

## INTRODUCTION

---

### *Predatory Data*

#### CIVIC AMPUTATIONS IN THE GLOBAL DATA ECONOMY

THIS PROJECT BEGINS WITH A PROPOSITION. What would it mean to narrate the origins of our contemporary data economy not with the conventional knowledge centers, academic vanguards, and industry settings that have dominated explanations of the advance of our present information age, but with another kind of temporal setting? That setting is the racialized datafication fever that fed the rise of what was arguably the twentieth century's first popular, globally expansive information movement when eugenic ambitions aimed to provide universal methods for predicting and perfecting the human race over a century ago.

To suggest that we expand how we locate the origins of our contemporary data economy, and to pin its growth around eugenics' segregationist history, is to not only decenter the dominant narrative of the information age from the familiar cast of Western technological heroes, genius male disruptors, and enterprise-seeking rebels that have been popularly celebrated as daring visionaries of a new computational future. It is to give name also to the political violences and explicitly raced, gendered, classed, and geopolitical dispossessions of the information age that, even while largely unspoken, have laid long and deep at its very foundations. Necessarily then, it is to call for the need to dislodge the monofuturist temporal lenses that have powerfully framed the ascendance of artificial intelligence and big data systems as the now singular culmination of technological "genius." Such lenses have insisted on information industries' principal protagonism in the course of history, drowning out all other alternative paths for future worlding against the percussive imperative for technological "revolution." They have not only cast the roots of our information past in a raceless and genderless shroud of innocent discovery and innovation-seeking ambition, but have ensured that

the overriding trajectory of the contemporary data economy remains perceived as inescapably evolutionary and progress driven. In doing so, they have seen to an intensification of anti-pluralist appetites, such that broadcastings for radical civic dissolution and necropolitical nationalist extermination are now mundane features of the informatic every day.

Against such a backdrop, eugenics' turn-of-the-century disinformation age and the conditions that allowed its violent advance over the course of half a century indeed bear new resonance. Over a century ago, eugenics researchers in the West—anxiously facing globalization's modern advent and growing independence and abolition struggles around the world—seeded a cross-continental movement to “optimize” society in the image of White Western elites and knowledge classes. They developed and promoted a suite of data-driven evaluation techniques and surveillance instruments to prevent what they projected as the “degeneration” of Western nations' genetic futures. While often dismissed today as a fringe movement or pseudoscience, eugenics was once a powerful global force in which prosegregationist visions and targeted extermination campaigns gained prominence far beyond Nazi Germany. This included the founding of research and information infrastructures to measure and market claims around essential human inequality and the risk of living in pluralistic societies where democratic freedoms could be broadly extended. Indeed, well before the start of World War II, eugenicists in the United States had institutionalized historic policy gains spanning the establishment of racialized immigration bans and quotas, forced sterilization of “dysgenic” populations, and the normalization of predictive uses of intelligence tests to promote and sustain the segregation of a “cognitive elite” from “degrading” populations. First promoted by male scientific elites and patrician classes in the United Kingdom and United States, eugenics advanced a monocultural, Western supremacist agenda. This was done by leveraging “rational,” data-driven techniques to address and predict the “problems” of globally pluralizing societies. By eugenicists' account, such problems were spurred through the rise of international migration and the spread of new political imaginaries that seeded new potentials for social change at the turn of the twentieth century, when diverse classes, races, political collectives, and their own dreams of freedom had more mobility than ever before.

*Predatory Data* brings together the globally mediated dimensions of that information past with our data-driven present to underscore eugenics as an overlooked forerunner to contemporary operationalizations of what this project frames as predatory data. Drawing together such cross-temporal

developments underscores predatory data as not merely a distinctive symptom of the contemporary. It highlights instead the persistent continuity of predatory data methods across generations, drawing attention to how the targeted monitoring and dispossession of minoritized populations were not merely incidental outcomes of data economies. They were, rather, essential consequences of dispossessive and profit-generating knowledge regimes that demanded the instrumentalization and continuous profiling of vast populations. From their earliest efforts, eugenicists targeted minoritized populations in particular to generate the excess of data and evaluation techniques that conditioned the rise of new classes of information elites. *Predatory Data* highlights the history behind such political and economic profiteering through data practice, attending especially to the knowledge work developed by eugenicists and contemporary data enterprises that remade and reprogrammed research infrastructures into instruments for political and economic stratification. The efforts of eugenicists and contemporary data enterprises would not have become so impactful without the data collection methods and global research and information infrastructures they extended to publicly mediate, authorize, and defend their efforts as rationally justified and fundamentally knowledge based. This was despite the dehumanizing acts of political violence and appetites for civic excisions and amputations that both forces normalized.

This project thus draws a through line between the present and past international movements for eugenics that were able to gain significant cultural and political prominence in contexts such as the United States by the first decades of the twentieth century. Such gains were accomplished by growing research architectures to informatically monitor and assess human populations and to differentiate “deserving” classes from the physically, morally, and mentally “unfit.” This project thus underscores how eugenics researchers enthusiastically and often obsessively channeled their ambitions through the frenzied development of varied new data methods, population monitoring techniques, and instruments for identifying and predicting degeneracy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These included biometric databases for criminals and immigrants, composite portraiture and intelligence metrics to predict future behavior, IQ exams, civic literacy evaluations for immigrants and people living in poverty, and morality and genetic surveys of the poor and broad classes of the “unfit” (Black 2003; Okrent 2019; Stern 2005) that allowed eugenicists to justify broad applications of surveillance techniques across democratic publics. Even while they argued

for the suspension of basic liberties and rights of “contaminating” minority populations who could threaten the survival of more worthy classes, data-driven practices allowed eugenicists to define and promote their efforts as fundamentally evaluative, with their advocacy based in objectively derived, knowledge-based findings (Bashford and Levine 2010).

While the power and influence of US eugenicists have been most clearly tracked through their success in policy gain, this project highlights the boom in eugenics’ profit-making information market, exploring how a golden age in eugenics publishing, the growth of a popular new intelligence testing industry, the spread of varied and widely selling eugenics information resources, and an explosion of hundreds of courses and lectures offered in some 350 US universities (Kevles 1985, 89) worked to broadly amplify and mainstream eugenics’ radically segregationist arguments to general audiences. Such data-based, consumer-facing products worked to cultivate new appetites across an emergent information class for surveilling populations to assess their social value. By 1928, historians noted that some three-quarters of US universities had introduced courses on eugenics, most of them using best-selling texts such as *The Passing of the Great Race* by the leading US eugenicist, Madison Grant, that popularized disinformation around “race suicide” and the threat of “Nordic races’ extinction” from the growth of global migration (Hothersall and Lovett 2022).

