BRILL

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 31.2 (2023) 25–48

historical materialism: research in marxist critical theory

brill.com/hima

Reexamining Race and Capitalism in the Marxist Tradition – Editorial Introduction

Robert Knox
Senior Lecturer, Department of Law, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK
Corresponding author
R.Knox@liverpool.ac.uk

Ashok Kumar
Senior Lecturer, Department of Management, Birkbeck,
University of London, London, UK
a.kumar@bbk.ac.uk

Received 1 March 2023 | Accepted 26 June 2023 |
Published online 3 August 2023

Abstract

The question of capitalism's relationship to issues of race, racism and processes of racialisation has become increasingly prominent in contemporary debates. This special issue of *Historical Materialism* on 'Race and Capital' seeks to intervene in these debates. In this Introduction, we situate the special issue within this wider political, historical and theoretical context. We begin by reconstructing some of the key tensions and fault lines within contemporary discussions of race and racism, particularly in relation to the Marxist tradition. Against those who claim a primarily oppositional relationship between the Marxist tradition and anti-racist thinking, we chart a historical account of key moments in which Marxist movements and thinkers have attempted to articulate distinctively historical-materialist accounts of race and racism. We then situate the key themes of the special issue – and the various articles that compose the issue – against this background.

Published with license by Koninklijke Brill NV | DOI:10.1163/1569206X-BJA10012
 | ISSN: 1465-4466 (print) 1569-206X (online)

Keywords

race – capital – slavery – labour – ideology – colonialism

It is now a truth almost universally acknowledged that the 2008 financial crisis – and the various permutations of austerity which followed – set the scene for the re-emergence of the concept of capitalism in the popular, political and academic scenes. That crisis revealed (once again) the unstable and chaotic nature of capitalist social relations, and the austerity which followed starkly highlighted capitalism's polarised class relations.

However, it was not simply *class* relations that were polarised in this context. For many, the uneven and unequal responses to capitalist crisis were also expressed in *racialised* terms. The sub-prime mortgage crisis, was, of course, deeply linked to racist housing provision in the US,[1] and the consequences of austerity were unevenly distributed along racialised lines.[2] This was true domestically, but even more specifically *internationally*, with racialised peripheral states bearing a heavy burden for the crisis.[3] The recent response to the Covid-19 pandemic has further highlighted this.[4] At the same time, at least partially as a response to the unrest unleashed by the crisis, racialised state violence in the domestic scene became much more prominent.

It is perhaps for this reason, that – alongside a social-democratic resurgence – the politics of the period since 2008, and especially since 2014, have also been expressed in racialised terms. On the left, several political movements – Black Lives Matter, Rhodes Must Fall etc. – invoked anti-racism as one of their guiding political principles. On the other hand, forces of the right mobilised racism: both in terms of attacks on racialised populations and in reactionary defences of 'whiteness'. In the English-speaking world this was most obviously the case with the Trump Presidency and the right-wing elements of the Brexit project.

This historical moment is also characterised by a notable presence of racially marginalised groups in positions of power. From Barack Obama to Rishi Sunak, the rise in representation means that racial and class structures are now managed and policed by previously subordinated groups. This shift may lead to increased resources for historically disadvantaged communities, but it also muddles lines, dulls conflicts, and creates incentives for the most

1 Taylor 2019.
2 Dymski 2009.
3 Harman 2010.
4 Saad-Filho and Ayers 2020; Knox and Whyte 2023.

privileged members of each racial group to maintain racial hierarchies and categories.

These political-economic events have of course been reflected intellectually. As was noted in a 2017 special issue of this journal, much of the intellectual production associated with these moments took the form of 'identity politics'.[5] Here the phenomenon of race was understood as the expression of individual or group *identities*. These positions, of course, built on a longer tradition of thinking about race and empire – drawn often from poststructuralist and postcolonial theory – in which race was seen as rooted primarily in psychic and cultural relations.

As such, in these modes of thinking, 'the historical specificity of racism and sexism's emergence through and alongside a capitalist mode of production is mystified', with issues of race and racism seen as separate from issues of capitalism and class.[6] Such positions, of course, fundamentally implicate the Marxist tradition: if race is a central political category, and one which cannot be explained in relation to social relations, then Marxism cannot claim to have a significant purchase on understanding and explaining the social totality. In some instances, this was a response to a sense that Marxist approaches often neglected issues of race and racism, relegating them to mere epiphenomena of capitalism, secondary contradictions, or as simply tools to divide the working class.

Racial Capitalism?

However, things were not ultimately as straightforward as this divide might suggest. Whilst there are many thinkers and traditions which insist on rigidly dividing questions of class and capitalism from those of race and racism, there are also those who have sought to understand their connections. This was particularly important in the context of the past 15 years, where the outcome of a capitalist crisis was widely understood as being racialised.

In this respect, rather than a simple *separation* of 'race' (as an 'identity') and capitalism, over the past eight years or so we have *also* seen particularly fraught debates about the relationship between the two. From debates on capitalism's

5 Kumar, Elliott-Cooper, Iyer and Gebrial 2018.

6 Kumar, Elliott-Cooper, Iyer and Gebrial 2018, p. 10.

relationship to slavery,[7] to debates over imperialism and the 'decolonial',[8] and debates over prison abolition[9] we have seen a real resurgence in work attempting to think through the ways in which capitalism is involved in processes of racialisation.

Emblematic of this new orientation has been the explosion of interest in Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism* and his attendant concepts of 'racial capitalism' and the 'black radical tradition'.[10] In that book, Robinson argued that practices of racial differentiation ('racialism') had emerged in Europe with 'the integration of the Germanic migrants with older European peoples'.[11] In this context a 'racial theory of order' had emerged from an '[e]nduring principle' in European feudalism, such that the effects of racialism 'were bound to appear in the social expression of every strata of every European society'.[12] Accordingly, capitalism, as a creation of Europe, emerged steeped in these categories, and reproduced them as it expanded outwards.

