

The History of American Racism is the History of Capitalism

“Development was, more than all other factors combined, the institutionalization of capitalism as a world system.

Underdevelopment was the direct consequence of this process: chattel slavery, sharecropping, peonage, industrial labor at low wages, and cultural chaos. The current economic amnesia of the West is therefore no accident, because it reveals the true roots of massive exploitation and human degradation upon which the current world order rests. The world “periphery” and capitalist “core” share a common history.” – Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, pgs. 3 – 4.

“Instead capitalism emerged within the feudal order and flowered in the cultural soil of a Western civilization already thoroughly infused with racialism. Capitalism and racism, in other words, did not break from the old order but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of “racial capitalism” dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide. Capitalism was “racial” not because of some conspiracy to divide workers or justify slavery and dispossession, but because racialism had already permeated Western feudal society.” Robin D.G. Kelley, *Why Did Cedric Robinson Mean By Racial Capitalism*, *Boston Review*, January 17, 2017

“Atlantic slavery emerged as the cornerstone of capitalism’s articulation of exploitation, appropriation, and



Racism and Capitalism in America

A pamphlet to help make the connection.

dispossession during the long sixteenth century, but it also bequeathed something that lasted—an enduring cheapness of black life. The production of race as a form of devalued collectivity has depended upon managing valuations and devaluations of black social and biological reproduction in the interests of capital accumulation and its social reproduction.” – Nikhil Pal Singh, *On Race, Violence and So-Called Primitive Accumulation*, *Social Text* 128 Vol. 34, No. 3, September 2016, pg. 43

How the Western World was Built on the Backs of Black People

“The ordeal of slavery was responsible for accelerating the economic and political power of Europe and North America over the rest of the mostly nonwhite world. Since the demise of slavery, and the emergence of modern capitalism, the process of Black underdevelopment has expanded and deepened. To understand this dynamic of degradation, first, is to recognize that development

itself is comparative in essence, a relationship of inequality between the capitalist ruling class and those who are exploited.” – Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, pg. 7

“Above all, we must remember the black worker was the ultimate exploited; that he formed the mass of labor which had neither wish nor power to escape from the labor status, in order to directly exploit other laborers, or indirectly, by alliance with capital, to share in their exploitation.” – W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, pg. 11

How Capitalism Perpetuates Racial Inequality

“Capitalism requires inequality and racism enshrines it.” - Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Geographies of Racial Capitalism* with Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Antipode Foundation, June 1st 2020

“Racial Capitalism, which is to say all capitalism, is not a thing, it’s a relation. However, if we look back through the history of capitalism as it developed, we

see that the understanding that those who own the means of production had of their differences from those whose labor they exploited were understandings that we can recognize today as racial practice. So, all capitalism is racial from its beginning, which is to say, the capitalism we've inherited that is constantly producing and reproducing itself and it will continue to depend on racial practice and racial hierarchy no matter what. This is another way of saying we can't undo racism without undoing capitalism." – Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Geographies of Racial Capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Antipode Foundation, June 1st 2020

"The labor needs of capital alone could explain how racism functioned under capitalism. The literal dehumanization of Africans for the sake of labor was used to justify their harsh treatment and their debased status in the United States. This dehumanization did not simply end when slavery was abolished; instead, the mark of inferiority branded onto black skin carried over into Emancipation and laid the basis for the second-class citizenship African Americans experienced for close to a hundred years after slavery." – Keeanga Yamahtta Taylor, What About Racism, Jacobin Magazine, March 16, 2016

What to Keep in Mind Going Forward

"The modes of racist domination – from barbaric slavery to bestial Jim Crow, Sr., to cruel Jim Crow, Jr. – are never reducible to individual prejudice or personal bias. Empire, white supremacy,

capitalism, patriarchy, and homophobia are linked in complex ways, and our struggles against them require moral consistency and systemic analyses." – Cornel West, The Radical King, pg. xiii

"We Communists adhere to the fundamental belief that complete and lasting equality of imperialist oppressed nations of peoples can be guaranteed only with the establishment of Socialism." - Claudia Jones, On the Right to Self-Determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt, 1946

This pamphlet is a concerted attempt by a number of scholars to easily and clearly communicate the relationship between American racism and capitalism.