Moreover, US eugenic researchers used design spectacles, data visualizations, interactive exhibits, local fairs, and urban museums as market-based, media tactics to strategically extend their “science” and technical methods. Through exploiting consumer markets that increasingly offered information-based goods, they channeled their ambition to seed a culture of self- and population-monitoring through promoting habits of surveillance and examination as everyday habits for ordinary publics that extended well beyond professional “expert” practitioners. Together, such forms of eugenic data work could come to be imagined as vehicles to correct the errors of democratic societies and institutions, where data-extractive surveillance instruments were promoted as a means to protect society’s most deserving and exceptional classes from the threat of degenerating forces. Eugenic promotions of authoritarian policies for population monitoring could thus be argued for as a means to truncate the excesses of democratic choice exercised by growing “deviant” classes and a necessary path to prevent the threat of an openly pluralistic society.

This project builds from such developments to explore the long history of predatory data—the habitual use of data and research methods that exploits the vulnerable and abuses power through datafication and prediction operations. Today, that has become a defining part of global debates around big data and artificial intelligence (AI)–driven systems. This follows growing reports of US Big Tech companies’ central roles in automating discrimination and amplifying a global resurgence of authoritarianism and political violence targeting minoritized populations around the world. Such impacts draw focus to how the profit-making commercial research and communications infrastructures that have grown around predatory data today have allowed for the mass amplification of conspiratorial logics around a pending threat of majority populations’ extermination and the urgent need to limit pluralistic living. This project argues that we cannot grasp the contemporary ramifications of such dynamics in the age of big data and AI without recognizing the longer legacy of predatory data practices and without grappling with the contemporary data economy’s imbrications with an earlier forerunner in predatory data—eugenics. To attend to such lineages and their channeling into techno-eugenic logics of assessment in today’s data economy is to recognize the double face—and “nocturnal,” necropolitical twin (Mbembe 2003, 2019)—that underpins predatory data’s growth. Such intertwined architectures are what allow big data and AI industries to operate—on the one hand, as official and even preeminent engines of innovation working under the guise of Western liberalism’s highest promise, and on the other hand, as entities that can profit by economizing global progress and security for only those deemed most worthy. They do all this while instrumentalizing global crises into “opportunities” for Western technologists to continue to build more product solutions and ensure, as the billionaire venture capitalist and libertarian activist Peter Thiel wrote in the years following his investment in Facebook and co-founding of PayPal and Palantir Technologies, that “the world [is made] safe for capitalism” (Thiel 2009).<sup>1</sup>

The pages that follow thus insist that we unfix our imaginaries from the frameworks of progress and “evolved” futuristic living and labor that have overdetermined our contemporary understandings of the information age. *Predatory Data* addresses sites and temporalities beyond the data-driven products and architectures of Western innovation centers that have too often been protagonized as explanatory agents, as if the most pressing questions of the contemporary were ones of how to sustain unparalleled economic

growth and technological revolution, and not ones of collective pluriversal living. The chapters that follow prompt us to move beyond the familiar trappings of such a master narrative and ask us to recognize instead how much techno-eugenic dictates for amnesia and amputation, and predation and parasitism, have been a part of the information age's organizing strains. They underscore, with other justice-based accounts, how much other overlooked counter-strains have pressed for futures where restoration and recovery could be organizing forces instead. The forces of monoculturalist stratification and prediction that reverberate through the past and present of today's information economy have not been inevitable. However, to steer toward other possible futures requires accounting for more than the stunning novelty and optimization conventionally promised in dominant forms of digital knowledge practice. It also requires confronting how much social disintegration and violence—alongside economic and technological processing—can find new forms of speed and scaling in the age of big data.

#### TECHNO-EUGENIC FORMATIONS

By the time the two Facebook researchers ran their experiment in February 2019, investigations into how the company's products fueled twenty-first-century campaigns of genocide, mob lynchings, and human rights violations in a range of global contexts far outside the company's Silicon Valley headquarters had already begun. By then, there were signs that the fantasy of digital universalism (Chan 2014) had begun to fray. That fantasy had once cast Western information technology firms and the digital markets they extended as shining exemplars of liberalism and engines for the advancement of global connection, individual freedom, and rational enlightenment in the contemporary age. Still, the brutal spectacle the Facebook researchers witnessed for weeks across their screens went beyond anything they were prepared for. This included an unrelenting torrent of hate-based imagery and polarizing content.

In the months leading up to India's general election, the pair had traveled to the South Asian nation as part of a company fact-finding team. They had created a test account of a twenty-one-year-old woman residing in North India to understand how Facebook's recommendation algorithm shaped the experience of a new user in India, the company's largest national market in the world, where some 420 million of Facebook's nearly three billion active

users lived at the time.<sup>2</sup> With the test account programmed to simply follow Facebook’s recommended pages and groups without any added direction from the user, the researchers watched as the account grew increasingly filled with pronationalist propaganda and anti-Muslim hate speech (Raj 2021). Graphic depictions of targeted violence that were perversely framed as a tribute to a “Hindu India” and a defense against its supposed extermination from the “threat” of ethnic and religious minorities in the country streamed across the site. In less than a month, an account that had started with a conventional newsfeed became flooded with what researchers described as “a near constant barrage of polarizing nationalist content, misinformation, and violence and gore” (Iyengar 2021). “These are pakistani dogs,” one caption read beside a photo of dead bodies on stretchers. “300 dogs died now say long live India, death to Pakistan,” read another post over a background of laughing emojis.

The memo the researchers pulled together to report their findings to company leadership came with a title that stressed the urgency of the matter in the months before the largest national elections on the planet were to be held: “An Indian Test User’s Descent Into a Sea of Polarizing, Nationalistic Messages.” It was likely one of the last things they had expected to find at the company whose founder, just two years ago, had loudly professed “building a global community” to be its driving principle.<sup>3</sup> Calling the test account an “integrity nightmare,” the authors aimed to find language for the indescribable scale of violence that few (if any) training programs in data science would have prepared them for. One researcher reported starkly that, because of their test, “I’ve seen more images of dead people in the past 3 weeks than I’ve seen in my entire life total” (Iyengar 2021). The researchers’ memo came to public light in late 2021, over two years later, as part of the tens of thousands of Facebook internal documents leaked to the US Securities and Exchange Commission and the *Wall Street Journal* by data scientist and Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen (Purnell and Horwitz 2021). The exposure underscored what human and civil rights advocates, reporters, and industry experts both in and outside of the United States had been sounding as reports of political violence and life-threatening impacts of the platform and of the wildly deficient “security” operations across social media more generally amassed. Particularly for minorities and historically marginalized populations, new forms of political targeting and racialized profiling on algorithmically driven platforms were being seen at unprecedented rates and increasingly with deadly ends.

The 2021 Facebook document leak also underscored how, even despite social media's growing profits from global markets and the company's explicit development of varied products (from Free Basics to Facebook Flex and Facebook Zero) targeting the Global South, the vast majority of the company's budget to protect user safety and fight misinformation (84%) had remained focused on just one country: the United States. Even while less than 10 percent of Facebook's daily active users (some 240 million accounts) were in the United States,<sup>4</sup> and despite its growth largely being driven by countries far beyond its Silicon Valley headquarters, just 16 percent of its safety and misinformation budget was reserved for what the company categorically labeled the "rest of world" (Horwitz and Seetharaman 2020; Zakrzewski et al. 2021).