In Robinson, then, we find two distinct arguments about the relationship between capitalism and racism, both of which have proved controversial for Marxists. The first is that racism – as a systemic organisational phenomenon – is understood to significantly precede capitalism. This is linked to a wider question about the source of racial animus. The second is that the connection that Robinson draws between capitalism *in particular* and racism is ultimately a contingent one – based on the historical phenomenon of racialism in Europe – as opposed to anything based on capitalism's intrinsic logic.

The risk here, of course, is that Robinson *overemphasises* the centrality of race in society, be it capitalist or pre-capitalist. In not offering an account of the historical specificity of race and racialisation, Robinson risks reducing all social relations to a racialised hierarchy. At the same time, the risk is that race appears as a *timeless* and transhistorical phenomenon, and, as such, a perennial or quasi-naturalised feature of human existence.

It is for this this reason that the subtitle of Robinson's book is so important. Whilst the book is ostensibly about 'Black Marxism', Robinson's argument is precisely that the Marxism of the figures he surveys (W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James and Richard Wright) did not offer sufficient resources to deal with the 'race question'. As such, these figures had to turn to a 'Black Radical Tradition'

7 Wood 2022.

8 See Patnaik and Patnaik 2021 for new imperialism debates. See Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndlovu (eds.) 2021 for decolonial and Marxism debates.

9 Shelby 2022.

10 Robinson 2020.

11 Robinson 2020, p. 84.

12 Robinson 2020, p. 28.

for those answers which 'began to emerge and overtake Marxism'[13] in their analyses. In this way, Robinson in fact diminishes the significance of the Black *Marxist* tradition. In the process, Robinson at times appears to rely – as Robin D.G. Kelley tentatively suggests in his Introduction[14] – upon an overly homogenous notion of African culture and experience as the basis for the commonality of approach characteristic of the 'Black Radical Tradition'.

Of course, Robinson's particular analysis here is not shared by everyone who uses the term 'racial capitalism' (and indeed the concept has a much longer and more explicitly Marxist history).[15] For many, the term operates as a kind of signifier to denote a general relationship between capitalism and racism. That being said, Robinson's formulations have been influential, with many insisting that whilst capitalism and racism have some kind of connection, it is not one that the Marxist tradition has been able to successfully capture.

The impetus for this symposium is to contest that assumption. The symposium seeks to build on *Historical Materialism*'s prior work on race and racism,[16] as well as that in the wider Marxist tradition. It represents an attempt to take questions of race and racialisation seriously while, at the same time, situating them firmly within their material context. This Introduction will now proceed to offer a few thoughts on the history and characterisation of Marxist work on race and racism – both intellectually and politically – before introducing the contributions to the symposium.

Marx and Engels on Race and Racism

Although Marx and Engels were not centrally concerned with issues of race and racism, it is a myth to imagine that these issues played no role in their analysis. Beyond their personal opinions on race and racism,[17] both Marx and Engels invoked questions of racism in important ways. Perhaps the most obvious and prominent here were in their discussions of primitive and accumulation and colonialism. Famously, Marx described the birth of capitalist production in racialised terms, noting:

13 Robinson 2000, p. xxxi.
14 Robinson 2000, p. xx.
15 See Bhattacharyya 2018. For an in-depth account, see Levenson and Paret 2022.
16 See e.g. Balthaser 2021; Kelly 2004; Le Blanc 2003; Camfield 2016; Johnson 2016; Kelly 2019; Opratko 2017; Kipfer and Mallick 2022.
17 van Ree 2019.

> The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation.[18]

Here, then, Marx recognised that the geographically uneven birth of capitalism was – in part – mediated through 'race'; this was an insight that was to prove crucial in later Marxist invocations. At the same time, Marx was at pains to insist that there was nothing 'natural' about the connection between race and slavery. In *Wage Labour and Capital* Marx famously posed the question: 'What is a Negro slave?'; in response he answered: 'A man of the black race. The one explanation is worthy of the other. A Negro is a Negro. Only under certain conditions does he become a slave.'[19] On the one hand, then, Marx pointed out that slavery was not a characteristic inherent to Black people. On the other, Marx did treat it as self-evident that there was a 'black race'.

Crucially, Marx insisted that race could serve as a device to divide the revolutionary working-class movement. Thus, in the context of the US Civil War – in which Marx supported the anti-slavery forces unreservedly – Marx was to argue that the US labour movement had been 'paralysed as long as slavery disfigured a part of the republic'. This was because, Marx argued, 'Labour in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin.'[20] This, of course, echoes Marx's stated position on Ireland,[21] where he argued that '[t]he ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life' in a manner 'the same as that of the "poor whites" to the Negroes in the former slave states'.[22] For Marx this '*antagonism* is the secret of the *impotence of the English working class*', and remedying it would be the '*first condition of their own social emancipation*'.[23]

In this way, Marx essentially bequeathed three points to later Marxists' thinking about race. The first was that race and racism are deeply connected to capitalism's spread internationally. The second was that racism is bound up with internal competition within the working class, and serves – both as a

18 Marx 1990, p. 915.
19 Marx 1933, p. 28.
20 Marx 1990, p. 414.
21 For more on Irish immigrant-workers and Marx, see Deleixhe 2019.
22 Marx and Engels 2010, pp. 471–6.
23 Ibid.

conscious project of the ruling class and directly via the labour movement – to undermine the basis for a revolutionary movement. The third was that Marx did not assign race or racism an independent causational force: it was clear that Marx did not think people were enslaved, exploited or dispossessed because of their racialisation, but rather owing to definite social conditions.

The latter also points us to a significant limitation of Marx's reflections: whilst Marx's analysis did not ascribe any particular causational power to race, he nonetheless took for granted the existence of racial categories. As such, 'race' as a category was not subjected to the same historical and materialist analysis that both Marx and Engels would deploy in relation to other phenomena, and it was this task that later thinkers in the Marxist tradition sought to undertake.

