targets of the exercise of power, it is undeniable that the discourse of terrorism has come to be a major force in locating those cross-hairs. Thus a book such as Verena Erlensbusch-Anderson's *Genealogies of Terrorism* is a strikingly timely exemplar for understanding how to develop a genealogical analysis of the operations of power. *Genealogies of Terrorism* provides an archaeological and genealogical analysis of the operations of power that define and design the twenty-first century politics of terrorism that form such a large agenda for politics today. In other words, *Genealogies of Terrorism* does for (part of) our present what Foucault's own genealogies and archaeologies did for (part of) his present. Erlenbusch-Anderson's book builds, sometimes more implicitly and sometimes more explicitly, on a range of previous works that have also redeployed Foucault's "methods" in the context of studying varying presents. When I think of these predecessors, three works come to mind for me: Arnold Davidson's *The Emergence of Sexuality* (at least the first two chapters), Ian Hacking's *The Taming of Chance*, and thirdly, and certainly most directly relevant to Erlenbusch-Anderson's own analyses, Ladelle McWhorter's *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy.*

What *Genealogies of Terrorism* adds to this list certainly includes: a reanimation of genealogical methods for understanding the contingencies of the concertation out of which twenty-first century discourse about the politics of terrorism has been formed, a resulting more thorough (because more complicated and more empirically informed) understanding of the discourse of terrorism which continues to seize so many lives and bodies today, and an extensive range of reflections on the value, stakes, meaning, and design of genealogical method as an option for political theory.

The symposium on Erlenbusch-Anderson's *Genealogies of Terrorism* featured here resulted from the gracious and generous engagements of three scholars of Foucault's work (and Continental Philosophy more broadly) who have taken up the book along the lines very summarily laid out above. How does genealogy help us understand dominant (and dominating) operations of power in our present? How does this understanding also refract through our understanding of potential sites for, and practices of, resistance to these dominating exercises of power? How does an understanding of power's manifold

operations, and its multiplicitous resistances, relate to the actual practical enactment of power and that which resists it? These are among the crucial questions posed by Erlenbusch-Anderson's book that are sharpened here by the delicate engagements of Samir Haddad, Sarah Hansen, and Cressida Heyes. These questions, as our commentators make clear, matter enormously both for the politics of our present and to any of us who might think that genealogy can contribute something important (be it in the form of understanding, explanation, diagnosis, resistance, and/or normative engagement) to our present. In her illuminating reply to these three engagements with her work, Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson continues to help us understand why genealogy matters, or at least why it can come to matter when it is done with the kind of exhaustive archival labor, methodological precision, analytic attention, and stylistic verve that characterizes not only Foucault's genealogies but also, and just as surely, *Genealogies of Terrorism*.

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