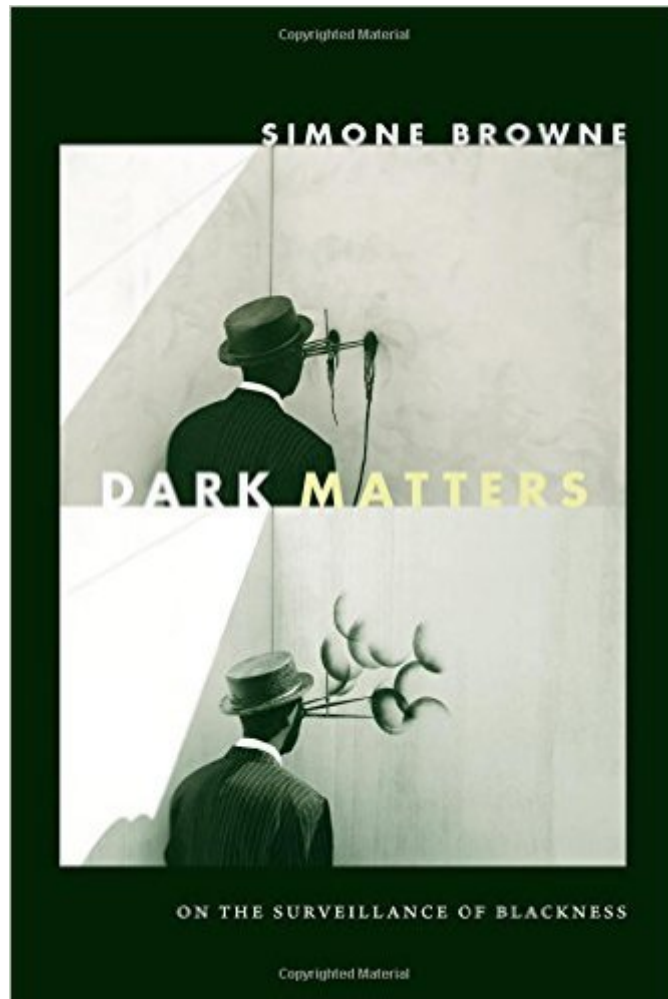


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# Dark Matters: On The Surveillance Of Blackness



## Synopsis

In *Dark Matters* Simone Browne locates the conditions of blackness as a key site through which surveillance is practiced, narrated, and resisted. She shows how contemporary surveillance technologies and practices are informed by the long history of racial formation and by the methods of policing black life under slavery, such as branding, runaway slave notices, and lantern laws. Placing surveillance studies into conversation with the archive of transatlantic slavery and its afterlife, Browne draws from black feminist theory, sociology, and cultural studies to analyze texts as diverse as the methods of surveilling blackness she discusses: from the design of the eighteenth-century slave ship *Brooks*, Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, and *The Book of Negroes*, to contemporary art, literature, biometrics, and post-9/11 airport security practices. Surveillance, Browne asserts, is both a discursive and material practice that reifies boundaries, borders, and bodies around racial lines, so much so that the surveillance of blackness has long been, and continues to be, a social and political norm.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Simone Browne's *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* is a fascinating interdisciplinary book that provides a critical intervention into the field of surveillance studies by bringing it into conversation with a diverse set of disciplines, including Black feminist thought, critical race theory, sociology, geography, criminology, and cultural studies. Throughout *Dark Matters*, Browne advances the carefully constructed argument that contemporary surveillance practices and

technologies emerge from historical and contemporary conditions of anti-black racism in the United States and Canada. Browne skillfully critiques the under-theorization of race within surveillance studies without ever suggesting an outright dismissal, rather she shows readers how such a limitation can be addressed by providing an overview of developments in American surveillance practices and procedures as informed by historical and ongoing anti-black racism similar to a genealogy. To reveal the manner in which anti-blackness has informed modern surveillance, Browne delves into what she refers to as the archives of the Atlantic Slave Trade and its Aftermath beginning with the Door of No Return, a figurative and literal door leading to ships intended to transport enslaved bodies to American and British colonies. From there, *Dark Matters* deftly moves across a number of sites and spaces over different time periods, including Brooks (1789), the plantation, the streets of New York City, eBay.com, and airport terminals and planes. To better explain certain racialized surveillance practices, policies, and technologies, Browne introduces some very interesting theoretical concepts throughout the book that I found helpful.

Simone Browne's *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, is a beautifully written disruption, analysis, conversation, and invitation. Browne carefully moves through archive of the transatlantic slave trade and its afterlife to provide a critical and necessary intervention into surveillance studies. I came to this book with little background on surveillance studies, but Browne generously provided a clear and engaging overview of the major principles and scholars of this study. In this book, Browne identifies a gap that exists in the discipline: dark matters. Dark matters is about understanding how race has historically, and continuously, structured surveillance practices. Browne approaches this work through a racialized and critical lens, arguing that when Blackness enters the framework of surveillance, it troubles how this discipline has been, and continues to be, theorized. As she describes it, "Drawing a black line", Browne uses Black feminist scholarship to re-interpret and complicate surveillance studies. Moreover, Browne considers dark sousveillance as the ways that surveillance is resisted, challenged, and responded to. Browne's focus on sousveillance sheds light on how surveillance practices are subverted and refused. From escaping enslavement to contemporary art pieces, Black people continue to talk back to a surveillance state. To me, this is what Black Twitter aptly calls a "clapback". What I found especially refreshing about this book was how Browne clearly, but thoughtfully, approached concepts. This is a book for the academic and non-academic alike. She works with highly theoretical concepts and speaks to academic work, but situates it in historical references, contemporary examples, stories, and anecdotes.

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