The Third International and the Turn East

Marx's attention to the colonial dimensions of race became particularly important in the context of the Russian Revolution. As is well-known, Lenin – borrowing much of his analysis from Bukharin,[24] Hobson[25] and Hilferding[26] – argued that the question of imperialism had become central to capitalism, thus bringing with it the question of race and racism.

The discussion here was twofold. Bukharin and Lenin argued that mature monopoly capitalism had led to a situation in which a handful of advanced capitalist countries – in order to stave off capitalist crises – had been forced to export capital to less-advanced and pre-capitalist societies.[27] In order to protect this export, and so guarantee profit rates, these advanced capitalist countries transformed and dominated those societies. However, profit here was not repatriated to those countries; rather, surplus value flowed back to the metropole. This situation was justified and framed in racial and civilisational terms.

Alongside this, Lenin and Bukharin sought to explain why the traditional Social-Democratic parties had been unwilling to oppose their own nations' imperialism. Here, they turned to Marx's ideas about the role of race and competition in dividing the working class, as well as Engels's reflections on the possibility of a section of the working class becoming – through the provision of

24 Bukharin 1972.
25 Hobson 2018.
26 Hilferding 2019.
27 Lenin 1964a.

higher wages – an 'aristocracy of labour'. In the context of imperialism, they argued, this had become a reality since:

> All the relative 'prosperity' of the European-American industry was conditioned by nothing but the fact that a safety valve was opened in the form of colonial policy. In this way the exploitation of 'third persons' (pre-capitalist producers) and colonial labour led to a rise in the wages of European and American workers.[28]

For Lenin, the possibility of super-profits enabled capitalists to pay a section of the working class wages that were much higher than they might otherwise have obtained, and so 'bribe *their own* workers, to create something like an alliance … between the workers of the given nation and their capitalists *against* the other countries'.[29] In this way, to 'a *certain degree* the workers of the oppressor nations are partners of *their own* bourgeoisie in the plundering … of the oppressed nations'. These workers occupy 'a *privileged* position in many spheres of political life' and '[*i*]*deologically* … are taught … disdain and contempt for the workers of the oppressed nations'.[30] As such, racism represented the ideological articulation of the material relationships of imperialism.

Of course, the labour-aristocracy thesis has not been without criticism,[31] but it certainly set the scene for the politics of the Third International. In the wake of the Russian Revolution, and the defeat of the revolutionary movements in Europe, the Communist movement turned East,[32] incorporating anti-imperialism and self-determination directly into the political programmes of the Communist International. Thus at the Second Congress of the Communist International, the task was set 'to bring into being a close alliance of all national and colonial liberation movements with Soviet Russia'.[33] Crucially, in this context the 'Negro Question' was explicitly linked to the colonial question.[34] This theme was further developed at the Fourth Congress, which resolved to 'support every form of the Black movement that either undermines or weakens capitalism' and committed itself to 'struggle for the

28 Bukharin 1972, p. 165.
29 Lenin 1964a, p. 114.
30 Lenin 1964b, p. 56.
31 There has been many a critique in the pages of this journal over the question. See Maguire 2021 and Post 2010.
32 Knox and Tzouvala 2021.
33 Degras (ed.) 1956, p. 121.
34 Zumoff 2014.

equality of the white and Black races, and for equal wages and equal political and social rights'. This was matched by a political commitment to:

> [U]tilise all the means available to it to compel the trade unions to take Black workers into their rights, or, where this right already exists in form, to make special efforts to recruit Blacks into the trade unions. If this proves to be impossible, the Communist International will organise Blacks in their own trade unions and make special use of the united front tactic in order to force the general unions to admit them.[35]

Third Worldism and the Civil-Rights Movements

These commitments to anti-imperialism and anti-racism – on both a theoretical and practical level – became crucially important to the development of Marxist accounts of race and racism for two interconnected reasons. Firstly, in a practical sense, they built immediate solidarity between the European Communist movement, non-Europeans, and racialised people living in Europe. The Congresses saw representatives from the colonies and others directly participate in these debates. Secondly, the intellectual resources provided by Marxist theory proved crucial in negotiating and conceptualising the anti-imperialist and anti-racist struggles.

The net effect of these two issues was that Marxist thought played a significant role in the period from the 1930s up to the 1980s in the anti-imperialist, anti-racist and radical civil-rights movements. Communist Parties and Marxist organisations played a leading role in anti-colonial and national-liberation movements,[36] as well as serving as key players in the struggles against racism, particularly in the US.[37] Some of these movements were affiliated with the 'official' Communism of the USSR or the People's Republic of China, but many were more heterodox formations, and all these movements produced intellectuals and theorists not beholden to any party line.

Of course, this was by no means a *seamless* phenomenon. The anti-colonialism of the official Communist movement sometimes stood at odds with its broader political lines, particular in the periods of 'socialism in one

35 Riddell 2014, p. 951.

36 Kalyvas and Balcells 2010 found that the most effective liberation struggles were ones that adopted a Marxist ideology.

37 Kelley 1987, documenting the Communist Party's Alabama Sharecroppers' Union, is but one example of Marxists' commitment to interracial organising efforts. See also Omi and Winant 2014 and Pulido 2006.

country' and 'peaceful co-existence'. This led to situations in which particular anti-colonial struggles were deprioritised in favour of various 'national' priorities: most notable here was the French Communist Party's lukewarm position on the Algerian Revolution.[38]

Accordingly, it was not the case that non-European, anti-colonial Marxists simply 'received' a Marxism which they then unthinkingly applied. Rather, they used Marxist categories to understand the conditions in which they existed. Here, the analysis of *racism* was not simply an added extra appended to an analysis of capitalism, but rather had to be understood as in some sense central to it. As Frantz Fanon memorably put it:

> The originality of the colonial context is that economic reality, inequality, and the immense difference of ways of life never come to mask the human realities. When you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species. In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence, you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich.

