The International Order of White Sovereignty and the Prospect of Abolition

Owen R. Brown

Despite a lack of agreement on what exactly international order is, what many accounts have in common is a presumption that the contemporary international order—the "liberal international order"—is desirable and that it is indeed essential for global peace and stability. Without it, the conventional wisdom holds, we would descend into chaos. But is this order really as necessary and desirable as many seem to assume? Would its absence or abolition necessarily mean the "return" of a violent and chaotic international system? In this essay, I take up these considerations and interrogate the nature and presumed necessity and desirability of the contemporary international order. By elaborating a processual and emergent approach to international order that draws out its political nature and allows for a recognition of its imbrications with processes of racialization, I call into question the purported desirability and appeal of the liberal international order. Against this view, I suggest that the contemporary international order is better characterized as an international order of White sovereignty that secures the domination and rule of some over others, of Whiteness over non-Whiteness. Recognizing the violence, injustices, and forms of racialization that are perpetuated and reproduced in the name of protecting and securing this order, I argue, points toward a need to take seriously calls for abolition, something that much of the literature on global justice has thus far failed to do. The promise of abolition—grounded in the realities of the world as it is, yet

Owen R. Brown, Scripps College, Claremont, California, United States (obrown@scrippscollege.edu)

envisioning a world that could be—calls on us to break free from the constraints of the present order and reach into an as-yet-unimaginable future.

The Political and Emergent Nature of International Order

What is the "international order" that so many are fearful of losing? If order, at its most basic level, is understood as the recognition or perception of a pattern or degree of regularity in the relations among things, then it can be examined as something that emerges out of and through human engagement with the world.[1] Moreover, since order is something that we *perceive*, the patterns and regularities that constitute order are necessarily shaped and determined by the social and political contexts that we inhabit.[2] Order is thus a political process for both organizing and understanding the world, and for capturing the structure, organization, and governance of social relations. When viewed in this light, order is simultaneously descriptive, describing how things are, and normative, making a claim as to how things ought to be. Order, then, as both descriptive and normative, involves the recognition or perception of regularity as well as processes of regulation. Processes of regulation comprise multiple efforts and activities, and include practices of governance, management, and control that function to keep things "in their place" and ensure the relative stability of the subjects and objects that are (to be) ordered, as well as the technologies of governmentality and forms of knowledge that render such subjects and objects legible and manageable.[3] Such regulatory processes and practices function, in part, as ordering processes and practices to the extent that they are also regularizing—that is, they help reproduce and secure the appearance and perception of regularity, making things appear regular or normal. In other words, order is created and maintained through the combination of regulatory and regularizing processes that work to supply, secure, and maintain social life and political relations with a measure of patterned regularity.

Viewing order in this way changes the terms of reference for international order and shifts some of the debate and controversy around it. Thus, if international order is both emergent and processual, constituted reflexively through the systems of regulation and regularization that constitute the subjects and objects of international politics, international order as such may be unavoidable. While this approach says nothing about the specific character or content of international order, it does suggest that some form of order is inescapable insofar as it develops

Owen R. Brown

through and emerges out of human experience and engagement with the world. When seen as such, the fear that many appear to express about the potential loss of international order is not so much a fear of the loss of any or all international order but rather an anxiety about fundamental change in or the loss of a specific structure of international order instantiated in the liberal international order. However, because this specific order is presented not only as a description of how the world of global politics operates but also as a normative picture of how things should be—collapsing to some extent the distinction between international order as such and a particular instance of it—the possible absence or end of this order is seen as a return to chaos and anarchy. By presenting the only possible alternative to the present order as one of disorder, not only are the violence and injustices that go into creating and maintaining the current international order glossed over but the possibilities for imagining something different or otherwise are also limited, perhaps even foreclosed, and the prospect of this order's abolition is rendered a terrifying one.

The International Order of White Sovereignty

But what exactly is the nature of the specific international order that is under threat or in crisis? And what exactly would be lost were this order to be abolished? If, as I suggested above, international order emerges out of specific social and political processes and contexts, it is necessarily shaped by the discourses and practices prevalent in them. One such set of discourses and practices through which international order emerges and is shaped in modernity is race.[4] Race, as I understand it, is a colonially constituted assemblage[5] of discourses and practices that functions to regulate and regularize a historically contingent set of social and political relations under which Whiteness and/or Europeanness is constituted and made sovereign over non-Whiteness/non-Europeanness. Whiteness here does not denote any sort of phenotypical difference; rather, it refers to a racialized assemblage that renders certain European-derived forms of knowledge, being, culture, politics, and so on as superior to and supreme over all others.[6] These relations are instituted and upheld through forms of colonial-racial violence, domination, and subjection/subjectification—codified in categories of race—that regulate and regularize this form of domination by ensuring that everyone is assigned to and kept in their "proper" place. Race thus functions as a form of order that renders such colonial domination and rule natural, given, or necessary, and in this