Indeed, years earlier, global human rights workers and scholars had already begun flagging the implications of such disparities and reporting the disturbing spread of viral messages that warned not only of the alleged "existential threat" to and "replacement" of majority populations by minorities in various nations around the world, but that magnified calls for political violence. By 2017, distressing signs had heavily mounted around the central role that social media played in an epidemic of xenophobic mediated conspiracy theories, the rise of antidemocratic parties, and political violence in varied international contexts, including sites as diverse as Ethiopia, Myanmar, Hungary, and the United States (Akinwotu 2021; Mozur 2018a, 2018b; Stevenson 2018a, 2018b; Taub and Fisher 2018; Vaidhyanathan 2018). Observing a parallel surge of heightened polarizing online content circulation decrying the complicity, weakness, or unwillingness of democratic institutions to prevent the supposedly impending destruction of majority populations, human rights advocates and scholars called attention to the pattern of authoritarian fervor embraced in the name of racial and national "preservation" escalating in site after site around the world. Not since the international rise of fascist parties in the decades leading up to World War II had calls to dismantle pluralistic, democratic societies seemed to find so many ready champions around the world (Brown 2019; Bashford and Levine 2010). And not since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' global spread of eugenics movements – that turned calls for the forced exclusion, segregation, and sterilization of so-called "unfit" populations into national policies for racial betterment – had a politics of nationalist xenophobia seemed so widespread and so widely tied to information-based practices. Cameroonian political philosopher Achille Mbembe thus described the global intensification of il-liberal, anti-pluralistic

politics in the twenty-first century as “the desire for an enemy, the desire for apartheid (for separation and enclaving), [and] the fantasy of extermination” (2019, 43). These have become unavoidably mainstream elements in and beyond the West and even in the world’s largest and oldest democracies.

In India, reports of platform-amplified political violence that had been documented since 2014 (Banaji and Bhat 2019; Mukherjee 2020; Shah 2022) began to draw international attention after the growing circulation of recorded murders and mob killings began to break records in digital traffic—all the while, with minimal intervention from tech companies. In most cases, victims were members of minority Muslim and Dalit communities and had been attacked after the online spread of Islamophobic conspiracy theories around “Love Jihad,” “Corona Jihad,” and Hindu child kidnapping (Saaliq and Pathi 2021). In one viral video case in 2017, a forty-eight-year-old Muslim migrant worker had been brutally murdered by an assailant who was inspired by the widespread circulation of nationalist politicians’ online propaganda videos (Dey 2018). The entire crime was uploaded to YouTube with a series of sermons against “Love Jihad” and what the killer called the “entrapment” of Hindu women by Muslim men (Mankekar 2021; Mirchandani 2018). The same year, “WhatsApp lynchings” would begin to regularly appear in news headlines as multiple nationalist mobs’ assaults on victims occurred after false accusations of kidnapping, theft, and local crime had quickly spread over the Facebook-owned social messaging platform. Violence would gain renewed force as images of victims’ bodies—some as young as twelve years old (Mukherjee 2020)—circulated with impunity on Hindu nationalist social media channels (Anwar 2018; Human Rights Watch 2019). Researchers would later uncover that several of the documented attacks between 2009 and 2018 had involved hired professional video makers (Mukherjee 2020). About 90 percent<sup>5</sup> of the hundreds of assaults were reported after the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) party came to power in May 2014 with social media leveraged as an unprecedented part of its political machinery. By 2017, the BJP could champion Narendra Modi as “the world’s most followed” international political leader on social media (Sinha 2017).<sup>6</sup> As the party continued its “multi-media carpet-bombing” strategy (Sardesai 2014) without deterrence, tens of thousands of daily messages saturated social media and public space alike (Jaffrelot 2015).

By 2018, human rights advocates could formally tie social media giants to official accounts of political violence and genocide. It was that year when the UN Human Rights Council released its report on a fact-finding mission in

Myanmar that stressed Facebook’s role in twenty-first-century political campaigns directed toward what the UN High Commissioner called an “unprecedented” intensity of violence against Muslim minorities (2018). The UN mission’s investigation, which began in early 2017, had been spurred by an emergency study undertaken in 2016. Evidence of scorched earth campaigns in hundreds of villages (some 354 known by the end of 2017) (UN 2017a) and mass atrocities against Rohingya Muslims at the hands of Myanmar’s Buddhist nationalists began to accrue (Amnesty International 2017; Human Rights Watch 2017; UN 2017b), with survivors reporting mass graves and rivers filled with evidence of atrocities as they were forced to flee. When the UN’s official report on the crisis was released in October 2018, they documented evidence of “gross human rights violations” and numerous links and references to social media, with Facebook described as the primary means for receiving information (UN 2018).<sup>7</sup>

Separate sections in the report were dedicated to the role of social media platforms and Facebook in particular, and included a glossary of themes, lists of specific social media accounts, and ethnic slurs commonly used by public figures and established political leaders to promote extermination campaigns online. Many of those campaigns were reported to still be live posts on the platform, even at the time of the report’s publishing. Countless messages—from known Buddhist extremist groups and religious and political authorities alike—circulated unimpeded around themes of a “Muslim threat” endangering the “Buddhist character” of the nation. In such posts, Rohingya Muslims were repeatedly described as “illegal invaders” that posed an existential threat to Burmese racial purity justified taking whatever means needed to protect “race and religion” in the country. “Our country, race and religion can only survive, if we defend [the nationalist forces],” one post cited in the report said, with a warning that the mistaken application of “human rights” in the nation would “turn Myanmar into a Muslim country” (UN 2018, 326). The UN report stated too that Facebook had ignored reports of a growing crisis across nearly half a decade, despite the company’s targeting of Myanmar as an early market for its Free Basics product in the same period.<sup>8</sup> And it decried Facebook’s “ineffective content moderation” as enabling extremist groups’ popularization and an escalation of their calls for ethnic cleansing and political violence.

The UN’s 2018 report also referenced vocal pushback from civil society organizations in the Global South, who cited not only the exploitation of their labor for content moderation by social media companies, but also

critiqued how companies' business practices actively amplified the precarity of their work to defend human rights. That same year, multiple Myanmar-based civil society organizations had come together to issue a letter to Facebook decrying its continued lack of Burmese-speaking staff<sup>9</sup> and the sweeping failure of its detection systems in the growing crisis. It stated, "We believe your [detection] system, in this case, was us—and we were far from systematic . . . . Though these dangerous messages were deliberately pushed to large numbers of people . . . [and despite] all of [Facebook's] data," Facebook's teams failed to "pick up on the pattern" (Phandeeay et al. 2018). The UN report further cited its own research team's experience of "ineffective response" from the company after one of its own locally contracted workers began to receive repeated death threats online for his work: "As long as we are feeling sorry for them, our country is not at peace. These dogs need to be completely removed"; "If this animal is still around, find him and kill him"; "Don't leave him alive. Remove his whole race. Time is ticking." The threats followed a widely circulated post that targeted and identified the UN worker as Muslim and a "national traitor" for collaborating with the UN mission. Although Facebook was alerted about the death threats in four separate reports, after each one, the response received was that the company had determined that the post "doesn't go against one of [Facebook's] specific community standards." As the UN report noted, the company's inaction meant that weeks and months after the original post went online, the worker and his family "continued to receive multiple death threats from Facebook users, warnings from neighbors, friends, and even taxi drivers that they had seen his photo and the posts on Facebook" (UN 2018).