As such, Fanon went on, 'Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to deal with the colonial problem'.[39] Some have interpreted this 'slight stretching' as a wholesale repudiation of the Marxist tradition (indeed, in some sense this is Robinson's thesis). But it is more accurate to say that figures in the Third Worldist and anti-racist movements in this context sought to *deepen* the Marxist tradition through theorising the conditions in which race and racism comes to play a structuring role within a given social formation.

Attempting to grapple with the numerous figures in this period is beyond the scope of this Introduction, but we can pick out some key themes that emerged. One crucial element shared by almost all the approaches was the insight that race is not a 'natural' phenomenon to which racism is a response. Instead, in the words of Eric Williams in his discussion on slavery, '[s]lavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery'. Indeed, for Williams slavery was 'basically an economic phenomenon' which had been given a 'racial twist'.[40]

38 Wall 1977.
39 Fanon 1963, p. 40.
40 Williams 2021, p. 7.

In this way, these Marxists were committed to an account of *racialisation*. The question was how to situate these processes of racialisation within their material contexts, and to chart out the relationship these processes had with capitalist social relations. In this way, these figures departed from Marx himself in refusing to assume that 'race' was an unproblematic category. At the same time, by delineating racism's place in capitalist social relations, they were deepening Marx's own project of charting a social totality.

For the radical anti-imperialist movements, race and racism were deeply intertwined with the uneven nature of the capitalist world market, and its attendant division of labour. As Fanon wrote,[41] a 'country that lives, draws its substance from the exploitation of other people, makes those peoples inferior'.[42] In this way racism is part of a totality characterised by 'the shameless exploitation of one group of men by another which has reached a higher stage of technical development'.[43] As such, racism was understood as intrinsically connected with the rise, consolidation and spread of capitalist social relations. As Walter Rodney noted, 'no people can enslave another for centuries without coming out with a notion of superiority, and when the color and other physical traits of those peoples were quite different it was inevitable that the prejudice should take a racist form'.[44] In this way, 'the white racism which came to pervade the world was an integral part of the capitalist mode of production'.[45]

In this way, racism was coterminous with the international division of labour in capitalism. At the same time, racism was used both to divide the European working class from the non-European masses – which, following the labour-aristocracy thesis, had a material basis – and, vitally, to sow division amongst the oppressed and exploited in the less-advanced capitalist states.[46] Both of these facts taken together meant that racism was both a product of capitalist social relations and a central element in their maintenance and reproduction.

These positions also found purchase in more 'domestic' anti-racisms (the division here is, of course, artificial). In the 1960s and 1970s many Black radicals – especially those associated with the Black Panther Party – theorised

41 For a Fanonian reconsideration of racism and the logic of capitalism, see Hudis 2018.
42 Fanon 1988, pp. 40–1.
43 Fanon 1988, pp. 37–8.
44 Rodney 1982, p. 88.
45 Ibid.
46 Balibar and Wallerstein 1991 uses nation as a middle term in the relationship between race and capitalism to argue that nations are used to legitimise and reinforce hierarchies that exist within capitalist societies.

the situation of racialised peoples within the US as analogous to colonialism, with Black populations essentially forming an 'internal semi-colony'.[47] In this respect, they built on the Black Belt thesis, advanced by both the Comintern and elements of the CPUSA, in which Blacks in the South were understood as an incipient nation with a right to self-determination.[48] Perhaps the height of this was Huey Newton's theory of 'revolutionary intercommunalism', which he devised as a solution to the problem of imperialism and racism. For Newton, the oppression of Black Americans was not simply 'racism' but rather was rooted in a global economic system of imperialism. This imperialism was not based simply on nations, but rather 'communities'; for Newton, a community is a 'small unit with a comprehensive collection of institutions that exist to serve a small group of people'.[49] Imperialism was characterised by a situation in which a small circle 'administers and profits from the empire of the United States' as against other oppressed communities. In this context, a revolutionary intercommunalism would unite those communities oppressed and exploited through empire, creating a society based on equality and mutual aid, in which everyone's basic needs are met, where this would be achieved through the collective ownership of resources and the abolition of private property.[50]

Particularly important in the US context were those theories that sought specifically to understand the formation of 'whiteness', and how this 'whiteness' interlocked with the US working class. Perhaps most famously, W.E.B. Du Bois characterised the racism of the white working class in the US postbellum South as a 'public and psychological wage'.[51] Here, Du Bois argued, whilst white labourers received a low wage they nevertheless received other compensations such as deference and courtesy, and had access to a number of public benefits such as the best schooling, access to public areas, and an influence in terms of electoral politics.[52] By contrast, Black workers were subject to '[m]ob violence and lynching', which in certain contexts served as 'entertainment' for 'vicious whites'.[53] As such, Du Bois argued:

> One can see for these reasons why labor organizers and labor agitators made such small headway in the South. They were, for the most part, appealing to laborers who would rather have low wages upon which they

47 Pinderhughes 2011.
48 Kelley 1987.
49 Newton 2018.
50 Vasquez 2018.
51 Du Bois 1999, p. 626.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.

> could eke out an existence than see colored labor with a decent wage. White labor saw in every advance of Negroes a threat to their racial prerogatives, so that in many districts Negroes were afraid to build decent homes or dress well, or own carriages, bicycles or automobiles, because of possible retaliation on the part of the whites.[54]

Du Bois's emphasis on the construction of whiteness through the provision of 'privilege' has been a significant influence on theories of race and racism. 'White privilege' is, of course, a concept that has been invoked in many non-Marxist accounts to explain racism.[55] Yet beyond this, Du Bois's account has been of direct importance for those Marxists in the US who sought to explain the relative quiescence of the US labour movement – both in general and in relation to anti-racist struggles. Particularly important in this respect were the theoretical positions that emerged from figures associated with the New Communist Movement – especially the Sojourner Truth Organisation – including Theodore W. Allen, Noah Ignatiev and, later, Elizabeth Esch and David Roediger.[56]

Following on from Du Bois, these figures – whilst of course articulating a myriad of different positions – all located the construction of 'whiteness' in the provision of a series of 'privileges'. The crucial historical moment here was understood to be in the seventeenth century, where racial divisions were seen to have hardened. Particularly important in the American context was the experience of the Virginia plantations. Here – particularly following Bacon's Rebellion[57] – there was the potential for an alliance between 'white' indentured labourers and Black slaves, fighting together against their common white masters. In response to this, the plantation ruling class intensified the racialisation of slavery, and emphasised the relative 'privilege' of those 'white' labourers. In this way, 'whiteness' serves as mechanism of social control, by separating out the white workers from Black slaves; as David Roediger put it:

> Thus the very idea of formal equality among industrious free white citizens emerged in and after the American Revolution from creating, measuring, and imagining their social distance from African American slaves

54 Ibid.

55 There are innumerable books that individualise either directly or indirectly utilising the ideas of 'privilege'. Such books can found at any airport kiosk, the best-selling of which is Robin DiAngelo's 2022 book *White Fragility*.

