



What is racial capitalism?

Arun Kundnani / October 23, 2020

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Blessing Ngobeni, "A Note From Error"

A video recording of this lecture is available to watch at the [Havens-Wright Center for Social Justice website](#).

In recent years, the term “racial capitalism” has proliferated among scholars and activists. Articles in places such as *New Yorker* and *Vox* have introduced the term to a wide readership. The term is beginning to carry institutional weight in the academy, with a plethora of research initiatives emerging in recent years, and funding from the Mellon Foundation. But we are still in the process of clarifying what we might mean by “racial capitalism.” Go, for example, to the website of the Research Initiative on Racial Capitalism at UC Davis and click on the link for “What is racial capitalism?” and you arrive at a blank page.

The scholars who use the term agree that it refers to the mutual dependence of capitalism and racism. Walter Johnson writes that racial capitalism is “a sort of capitalism that relies upon the elaboration, reproduction, and exploitation of notions of racial difference.” For Peter Hudson: “Racial capitalism suggests both the simultaneous historical emergence of racism and capitalism in the modern world and their mutual dependence.” All agree that the framework of racial capitalism is a challenge to the narrative that capitalism matured out of the racism and violent coercion of the slave plantations to a system based upon labor that is “free,” waged, and homogenous. As Robin Kelley has written, “capitalism was not the great modernizer giving birth to the European proletariat as a universal subject.”

The promise of the term lies in its apparent bridging of the economic and the cultural, of the class struggle and the struggle against white supremacy, allowing us to understand police and plantation violence as linked to capital accumulation. It promises a way to close the race-class gap on the Left, a gap through which marched Trump and Brexit, with their nationalist constructions of a white working class. The term “racial capitalism” seems to offer a way through the debate about so-called identity politics that has marked the Euro-American Left since the 1970s.

We’re going to return to that very old question of race and class, and try to clarify what the term “racial capitalism” might mean. I’m going to suggest that we reconstruct the term’s meaning from the work of scholars based in the UK in the late 1970s and early 1980s: first, exiles from the movement against South African apartheid, who were the first to use the term ‘racial capitalism’; second, Cedric Robinson, who was then based in the UK working on his influential book *Black Marxism*; and, third, Stuart Hall, who, in his work during this period, offered, I think, the most effective account of racial capitalism.

In the UK of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the contours of what we would now call neoliberalism were first becoming visible. At the same time, the older traditions of Black, anti-colonial, and working-class struggles in Britain, in the Third World, and in the United States had enough life in them to provide the seeds of an analysis of the newly emerging political terrain. All these struggles converged in Britain to produce a space of political and theoretical creativity.

Two quick clarifications before I get into the core of my presentation. First, my way of reconstructing these discussions is, of course, one among multiple possible readings. Second, the scholars I am considering largely did not directly engage each other, so my placing them together is an act of constructive interpretation. Stuart Hall did not use the term “racial capitalism” so to present him as offering a way of theorizing it is to stretch his work beyond his own terminology.

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In 1976, the anti-Apartheid movement in London published a pamphlet entitled *Foreign Investment and the Reproduction of Racial Capitalism in South Africa*. It was the first time that the term “racial

capitalism” was used, as far as I can tell. At this time, the anti-Apartheid movement was calling for an international boycott of South African exports. In response, opponents of the boycott argued that economic growth and continued industrialisation would weaken the influence of racial prejudice in South Africa. The pamphlet set out to show, on the contrary, that South African racism was strengthened not weakened by capitalist growth. Capitalism was not the solution to racism but the soil upon which it grew.

The pamphlet's authors, Martin Legassick and David Hemson, were part of a group of South African Marxists working in the 1970s, including Harold Wolpe and Neville Alexander, who started using the term “racial capitalism” to analyze the political economy of Apartheid South Africa. I'm not going to go into the detail of the variations in, and evolution of, the analyses that Harold Wolpe, Martin Legassick, and Neville Alexander developed, nor speak about how their analyses built upon the work of others thinking along similar lines in the early 1970s, like the sociologist John Rex, and Giovanni Arrighi's work on Rhodesia. Instead, I want to roughly trace a line of thinking that was later picked up by Stuart Hall and Cedric Robinson.