By mid-2018, Facebook, the company that made "move fast and break things" a Silicon Valley mantra, publicly admitted that it had been "too slow" in responding to the growing humanitarian crisis in Myanmar (Roose and Mozur 2018) and commissioned its own internal report. Released in November of that same year, the sixty-two-page independent study from the nonprofit organization Business for Social Responsibility (BSR) found that Facebook had become a "platform to undermine democracy and incite offline violence." It asserted that more needed to be done to enforce its existing policies on hate speech, fake accounts, and human rights abuses, not only in Myanmar but in the "multiple eventualities" it stated were certain to arise around the world (Business for Social Responsibility 2018). In a company blog post accompanying the report, Facebook's product policy manager, Alex Warofka, promised to take the "right corrective actions." But he also

insisted on projecting Big Tech companies as defenders of Western liberal frameworks whose technology products in fact made them the best functional stewards of human rights in many contexts. Reminding publics of Myanmar's own lack of formalized universal human rights principles, then, he assured readers that Facebook's own "human rights standards" (2018)<sup>10</sup> would be reinforced through improved "tools and technologies" (Su 2018)<sup>11</sup> and more extensive applications of AI in detection systems.

The multiple global "eventualities" that the BSR warned of, however, had already begun to manifest. Two years earlier, the 2016 presidential elections in the United States and the infamous Cambridge Analytica scandal had put Facebook under heightened scrutiny for intensifying antidemocratic disinformation campaigns in the West. Rising concerns around "xenophobia" and "post-truth" that same year had even led Dictionary.com and the *Oxford English Dictionary* to declare them words of the year for English-speaking publics, as the sites noted spikes in their searches online (Dictionary.com 2017; Steinmetz 2016a, 2016b). Attempting to allay growing concerns of political fragmentations and to cast Facebook as a defender of liberal commitments around the world, Facebook extended increasingly familiar promises to dedicate new investments into varied "technological fixes" (Benjamin 2019; Hoffman 2021) that it claimed would enhance existing ethics checks and "global safety infrastructure." In a nearly six-thousand-word "Building a Global Community" letter that Mark Zuckerberg issued in early 2017—which later was referred to as the "Facebook Manifesto"—he reminded audiences of what he saw as the elevated stakes surrounding Facebook's growth worldwide. This involved nothing less than "humanity's" shared benefit in a "Global Facebook" that would combat the polarizing filter bubbles that fragment "common understanding." As Zuckerberg argued in the manifesto, "Progress now requires humanity [to come] together not just as cities or nations, but also as a global community." He made no direct mention of the growing violence around the world that was being directly tied to social media, and Facebook's platform specifically, or to the escalating death and hate campaigns waged by vigilante "truth" and neofascist networks and online radicalization, including in the West.

Such omissions were glaring. By the time Zuckerberg posted his manifesto, extremist calls in the United States were already reported to be driving ever-larger online traffic patterns and mainstreaming alt-right themes of "White genocide," "White sharia," and "death of the West" (Southern Poverty Law Center 2017, 2019). By early 2017, as far right groups in the

United States too were visibly organizing across Facebook and other online platforms to prepare for the deadly August 2017 Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, Facebook groups such as Alt Reich: Nation and pages for far-right politicians in the United States and Europe were being flagged as active sites of radicalization. An alarming rise in national hate crimes made headlines that year as a twenty-seven-year-old shooter killed six Muslim worshippers in a January 2017 attack on the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City, and a twenty-two-year-old killed a young African American army lieutenant at a bus stop at the University of Maryland. By summer 2019, deadly hate crimes rose further with new mass minority-targeting killings in El Paso, Texas, with twenty-three murdered in the largest anti-Latino attack in recent US history, and with fifty-one murdered in Christchurch, New Zealand, in an assault on two mosques. Reports later revealed how the massacre in New Zealand, which had been live streamed on Facebook by the shooter, had been an inspiration for the El Paso shooter's plan (Southern Poverty Law Center 2019). Moreover, national reports demonstrated a continuation of the trend even after a new presidential administration replaced Donald Trump in the White House. The FBI reported in 2023 that US hate crimes rose in 2021 to the highest level since the federal government began tracking the data more than three decades ago, with the 10,840 bias-motivated crimes reported demonstrating a nearly 25 percent increase from 2020 (Nakamura 2023).

In the face of such developments, Zuckerberg's manifesto asserted an explicitly Silicon Valley-centric worldview that not only conspicuously "forgot" and excised any mention of the growing violence linked to it and other social media platforms, but projected elite, Western data scientists' and Big Tech companies' exclusive right to continuously build. Indeed, so firmly did he defend the ultimate virtue of companies' technological designs, whatever the evidence of their impact, he continued to insist that they were the best solutions for a "free society." He would take until the end of the over twelve-page letter to admit to "making mistakes," only euphemistically calling the company's errors "operational scaling issues" born out of growth that had outpaced its "social infrastructure." He blithely acknowledged that Facebook might have been challenged to respond to populations who "do not share its vision of global connection." But he asserted that "in times like these, the most important thing we at Facebook can do is develop the social infrastructure to give people the power to build a global community that works for all of us."

In the wake of the globally escalating tallies of victims tied to the epidemic of mediated hate hosted on Big Tech platforms, Zuckerberg’s manifesto coached audiences that the right step forward was to continue to build new tools. Those tools, he attested, should not merely be “focused on connecting friends and families,” as the company had been doing, but should scale up for “developing the social infrastructure for community.” He framed Facebook’s recommendations system—the very feature that civil society groups had reported as a radicalization tool for hate groups—as instead a “design opportunity.” He wrote, “More than one billion people are active members of Facebook groups, but most don’t seek out groups on their own. . . . If we can improve our suggestions and help connect one billion people with meaningful communities, that can strengthen our social fabric. . . . [T]here is more to build.” Insisting too that new “civic engagement” tools on Facebook would “help establish direct dialogue between people and our elected leaders,” he likewise inverted the critiques of human rights groups. He reframed the same signs they had flagged as media manipulation practices by authoritarian political parties as indicators of Facebook’s success in global markets instead. In perhaps the most direct affront to the concerns of human rights groups in India, he even proudly referenced Facebook’s ties to India’s nationalist BJP party and Prime Minister Modi. He added, proudly attesting to the global political power of Facebook, “In recent campaigns around the world—from India and Indonesia across Europe to the United States—we’ve seen the candidate with the largest and most engaged following on Facebook usually wins.”

