Bénédicte Boisseron’s *Afro-Dog: Blackness and the Animal Question* is an engaging and broad introduction to historical and philosophical concerns regarding the human/animal divide and racist accusations of prejudicial blackness. The introduction of the synthetic *Afro-Dog* focuses on Marjorie Spiegel’s *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (1988) and Claire Jean Kim’s recent *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species, and Nature in a Multicultural Age* (2015) to offer academic dialogue on how the activist use of animal oppression and/or the history of slavery often privileges one oppressed group through possibly trivializing categories of human or animal oppression. To further illustrate these concerns, *Afro-Dog* portrays recent propaganda from the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals that compares enslaved bodies and modern animals in chains.

Searching for narratives of interspecies connectedness, rather than structural similarities used by activists, Boisseron specifically argues that a troubling discourse often emerges when black studies or critical animal studies is combined with activist goals that provides a space for either group at the forefront. As a corrective, *Afro-Dog* pushes back against scholarship that privileges the projects of animal liberation through applying a comparison to chattel slavery as a similar form of structural oppression. Boisseron argues against such oversimplifications within activist literature while also offering nuanced critiques focusing on the comparison between animals and slaves regardless of the direction in which the political argumentation is applied.

Chapter 1 explores these general concerns with intersectional discourse that often privileges either nonhuman animals or racialized black populations for activist goals. Tracing the history of the animal rights movement from Jeremy Bentham through Peter Singer and into modern discussions of animal rights activism, *Afro-Dog* offers a summary of the dreadful comparison often used to prop up social arguments that combine the misery of slavery with nonhuman animal oppression. Boisseron then summarizes the most forceful aspects of the animal liberation movement within this troubling dialectic through comparisons to the historical work of black abolitionists and analysis of the current studies by Carol Adams on intersections of speciesism and sexism. This discussion on masculinity and meat continues into questions of class, race, and the politics of veganism as a possibly settler manifestation within neoliberal modernity.[1]

Chapter 2 traces the history of the nefarious use of dogs within American and Atlantic slavery through introducing the multivalent and metaphorical rhetoric of Donna Haraway’s *Companion Species Manifesto* (2003). Summarizing the use of slave dogs to control chattel populations throughout the Atlantic world provides one of the few existing analyses of these biopolitically educated canines and their calamitous hunting skills. Starting with portrayals of such slave dogs in depictions of slavery within modern media, this summary continues through an interesting reading of the use of canines during the military excursions of European empires related to the Haitian Revolution.

This history of dogs and black bodies is then framed through modern discussions of the informal public trial, formal conviction, and prison sentence of American football player Michael Vick for running a dog-fighting ring
that was uncovered in 2007. Arguing that resistance to
dogs was an important aspect of black civil disobedience
within slavery, during the civil rights movement
(as with struggles at Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963), and
into modern confrontations in cities like Ferguson, Mis-
souri, Boisseron walks a fine line that almost absolves
Vick while articulating a redolent distaste for dogs within
black communities in the Americas.

Chapter 3 applies French social theorist Michel Ser-
res’s understanding of The Parasite (1982) to articulate
a fresh appreciation of the use of rebellious animal
metaphors through considering the commensal dog and
the rights of minorities to own animals within their op-
pressed living spaces. Commensalism is a term that
defines the human/dog relationship through an under-
standing of mutual benefits. The domestication of the
dog, in this conception, came because of the benefits that
dogs gained through their relationships with early hu-
mans. This reading of domestication procedures locates
a reading of the shared ecology of subaltern humans and
animals through a later history of the concept of dias-
pora for both black and Jewish populations alongside an-
imals that were part of diasporic familiarities. Those ex-
periences often involved languages created to keep dogs
at a distance through terms akin to “scram.” For Bois-
seron, the creole and commensal dog within diasporic
communities, due in part to this language of distancing,
exists often within liminal spaces of the outside, as in the
Caribbean, where ownership by a private individual is
relatively extraordinary.

Chapter 4 focuses on these ideas of ownership and
nuisance concerning nonhuman animals and the memo-
ries of colonialism and chattel slavery. This analysis ex-
plores issues of language within the French terminology
of “un meuble,” “meuble,” and different other terms used
within the Francophone animal rights movement. Com-
paring issues related to this signifier that means “furni-
ture” but also implies movement and freedom, Afro-Dog
examines etymological issues through expanding a dis-
course regarding the subjugation of Algerians in mod-
ern France and Jews during the Holocaust through the
use of often oppressive and rhetorically potent animal
metaphors that imposed languages of pre-ownership and
the concept of the stray dog upon subaltern, colonized,
and previously enslaved populations.

Throughout the later chapters of her work, Boisseron
connects how the human is often considered a human
through the right to ownership of nonhuman animals,
and how only white men have historically been granted
this right of ownership and companionship. The last
chapter frequently uses Jacques Derrida’s lectures on
witnessing published in The Animal That Therefore I Am
(2008) to question these concepts of ownership through
the idea of observation relating to a famed anecdote re-
garding Derrida’s cat seeing and possibly judging his
naked body. This often repeated analysis of the ani-
mal gaze within Afro-Dog turns to discussions of how
the Curse of Ham and the Abrahamic religious traditions
that articulate blackness were part of a curse placed upon
Canaan caused by Ham witnessing Noah’s naked body.
The final chapter ends with a famous question from Gay-
atri Spivak regarding the ability of the subaltern to speak
through a summary of slave narratives and the role of
shaming within memories of different forms of social op-
pression.[2]

A short coda offers engagement with clarifying au-
thorial concerns that Boisseron faced from scholars who
argued that specific academics should not engage topics
that are better suited to authors only from within that
subaltern group. In general, Afro-Dog is a deeply engag-
ing summary of important historical theories related to
oppression and the human/animal divide. Although of-
ten without much thematic structure or a temporal nar-
rative, Boisseron’s work is still an engaging, synthetic,
and quick read on the importance of understanding the
flaws of privilege in the making of activist engagements.
As such, it should be read by scholars of Atlantic slavery,
racial identity, and the animal liberation movement.

Notes
[1]. Carol Adams, The Pornography of Meat (New
York: Continuum, 2003).
[2]. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Can the Subaltern

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