Racial Capitalism

INTRODUCTION

“Racial capitalism” has been defined by Nancy Leong as “the process of deriving social and economic value from the racial identity of another person.”¹ Using this very broad definition, we can understand the modern world – the “modern world-system” -- as founded as much upon racial domination as upon class exploitation, as much upon anti-racist resistance as upon class struggle. On that premise, “racial capitalism” is merely a more accurate term for capitalism itself. A capitalism that has race at its center, so to speak.

We must also include the struggle components of racial capitalism: the political economic element, resistance to that “deriving of … value from racial identity.” And we realize that racial capitalism is a personal as well as a political set of relationships. It is not only social structural but personal.

So what is racial identity, that capitalists can exploit it? From the past mass expulsions, killings, and kidnapings to the present racial police state, what is racial identity about? How has society -- and the world -- been racialized?

Studying this topic – racial formation -- takes you deeply into such matters as settler colonialism, primitive accumulation, racialized labor, intersectionality, and the current racial world.

It is not only a story of colonialism, slavery, and genocide, not only a story of injustice and degradation; it’s also a story of deep and continuous resistance, cultural creativity, and giving leadership to humanity: I refer to insurgent anti-racist struggles across the board: in workplaces, jails, native lands, bedrooms, neighborhoods, archives…

READINGS


I will post other significant readings on GauchoSpace from time to time.

**REQUIREMENTS**

**Reaction Papers**: These are brief book reviews, c. 750 words, focused on the main text assigned each week. RPs are due every week except Week 1 and Week 11. In some cases you will have the chance to write two RPs on a main text, since we read a few books over two weeks. Think of yourself as a reviewer for *Contemporary Sociology* or *The Nation*. RPs should be submitted on the GauchoSpace Forum before 600pm of the Sunday before the class when it is assigned (Please, not the night before...). These are not graded. A sample RP is posted on GauchoSpace.

**Final Paper**: Your final paper will respond to the following prompt:

David Roediger writes:

*Marx's leaps where race was concerned came not just or mostly from study or even from application of a method. Instead they arose from seeing matters literally anew because of social motion by the oppressed and in particular by the colonized and the enslaved.*

*The very emphasis on self-emancipation of the working class in the foundational documents of the First International came as Marx had before him the concrete examples of the self-emancipation of the enslaved persons of the Confederacy, and the emancipation of Russian serfs.*
Sharp questioning by Marx of his earlier beliefs in the progressive role of empire followed the Sepoy Rebellion in India in 1857-58, and its brutal suppression. It was in this moment that, as Pranav Jani writes, Marx started “to theorize the self-activity and struggle of colonized Indians.”

While Marx’s interest in Irish struggles was longstanding, his acute concern with Ireland came after Fenian militancy, as [Kevin] Anderson puts it, “really came to a boil.” It was then that Marx argued that the “national emancipation of Ireland is not a question of abstract justice or humanitarian sentiment but the first condition of social emancipation.”

In your paper on racial capitalism, discuss ways we can "see matters literally anew" by looking at the struggles and conflicts that shape your interests. For example, you might analyze the ways in which struggles against mass incarceration, or #Movement4BlackLives, or #ImmigrantsRights, or #SayHerName give us new insights into the dynamics of racial capitalism today.

In writing about this, try to reflect on our course readings too, where they link to the key issues of your own work. This means that if you are interested in, say, race and migration today you might find links between the legacies of slavery, settler colonialism, earlier migrations, and “accumulation by dispossession” (Robinson, Mbembe, Karuka, Federici) and your area of interest. For example, let’s say you are working on women of color and carcerality; you might want to connect to slavery and abolition, reproductive labor, (post)colonialism…. Of course, draw on our course readings only as appropriate, and feel free to develop your own sources, while still directing your attention to problems of racial capitalism.

Suggested length: 3000-3600 words (10-12 double-spaced pages). Final papers are due on GauchoSpace before 600pm Sunday Dec 15.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Week 1

Tues Oct 1

Introductory discussion: talking about concepts, our work, the course itself


3 I don’t know all your key research interests, although I do know some of your work. So I can’t say which readings will resonate with you.
Week 2
Tues Oct 8

Week 3
Tues Oct 15
*Black Marxism* II

Week 4
Tues Oct 22
Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* I

Week 5
Tues Oct 29
Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* II

Week 6
Tues Nov 5
Prashad, *The Darker Nations*

Week 7
Tues Nov 12
Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks*

Week 8
Tues Nov 19
Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*

Week 9
Tues Nov 26
Thanksgiving holiday week; no class

Week 10

Tues Dec 3

McAuley, *The Spirit vs. the Souls*

FINAL PAPER DUE: On GauchoSpace before 600pm, Thursday Dec 12