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Top of the Heap: Adia Benton

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By Hannah Gibson

For this installment of Top of the Heap, I was delighted to work with Assistant Professor Adia Benton from Northwestern University.



I think it's probably common for people to talk about how large their book heap is. Mine is no different. I'm at the end of my sabbatical and the beginning of my maternity leave. The former should have left me ample time to read, the latter... not so much. I am juggling a couple of book projects right now, so the books I have at the top of the pile reflect those interests and the ideas spinning off from them. The ones that continue to rise to the top are [On Being Included](#), by Sara Ahmed. The book is about diversity initiatives in a university setting. In addition to being a useful account of these efforts at a time when these conversations are taking place in academia, I see this book as potentially offering lessons about how institutions "think", how they issue documents and propose non-solutions to those problems. [Expected Miracles](#), by Joan Cassell, is an older book. It's still relevant in that it describes the culture of surgery in US hospitals and many of its insights still ring true for the surgeons I know. [Habeas Viscus](#), by Alexander Weheliye, is a slim and dense book that provides a much needed corrective to accounts of biopolitics and bare life

that are insufficiently attentive to race.

I'm almost done with Randy Packard's [A History of Global Health](#). Packard lays out a straightforward account of why, at different points in time, international health and colonial public health largely focused on disease-specific programs, rather than on the social determinants of health. I suspect it'd be a wonderful book in an introduction to global health course. Marion Moser Jones's [The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal](#) is a historical account of how humanitarian concepts like neutrality emerged. This complements anthropological accounts of humanitarian organization like those by Peter Redfield and Renee Fox.

I follow some excellent scholars on Twitter, so I find myself waiting for their new books to come out. I'm pre-ordering Christina Sharpe's [In the Wake](#). I've already recommended it to people based upon what I have already read and discussed with her because it does important work theorizing black life as operating in multiple registers of "the wake." One of my current preoccupations is with public health surveillance—and particularly works that bring black studies and surveillance studies together—has gotten Simone Browne's [Dark Matters](#) at the top of the heap.

And finally... The early months of infancy, for me, means catching up on television series. Either I'm watching edgy comedies, or police procedurals—British and American—but occasionally I pick up a random mystery book in a series. I am slowly reading [Maybe](#) (A Junior Bender Mystery) and just finished [Honky Tonk Samurai](#), a Hap and Leonard novel.



Adia Benton is a cultural anthropologist with interests in global health, biomedicine, development and humanitarianism and professional sports. She is interested in patterns of inequality in the distribution of and the politics of care in settings "socialized" for scarcity. Her first book, [HIV Exceptionalism: Development through Disease in Sierra Leone](#) (University of Minnesota, 2015), explores the treatment of

AIDS as an exceptional disease and the recognition and care that this takes away from other diseases and public health challenges in poor countries. Her second book project, tentatively titled Cutting Cures, focuses on the global movement to improve access to quality surgical care in poor countries, using it as a case study for describing and understanding ideological formations in global public health.

Image: Book Cave.

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