South Africa made Apartheid its official policy in 1948 while the rest of the world was at least claiming to eradicate racism after the defeat of Nazism in 1945. By the 1970s, the Apartheid regime seemed impregnable. The Sharpeville massacre in 1960 put an end to mass protests and then, over the next decade, the regime imprisoned or exiled leaders of the underground liberation movement. And there was rapid industrial growth, at levels that resembled Europe or the United States.

How could such a society be made sense of in Marxist terms? In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels wrote that capitalism would tend to sweep away “ancient and venerable prejudices.” Capitalist development was, it was assumed, “rational” in the sense that it organized itself according to abstract rules that were, in principle, generally applicable; not based on irrational and arbitrary differentiations, such as racism. But in South Africa, the force of racism seemed to increase the more advanced its capitalist economy became: the apartheid system was not a legacy from the nineteenth century that had survived into the 1970s; it was the creation of a modern capitalist state in the 1940s. In apartheid South Africa, the prevailing social antagonism did not appear to be owners of industrial capital arrayed against an industrial waged workforce but a white minority ruling over a black majority. Nor could one plausibly claim that racism served as an ideological means to divide the working class and mask its true interests. Apartheid was obviously more than a propaganda campaign to manipulate white workers. Moreover apartheid could not be explained as simply the expression of transhistorical prejudices or hatreds. In very specific ways, it was a formation of the twentieth century.

One possible interpretation within the Marxist tradition was the theory of national oppression, drawing on Lenin's analysis of European imperialism. In South Africa, this would be a form of internal colonialism. But on this view, imperialism was supposed to freeze capitalist development. Which would imply a nationalist anti-colonial struggle had to be waged first, before an anti-capitalist class struggle could take place to create a socialist society. In fact, this was the two-stage programme the South African Communist Party adopted in 1962. But the problem was that South African capitalism was not frozen.

South Africa's apparent refusal to fit traditional Marxist categories – and the fact of an African revolutionary struggle against apartheid – forced a productive creativity in Marxist theory. Martin Legassick, Harold Wolpe, and Neville Alexander began precisely with what seemed distinctive about South Africa: the seeming co-existence of an urban industrial capitalist economy, centered upon white society, and a black-centered rural, non-capitalist economy. They noted that, in the areas of African

concentration, land was held communally and worked by social units based on extended family networks. What was produced was distributed, not by market exchange, but directly according to kinship rules. Much of this non-capitalist, subsistence economy existed in the so-called “reserves” – areas that had successfully resisted European conquest until the late nineteenth century.

But rather than see this subsistence economy as outside of capitalism and destined to be dissolved by it in a process of dispossession and expulsion – in other words, primitive accumulation – instead the two economic systems were combined together in a single structure. In Europe, a necessary condition for the establishment and reproduction of capitalism was the violent wave of enclosures of common land that inaugurated the modern regime of private property and produced a population removed from direct subsistence and forced into waged work. But in South Africa, they argued, a precondition of capitalism was the preservation of non-capitalist economies, not their destruction. By employing temporary migrant workers from the reserves, capital was able to pay for labor-power far below its cost of reproduction, because it did not have to cover the full cost of subsistence – housing, care of the young, the old, the sick, and so on. The African non-capitalist economy could meet these needs, enabling capitalists to profit from an exceptionally high rate of exploitation.

What emerged then was a differentiated economy. On the one hand, white workers were *fully proletarianized* and able to claim individual and social wages sufficient to meet the needs of their subsistence. On the other hand, black workers were *semi-proletarianized*, temporarily migrating from the reserves for waged work in the industrial sector as needed, but whose subsistence was met largely by a non-capitalist economy.

