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<b>INTRODUCTION</b> Examining the Wreckage	
NICK ESTES AND ROXANNE DUNBAR-ORTIZ	1
Modern U.S. Racial Capitalism: Some Theoretical Insights	
CHARISSE BURDEN-STELLY	8
Race Is About More Than Discrimination: Racial Capitalism, the Settler State, and the Challenges Facing Organized Labor in the United States	
BILL FLETCHER JR.	21
Poultry and Prisons: Toward a General Strike for Abolition	
CARRIE FRESHOUR	32
Colonialism, Migration, Pandemic: The Immutable Evidence that Capitalism Is Racist and Misogynist	
LILIA D. MONZÓ	48
The Yellow Plague and Romantic Anticapitalism	
LYKO DAY	64
Racial Capital from Pan-Africanism and Coloniality to Epistemic Rupture: New Directions in a Life with Marxism	
JESSE BENJAMIN	74
Oliver Cromwell Cox's Marxism	
PAUL M. SWEEZY	93
Marx and Slavery	
JOHN BELLAMY FOSTER, HANNAH HOLLEMAN, AND BRETT CLARK	96
<i>"The language of the unheard" on the cover is a reference to Martin Luther King Jr.'s "The Other America" speech, in which he said that "a riot is the language of the unheard."</i>	

## Notes from the Editors

As this special issue of *Monthly Review* on racial capitalism goes to the printer, the entire United States has been upended by more than a week of protests and riots, extending to over 150 cities, sparked by the police murder of George Floyd. The widespread rebellions are a manifestation, at a deeper level, of the unraveling of the social fabric due mainly to the actions of the neofascist White House under Donald Trump at the apex of the U.S. state. On June 1, in response to the protests, Trump called for deadly force to be unleashed on the protesters, seeking to utilize the U.S. military in what he is calling a policy to "dominate" U.S. society. All of this is in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a deep economic depression, and the most brazen examples of class corruption, property theft, and violation of the so-called rule of law seen in modern U.S. history.

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The murder of Floyd merely for being a Black man in the United States, though hardly unusual in U.S. racial capitalism past and present, stood out, as Cornel West explained on CNN on May 29, as “a lynching at the highest level.” It was carried out by the Minneapolis police as part of a larger national policy of instilling terror on the Black population as well as other populations of color. It had its basis in the almost complete legal immunity in such actions conferred by the state on the police. As sociologist Oliver Cromwell Cox observed in *Race* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000 – a reprint of the final part of his *Caste, Class, and Race*), the threat of such lynchings is constantly “in the whip hand of the ruling class,” aimed at the Black population. “It is the most powerful and convincing form of racial repression operating in the interest of the status quo. Lynchings serve the indispensable social function of providing the ruling class with the means of periodically reaffirming its collective sentiment of white dominance” (257). But the lynching of Floyd was not the product of white mobs taking the law into their own hands as under the Old Jim Crow. It was instituted in today’s New Jim Crow by a militarized police force in the name of that very law, backed up by the authorities, in what has now become an all-too-common practice sanctified by the so-called justice system.

However, at this particular moment in history, the state strategy of terror and repression directed at the Black population backfired. Occurring at a time of increasing working-class and socialist consciousness, developing particularly among the youth in U.S. society and fueled by the inequities promoted in the midst of the pandemic, the Minneapolis police lynching of Floyd touched off protests and riots in city after city across the country and the world. The mutiny against the status quo arose from youth and working-class activists of all colors, crossing racial lines, representing a scale of solidarity in the face of racial capitalism exceeding that of the civil rights era. These events bring to mind the hopeful words of Martin Luther King Jr. (“The Other America,” Stanford University, April 14, 1967):

I realize and understand the discontent and the agony and the disappointment and even the bitterness of those who feel that whites in America cannot be trusted. And I would be the first to say that there are all too many who are still guided by the racist ethos. And I am still convinced that there are still many white persons of good will. And I’m happy to say that I see them every day in the student generation who cherish democratic principles and justice above principle, and who will stick with the cause of justice and the cause of Civil Rights and the cause of peace throughout the days ahead. And so I refuse to despair.

This special issue of *Monthly Review* on racial capitalism is dedicated to those solidarity protesters of all colors who are challenging the dominance of white supremacy and the racist state, recognizing that this is a class as well as race struggle.