In a striking reification of Western Big Tech monofuturism, Zuckerberg’s post was quickly framed within hours of its posting in English-language news headlines as a “manifesto to save the world” (Guynn 2017; Kosoff 2017). News outlets extolled it as a “plan [to] to fix humanity” (Levy 2017), and a “letter to the world” to “reboot globalization” (Ahmed 2017), written with presidential overtones (*The Guardian* 2017). While the news accounts of Zuckerberg’s letter and the cascade of press interviews that accompanied its release echoed Facebook’s professed mission to newly center “building global community,” they made no reference to the various human and civil rights groups around the world pushing to reform the company, particularly in the Global South. Unsaid too were how the letter’s presumptions around broken governance systems in the rest of the world—and of the unique capacity, and even authorized duty, of Western Big Tech to intervene—reanimated colonial frameworks around Western supremacy. Zuckerberg largely rechanneled

unapologetically universalist projections around the evolutionary thrust and progress-enhancing, civilizing impacts of platform technologies. The official story that circulated faithfully through news accounts amplified narratives of Facebook as filling a void in the “global community” around the world—a global community that would presumably cease to exist without it. In the language of Western Big Tech futurism that Zuckerberg channeled and that the mainstream English-language press endorsed, US Big Tech companies didn’t merely provide the “tools” for user “freedom.” They could now be imagined as providing the basic structures and logics to “fix” global governance and a broken global “humanity.” In such a world, companies were not only innocent, external observers to human and institutional errors that multiplied around them, but were beneficent tinkerers who could convert crises into opportunities for tech development and data solutions. They were entities, moreover, for whom remaking the “social fabric” was primarily a question of designing meaningful user engagements with the right technologies.

In the midst of growing global reports that Western social media platforms were becoming authoritarian regimes’ favored tool for nationalist media manipulation, xenophobic fearmongering, and techno-eugenic-styled campaigns against pluralistic societies, Zuckerberg’s missive projected a starkly Silicon Valley-centric conceit and existential logic that flatly negated the gravity of what was unfolding beyond its walls. More than simply channeling Silicon Valley’s familiar “game” of promissory digital “hype”—a language that works to generate the present to enable the future to emerge, according to anthropologist Kaushik Sunder Rajan (2006, 34)—Zuckerberg’s manifesto and his rewriting of past records betrayed a much darker message. By insisting that the issue of highest import for Big Tech companies and the public was to ensure that there remained “more to build,” he sent a clear message on the significance of the mass political violence and minority-targeting hate campaigns that human and civil rights groups were reporting from around the world. He implied that such costs could be an expendable, collateral sacrifice for an ultimately greater good and an optimized future driven by Western Big Tech companies. Newly economized, progress in such a future could emerge as a thing to be concentrated and filtered through a logic of exception that operated not toward a common good, but toward an explicitly differentiated good that prioritized security for those deemed most worthy of investment. It was a projected future that framed Western Big Tech and its cognitive elites’ continued dominance as a genuine virtue that could guarantee there remained “more to build” at whatever cost.

This project pushes back on such pernicious logics of “expendable” life, and the “imperative to build” in the name of Western Big Tech and its future of optimized, techno-eugenic progress and economized security. It aims to diagnose a global condition where, in the face of a global epidemic of anti-pluralistic authoritarianisms and politics of xenophobic segregation directly tied to Western platform technologies, Big Tech firms and the growing AI- and big data-driven economy can still perversely be promoted and framed as uniquely scalable engines of global salvation. These are engines whose algorithmic accelerations are not only projected as best suited to “fix humanity,” but whose designs can be celebrated as optimizing fixes that “reboot globalization.” This project aims to decenter digital technology and the data economy’s contemporarily dominant narrative as preeminent forces of Western innovation and global evolution. It brings focus to the accounts of violence and necropolitical disintegration that underpin the growth of expansive infrastructures for datafication and prediction that have arisen in their wake. Their life-negating impacts reverberate in embodied, material forms throughout a widening ecology. Such violence is evident not only through the forms of distant suffering that are architected, scaled, and maintained by Big Tech firms in accordance with their assessments of global priority valuations and market calculations. It’s notable too through the voracious systems of datafication designed to claim that human experience around technology use can be converted into perfectly predictable, statistically probabilistic forms of activity. Through such functions, the data economy’s globally extractive data mining infrastructures and algorithmically scaled calculations can drown out all other alternative voices that aim to speak for data practice, research, and knowledge on the possibilities of human experience. All this, while they rationalize their own calculations around “reasonable” loss when it comes to some global user populations and the differentiated cost of human security.

This project underscores the striking resurgence and accelerated spread of eugenic logics and popular methods for predicting the differential value of life and promoting segregationist policies as central to an explicitly techno-eugenic turn. I underscore this as a techno-eugenic logic to stress its inseparability from global data-driven technologies and research infrastructures that power today’s data economy. Moreover, the explosion around the world of explicitly authoritarian, anti-pluralistic, and xenophobic movements demonstrates the enduring resonances of eugenic mobilizations that, far from

disappearing following World War II, instead transformed through market-based methods and applying techniques to economize users, products, and producers. These methods, even if no longer explicitly adopting the language of racial hygiene and cleansing through national policy, were nonetheless invested in quantifying, modeling, and predicting the differential values of human attributes as market-based assets and racialized economic functions. Indeed, varied historians have documented how eugenics never truly disappeared from research cultures, either. Such work has mapped eugenics' enduring impact on a range of contemporary domains where its techniques have long defined foundational practices as they developed in the twentieth century. This includes in modern genetics (Cowan 1969; Kevles 1985; Stern 2005; Subramaniam 2014), criminology (Maguire 2009), population sciences (Ramsden 2002), education (Jacoby and Glauberman 1995), industrial design and urban planning (Cogdell 2004), and contemporary statistics and data applications (Chun 2021; Cowan 1969; Mackenzie 1981). Alongside these developments have been market-based stratifications that continue to draw from the above and that culminate today in the rapid growth of AI- and data-driven economies.

Seriously regarded in its day, eugenics spread internationally among the lettered “information” classes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the resources extended across research and communications infrastructures. Led and promoted by prominent scientific and research authorities, its leading voices and figureheads included Sir Francis Galton, eugenics' founder and a cousin to Charles Darwin, as well as academic, medical, and political leaders in institutions of the highest prestige—from the University College London to Stanford University and Harvard University, among others (Black 2003; Okrent 2019; Stern 2005). Obsessed with data collection (Cowan 1969) and fixated on enhancing the survival of those classes, eugenics promoted a program to predict and ensure the best physical, mental, and moral “fitness” for human futures. Eugenicists thus adopted sweeping strategies to promote the outputs of their research centers and to saturate the information channels of the day with the messages of what they aimed to be a new science-based “religion” (Kevles 1985) for the wholesale transformation of society. So successful were they in exploiting information markets and seeding a profitable, information-driven movement in “vogue” (Kevles 1985, 59) with lettered publics around the world—most notably in the United Kingdom and United States, where the movement first took root—that its leaders came to be regarded as a “priestly” class (Kevles 1985, 69). It

was a class, moreover, that proved itself as able to reshape US national and state policies around human migration, segregation, and sterilization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Through such efforts, eugenics researchers mainstreamed experimental infrastructures that promoted extremist policies for restricting democratic norms, expanding data collection on broad populations in efforts to engineer optimized societies. They also saw to—in the United States alone—the historic expansion of national immigration restrictions and sterilization policies targeting the “unfit” in over thirty-two states, where victims were disproportionately women of color identified as poor, immigrant, or disabled. By the early twentieth century, eugenics’ communications and research infrastructures had enabled a “shared language and ambition” (Bashford and Levine 2010, 2) to develop worldwide, uniting the United Kingdom and United States and an array of distinct global locales. Those included Northern and Western Europe (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland), Eastern Europe (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Turkey, Latvia, Russia), the Americas (Canada, Cuba, Mexico, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Argentina), Asia and Australia (New Zealand, Japan, Hong Kong, South Asia, Singapore), Africa (Kenya), and Germany (Adams 1990; Bashford and Levine 2010).