56 Roediger and Esch 2009; Roediger and Esch 2012.

57 Allen 1973.

> and from Indians whose alleged laziness rationalized their dispossession and exploitation.[58]

Unlike contemporary uses of 'privilege', Ignatiev's concept was embedded in a social structure rather than based on individual identity. According to Ignatiev's analysis some groups secured advantages in the *short term*, but these privileges were ultimately harmful not only to the oppressed but also to those who seemingly benefited from it. In contrast, contemporary deployments of the concept of 'privilege' can be overly individualistic and insufficiently attuned to structural factors and the role of race in sowing social divisions that also disadvantage the 'privileged'.[59]

Crucially, the above figures argue that this survived the formal abolition of chattel slavery, with the 'production of difference' outside of formal juridical categories remaining crucial in the management of labour.

Race, Ideology, Neoliberalism

The collapse of the anti-colonial and radical civil-rights movements in the late 1970s and 1980s very much reconfigured the relationship between Marxism and the anti-racist movement – in both intellectual and political terms. In this period, in which the forces of the organised left fought, and eventually lost, a sustained battle with the emergent neoliberal right, many began to cast doubt on the ability of the Marxist tradition to grapple with questions of race and racism (indeed in this context, it is perhaps no accident that *Black Marxism* was published in 1983). In particular, with the seeming fragmentation of the bastions of organised labour, and the rise of the various 'new social movements' (particularly around race, gender and sexuality), many argued that Marxism, with its purportedly narrow focus on class, could not account for these social antagonisms.

Such arguments were, in many respects, associated with the 'post-' theories of the 1980s – poststructuralism, postcolonialism and Post-Marxism – as well as the solidification of what was to become 'identity politics'. Crucially, these developments did not simply occur 'outside' of the Marxist tradition; instead, they were an intrinsic part of the Marxist attempts to relate to the 'new social movements'. In this respect, Marxist accounts of hegemony and ideology became crucial.

58 Roediger 2019, p. xv.
59 Ignatiev 2003.

Perhaps the most significant work here was that of Stuart Hall. In *Policing the Crisis* Hall – along with Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts – argued that race is 'a critical structure of the social order of contemporary capitalism'.[60] Here, race helps to 'reproduce labour' in an 'internally divided form', and thus create sections of the working class which might be subject to greater forms of exploitation and to forestall 'the unity of the [working] class as a whole'.[61] In this way, race serves as one of a number of structures that 'reproduce the class relations of the whole society in a specific form on an extended scale',[62] with the role of racism being to reproduce the 'working class in a racially stratified and internally antagonistic form'.[63]

At the same time, however, Hall insisted that race did not simply serve as an objective form, but rather, also, as the subjective mode through which individuals *experience* their class position; accordingly, as he famously put it in *Policing the Crisis*, race was:

> the principal modality in which the black members of that class 'live,' experience, make sense of and thus *come to a consciousness* of their structured subordination. It is through the modality of race that blacks comprehend, handle and then begin to resist the exploitation which is an objective feature of their class situation. Race is therefore not only an element of the 'structures'; it is a key element in the class struggle – and thus in the *cultures* – of black labour. It is through the counter-ideology of race, colour and ethnicity that the black working class becomes conscious of the contradictions of its objective situation and organises to 'fight it through'.[64]

These formulations were part of Hall's larger, Althusserian-influenced perspective on Marxism and race. For Hall, ultimately, capitalist social formations had to be understood as specific complex 'articulations' of different modes of production, as well as different instances of the social totality. In this way, it is necessary to start with 'historically specific racisms, beginning with an assumption of difference, of specificity rather than of a unitary transhistorical universal "structure"'. Accordingly:

60 Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts 1978, p. 345.
61 Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts 1978, p. 346.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts 1978, p. 347.

> One must start, then, from the concrete historical 'work' which racism accomplishes under specific historical conditions – as a set of economic, political and ideological practices, of a distinctive kind, concretely articulated with other practices in a social formation. These practices ascribe the positioning of different social groups in relation to one another with respect to the elementary structures of society; they fix and ascribe those positionings in ongoing social practices; they legitimate the positions so ascribed.[65]

Consequently, for Hall, there could be no broader theory about race and capitalism, with racism not being necessary to the functioning of all capitalisms, and the mission of materialist analysis to demonstrate how particular racisms are articulated with particular social formations. Although Hall's position did not develop into a full-blown post-Marxist one, he was – of course – a central figure in *Marxism Today* and the broader Eurocommunist wing of the CPGB. Here he was criticised politically by other figures on the Marxist, anti-racist left; particularly important in this respect was Ambalavaner Sivanandan,[66] whose own work carefully foregrounded the centrality of class and state as determinant elements in producing a racialised capitalist society.[67]

Marxist Theory Today

The above discussion, cannot, of course, encapsulate the diversity and breadth of Marxist writing about race and racism. Yet it does, at the very least, give an idea of the seriousness with which Marxists have historically taken these issues. Far from being a mere 'epiphenomenon', many in the Marxist tradition have sought to significantly extend historical-materialist theory in order specifically to understand race and racism. In some ways, however, the mature neoliberal period saw something of a retreat from these positions: with greater emphasis placed on the category of race as one simply *opposed* to Marxist analysis.