Today’s explosive new research into “racial capitalism,” defined by historian Walter Johnson as “the dialectical relationship between capitalist exploitation and racial domination” (*Harvard Gazette*, May 11, 2020), is usually seen as having its inception in Cedric J. Robinson’s powerful and iconoclastic work, *Black Marxism: The*

(continued on page 120)

(continued from inside back cover)

*Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed, 1983). Robinson sought to “map the historical and intellectual contours of Marxism and Black radicalism, two programs for revolutionary change.” In this context, he introduced the concept of “racial capitalism,” developing at the same time a critique of Eurocentric forms of Marxism (1, 9). This tradition, emanating primarily from Black radicalism, has now converged with related work arising within the Native American and Latinx communities. The present special issue of *Monthly Review*, as explained in the introduction by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and Nick Estes, is therefore devoted to exploring this complex interweaving of the classical Marxian critique with the rapidly developing critique of racial capitalism.

It is important to note in this context that the historic Black radical tradition and the critique of racial capitalism more generally, evoked by Robinson, have long been important influences on *Monthly Review*. Among those he singled out as key to the Black radical tradition, both in the United States and abroad, were W. E. B. Du Bois and Cox, both major contributors to *Monthly Review* and Monthly Review Press. Other MR and Monthly Review Press authors who can be considered formative theorists of the critique of racial capitalism in Robinson’s sense include such leading figures as Samir Amin, Grace Lee Boggs, James Boggs, Julian Bond, Anne Braden, Amílcar Cabral, Aimé Césaire, Domitila Barrios de Chungara, Eric Foner, Eduardo Galeano, Shirley Graham (Du Bois), Che Guevara, Lorraine Hansberry, Gerald Horne, C. L. R. James, Bruce E. Johansen, Robin D. G. Kelley, Malcolm X, Manning Marable, Chico Mendes, Walter Rodney, Clive Thomas, Alice Walker, and Cornel West.

Monthly Review Press published the famous Combahee River Collective Statement (written primarily by Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, and Demita Frazier) in 1979 in Zillah Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*. It has also republished classic works by figures such as José Martí and José Carlos Mariátegui.

Almost seventy years ago, Du Bois wrote in “Negroes and the Crisis of Capitalism in the United States” (*Monthly Review*, April 1953, 484–85):

The United States, with its existing social structure, cannot today abolish the color line despite its promises. It cannot stop injustice in the courts based on color and race. Above all, it cannot stop the exploitation of black workers by white capital, especially in the newest South. White North America beyond the urge of sound economics is persistently driving black folk toward socialism. It is the United States which is straining every effort to enslave Asia and Africa, and educated and well-to-do black Americans are coming to know this just as well as anybody. They may delay their reaction; they may hold ominous silence. But in the end, if this pressure keeps up, they will join the march to economic emancipation, because otherwise they cannot themselves be free.

Capitalism and racism, Du Bois taught us, did not simply intersect, but rather coalesced organically through colonialism/imperialism – hence racism was a product from the start of the emergence of the capitalist world system. Karl Marx, as Du Bois pointed out (see “Karl Marx and the Negro,” *Crisis*, March 1933), did not simply focus on the abstract theory of capital but was engaged in the confrontation with the slaveowner capitalism of the U.S. South through his support of the radical abolitionists, his detailed analysis of slavery, and his role in the political organizing of English working-class protests against British support of the Southern slavocracy. Du Bois’s perspective, which encompassed colonialism, imperialism, racial capitalism, and third world revolution, far from being a departure from historical materialism, constituted in many ways the vital core of the Marxian critique in

(continued on page 119)

the twentieth century. For *Monthly Review*, it has long been understood that the main “revolutionary agent capable of challenging and defeating capitalism” in the twentieth century is to be found in the Global South and in the struggle of those revolting against colonialism/imperialism worldwide (Paul M. Sweezy, *Modern Capitalism and Other Essays* [New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972], 164).

Cox was another foundational thinker for *Monthly Review*. Monthly Review Press reprinted his *Caste, Class, and Race* in 1959 and published his *Capitalism as a System* in 1964. As Paul M. Sweezy wrote in “Oliver Cromwell Cox’s Marxism” (his foreword to Cox’s *Race, Class, and the World System*, ed. Herbert M. Hunter and Sameer Y. Abraham [New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987] – reprinted in this issue): “I am quite simply [Cox’s] pupil. Before *Caste, Class, and Race* I had never thought about the theoretical issues involved. I found his refutation of caste theory, so popular in the United States at the time, totally persuasive, and his linking of capitalist exploitation and modern race relations provided the necessary historical perspective.” An important part of Cox’s work for Sweezy was its pushing back of the history of bourgeois society to the Italian city-states of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which allowed a deeper conception of the world-system character of capitalism and its basis in the global expropriation of land, resources, and bodies.