To attend to the global reverberations of techno-eugenics is to thus recognize the underacknowledged ecologies of illiberal violence and anti-pluralist, xenophobic terrains—sites where “death has nothing tragic about it” (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014; Mbembe 2003, 2019)—as necessary for the growth of contemporary data economies and AI-driven systems. Scholars of necropolitics have recognized such death terrains, as well as the maintenance of economic “production” spaces where the givenness of individual rights could be officially suspended, as foundational to the growth of modern orders. They have thus underscored the inseparability of the growth of Western liberalism with the extension of global systems of imperialism and terrains of settler colonial dispossessions that decolonial, critical race, and feminist and queer scholars have long explored (Azoulay 2019; Byrd 2011; Cacho 2012; Hartmann 1997; Mbembe 2003, 2019; Rosas 2019). Achille Mbembe wrote of how such spaces of political exception—central among them, the colony and the plantation—functioned as the “nocturnal face” of liberal states (2003, 2019) that could be architected away from official sites where civil peace needed to be formally maintained. In such remote sites of exception and profit-generating production, conditions of

“unregulated war” and violence—exercised outside normative conventions, and “obey[ing] no rule of proportionality” (2019, 25)—could give rise to the organized destruction of necropolitical “death worlds.” The full functioning of these death worlds first requires, however, as Mbembe specified, “on the one hand, a generalized cheapening of the price of life and, on the other, a habituation to loss” (2019, 26). Mbembe thus reminds readers how often necropolitical sites have emerged, not as the antithesis or limit of liberal democracies but as their hidden twin and underacknowledged double. Ever latent within liberal political orders, they can emerge and come to dominate not merely once the world can be segmented into realms of the biopolitically “useful” and “useless” but once a generalizing acceptance of and “habituation to loss” has been conditioned.

Read through such a lens, the sacrificial economy that contemporary big data and AI-driven systems have amassed in the wake of their era-defining expansions emerges not in spite of, or as the exception to, the data economy’s growth. It emerges instead as its offspring, developing as necessary extensions of technological and economic “production” cycles through remote and seemingly disconnected “sites of experimentation.” In the name of preserving data firms’ profitability and growth and sustaining an official narrative of Western technology (and big data and AI systems, especially) as the twenty-first century’s consummate force of progress, innovation, and high enlightenment, security and civic viabilities for minoritized populations are rendered into expendable resources that are most “value” generating in their very expendability.

*Predatory Data* builds upon and complements scholarly developments around racial capitalism and the data economy to underscore eugenics’ continued hauntings in our information present and to excavate the explicitly informational and data-engaged aspects of our eugenics past that remain largely overlooked. This is despite the breadth of the data collection practices and research infrastructures that were directed toward broad public outreach to cultivate “eugenic-minded” populations (Kevles 1985, 60) and despite the enduring reverberations of eugenics methods across a span of contemporary knowledge practices. I underscore, then, how the expansive infrastructures for research and communication that eugenicists first developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—spanning labs, record-keeping offices, professional societies, and education networks crossing a vast array of knowledge institutions and universities—were dedicated even a century ago to dispossessive forms of data collection, surveillance,

and experimentation. They also coordinated efforts toward the mainstreaming and marketing of eugenics practices, and the spread of a range of modern documentation and assessment techniques. Such techniques, generations before the rise of today's data economy, shaped an emergent class of information consumers. And their appetites for self- and social-monitoring might be expanded, eugenicists recognized, even as the contours of an information age had yet to be fully defined.

## DATA PLURALIST FUTURES

Despite its growth, the contemporary data economy's projected occupation of global knowledge futures and the expansion of techno-eugenic logics through research infrastructures and data economies is far from inevitable. However much Big Tech firms have saturated information channels with insinuations of technological supremacy and an ascendent big data and AI-driven epoch that stifles any versions of potential future otherwise, information futures and global "progress" do not rest on their continued dominance. Various research-engaged actors continue to refuse the monofuturist projections of AI and big data temporalities, pressing for an alternative version of knowledge futures and drawing from a range of justice-oriented global traditions to articulate new, data pluralist solidarities. Working to expose the deadly contradictions within Western Big Tech's calculations for an optimized global progress, such actors press for the value of heterogeneous knowledge infrastructures to diagnose and document oppressive systems within diverse local contexts.

Moreover, their commitments to possibilities of futures resonant with data pluralism begin with recognizing the irreducibly varied methods, formats, tempos, and histories long cultivated by a multiplicity of practitioners across local worlds. They work to call out the false conceit of big data and AI's projected universalism, taking seriously not only the assertion of Yanni Loukasis (2019) that all data are local, but reminding of us too of the *situated* nature of any justice-oriented data practice. That is, seeing data from "below" and in context and rejecting what Donna Haraway (1988) called the "god's eye view from nowhere" is an ethical stance that is our best bet for allowing relations of accountability to develop across the diverse local worlds of data work.

Today's data pluralists thus build on the legacy of varied justice-oriented traditions and past and present abolitionist actors, who, in the age of

eugenics, brought together feminist, immigrant, and anti-racist researchers to speak for and develop data practices in explicit refusal of dominant models. Pushing beyond liberal and professional social science research norms that were becoming institutionalized in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they underscored the fuller possibilities of research experience and agency exercised by nontraditional researchers. This applied to poor and marginalized populations and methods that extended from alternative research infrastructures to confront the complexities of dynamic, globalizing change. Their data and documentation work thus distinctly drew attention to structures of deadly oppression whose local manifestations—in urban sweatshops, racialized ghettos, and exploitative tenement and residential housing systems—were readily evident in turn-of-the-century US cities. Seeding early articulations of what I call “relational infrastructures,” they cultivated knowledge practices oriented toward other ends than the forms of market innovation, freedom, or growth projected by classic liberalism, contemporary neoliberals, and digital libertarians alike as universal goods. Explicitly grounded in the aims of global justice-based reforms of historically marginalized and vulnerable communities, the relational infrastructures of data pluralists today bring focus as much to the stakes around an underaccounted for past as to a fetishized future. The methods and orientations to knowledge work they cultivate thus center conditions of local restoration and healing, “situated” knowledge engagements, and data solidarities over extractivisms as pathways to accountable local empiricisms (Haraway 1988).