Indeed, this has been the character of many *contemporary* debates on the issue, with many contemporary Marxists contesting the idea that race and racism have any independent explanatory power or standing.[68] At the same time,

65 Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts 1978, p. 338.
66 Sivanandan 1990.
67 Sivanandan 1976.
68 See, e.g., Fields and Fields 2014; Wood 1995, pp. 264–84.

however, a number of Marxist works respond to the older traditions described above, and seek to advance their arguments in a contemporary sense. These debates, drawing on the history of Marxist thinking about race and racism, have arguably been structured around the following issues:

– The relationship between 'race' and 'class'. This encompasses both the question of what *status* each have in capitalism, and – perhaps more productively – the role that practices of race and racialisation play in class-formation.[69]
– The degree to which racism can be understood as having a *necessary* connection with capitalist social relations; that is to say whether or not racism might be said to be inherent in the logic of capital, or whether it is a contingent historical outgrowth. This touches on the question of whether racism exists prior to, and alongside, the capitalist mode of production.[70]
– In contrast to ideologies eschewing universal theorisations of race (post-structuralism) or ones in which their universal theory is fixed in its hierarchy (afro-pessimism), that race is both socially constructed and also carries its patterns across the world, be this in the exploitation of migrant labour or the dispossession of land.

In this way, of course, the contemporary debate attempts to respond to the broader question of the relationship between processes of capitalist accumulation and those of racialisation.

Special Issue

The articles in this special issue need to be understood against this wider context. Eschewing overly binary discussions about the 'competition' between 'race' and 'class', they instead represent more specific interventions – on both the theoretical and historical level – into these questions. Whilst the contributions are of course varied, we can understand them as responding directly to many of the questions outlined above. These interventions are multifaceted and intertwined. And yet, despite their interconnectedness, it is necessary to place these interventions within thematic categories in order to provide some structure and coherence to the discussion. Some themes are more bounded than others, but even those that are more narrowly defined are often overlapping and interconnected; it proved a delicate balancing act that required careful consideration. Given the sheer size of this special issue, it will be covered

69 See, e.g., Kelley 1987; Reed and Chowkwanyun 2012; Roediger 2017; Virdee 2014.
70 See, e.g., Virdee 2019.

over two physical issues. The first will contain the articles under the theme of Race and Capital and Colony, while the second issue will look to the areas of Ideology, Chains, and Labour.

We start our discussion on *Race and Capital* with two pieces by Satnam Virdee and Charles Post that get to the historical roots of the relationship between race and capitalism. Virdee traces the origins of racism to the dissolution of absolutist states in Western Europe in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, while Post sees racial subordination as rooted in capitalist social-property relations. Peter Hudis then evaluates whether Marxist theorists can explain the persistence of racism and the emergence of subjective agency opposed to it, using the mass protests against police abuse that swept across the US and other countries as a critical test. Finally, Sheetal Chhabria examines the South Asian caste system in the context of Robinson's 'racial capitalism' to answer the question of whether there can be a global history of racial capitalism.

This takes us to our next section, *Colony*. Here we continue within South Asia with Tania Bhattacharyya's research into the Sidi community in Bombay, which comprises descendants of freed people of African heritage rescued from slaving boats in the Indian Ocean in the nineteenth century. While colonial liberation foregrounded ideas of race, Sidis have rejected such categories. Through an exploration of the colonial archives, Bhattacharyya critiques colonial racecraft, a form of race-making intended to incorporate displaced former enslaved people from East Africa into colonial Bombay's burgeoning steamship industry as stokers, fireman and trimmers. Yet, Sidis, in the tradition of Fanon, attempted to move beyond the racial categories prescribed to them. Meanwhile, Jack Davies takes us to the Australian settler-colony to critique 'settler colonial studies' for its universalising of the Australian settler-colonial experience. Indeed, the limitations of Settler Colonial Studies goes beyond its use of Australia as a paradigm instance; for Davis it remains overly reliant on an expansive notion of primitive accumulation drawn from David Harvey and built on a single, inadequate, reading of Rosa Luxemburg. Ultimately, Davis argues that such an interpretation is to the detriment of our understanding of race in this contemporary phase of capitalism. Finally, Gabi Kirk continues this critique of settler colonial studies while looking at the case of Palestine. To Kirk the question of 'indigeneity' remains underexamined. Through the Palestine example, Kirk shows how the valorisation and privatisation of indigeneity narrows notions of the biological-cultural, offering challenges to Palestinian struggles in the context of the larger debate on racial capitalism.

The second issue begins with *Ideology*. Adam Hanieh and Rafeef Ziadah's article argues that borders are a mystification, an ideological misrepresentation

of social reality, that emerged from the nature of capitalism as a society based upon generalised commodity production. Using value-form theory, they examine migration as a process of mystification and class formation, and how borders shape and circumscribe the various fractions of labour as demarcated, contained, and brought into relation with one another. Matthew Dimick's article takes a closer look at race and reification through Marx's concept of commodity fetishism. In doing so, he explores how race is naturalised through a wide-reaching exploration of domination, exploitation and ideology. Finally, Lukas Egger sets forth a value-form theoretic approach to racism, building upon and against the work of Peter Schmitt-Egner, to make sense of how capitalism is bound up with racism through the past and into the present.