way, race ensures its (re)production and continuation. Barnor Hesse refers to this set of relations and the "colonial violence that created the modern practice of fashioning race as the rule of Europe and whiteness over non-Europe and nonwhiteness" as "White sovereignty."[7] White sovereignty thus involves the creation, regulation, and regularization of race so that White/European populations can dominate non-White/non-European populations. As such, White sovereignty "was based on proprietorial, exploitative, and regulatory claims on nonwhite bodies, labor, economies, cultures, and territories. It was concerned with establishing white occupation and possession as non-negotiable."[8]

The notion of White sovereignty directs us toward the hidden locus of power and authority under the (post-)colonial form of modernity that we inhabit. By establishing White occupation and possession as nonnegotiable, White sovereignty thus has a foundational character that stabilizes a historically contingent set of social relations, renders them natural, and permanently annexes sovereign and constituent power—as the power to establish or found—to Whiteness.[9] This order of White sovereignty is, importantly, historically constituted, having been birthed through historical assemblages and forms of colonial-racial violence. Nevertheless, the processes and violences that constitute it continue to operate reiteratively to ensure "the permanent authority of whiteness"[10] such that it becomes part of "the central cultural [and social] *imaginary*."[11] White sovereignty, then, involves not only the constitution of race as the exercise of White/European domination and rule but also the constitution of an order that regulates and regularizes this form of domination. Moreover, while White sovereignty first emerged in and through the European settlement and colonization of the Americas from the sixteenth century onward, it was subsequently spread across much of the planet as European empires extended their reach and rule through, for example, the expansion of coloniality, (racial) capitalism, and the racial state.[12] To the extent that these racialized and racializing processes that establish and secure White sovereignty operate globally—with important contextual differences and variations—they constitute one of the systems through which international order emerges.[13] The global order that emerges out of them can therefore be characterized as an order of White sovereignty.

Although White sovereignty is perhaps most apparent at the level of the state, its constituent power remains visible in the creation and operation of international order. This can be seen, for example, in the ways in which Euro-America is made the source or origin of the international order and those regions outside of it

192   *Owen R. Brown*

rendered its more or less passive recipients. The social, political, and cultural practices annexed to Whiteness are thereby elevated above all others and cast as sovereign over them. For example, early English School scholars of international society often presented Europe as the sole progeniture of international society and express dismay at movements for independence and self-determination among non-European states and societies that called into question the existing locus of global authority in Europe.[14] Similarly, it is also visible in an understanding of international law and legal order that subtly relies on teleological progress narratives that paint some as the vanguard of international law and justice and others as stuck in "savagery" and "barbarity,"[15] or as pulling the world "backwards."[16] White sovereignty is likewise apparent in the ways in which the architects of the postwar global order failed to account for the role and effects of colonialism and race in shaping the modern order[17] and in the systems that were erected to manage diversity and difference,[18] as well as in the structures and practices of globalized racial capitalism that construct subjects and spaces as differently exploitable and expropriatable.[19] However, that the contemporary international order is structured and constituted through the constituent power of White sovereignty is especially visible in the expressed fears surrounding changes in this order. G. John Ikenberry notes that the liberal international order—an order built for and by Western liberal democracies[20]—is facing a crisis of diversity and cohesion: "As increasingly diverse states entered the order with new visions and agendas, the democratic world became no longer primarily Anglo-American or even Western. The liberal democratic world was expanding, but expansion made it a less coherent political community."[21] To be clear, Ikenberry is not himself advocating for a racialized hierarchy, but in this description we can see how the crisis, then, might be read as not merely a crisis of cohesion or even diversity but as a crisis resulting from the subsequent loss of constituent power on the part of "Western" liberal democracies as they can no longer exercise the power and authority they once did. Read as such, were this order to disintegrate or be abolished, what stands to be lost is White sovereignty and its constituent power in the liberal international order.