For this arrangement to be sustainable, the non-capitalist economy needed to be productive enough to enable the reproduction of a labor force for capital. Otherwise, there would be permanent African migration to the urban areas and demands for the same subsistence wages as whites. But at the same time, it could not be so productive that Africans became self-sufficient and escaped the orbit of capitalism altogether. Apartheid was a political means to maintain this divided but combined social formation. The movement of labor was controlled through pass laws to ensure the racial division of labor was upheld, while the reserves were granted a quasi-autonomy, with so-called tribal chiefs constituting a comprador class to manage and sustain the non-capitalist sector on the terms set by racial capitalism.

This argument has a number of important consequences. It implies that our picture of capitalism has to be altered. Once we accept that capitalism can stably co-exist with other modes of production in a complex structure of dominance within a single social formation, then any teleological or evolutionary assumptions have to be thrown out. We can no longer hold that capitalism of necessity seeks the abolition of pre-existing modes of production. Our picture is now of a capitalism that is conjoined with non-capitalisms, a capitalism that fails to universalize itself. Primitive accumulation begins to appear not as a transitional phase at the birth of capitalism but a permanent aspect of it. (This is a good place to acknowledge that I live on land that was dispossessed from the Cayuga nation as part of one such process of primitive accumulation.)

This new picture of capitalism also gives us an account of the structural reasons why capitalist development was imbricated with racism. Differentiation of the workforce, as much as homogenization, can be derived from capitalism's core dynamics. Racism is the means by which this differentiation is coded and managed, the terms upon which capitalism narrates its own failure to universalize. And because waged labor is not universalized, nor are the political structures of liberal democracy that, in Western Europe at least, were forged in the conflicts between waged labor and

capital. State racism, violence, and mass coercion of subordinate workers are the correlates of this failure to universalize waged labor. Thus, whatever the long histories of racial prejudice, racism under capitalism is not to be conceived as an archaism or legacy that anachronistically survives from the past into the capitalist present. Rather, we can explain racism as a material force within the development of particular social formations. And we can do so without creating the problem of dual or triple structures of power – race, class, gender – whose general relationships to each other become hard to analyze.

This is quite different from the common Marxist claim, seen in the work, say, of David Harvey or Ellin Measkins Wood, that racism is primarily an ideological division among waged workers. Instead, here, black and white labor are divided materially as well as ideologically. Their respective relations to the means of production are of a quite different character. There is therefore no prospect that black and white might become conscious of their true, shared interests and, as in the old slogan, “unite and fight.” Rather, there would have to be an autonomous black struggle against racial capitalism. That should tell you how far we have come from Marxist orthodoxy.

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The current prevalence of the term “racial capitalism” originates from recent interest in Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism*, with its immense reach and powerful challenge to orthodoxy. Robinson researched the book while he was in Cambridge, England, in the late 1970s. While there, he found a home with the journal *Race & Class*, published by the Institute of Race Relations in London. His first article in the journal, on Richard Wright, appeared in 1978. In 1980, he joined the journal's editorial working group. And *Race & Class* published a good deal of his work over the following decades. In the 1970s, *Race & Class* was one of the main scholarly outlets for analysis of the struggle in southern Africa, the Black struggles in Britain, and anti-imperialist politics in general. The work of Neville Alexander, for example, was discussed in the journal. The argument of Robinson's *Black Marxism* can be read as building on the currents he was encountering in England and connecting them to the Black Radical Tradition in the US – people like W. E. B. Du Bois, Oliver Cromwell Cox, C. L. R. James, Claudia Jones, and James Boggs, who had long been thinking of how racism and capitalism are mutually imbricated.

While the South African Marxists were working on the basis that South Africa presented an *exception* to traditional Marxist assumptions, Robinson turned the argument on its head. The exception was, in fact, the rule. What the South Africans had called “racial capitalism” was not only to be found in South Africa but wherever capitalism prevailed. All capitalism was racial capitalism. The orthodox Marxist account of capitalism had to be rethought, not just in colonized settings, but even in Western Europe, where, Robinson claimed, racial divisions of labor had existed throughout the history of capitalism.