*Predatory Data* thus builds on the work of critical data and technology studies scholars who, alongside community-based organizers, have highlighted the violent and dispossessive impacts of a big data and AI-driven economy to counter their continued legibility as high forces of liberal knowledge production, technological development, and economic advancement. Such work has critically explored the means by which the politics of race, gender, class, and nationality fundamentally drive the global market pursuits of Silicon Valley’s tech companies (Irani 2019; Lindtner 2020; Vora 2015). Such work has exposed Big Tech’s reliance on hidden networks of global “ghost workers” (Gray and Suri 2019), who are hired and exploited to filter vast scales of “unsafe” content online and who intentionally maintain in Big Tech’s “shadows” as an informalized force of contract labor (Roberts 2019; Raval 2019; Wan 2021). Critics of “surveillance capitalism” further decry the routine violation of seemingly sacrosanct liberal ideals around privacy, free will, rational choice, and “the moral integrity of the autonomous individual”

(Zuboff 2019) that transpires through Western Big Tech companies' expansive applications of user surveillance, prediction, and behavior modification techniques (Ortiz Freuler 2022; Ridgway 2023). Likewise, critical data scholars have explored the radically fragmenting, antisocial impacts of big data platforms, underscoring how they have dissolved the modern liberal promise of information-engaged audiences and the connective power of public discourse (Vaidhyanathan 2018). Big Tech companies, such critical accounts have found, instead foment the explosive rise of disinformation dynamics and intensify political extremism and violent nationalist organizing in the United States (Donovan 2020; Donovan and Wardle 2020; Krafft and Donovan 2020; Markwick and Lewis 2017).

In conversation with feminist, anti-racist, and decolonial critical data scholars who explore the rise of algorithmic violence (Onuoha 2018), data violence (Hoffman 2021), data necropolitics (Pele 2022), and data colonialism (Couldry and Mejias 2019b), *Predatory Data* similarly pushes beyond liberal frameworks to draw focus to the data economy's routinization of violence and erosion of everyday securities for vulnerable populations both in and outside the West. It thus builds on intersectional scholarship from North America that draws focus to the means by which contemporary data economies have disproportionately amplified the insecurity and scale of harms to historically marginalized peoples (Amoore 2013; Broussard 2018; Buolamwini and Gebru 2018; Cifor et al. 2019; Costanza-Chock 2020; Cox 2023; Crawford 2021; D'Ignazio and Klein 2019; Eubanks 2011; Ganesh and Moss 2022; Gurumurthy and Chami 2022; Kuo and Bui 2021; Lewis et al. 2018; McGlotten 2016; McIlwain 2020; Morales and Reilly 2023; Precarity Lab 2020; Shah 2023). Such analyses have placed critical spotlights on the growing patterns of social stratification, segregation, and discrimination that have been driven by the predictive applications of Big Tech companies and that have oversurveilled and overcriminalized people of color and those living in poverty under digital systems. These systems, as justice-oriented US critical data scholars put it, fundamentally increase inequality and punish the poor (Eubanks 2019; O'Neill 2016) with "algorithms of oppression" (Noble 2018).

The continued reproduction of unequal and often violent relations in spite of Big Tech companies' expansion of "data ethics" plans has thus led Anna Lauren Hoffman (2021) to call attention to the forms of "discursive violence" enacted by Big Tech. Hoffman likewise underscores the means by which liberal frameworks around inclusion can be used as a decoy, cover, or

means to prevent deeper reforms from being enacted, as companies “work to scatter opposition to structural inequality, reinforce unequal relationships, and maintain data science and technology’s potential for violence” (Hoffman 2021, 2). Similarly, Ruha Benjamin (2019) has unpacked how liberal claims of heightened “objectivity” and prodiversity “colorblind” designs allow US tech companies to promote their technological solutions even when they reflect or amplify existing inequities and extend logics toward a new “era of Jim Code” in the United States and a “digital caste system” globally.

*Predatory Data* thus builds on recent work by feminist and critical race data studies scholars who have explored the historical linkages between big data’s discriminatory impacts and past techniques developed to maintain White supremacy—from racialized surveillance and forms of policing rooted in slavery (Browne 2015) to eugenic methods for metricizing difference through research (Chun 2021). Building on histories of science that explore the methodological roots of contemporary statistics with the techniques of correlation and linear regression developed by the British biostatistician and famed founder of eugenics Francis Galton (Cowan 1969; Kevles 1985; Mackenzie 1981), Wendy Chun emphasized data science’s methodological roots in eugenics. She demonstrated how an unquestioned reliance on statistical methods by data professionals today (O’Neill 2016) reproduces deterministic, fundamentally undemocratic worldviews rooted in Western eugenics (Chun 2021). Highlighting the research claims of contemporary data scientists around machine learning and AI-driven applications—from facial recognition to digital matchmaking—Chun demonstrated how today’s data science applications have come to not merely automate “the mistakes of a discriminatory past” shaped by popular forms of eugenics and “race science,” but reproduce once debunked eugenic claims around physiologically readable and “signaled” forms of human difference. While separated by a century, eugenics and contemporary data science continue to amplify the others’ projects. Both, she writes, “frame the world as a laboratory (most explicitly through their surveillance of the most impoverished communities); both seek majorities by propagating ‘nonnormative’ traits; and both promote segregation as the ‘kindest’ solution to inequality (segregation as a training program for racism)” (2021, 23).

*Predatory Data* builds from such critical interdisciplinary work to explore the central role of Big Tech and AI-driven systems in the global expansion of assaults on pluralism, democratic dissolution, and the parallel amplification of economies of insecurity driven by logics of “reasonable” loss and

calculations of “worthy” living. I explore here how eugenics’ shared lineages with big data cultures today continue to reverberate not only among data science professionals and their routine uses of datafication and prediction methods. Eugenics’ impacts continue to be visible through an array of cultural and information-based practices that continue to sow appetites for population monitoring and for the targeted surveillance of minoritized populations in particular to enhance security for “deserving” populations. I explore how such eugenic norms continue to get mobilized through the globally expansive data infrastructures that scale out evaluative operations for the differential value of life. Interweaving between multisited scenes from our eugenic past and data present, the chapters of *Predatory Data* explore the resonances across the two movements’ interlinked “revolutions.” Through such analyses, the chapters aim to dislodge our imaginaries from a fixation on our data present and from the percussive insistence of an evolutionary arc when it comes to framings of the information age.

Drawing from mixed qualitative methods in science and technology studies (STS), cultural history, digital studies, critical theory, and ethnographies of data cultures that place the present in necessary conversation with the past, *Predatory Data* reminds us how far the techno-eugenic underpinnings and impacts of our information age have traveled. Blending ethnography with historical and archival study, and multisited in terms of both explorations of the past and present, and of locales across the global Americas, this project highlights its own adoption of pluralistic data practices. Such mixed methods enable me to trace the diverse means by which eugenics continues to haunt our data present and to likewise follow the varied contestations that have emerged globally to resist it.