All this reflected the fact that for *Monthly Review*’s founding editors Leo Huberman and Sweezy (and later Harry Magdoff), the Black radical tradition was a development within Marxism, returning to the perspective of classical historical materialism and questioning certain distortions of Marxism, including Eurocentric views, that were, as Sweezy stated in his celebration of Cox, “a vicious caricature of the real thing.”

Samir Amin’s *Eurocentrism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989, 2010) was to constitute still another turning point in the critique of imperialism, culturalism, and racial capitalism, developing out of decades of dependency theory, world-system theory, and the critique of globalization – in all of which Amin had played a central part (see John Bellamy Foster, foreword to Samir Amin, *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization* [London: Zed, 2014]). Here, Amin introduced the critique of what he called “Eurocentrism,” defined as a culturalist view, in which Europe was designated as the *universal culture*. Max Weber, as an extreme proponent of Eurocentrism in Amin’s view, wrote in 1920, in the opening sentence of his series on the Sociology of Religion: “A product of modern European civilization, studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and value” (Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [London: George Allen and Unwin, 1930], 13). In the usual scheme of modernity, European (and North American) development was seen as constituting the *universal culture* and economic pattern, to which all other *particular cultures* outside the West must conform. Conversely, non-European cultures were seen as hamstrung by their lack of Western cultural-economic developments, preceding the development of capitalism, such as the rationalism attributed to the ancient Greeks, Roman law, and European-style feudalism, hindering them from developing the culture of capitalism.

Based on classical historical materialism, Amin opposed these assumptions, along with their culturalist pretensions. He also rejected much of the official Marxist tradition, with its rigid, linear analysis, and returned to Marx’s nonlinear and nondeterminist method. In Amin’s view, Marx remained an essential *starting point* (23), given his avoidance of hasty generalizations on universal patterns of development; his complex, nonlinear conception of the evolution of cultures of pro-

(continued from page 119)

duction, which envisioned a different pattern of development for Asia; and his guiding thread on the relation of productive forms to the state and ideology. Both V. I. Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg can be seen as following Marx in this respect. However, there subsequently arose a more dogmatic approach within official Marxism, generating a “Eurocentric interpretation of Marxism” (190–91). In dissenting from such perspectives and reenvisioning universal history in line with the method of classical historical materialism, Amin introduced the notion of the tributary mode of production as a way of describing what was common to precapitalist economic formations. Thus, he reduced European feudalism to just one type of tributary formation, while recognizing the numerous paths of development across cultures – interrupted almost everywhere by European colonialism. Europe, in this view, had leaped ahead not because it was more advanced, but rather due to its peripheral status, which led to the early development of capitalism. Amin also questioned the racist, Aryan myths that gave a unique Eurocentric place to Greek civilization, seconding the important revelations of Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena: Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New York: Rutgers, 1987).

In his exploration of “actually existing capitalism” in *Eurocentrism*, Amin emphasized that, according to the dominant Western ideology, “the millions of abandoned children in Brazil, famine in the Sahel, the bloody dictatorships of Africa, slavery in the mines of South Africa, and the exhaustion of young girls on the assembly lines of the electronics factories in Korea and elsewhere, all of that is not truly capitalism” (258). Nor, of course, was the whole history of the slave trade or the genocide inflicted on indigenous populations throughout the world, or the First and Second World Wars, including Nazi Germany. Amin challenged all of this.

This meant a radical reconception of the history and development of capitalism. Despite the theoretical necessity of engaging in a critique of capital’s pure logic, such a critique could only ultimately be concretized in terms of actual revolutionary practice if it addressed accumulation on a world scale, including the historical reality of colonialism/imperialism and racial capitalism. Only then could the expropriation of peoples on a world scale, the barbaric heart of the current system, and threats to Earth System itself, be understood. Central to this more concrete, revolutionary understanding of capitalism all along has been the powerful challenge offered by the Black radical tradition from Du Bois to the present.



We are pleased to announce that Brett Clark, Daniel Auerbach, and Karen Xuan Zhang’s article “The Du Bois Nexus: Intersectionality, Political Economy, and Environmental Injustice in the Peruvian Guano Trade in the 1800s,” *Environmental Sociology* 4, no. 1 (2018): 54–66, has won the Outstanding Marxist Sociology Award for 2020 from the Section on Marxist Sociology of the American Sociological Association. The award committee declared: “This article makes an important contribution in bridging Marxist sociology with the dynamics of race, class, nation, gender, sexuality and ecological relationships using the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois. It provides a thoughtful historical case study combining Du Bois’s manure theory with Marx’s metabolic rift analysis to further explain the international guano trade in the 1800s.”