For Robinson, racial capitalism is first a question of labor. The exploitation of waged labor that Marx analyzes in Volume 1 of *Capital* is an incomplete account of capitalist societies, he says. Robinson's claim is that capitalism has never been able to universalize the relationship between capital and waged labor. At no point in the history of capitalism has most of the work done been organized through the kind of exploitation described in that text. As he writes: “Certainly slave labor was one of the bases for what Marx termed ‘primitive accumulation.’ But it would be an error to arrest the relationship there, assigning slave labor to some ‘pre-capitalist’ stage of history. For more than 300 years slave labor persisted beyond the beginnings of modern capitalism, complementing wage labor, peonage, serfdom, and other methods of labor coercion. . . . From its very foundations capitalism had never been – any more than Europe – a ‘closed system.’” So you have to think of multiple differentiations of

forms of labor, involving varying degrees of non-economic coercion. Moreover, that differentiation is organized through race. He says: "The tendency of European civilization through capitalism was thus not to homogenize but to differentiate – to exaggerate regional, subcultural, and dialectical differences into 'racial' ones." All of this is what he means by "the non-objective character of capitalist development," or "racial capitalism."

So, like the South African Marxists, Robinson introduces the idea of the co-existence of modes of production within a single social formation. Like them, he sees capitalism not as a universal modernizing force but instead as preserving aspects of pre-capitalist society. And he shares with them the idea that racism is a means by which the relationship between these modes of production, and the associated differentiated forms of labor, are coded, managed, and legitimated. Capitalism, on this view, constantly recreates itself through differentiations of waged and unwaged or surplus labour, which in turn are associated with racial and colonial divisions between possessors and dispossessed, between citizens endowed with liberal rights and the unfree, between productive humanity and disposable humanity. Nikhil Singh's book *Race and America's Long War* powerfully develops this argument. And this analysis could also be supplemented with the emphasis that socialist feminists, such as Selma James, Silvia Federici, and Maria Mies, have placed upon domestic labor as another hidden dimension of unwaged labor under capitalism.

But in drawing out the significance of this argument, we get what I think are two different registers in Robinson's work: what I would call the problem of origins and the problem of reproduction. With the problem of origins, Robinson is concerned to identify racism's founding moment, its initial constitution. With the problem of reproduction, Robinson is concerned with how racism constantly reworks itself in new circumstances, how it overcomes the inevitability of resistance, how it stays the same while changing.

On the problem of origins, Robinson argues that European racism – or using his terms "racialism" or "racial sensibilities" – precede capitalism, colonialism, and the trans-Atlantic slave trade historically and, in a certain sense, ontologically. A racial calculus, he says, was "reiterated and embellished" by "one European ruling order after another, one cohort of clerical or secular propagandists following another" from at least the twelfth century. Once the slave trade starts, the "Negro" is invented as a legitimating figure but it is built on pre-existing racial forms within Europe, such as images of Slavs, Irish, Jews, Muslims, and so on. Racism, Robinson claims, runs "deep in the bowels of Western culture" – by the way, what a terrific metaphor! – and inevitably reverberated through the relations of production and forms of consciousness that have emerged from that culture. The suggestion is that capitalism expresses economically the racism that inheres in European culture. Capitalism did not melt away those pre-existing structures of racism but instead mediated them. In this register, racism is understood, at the most fundamental level, in terms of the transmission of Western cultural norms. It is this part of Robinson's work that can support the idea of race as a transhistorical substrate inhering in Western culture from its birth.

The other register in Robinson's work is the problem of reproduction. Here the focus is upon the constant work of reconfiguring race in new contexts. In this register, racism cannot be explained as a fixed category passed down from a founding moment that hard-wired the affordances of Western culture. Robinson introduces the term "racial regimes" to address this problem of reproduction. In the introduction to his book *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning*, he writes that racial regimes "are constructed social systems in which race is proposed as a justification for the relations of power. While necessarily articulated with accruals of power, the covering conceit of a racial regime is a makeshift patchwork masquerading as memory and the immutable. Nevertheless, racial regimes do