Spanning multiple generations of predatory datafication and prediction work, *Predatory Data* reminds us of the varied means by which dominant dispossessive logics around data practice were refused and of the diverse techniques and temporal interventions that were cultivated collectively to speak for other forms of shared information futures and research infrastructures oriented toward justice-based data pluralisms. Readers will also note that I’ve deferred from trying to compress or abbreviate the literature reviews covered in the chapters that follow. Recognizing the interdisciplinarity of this project, I’ve aimed instead to highlight the diverse global debates, scholarly traditions, and literatures that have informed this study across varied disciplines. Making these pathways explicit does multiple things. It firstly aims for accessibility and inclusivity, and veers away from the assumption

that familiarity with disciplinary debates or disciplinary expertise should be privileged. Making explicit the diverse traditions I draw from and situate myself within—whether STS, feminist, critical race and decolonial theory, critical data studies, or global studies—also voices a commitment to intersectionality, allowing readers to see how an interweaving of such work was foundational to the development of this project. Finally, this approach to citation as an intentional and inclusive practice furthers a feminist and decolonial project, making explicit the voices and struggle of others who made this one possible. As the feminist practitioner Sarah Ahmed writes, “Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow” (2017, 17). Recalling and documenting the diverse genealogies that ground this work honors that record of critical practice and commitment to more just forms of knowledge production.

Chapter 1, “Immigrant Excisions, ‘Race Suicide,’ and the Eugenic Information Market,” thus takes readers back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to explore the explosion of data collection and archival practices set off by the eugenics movement in the United States, when eugenics’ global developments first found its loudest champions. The chapter covers how varied reports, surveys, and studies were undertaken by emergent information classes across the country to advance eugenic theories for population-based prediction, prevent the risk of “race suicide” of well-born White American populations, and promote the excision of racialized immigrant groups who posed the greatest threat to well-born classes.

Chapter 2, “Streamlining’s Laboratories,” places global “smart city” scenes in the present day in dialogue with early twentieth-century streamline designers’ Futurama prototype that marketed eugenically “purified” lifestyles and consumer goods as designed ideals at the 1939 Chicago World’s Fair. Showcasing a future world of driverless traffic controlled from a distance by engineers who removed chaos from users’ unpredictable decision-making, streamliners’ Futurama exhibited the seductive potentials of merging industry-led innovation with eugenic efforts to identify and eliminate “dysgenic” excess, “parasitic drag,” and inefficiency in new consumer markets. Such developments are reminders of the enduring obsession within data-driven enterprises of monitoring performance in efforts to eradicate even minute inefficiencies and to cultivate a mindset of self-optimization among the ideal workers and residents of smart cities.

Chapter 3 unpacks the emergence of cognitive elites as a modern counterpart to the “undeserving poor,” tracing the classification of “cognitive elites” to eugenics researchers’ promotion of hereditary intelligence and IQ tests as predictive measures of individuals’ future worth and economic value in the early twentieth century. Such efforts to economize life have been sustained and bolstered into the new millennium, I argue, through intertwined developments. The first is the growth of discourse around the new knowledge economy, which focused attention around the driving force of knowledge classes and information producers and the outsized value of their cognitive and intellectual labor, while marginalizing a parallel focus on workers and classes beyond such domains. The second is what I describe as the rise of contemporary strains of techno-eugenics among leading voices in Silicon Valley, who project the risk of Western technology stagnation as rooted in an undervaluing of the innovative capacity of the cognitive elite. Echoing eugenicists of earlier decades, techno-eugenicists amplify dystopian disinformation messages, insisting that the regulatory tendencies of democratic states pose an existential threat to Western supremacy and technological capitalism as its highest order.

The subsumption of global imaginaries to eugenic logics are far from inevitable, however. Chapters 4 to 6 thus turn us toward imaginaries for new knowledge futures by historically marginalized communities. Such alternatives have persisted in making space for new freedom dreams by refusing the imperatives for technological revolution and profit-drive imposed by the dominant data economy. Chapter 4 reminds audiences of the growth of relational infrastructures as alternatives to dominant information and research cultures over a century ago. It explores how critical approaches emerged to challenge the forms of anti-pluralist eugenic research and objectivist social science current at the turn of the twentieth century. Tracing the data collection, and visualization techniques developed by women, queer, and immigrant researchers organized around Chicago’s Hull House in the late nineteenth century, the chapter excavates how researchers developed community-based and community-driven data infrastructures in relational methods that centered repair and equity-driven reform as assets to knowledge practice.

Chapter 5, “The Coalitional Lives of Data Pluralism,” takes us into the cross-national, intergenerational networks of intersectional feminist organizers in Latin America that have, against the odds, galvanized new

coalitions to attain the legalization of abortion access in several countries. While growing restrictions around reproductive rights in the United States have brought renewed attention to pro-choice advocacy, Latin American organizers underscored how the recent gains were part of ongoing mobilizations that for nearly two decades had drawn together diverse social justice actors across continents. In some contexts, these had grown to include varied organizations bridging reproductive rights advocates, anti-gender violence and LGBTQ organizations, unions and labor organizations, Indigenous groups, student organizations, and others, working together in an active, pluralistic coalition.

Chapter 6 brings us back into the present day and reviews the growth of contemporary data initiatives that center situated data practice and justice-based approaches, and that I argue collectively articulate a critical framework for community data. Often based outside the mainstream academy, and independent from corporate technology spaces, community data practitioners push back on dominant logics of data practice that have normalized hypersurveillance of, and data extractivism from, poor and marginalized populations. The diversity of relationalities represented across community data projects' multisited, multimethod research practices is a ready indication of the data pluralism that I underscore as inherent in all community data projects and that has long been silenced by the dominant data economy's monofuturist projection.

Together, these chapters argue that we can still disrupt predatory data's expansion, but to do so requires bringing our present and future forecasting into new conversations with the past. Indeed, we understand the impacts of predatory data in our present information age only dimly without a consideration of the history of eugenics and how its specter has fundamentally shaped the master narrative of knowledge work and technology in the twenty-first century. Alongside the work of other critical data studies scholars, this study prompts us to draw out our research lenses to other terrains beyond the conventional corporatized sites and familiar computational infrastructures that have come to define contemporary writing and studies of the digital. To steer away from the disintegrating impacts of predatory data toward other knowledge futures is to seek other forms of pluralistic covitality. It is to cultivate modes of relational accounting and justice-centered practices that promote healing, restoration, and solidarity through data work, rather than merely projecting growth and wealth creation as the lone ambitions or natural

trajectories of the digital. It is to foster forms of relating around data that enable creative agency and credit to be redistributed to actors long silenced and marginalized across space and time. And it is to enable, then, a recognition of how long alternative futures have indeed been pressed for, and so too, how much the ever-narrowing terms of the data economy's monofuture have been contested.