

# Briefly Noted

***Dread: Facing Futureless Futures***, David Theo Goldberg (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 2021), 244 pp., cloth \$64.95, paperback \$22.95, eBook \$18.

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Living during the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the global rise of far-right parties, and the escalating climate crisis, among myriad other issues, many people can relate to a sense of anxiety and nervousness on a transnational level. Building on these feelings, David Theo Goldberg explores topics ranging from racial identity to artificial intelligence in his recent book *Dread: Facing Futureless Futures*. Dread serves as the book's throughline, and Goldberg defines it in relation to the topic and perspective at hand. For instance, when discussing racial anxieties, Goldberg explicates how dread for those who identify as white is the anxiety they feel at the sense of losing "long-sustaining racial power" (p. 199). On the other hand, dread is also felt by those oppressed by that same long-sustained racial power. These juxtapositions are what make the book captivating, as Goldberg plays between and through perspectives and power dynamics, with a nod to intersectionality. Those interested in critical theory or who may feel a sense of post-modern dread will find this aspect of the book particularly compelling.

While Goldberg begins the book with a discussion on dread, he does not specifically

pin down a definition, which allows him to explore the concept as it relates to each topic he addresses in the book. Overall, however, he states that dread can broadly be thought of as a "social logic in which the war on everything is inevitably prompting a proliferating civil war, an internalizing war within and among ourselves" (p. 19). Dread goes further than anxiety, as dread operates and acts within our lives yet is external to our wishes, needs, and knowledge.

The first topic on Goldberg's docket is artificial intelligence and the dread that comes with the feeling of constant surveillance. He notes the role of facial recognition, tracking citizens' locations, and social media surveillance, each of which contributes to a sense of dread. Goldberg then builds on this to redefine and rethink capitalism, specifically referring to contemporary capitalism as "tracking-capitalism." Not only is there the dread that comes from technology replacing human labor, primarily in manufacturing, but there is also dread that comes from being tracked and from our behavior being sold, often without our understanding of the scope.

He then addresses the dread that has come from the pandemic. COVID-19 has cultivated a widespread sense of dread in part,

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he argues, because it is an invisible enemy; a virus that can harm anyone. Moreover, as a social force, the pandemic has heightened inequalities and racial hierarchies and exacerbated the existing tracking practices he described previously. Goldberg ties this into a discussion on the environment, which he says also contributes to a sense of dread, as far too little is being done to combat the climate crisis, and effecting positive change feels out of the individual's control. Finally, he talks about race and domestic divisions, which he argues are a type of civil war. Here Goldberg would have benefited from going into further conceptual depth about this notion and why he describes the tensions in the United States following the election of Donald Trump as a "civil war," which feels unnecessarily hyperbolic.

Goldberg ends on a positive note, wherein he attempts to explain how we can "de-dread." He claims that "the antidote to dread lies in the struggles to retain, sustain, and extend a just, dignified freedom for all . . ." (p. 197). In some ways, Goldberg mimics other theorists, such as Nancy Fraser and Alexandros Kioupkiolis, who have discussed collective strategies for reclaiming the commons and combating societal ills. For this reason, Goldberg could have further developed the last chapter to balance all the earlier chapters by explaining, in detail, how each of his selected topics contribute to an overall sense of dread. Yet, for an exploration on the pervasive sense of dread in society, Goldberg's book delivers and offers interesting insights into pressing contemporary problems.