



Black Prometheus: Race and Radicalism in the Age of Atlantic Slavery

Jared Hickman

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How did an ancient mythological figure who stole fire from the gods become a face of the modern, lending his name to trailblazing spaceships and radical publishing outfits alike? How did Prometheus come to represent a notion of civilizational progress through revolution--scientific, political, and spiritual--and thereby to center nothing less than a myth of modernity itself? The answer *Black Prometheus* gives is that certain features of the myth--its geographical associations, iconography of bodily suffering, and function as a limit case in a long tradition of absolutist political theology--made it ripe for revival and reinvention in a historical moment in which freedom itself was racialized, in what was the Age both of Atlantic revolution and Atlantic slavery. Contained in the various incarnations of the modern Prometheus--whether in Mary Shelley's esoteric novel, *Frankenstein*, Denmark Vesey's real-world recruitment of slave rebels, or popular travelogues representing Muslim jihadists against the Russian empire in the Caucasus-- is a profound debate about the means and ends of liberation in our globalized world. Tracing the titan's rehabilitation and unprecedented exaltation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries across a range of genres and geographies turns out to provide a way to rethink the relationship between race, religion, and modernity and to interrogate the Eurocentric and secularist assumptions of our deepest intellectual traditions of critique.

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