The Prospect or Promise of Abolition

The dominant discourse presents the crisis of international order as being rooted in a relative loss of power on the part of the West and suggests that this loss of

power necessarily implies a move "backward" to chaos, anarchy, and disorder. This narrative forecloses possibilities for exploring an international order that is constituted and could operate otherwise. Indeed, many of the responses to this crisis of international order suggest that its solution lies in the reinvigoration of the order's "liberal" foundations.[22] However, if, as I have suggested, this liberal international order is marked by White sovereignty, it is not so clear that its continuation or rescue is actually desirable. Might efforts to shore it up in the face of change and crisis be misdirected and limiting? Even if we accept that the liberal international order is in crisis, recognizing that it has been and remains implicated in the construction and perpetuation of an unequal, hierarchically structured, and racialized international order suggests that the solution to this crisis cannot lie in more of the same. Rather, reflecting on the possibility of imagining and doing things otherwise becomes all the more important. Although this might appear to be a massive task, one path forward may lie in the thought and practice of abolitionists and their work toward a different future absent racism as the "group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death."[23] Instead of retreating into ideal theory to envision a more just global order absent the legacies and presence of race and (settler) colonialism—as contributions to the global justice literature often do[24]—the work of abolition starts from the conditions of our nonideal world and heeds the voices of those most affected by racialized oppression and domination. In so doing, it points to a way forward; not by offering a ready-made alternative but by encouraging us to think and act beyond the limits of the present order and that which is at present politically imaginable.

Some might read the prospect of the abolition of the current international order as implying a return to the fundamental anarchy of international politics,[25] particularly where the absence of a familiar order is experienced as terror.[26] But, as Stefano Harney and Fred Moten remind us, "The object of abolition . . . [is] not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society."[27] Abolition is, therefore, more about presence than absence.[28] In other words, while abolition is certainly still about ending certain institutions and practices, its fundamental aim is to erect and secure the conditions that enable all life to thrive. Yet, abolition does not seek this in complete and rationalized plans and visions or in clearly delineated and structured programs for change; it neither seeks reform of current structures and institutions nor limits itself to the established practices of formal politics. Instead, abolition seeks to imagine and prefigure a different, better future through practices and forms of social organization and

Owen R. Brown

place making that "make freedom provisionally."[29] These include practices such as the redirection of funding away from carceral institutions like prisons and the police and into life-giving ones—including housing, healthcare, and education—or approaches to justice that focus on repair rather than retribution.[30] Although abolitionist praxis is necessarily rooted in changing the conditions of life in and for existing communities on the ground, and might therefore be read as primarily concerned with the conditions inside various states, it need not be limited in this way. Rather the work of abolition extends beyond and across borders to encompass the practices and institutions that instantiate and reproduce carcerality both domestically and globally—whether it be the globalized prison- and military-industrial complexes, the bordering and surveillance regimes, or the infrastructures of racial capitalism.

In this sense, abolition is about opening up possibilities for a different order by operating simultaneously "in relation to both the world as it *has become* and the world that is *otherwise*."[31] Abolition is thus concerned with what Minkah Makalani refers to as the "politically unimaginable," with "how one might exceed the limits of the current political or social order."[32] The politically unimaginable pushes us to abandon the limits of the present and envision a radically different future. This reach into the unimaginable is necessary because, by limiting ourselves to what is imaginable, "the range of possibility [is constricted] to what is reasonable, proper, and makes sense[,]" whereas "the unimaginable . . . refuses this normative range of possibility and begins precisely with that which is impossible or nonsensical . . . and culls from the experiences of peoples and movements those worldviews, practices, and knowledges that enable us to move beyond the already available."[33] By pushing us into the politically unimaginable, abolition requires that we not only let go of the institutions, structures, and ways of thinking, acting, and doing politics that we have become accustomed to but that we also listen, pay attention to, and learn from other ways of being, thinking, and acting, and other forms of relationality and politics. Moreover, although perhaps still politically unimaginable, abolition is not a utopian project or some sort of altruistic pipe dream. Rather, it consists in and of a life-sustaining and -giving praxis that is being enacted in the present across a range of contexts.[34] The call to think of and enact abolition in the context of international order is hence a call to imagine and work toward a different global order by recognizing and remedying the violence and damage that the international order of White sovereignty has done. This calls us to extrapolate from "those practices, configurations of political

life, and lives themselves [that are] taken as impossible [but] are in fact already present" to envision a different future.[35]

