

READING
BLACK
RECON-
STRUCTION
TODAY

EDITED BY
YOUSUF AL-BULUSHI,
GEO MAHER, AND
DAMIEN M. SOJOYNER

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Reading *Black Reconstruction* Today

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*Edited by Yousuf Al-Bulushi, Geo Maher,
and Damien M. Sojoyner*



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*For Joshua Clover,
his life a strike,
standing effortlessly astride the breach
that divides love for community
from hatred for its enemies,
who always knew how to take the trash out,
who lives forever in our fury.*

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Introduction

BLACK RECONSTRUCTION AS A PORTAL

Yousuf Al-Bulushi and Damien Sojoyner

“BLACK RECONSTRUCTION OF DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA”

IN 1935, AMID THE GREAT DEPRESSION and a crisis of global proportions that stimulated militant labor organizing across the United States, W. E. B. Du Bois published arguably his most important work: *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*. The book offers an alternative narrative of the Civil War in the United States, and the efforts to “reconstruct” the nation after the ultimately unsuccessful attempt at secession by the Confederate states of the South. Du Bois’s study radically reinterprets this history. Such a reinterpretation was necessary because mainstream, elite, and white historians had up until then collectively argued that Reconstruction amounted to a horrifically failed experiment. Theirs was a narrative shaped by the demands of pacification and counterinsurgency¹ that Du Bois termed “the propaganda of history,” operating as the intellectual basis for the more material “counter-revolution of property.”² This propaganda not only shaped the story of the past but also had a lasting effect on the present, distorting how race, class, and imperialism were conceived in the context of ongoing struggles to change the world. In addition to setting the historical record straight, then, Du Bois’s work also constituted a conjunctural intervention into his own time. As such, it offers us a model for reinterpreting history *in order to better intervene in the present*. Appropriately, Reading *Black Reconstruction* Today

mirrors Du Bois's insistence on "looking backward" in order to develop new ways of "looking forward."

For most of the Civil War, the North remained fundamentally uninterested in emancipating enslaved people. And as Du Bois demonstrates, Lincoln and the Union government he led were forced to embrace emancipation in 1863 as part of a last-ditch effort to defeat the Confederacy by robbing them of their workforce and their international legitimacy. The hope was that former slaves, who had already self-emancipated by abandoning southern plantations, would then join the ranks of a Union army struggling to enlist white volunteers, who often saw the war as an unnecessary distraction from their own lives. The strategy worked. But the result was not the product of well-intentioned sympathizers or of a remarkably tall white man in a top hat. Instead, explains Du Bois, it was the consequence of the "self-activity"³ of Black workers held in bondage. This transformed not only the outcome but the meaning of the Civil War. And it offers us a window into Du Bois's insistence on centering living labor and the primacy of resistance in theorizing both the significance of, and the real driving force behind, historical events.

Moreover, as Du Bois's original proposed title for the text makes clear—"Black Reconstruction *of Democracy* in America"—he was acutely concerned with what he called "the ultimate relation of slaves to democracy."⁴ Directly challenging not only American historians but the widely celebrated French political theorist and apologist for America, Alexis de Tocqueville,⁵ Du Bois asked: Could the United States even be considered a "democracy" at all, and if so, what kind? The inverse question was even more important for him: What *kind* of democracy became both conceivable and feasible once slavery and white supremacy were in retreat?⁶ And what did he mean by the cryptic statement that, "Democracy died save in the hearts of black folk" (30)?

AGAINST THE TALENTED TENTH, FOR ABOLITION DEMOCRACY

More than thirty years prior to publishing *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois, fresh out of Harvard graduate school, had argued for the need to raise up a "talented tenth" of African American leaders who might, through their enlightened wisdom, steer their people to freedom.⁷ *Black Reconstruction* dramatically upends this original thesis, inverting its underlying premise to

argue that enslaved people freed themselves—despite their prevailing illiteracy, geographical isolation on plantations, and lack of access to modern forms of communication. Indeed, as he puts it, the Black worker—a term that constitutes an intervention in and of itself—had engaged in a “general strike” of tremendous consequence, right in the middle of the Civil War.⁸