As the pages of history turned and the chains of slavery tightened around the world, questions of emancipation loomed large. We begin with the next theme of *Chains* and the question of enslavement. Naturally, we start with the question of whether Marx defended Black slavery. Gregory Slack corrects the misinterpretation of a single passage concerning Black slavery from an 1853 letter from Marx to Engels. This quote makes it seem as though Marx's support for emancipation was conditional upon the level of 'civilisation' attained by Black slaves. This has led to even right-wing publications making the case that 'Karl Marx Was a Total Racist'. The falsity of these interpretations is confronted by situating Marx's comments within their historical context and language, and understood against the context of his corpus of writings and actions. Scott Timcke then revisits the Plantation Society by drawing on the analysis of the oft-neglected New World Group of the West Indies. The group's economic analysis exposes the inherent logic of plantation societies, and the historical dynamics found in the Caribbean. In tandem with Timcke's examination, Ajmal Waqif takes a closer look at the revolutionary writings of Robert Wedderburn, which delve into the Haitian Revolution and maroon warfare, and propose a Spencean communist programme. Waqif uses these proposals to offer a rebuttal to the ideas generated by postcolonial theory and afro-pessimism, as he mines through the archives to provide a historically-grounded argument for universal emancipation in the political present.

Finally, the last section on *Labour* begins with Nicholas De Genova's exploration of the history of human labour, spanning from the era of enslavement to our contemporary moment. De Genova weaves a radical racial theory of labour, grounded in the labour theory of value, that challenges dominant ideas surrounding the position of migrant labour under global capitalism. Jane Komori tackles the issue of the 'labour problem' that plagued Canada's sugar beet sector. She argues that the challenge of recruiting and retaining field workers resulted in a form of racialisation, as the industry turned to groups such as interned

Japanese Canadians, Indigenous peoples removed from northern reserves in the period from the 1950s to the 1980s, and seasonal Mexican and Caribbean migrant workers to fill the labour gap. Despite the sector's increasing automation, Komori concludes that the industry still relies heavily on a racialised and captive pool of inexhaustible labour. Her analysis sheds light on the deeply embedded structures of oppression and exploitation that have shaped the labour landscape in Canada and beyond. We end with Alfie Hancox, who offers an exploration of how Britain's Black Power movement challenged the political outlook of the anti-fascist left, specifically the high-profile Anti-Nazi League, in the 1960s and 1970s. While the established labour movement interpreted the National Front as an aberrant threat to Britain's social democracy, Black political groups foregrounded the systemic racial violence of the British state. In a prescient move, they prefigured Stuart Hall's analysis of 'authoritarian populism', making powerful connections between fascism and state policies, both at the border and abroad. In so doing, they foregrounded the centrality of racism to capitalism, and its 'normal' mode of operation.

Taken together, these contributions offer a powerful and sobering critique of how race was both integrated into and born out of the plantations system, borders, the colony, and work, while proposing concrete ways towards a society free of racism and capitalism.

References

Allen, Theodore W. 1973, *White Supremacy in US History*, New York: Insurgent Worker.

Balibar, Étienne and Immanuel Wallerstein 1991, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, London: Verso.

Balthaser, Benjamin 2021, 'The Dialectics of Race: Proletarian Literature, Richard Wright, and the Making of Revolutionary Subjectivity', *Historical Materialism*, 29, 2: 119–42.

Bhattacharyya, Gargi 2018, *Rethinking Racial Capitalism: Questions of Reproduction and Survival*, London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bukharin, Nikolai Ivanovich 1972, *Imperialism and World Economy*, London: The Merlin Press.

Camfield, David 2016, 'Elements of a Historical-Materialist Theory of Racism', *Historical Materialism*, 24, 1: 31–70.

Degras, Jane (ed.) 1956, 'Theses on the National and Colonial Question Adopted by the Second Comintern Congress [28th July 1920]', in *The Communist International, 1919–1943: Documents*, Volume 1, London: Frank Cass.

Deleixhe, Martin 2019, 'Marx, the Irish Immigrant-Workers, and the English Labour Movement', *Historical Materialism*, 27, 2: 222–47.

DiAngelo, Robin 2022, *White Fragility: Why Understanding Racism Can Be So Hard for White People* (*Adapted for Young Adults*), adapted by Toni Graves Williamson and Ali Michael, Boston: Beacon Press.

Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt 1999, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880*, New York: The Free Press.

Dymski, Gary 2009, 'Racial Exclusion and the Political Economy of the Subprime Crisis', *Historical Materialism*, 17, 2: 149–79.

Fanon, Frantz 1963, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington, New York: Grove Press.

Fanon, Frantz 1988, 'Racism and Culture', in *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays*, translated Haakon Chevalier, pp. 29–44, New York: Grove Press.

Fields, Karen E. and Barbara J. Fields 2014, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*, Reprint Edition, London: Verso.

Hall, Stuart, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts 1978, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, London: Macmillan.

Harman, Chris 2010, *Zombie Capitalism: Global Crisis and the Relevance of Marx*, Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.

Hiferding, Rudolph 2019, *Finance Capital: A Study in the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development*, translated by Tom Bottomore, London: Routledge.

Hobson, J.A. 2018, *Imperialism: A Study*, London: Routledge.

Hudis, Peter 2018, 'Racism and the Logic of Capital: A Fanonian Reconsideration', *Historical Materialism*, 26, 2: 199–220.

Ignatiev, Noel 2003, 'Whiteness and Class Struggle', *Historical Materialism*, 11, 4: 227–35.

Johnson, Cedric 2016, 'Between Revolution and the Racial Ghetto: Harold Cruse and Harry Haywood Debate Class Struggle and the "Negro Question", 1962–8', *Historical Materialism*, 24, 2: 165–203.

Kalyvas, Stathis N. and Laila Balcells 2010, 'Did Marxism Make a Difference? Marxist Rebellions and National Liberation Movements', APSA 2010 Annual Meeting Paper, available at: <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1642509>.

Kelley, Robin D.G. 1987, *'Hammer n' Hoe': Black Radicalism and the Communist Party in Alabama, 1929–1941*, PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.

Kelly, Brian 2004, 'Materialism and the Persistence of Race in the Jim Crow South', *Historical Materialism*, 12, 2: 3–19.

Kelly, Brian 2019, 'Slave Self-Activity and the Bourgeois Revolution in the United States: Jubilee and the Boundaries of Black Freedom', *Historical Materialism*, 27, 3: 31–76.