Conclusion

The liberal international order may indeed be in crisis. This crisis, however, does not stem only from a lack of order or cohesion; neither does it necessarily stem from a weakening of its "liberal" foundations. Rather, if there is a crisis, it is perhaps the result of a growing recognition of the injustices, forms of violence and domination, and White sovereignty upon which the order rests. As such, and in the face of this recognition, rather than attempting to rescue or resecure this order from collapse or disorder—if seen as emergent and processual, some form of international order may be unavoidable after all—meeting the demands of such a crisis requires that we think both about what the world has become and what lies beyond these conditions and is as yet unimaginable. This is the task that abolition sets for us. However, as provisional and prefigurative, abolition does not offer a fully formed order with which to replace the current one; requiring it to provide us with one not only overlooks how orders are constituted but also would appear a bizarre request when faced with the fact that no order emerges fully formed or developed. Thus, even though abolition may not provide a complete map of the path ahead—that path may first have to be cleared, cut, and trodden—it does point us in a worthwhile direction. Recognizing this, the call to abolish the (liberal) international order of White sovereignty, while certainly directing us toward what is required for liberation on a global scale—namely, the removal of racialized and racializing hierarchies and forms of dispossession and exclusion, the dismantling of racial capitalism, the end of carcerality, and so on—does not and cannot offer up a ready-made replacement; nor should it if we want to move beyond the limits of our current order. If our aim is to move beyond coloniality and White sovereignty, the call for abolition is therefore not a suggestion that we "grope toward a clearly outlined, rationally ordered future that would realize a utopia."[36] However, by heeding the insights of the oppressed regarding the limits and injustice of the liberal international order, abolition at least offers the possibility of transcending White sovereignty and coloniality.

Notes

[1] See Emanuel Adler, *World Ordering: A Social Theory of Cognitive Evolution* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 47; and Cedric J. Robinson, *The Terms of Order: Political*

Science and the Myth of Leadership, 2nd ed. (1980; repr., Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), p. 38.

2. Robinson, *Terms of Order*, pp. 29–34; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970; repr., London: Routledge, 2002); and Bentley B. Allan, *Scientific Cosmology and International Orders* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

3. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2009), pp. 108–9. See also Mitchell M. Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, 2nd ed. (London: SAGE, 2010); and Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

4. On the question of the modernity of race, see Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," trans. Michael Ennis, *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (November 2000): pp. 533–80; Walter D. Mignolo, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (Winter 2002), pp. 57–96; and Barnor Hesse, "Racialized Modernity: An Analytics of White Mythologies," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 4 (2007), pp. 643–63.

5. "Assemblages" are sets of "institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts." Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 3.

6. This is not to suggest that the White/non-White binary is totalizing; nor is it to suggest that these categories are used across all contexts where race and racialization are operative. On this critical conception of Whiteness see Hesse, "Racialized Modernity"; Barnor Hesse, "White Sovereignty (. . .), Black Life Politics: 'The N****r They Couldn't Kill,'" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116, no. 3 (July 2017), pp. 581–604; Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (March 2007), pp. 240–70; Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999); Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America"; and Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

7. Barnor Hesse, "Two Concepts of White Sovereignty," in Anselm Franke, Nida Ghouse, Paz Guevara, and Antonia Majaca, eds., *Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2021), pp. 85–98, at p. 87. See also Hesse, "White Sovereignty (. . .), Black Life Politics."

8. Hesse, "Two Concepts of White Sovereignty," p. 87.

9. "Constituent power" refers to the power or capacity to establish or found: it is "the source of the force that exerts and retains the capacity to constitute the law, order, and norms that formalize a society." Hesse, "Two Concepts of White Sovereignty," p. 87.

10. Hesse, "White Sovereignty (. . .), Black Life Politics," p. 592.

11. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, trans. A. M. Berrett et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 25; emphasis in original.

12. For an extended discussion on this and the role of racialization in the construction of international order, see Owen R. Brown, "The Underside of Order: Race in the Constitution of International Order," *International Organization* 78, no. 1 (Winter 2024), pp. 38–66. See also Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America"; Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 2nd ed. (1981; repr., Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); and David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002).

13. On the globality of race, see Charles W. Mills, "Race and Global Justice," in Duncan Bell, ed., *Empire, Race and Global Justice* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 94–119; Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); and Debra Thompson, "Through, against and beyond the Racial State: The Transnational Stratum of Race," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 1 (March 2013), pp. 133–51.

14. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 4th ed. (1977; repr., New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 90–94; Hedley Bull, "The Revolt against the West," in Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds., *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 217–28; Adam Watson, "European International Society and Its Expansion," in Bull and Watson, *Expansion of International Society*, pp. 13–32; and Martin Wight, "Western Values in International Relations," ch. 3 in *International Relations and Political Philosophy*, ed. David S. Yost (1966; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 49–87.

15. For a discussion of this in connection with the International Criminal Court, see Oumar Ba, *States of Justice: The Politics of the International Criminal Court* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2020); and Oumar Ba, K.-Jo Bluen, and Owiso Owiso, "The Geopolitics of Race, Empire, and Expertise at the ICC," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, ed. Nukhet Sandal, May 24, 2023, oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-717.