possess history, that is, discernible origins and mechanisms of assembly." They sometimes "'collapse' under the weight of their own artifices, practices, and apparatuses; they may fragment, desiccated by new realities" Moreover, racial regimes, for Robinson, can be quite straightforwardly grounded in relations of production. "The needs of finance capital," he writes, "... in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, determined the construction of successive racial regimes." Or: "The creation of the Negro was obviously at the cost of immense expenditures of psychic and intellectual energies in the West. The exercise was obligatory. It was an effort commensurate with the importance Black labor power possessed for the world economy sculpted and dominated by the ruling and mercantile classes of Western Europe." Yet elsewhere, Robinson is averse to allow property relations to be sufficient explanation for racism. What he calls the "nastiness" of racial capitalism, its violence and terror, must involve more than modes of production, he writes. It can only be fully explained by that shittiness in the body of Western culture. It seems to me that there is a tension here between the picture of racism as constantly regenerated through changing relations of production and the picture of racism as exceeding its imbrication with relations of production and ultimately residing in a separate history understood as the transmission of cultural norms.

However we resolve this tension, the implications for movements are clear. Radical opposition to capitalism is not generated only from within the dialectic of capital and waged labor but also from the antagonism between capital and the various other categories of non-waged, coerced, and surplus labor within racial capitalism – from the enslaved to the racialized lumpenproletariat whom the Black Panther Party saw as the vanguard of the revolution in the United States. Moreover, Robinson argues – and it is a logical consequence of his position – the cultural resources upon which those struggles are waged will not be generated only from within capitalism itself but also from cultural repertoires that pre-date capitalism. And this is where Robinson's attention to the Black Radical Tradition comes in as an "evolving resistance of African peoples to oppression" that has a "specifically African character", and whose meanings are "distinct from the foundations of Western ideas" (pp. 3–4) and are rooted in the "raw material" of reconstituted African "values, ideas, conceptions, and constructions of reality."

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Let's turn to Stuart Hall's work in the late 1970s and early 1980s on these same questions. Hall directly engaged with the South African Marxist debate in his essay "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance," published in 1980. And in the final chapter of the classic co-authored volume *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, published in 1978, Hall's argument is also shaped by his engagement with these debates, US discussions of agency in the aftermath of the Black Power movement, and the work within the UK Black movement on the relationship of racism to capitalism. After 1980 or so, Hall abandoned this mode of analysis and turned to a focus upon identity that was somewhat detached from questions of political economy and state power – providing some of the intellectual groundwork for the abandoning of socialism by the Labour Party under Tony Blair – an error he seems to have acknowledged towards the end of his life. But I think these two earlier texts remain crucial references for us in understanding racial capitalism, even though he does not use the term.

Like Robinson, Hall generalizes from the South African argument. He suggests that, in colonial contexts, there is no inevitable tendency for waged labor to be universalized, even in the long run. Colonial capitalism is marked by a proliferation of different forms of labor and associated ascriptive statuses. And where capitalism develops in this way, racist political discourse serves to resolve the resulting tension between a vaunted universalism and the particularism of forms of labor. Race provides the means to naturalize and dehistoricize the boundaries between different categories of

labor that are accorded different rights and privileges. Hall does not want to be too determinist about this relationship between relations of production and race. He thinks of it in terms of “tendential combinations” rather than mechanical causation. He does not think one can build from this relationship a general theory of racism. But, he says, this kind of explanation of “the emergence and operation of racism” “provides a better, sounder point of departure than those approaches which are obliged to desert the economic level, in order to produce ‘additional factors’ which explain the origin and appearance of racial structuring at other levels of the social formation.”

It follows, in Hall’s account, that racism is not the transhistorical cultural force that it sometimes appears to be in Robinson’s work. For Hall, it is a mistake to think there is some underlying structure of racism in Western culture or in capitalism or in the United States that is laid down at an originating moment and then acts uniformly and mechanically thereafter. He writes: “Unless one attributes to race a single, unitary transhistorical character – such that wherever and whenever it appears it always assumes the same autonomous features ... then one must deal with the historical specificity of race in the modern world. ... Here one is then obliged to agree that race relations are directly linked with economic processes: historically ... The problem here is not whether economic structures are relevant to racial divisions but how the two are theoretically connected.” This is Hall’s commitment to a Gramscian, conjunctural, materialist approach. It is a difficult commitment to maintain because white supremacy appears to be a constant feature of modernity. But, Hall says, that ignores resistance. Racism has to adapt to overcome resistance. It therefore always registers the traces of that resistance in its structures.