His reinterpretation of the entire narrative of Reconstruction through the eyes of workers was likely due, at least in part, to the influence of actually existing struggles setting the world on fire in the global 1930s.⁹ But Du Bois’s framing focuses on the self-activity of everyday people, rather than on a Leninist vanguard of leaders or a liberal notion of representatives. Such a reinterpretation of the Civil War and its aftermath also allows us to understand that Du Bois believed in a much more radical form of democracy than the US Constitution promised. This more radical form is what he called “abolition democracy,” a term that retains central importance for abolitionist organizing today. For Black workers to truly be free, he argued, we needed to recognize the inextricable relationship between civil, political, and economic rights—not to mention the organized force necessary to defend them. Perhaps most importantly, the period of Reconstruction that began during the tail end of the war and lasted until 1877 demonstrated that newfound efforts to secure education and the right to vote—as well as the emerging democratic system such rights were intended to buttress—would all be meaningless without also enacting radical forms of land redistribution to break up the former plantations. Abolition democracy, in other words, required a material basis, and for Du Bois, that basis was land. Abolition democracy therefore needed to be built on the triumvirate of land, labor, and education.

A BLACK RADICAL PHILOSOPHY OF PRAXIS

What is more, the mobilization by enslaved workers was made possible, Du Bois argues, by their ability to draw on a cultural reservoir grounded in a distinctly eschatological epistemology—a tradition of interpreting the world—that understood the arrival of the Civil War eschatologically as “the coming of the Lord,” that is, as the second coming of Christ, with all the promises of freedom this might offer. Like C. L. R. James, who in *The Black Jacobins* mentioned (albeit only in passing) that “voodoo was the medium of the conspiracy,”¹⁰ Du Bois argues for the fundamental role

played by culture in the constitution of a Black radical tradition. Indeed, on the first and second pages of the opening chapter, he states: "In origin, the slaves represented everything African, although most of them originated on or near the West Coast. . . . Most of them that came to the continent went through West Indian tutelage, and thus finally appeared in the United States. They brought with them their religion and rhythmic song, and some traces of their art and tribal customs" (3–4).

And in case readers gloss over this opening emphasis on African-descendent culture as central to what made mobilization possible, Du Bois further underscores it a mere ten pages later: "And of all human development, ancient and modern, not the least singular and significant is the philosophy of life and action which slavery bred in the souls of black folk. In most respects its expression was stilted and confused; the rolling periods of Hebrew prophecy and biblical legend furnished inaccurate but splendid words. The subtle folk-lore of Africa, with whimsy and parable, veiled wish and wisdom; and above all fell the anointing chrism of the slave music, the only gift of pure art in America" (14). To sum up, early in the book, Du Bois lays out a threefold argument that 1) enslaved people constituted a working class, 2) this working class was fundamental to the rise of the modern global capitalist system, and 3) the agency of the enslaved working class was not unidirectionally constituted by their social and geographical relation to the means of production, however fundamental their labor was for capital. Rather, resistance emerged in large part as a result of "the philosophy of life and action" that Du Bois referred to above. Listen to how, at the end of chapter 5, he frames the general strike of enslaved workers that broke the Confederate army and won the Civil War:

The mass of slaves, even the most intelligent ones, and certainly the great group of field hands, were in religious and hysterical fervor. This was the coming of the Lord. This was the fulfillment of prophecy and legend. It was the Golden Dawn, after chains of a thousand years. It was everything miraculous and perfect and promising . . . (122).

Foolish talk, you say, of course; and that is because no American now believes in his religion. Its facts are mere symbolism; its revelation vague generalities; its ethics a matter of carefully balanced gain. But to most of the four million black folk emancipated by civil war, God was real. They knew Him. They had met Him personally in many a wild orgy of religious frenzy, or in the black stillness of the night. His plan for them was clear; they were to suffer and be degraded, and then afterwards by Divine edict, raised to manhood and power; and so on January 1, 1863, He made them free (124).