Kipfer, Stefan A. and Ayyaz Mallick 2022, '"Stretch" and "Translate": Gramscian Lineages, Fanonist Convergences in the (Post)Colony', *Historical Materialism*, 30, 4: 137–73.

Knox, Robert and Ntina Tzouvala 2021, 'Looking Eastwards: The Bolshevik Theory of Imperialism and International Law', in *Revolutions in International Law: The*

Legacies of 1917, edited by Anna Saunders, Anne Orford, Kathryn Greenman and Ntina Tzouvala, pp. 27–55, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Knox, Robert and David Whyte 2023, 'Vaccinating Capitalism: Racialised Value in the COVID-19 Economy', *Mortality*, 28, 2: 329–45.

Kumar, Ashok, Adam Elliott-Cooper, Shruti Iyer and Dalia Gebrial 2018, 'An Introduction to the Special Issue on Identity Politics', *Historical Materialism*, 26, 2: 3–20.

Le Blanc, Paul 2003, 'The Absence of Socialism in the United States: Contextualising Kautsky's "American Worker"', *Historical Materialism*, 11, 4: 124–70.

Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich 1964a, 'Imperialism and the Split in Socialism', in *Collected Works*, edited by M.S. Levin, Volume 23, pp. 105–20, Moscow: Progress Publishers.

Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich 1964b, 'A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism', in *Collected Works*, edited by M.S. Levin, Volume 23, pp. 28–76, Moscow: Progress Publishers.

Levenson, Zachary and Marcel Paret 2022, 'The Three Dialectics of Racial Capitalism: From South Africa to the U.S. and Back Again', *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, <doi:10.1017/S1742058X22000212>.

Maguire, Alex 2021, 'What Is the Traditional Working Class?', *Historical Materialism Blog*, 19 February, available at: <https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/blog/what-traditional-working-class>.

Marx, Karl 1933, *Wage-labour and Capital*, New York: International Publishers.

Marx, Karl 1990, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*, translated by Ben Fowkes, London: Penguin.

Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels 2010, *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Volume 43: Letters 1868–70, London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. and Morgan Ndlovu (eds.) 2021, *Marxism and Decolonization in the 21st Century: Living Theories and True Ideas*, London: Routledge.

Newton, Huey P. 2018, 'Intercommunalism (1974)', *Viewpoint Magazine*, 11 June, available at: <https://viewpointmag.com/2018/06/11/intercommunalism-1974/>.

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant 2014, *Racial Formation in the United States*, New York: Routledge.

Opratko, Benjamin 2017, 'Islamophobia: The Bigger Picture', *Historical Materialism*, 25, 1: 63–89.

Patnaik, Utsa and Prabhat Patnaik 2021, *Capital and Imperialism: Theory, History, and the Present*, New York: Monthly Review Press.

Pinderhughes, Charles 2011, 'Toward a New Theory of Internal Colonialism', *Socialism and Democracy*, 25, 1: 235–56.

Post, Charles 2010, 'Exploring Working-class Consciousness: A Critique of the Theory of the "Labour-Aristocracy"', *Historical Materialism*, 18, 4: 3–38.

Pulido, Laura 2006, *Black, Brown, Yellow and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Reed, Adolph L. and Merlin Chowkwanyun 2012, 'Race, Class, Crisis: The Discourse of Racial Disparity and Its Analytical Discontents', in *Socialist Register 2012: The Crisis and the Left*, edited by Leo Panitch, Greg Albo and Vivek Chibber, pp. 149–75, London: The Merlin Press.

Riddell, John 2014, *Towards the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922, Historical Materialism* Book Series, Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.

Robinson, Cedric J. 2000, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Third Edition, Revised and Updated, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Rodney, Walter 1982, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press.

Roediger, David R. 2017, *Class, Race and Marxism*, London: Verso.

Roediger, David R. 2019, *How Race Survived US History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Eclipse of Post-racialism*, London: Verso.

Roediger, David R. and Elizabeth Esch 2009, 'One Symptom of Originality: Race and the Management of Labour in the History of the United States', *Historical Materialism*, 17, 4: 3–43.

Roediger, David R. and Elizabeth D. Esch 2012, *The Production of Difference: Race and the Management of Labor in U.S. History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Saad-Filho, Alfredo and Alison J. Ayers 2020, '"A Ticking Time-bomb": The Global South in the Time of Coronavirus', *The Journal of Australian Political Economy*, 85: 84–93.

Shelby, Tommie 2022, 'The Idea of Prison Abolition', in *The Idea of Prison Abolition*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Sivanandan, Ambalavaner 1976, 'Race, Class and the State: The Black Experience in Britain', *Race & Class*, 17, 4: 347–68.

Sivanandan, Ambalavaner 1990, 'All That Melts Into Air Is Solid: The Hokum of New Times', *Race & Class*, 31, 3: 1–30.

Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta 2019, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

van Ree, Erik 2019, 'Marx and Engels's Theory of History: Making Sense of the Race Factor', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 24, 1: 54–73.

Vasquez, Delio 2018, 'Intercommunalism: The Late Theorizations of Huey P. Newton', *Viewpoint Magazine*, 11 June, available at: <https://viewpointmag.com/2018/06/11/intercommunalism-the-late-theorizations-of-huey-p-newton-chief-theoretician-of-the-black-panther-party/>.

Virdee, Satnam 2014, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Virdee, Satnam 2019, 'Racialized Capitalism: An Account of its Origins and Consolidation', *Sociological Review*, 67, 1: 3–27.

Wall, Irwin M. 1977, 'The French Communists and the Algerian War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12, 3: 521–43.

Williams, Eric E. 2021 [1914], *Capitalism and Slavery*, Third Edition, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Wood, Ellen Meiksins 1995, *Democracy against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wood, Peter W. 2022, *1620: A Critical Response to the 1619 Project*, New York: Encounter Books.

Zumoff, Jacob A. 2014, 'The "Negro Question" to the Fourth Comintern Congress', in *The Communist International and US Communism, 1919–1929, Historical Materialism* Book Series, pp. 287–311, Leiden: Brill.