16 Karen J. Alter, "Visions of International Law: An Interdisciplinary Retrospective," *Leiden Journal of International Law* 33, no. 4 (December 2020), pp. 837–69, at p. 869.

17 Amitav Acharya, "Race and Racism in the Founding of the Modern World Order," *International Affairs* 98, no. 1 (January 2022), pp. 23–43.

18 Zoltán I. Búzás, "Racism and Anti-Racism in the Liberal International Order," *International Organization* 75, no. 2 (2021), pp. 440–63; and Christian Reus-Smit, *On Cultural Diversity: International Theory in a World of Difference* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

19 Gargi Bhattacharyya, *Rethinking Racial Capitalism: Questions of Reproduction and Survival* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018); Nancy Fraser, "Expropriation and Exploitation in Racialized Capitalism: A Reply to Michael Dawson," *Critical Historical Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2016), pp. 163–78; Robinson, *Black Marxism*; and Lisa Tilley and Robbie Shilliam, "Raced Markets: An Introduction," *New Political Economy* 23, no. 5 (September 2018), pp. 534–43.

20 G. John Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crises of Global Order* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2020), p. 13.

21 Ibid., p. 274.

22 Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "Liberal World: The Resilient Order," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 4 (August 2018), pp. 16–24; Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy*; and Tanja A. Börzel and Michael Zürn, "Contestations of the Liberal International Order: From Liberal Multilateralism to Postnational Liberalism," in "Challenges to the Liberal International Order: International Organization at 75," special issue 2, *International Organization* 75 (Spring 2021), pp. 282–305.

23 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence," in Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin, eds., *Futures of Black Radicalism* (London: Verso, 2017), pp. 225–240, at p. 228.

24 For a critique of this, see Bell, *Empire, Race and Global Justice*.

25 Anne-Marie Slaughter, "The Return of Anarchy?," in "THE NEXT WORLD ORDER: Special 70th Anniversary Issue," special issue, *Journal of International Affairs* (2017), pp. 11–16.

26 Robinson, *Terms of Order*, pp. 106–7.

27 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe, U.K.: Minor Compositions, 2013), p. 42.

28 Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Léopold Lambert, "Making Abolition Geography in California's Central Valley," *Funambulist* 21 (December 20, 2018), thefunambulist.net/magazine/21-space-activism/interview-making-abolition-geography-california-central-valley-ruth-wilson-gilmore.

29 Gilmore, "Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence," p. 238.

30 Allegra M. McLeod, "Envisioning Abolition Democracy," *Harvard Law Review* 132, no. 6 (April 2019), pp. 1613–49.

31 Andrew Dilts, "Crisis, Critique, and Abolition," in Didier Fassin and Bernard E. Harcourt, eds., *A Time for Critique* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), pp. 230–51, at p. 237; emphasis in original.

32 Minkah Makalani, "Black Lives Matter and the Limits of Formal Black Politics," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116, no. 3 (July 2017), pp. 529–52, at p. 547. See also Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post–Civil Rights Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

33 Makalani, "Black Lives Matter and the Limits of Formal Black Politics," p. 547.

34 McLeod, "Envisioning Abolition Democracy"; and Dylan Rodríguez, "Abolition as Praxis of Human Being: A Foreword," *Harvard Law Review* 132, no. 6 (April 2019), pp. 1575–1612.

35 Dilts, "Crisis, Critique, and Abolition," p. 237.

36 Makalani, "Black Lives Matter and the Limits of Formal Black Politics," p. 548.

Abstract: Discussions of the liberal international order, both inside and outside the academy, tend to take its necessity and desirability for granted. While its specific contours and content are left somewhat open in such debates, the idea that this international order is essential for global peace and stability is left largely unquestioned. What is more, the potential loss or end of this order is often taken to mean a return to anarchy, chaos, and disorder. In this essay, I question the presumed necessity and desirability of the liberal international order that most discussions of it seem to share. By rethinking the international order as processual, emergent, and grounded in the social and political contexts that shape its constitution and operation, I suggest that fears about the crisis of international order are less about international order itself and more about the loss of a specific order. This specific order, I argue, constituted in part through processes of racialization, is not so much a rules-based order of sovereign equality but rather an international order of White sovereignty that secures the domination and rule of some over others, of

198

Owen R. Brown

Whiteness over non-Whiteness. Recognizing the role of White sovereignty in the contemporary international order points toward a need to take seriously calls for abolition. Rather than signifying a return to chaos and disorder, the prospect and promise of abolition represents a call to break free from the constraints of the present order and reach into an as-yet-unimaginable future.