For Hall, whatever conclusion we reach about the origins of racism – whether we think of Bacon’s rebellion in seventeenth century Virginia, or of 1492, or the crusades, or the Battle of Tours in 732, or Aristotle – take your pick of origin story – whatever conclusion we reach about the origins of racism, it does not settle the question of how and why racism reproduces itself today. We cannot understand, say, mass incarceration as the expression of an anti-Blackness that was enshrined at the birth of modernity and, since then, has acted as a transhistorical force, as if its reproduction from one conjuncture to the next can be assumed a priori. The past cannot serve as an alibi for the present. And without an explanation of racial capitalism’s reproduction today, our political strategies to abolish it will be ineffective.

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How might we briefly apply the kind of analysis I have been developing to today’s context? Let us start with what Hall would call the conjuncture and its relations of production. First, from the 1970s, there has been a new global regime of capital accumulation – neoliberalism. Through privatization, commodification, and financialization, it has involved what Susan Ferguson and David McNally have called “the most accelerated and extensive processes of primitive accumulation in world history.” This has produced a mass rendering of surplus populations across the global South and in the North. Neoliberalism’s surplus populations are generally not engaged as waged labor by capital even for short periods. They are, as Achille Mbembe has written, “unable to be exploited at all. They are abandoned subjects, relegated to the role of a ‘superfluous humanity.’ Capital hardly needs them anymore to function.” Kalyan Sanyal calls them the “wasteland” populations, defined by their being fully excluded from capitalist exploitation, not even able to serve as a reserve army of occasional labor. Gargi Bhattacharyya develops this argument in her excellent recent book on racial capitalism.

Race serves as the means by which neoliberalism organizes and codes the complex, dispersed boundaries between these populations and others, between the “exploitable” and “unexploitable,” the

“free” and “unfree,” the “deserving” and “undeserving.” It is a material feature of the global division of labor that neoliberalism generates. Ideologically, neoliberalism is haunted by the existence of these surplus populations. They signify a limit to its reach, a failure to universalize, a space from within which resistance is generated. The tension between the desire for a universal market order and the anxiety that there are limits to market rule is resolved through race, which enables neoliberalism’s limits to be naturalized and dehistoricized. Political opposition to market systems mounted by movements of the global South or racialized populations in the North is then read by neoliberal ideology as no more than the acting out of cultures inherently lacking in the appropriate traits of individualism and entrepreneurial spirit. This displaces the political conflicts generated by neoliberalism onto the more comfortable terrain of clashes of culture.

In particular, racisms of the border, of law and order, and of counter-terrorism are the arenas within which the complex fears, tensions, and anxieties generated by neoliberalism and its discontents are projected and worked through. The surplus dispossessed come to be represented through a series of racist figures – “welfare queens,” “Muslim extremists,” “illegals,” “narcos,” “super-predators,” and so on – as part of the process of securing neoliberalism in the realm of ideology. These figures of economic dependency, violations of property, and threats to Western culture rework older forms of racism to produce images that are distinctive to the neoliberal era. What these figures have in common is their representing limits to market logic. They serve as displaced signifiers of neoliberalism’s failure to universalize its legitimacy, analogues of the “black mugger” whom Hall described in the 1970s as a “signifier of the crisis in the urban colonies.” With this phrase, Hall meant that racist figures are not conjured out of nothing in the corridors of power but involve displacement along a signifying chain from actual political insurgencies or social antagonisms to the racist fantasies that fail to represent them. Behind the phantasms of the “welfare queen,” the “Muslim extremist,” and the “illegal immigrant” lie fears of actual Black radicalism, of the actual Palestinian national movement, and of the actual politicization of the working class induced by migrant workers. By associating poverty, deviancy, and radicalism with Blackness, for example, the poverty, deviancy, and radicalism of all surplus populations, including whites, is more easily managed ideologically. Thus racism enables state violence *in general*.

Politically, race offers the neoliberal state organizing terms for embedding markets in systems of spatial order and for policing surplus populations. In the state’s practices of “law and order,” “securing borders,” and “national security,” race is both concealed and constitutive. The dramatic increase under neoliberalism in the capacity of states to carry out policing, carceral, border, and military violence, domestically and globally, is linked to the need to manage surplus populations – and it is racially coded. A transnational security infrastructure, led by the United States but dispersed globally through the nation-state system, spatially organizes the neoliberal order through race. Racist bordering regimes, with their huge death tolls in the seas and deserts to the south of Europe and the United States, and their warehousing of millions of refugees in camps conveniently far from the West; racist projects of broken windows policing and mass incarceration, which as Ruth Wilson Gilmore has shown, is another form of warehousing of surplus populations; and global infrastructures of counter-insurgency, such as the racist wars on terror and on drugs, causing the deaths of hundreds of thousands – all this is inextricable from neoliberalism’s market order. The global policing of Blacks, migrants, and Muslims thus meshes with and comes to stand in ideologically for the broader problem of policing neoliberalism’s surplus populations, within and without the West. It is not coincidental that the think-tank networks involved in promoting neoliberal political economies have typically also been key mobilizers of projects of racist policing, incarceration, and counter-terrorism.

In particular, the neoliberal border produces racial segregation as absolutely and violently as the Jim Crow laws of the US South or South African apartheid. The border becomes the key tool for producing spatial boundaries between different kinds of laboring populations and a material aspect of the racist global division of labor under neoliberalism. In this way, to draw on Stuart Hall's formulation, race is the modality in which the global structure of class relations is "lived," the medium through which they are experienced, the form in which they are "appropriated and 'fought through'," not only an "ideological trick" but "the material and social base on which 'racism' as an ideology flourishes." It follows that the kinds of racist politics that have surged in recent years cannot be analyzed as masks with which to conceal a putative non-racial economic core to neoliberalism. Rather, they can only be made sense of by understanding the "material and social base" of actual racial divisions of labor and the racist practices of neoliberal states, which provide a legitimacy and spontaneous "folk" plausibility to right-wing racist political rhetoric. Trump has thrived because his rhetoric resonates with decades of neoliberal bipartisan state practice in the name of securing the United States from illegal drugs, immigration, and terrorism. The recent electoral successes of racist politicians and parties are not an indirect consequence of the devastation that neoliberalism wreaks, as scholars such as Wendy Brown have argued. Rather they are the making explicit of a racial ordering that neoliberalism has always worked through.

It follows from this analysis that our movements against neoliberalism will of necessity be rooted in the specific cultural and political histories of laboring and surplus populations constituted in racial differentiation. I don't have time to paint a picture of what those movements might look like and the kinds of questions of strategy and coordination they throw up. But I want to leave you with an image from A. Sivanandan, another key thinker of racial capitalism in Britain in this same period, and the founding editor of the journal *Race & Class*. He narrates the so-called Pentonville Five case of 1972, in which five white workers were arrested and imprisoned for organising unofficial picketing in support of a strike by dockers. The trade unions invited black organisations to join a march to Pentonville prison where the men were held. The dilemma for black organisations was that, while they recognised that 'the unions' struggle was also black people's struggle' (they, too, were workers), the entrenched racism of the trade unions meant they would not join the official march. Four years earlier, the dockers had marched in support of the racist politician Enoch Powell. Moreover, to the black organisations, imprisonment was an aspect of state racism that impinged on their communities in a distinct way. Instead, black organizations led a different march down a different road to the same spot on behalf of the Pentonville Five. Same destination, different journey. Not the intersection of identities or oppressions but of movements; not a hierarchy of oppression but an opening out to other struggles while maintaining the specificity of one's own. Understood in this way, what some people still insist on calling "identity politics" does not fragment class struggle but radicalizes it.

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