To underscore the point once more: this argument constituted an intervention by Du Bois into the prevailing orthodoxies of the Marxist philosophy of praxis in the 1930s. He desperately wanted his fellow travelers in the labor movement, in the international communist movement, and among the largely middle-class Black liberation and anticolonial movements, to understand the potential of a Black radical philosophy of praxis rooted in the Black working class.¹¹

CLASS STRUGGLE, OR, HOW “THE ECONOMIC PROBLEM INCREASED IN INTRICACY”

A basic Marxist argument is that, under capitalism, a line of antagonism is drawn between workers and bosses, constituting the basis for class struggle. This struggle is at once objective—emerging from the conditions of production and reproduction produced by capitalism as a social relation—and subjective—the result of bosses and workers both coming to understand themselves as constituting classes that can best realize their transformative goals by consciously uniting into a broader group. This represents, in rudimentary form, the *theory* of class struggle, as detailed in *The Communist Manifesto* and *Capital*. This theory, however, must necessarily be deconstructed and reconstructed in the course of actual historical events. In other words, *actually existing* instances of class struggle are a lot messier than workers and bosses confronting each other as two internally united and externally antagonistic groups.

Marx makes this clear in his historical studies, especially in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and *The Civil War in France*. In these texts, actually existing class struggle turns out to be the result of dozens of groups and subgroups, including the peasantry, the lumpenproletariat, the proletariat, the petit bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie, and the aristocracy. Each of these classes is also internally divided, with different sectors of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie confronting each other, often in the form of rival political parties. Crucially, these various classes also often succeed in forming strange alliances across what one might assume to be contrasting interests, successfully uniting the rulers and the ruled. The most famous account of one of these surprising cross-class alliances in these texts is when the aristocrat Louis Napoleon Bonaparte nonetheless succeeded in appealing to the peasantry and the lumpenproletariat, who unfortunately supported his return to power

and the restoration of the monarchy in France after the failed worker uprisings of 1848. It is in the context of this concrete historical event that Marx issued his criticisms of the revolutionary potential—or lack thereof—of the lumpenproletariat, while also proclaiming of the peasantry: “They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.”¹²

It has been left to the colonized world, and to the tradition of thinkers that Cedric Robinson called a Black radical intelligentsia, to reconstruct such pronouncements in the context of evolving historical and geographical conditions of struggle. This is what Frantz Fanon meant when, one hundred years later, in the context of the African anticolonial struggle, he re-wrote *The Eighteenth Brumaire* as *The Wretched of the Earth*, and argued that “Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched when it comes to addressing the colonial issue.”¹³ Famously, Fanon would argue that, in the context of colonialism, the lumpenproletariat and the peasantry constituted not reactionary classes but the *most* revolutionary classes, a framework taken up by the Black Panther Party in their efforts to organize their own lumpen constituency—think Bunchy Carter and George Jackson—as an internal colony in both cities and prisons across the United States of America.

Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, James’s *The Black Jacobins*, and Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction* are part and parcel of this tradition of reconstructing the theory of class struggle to take into account at least two changing factors: the evolving historical and geographical events—moving from 1848 France to the 1863 United States—and the increasing complexity of class struggle that required a recognition of the inextricable relationship between race and class. On the third page of the book Du Bois once again foreshadows the entire story by explaining to the reader that they will “see how the economic problem increased in intricacy. This intricacy is shown by the persons in the drama and their differing and opposing interests” (6). By intricacy, Du Bois is referring to the same complexity of actually existing class struggle tackled by Marx, Fanon, and James. First and foremost, for Du Bois, this requires that we pay special attention to “the economic rivalry of the black and white worker” and how “the [capitalist] system was held stable and intact by the poor white” (12) aligning with the plantation aristocracy. But the term “intricacy” does not just refer to the heterogeneity introduced by the problem of thinking race and class together. For Du Bois, it also refers to the many subgroups and alliances formed and deformed throughout the “drama” of Reconstruction.¹⁴

His belief in (a reconstructed and more intricate) class struggle is underscored by the criticism he repeatedly levels at the abolitionists in the North, who aligned themselves with the cause of abolishing slavery while at the same time neglecting the plight of the white working class. This hope, however, does not prevent him from identifying the fundamentally reactionary role played by this class: “It was the dreary destiny of the Poor White South that, deserting its economic class and itself, it became the instrument by which democracy in the nation was done to death, race provincializing deified, and the world delivered to plutocracy” (241). The tragedy of Reconstruction is shaped by the ultimate failure to take advantage of these opportunities: the failure of white labor leaders to understand that the abolitionist movement constituted what Du Bois referred to as a *second* labor movement and the failure of the abolitionists to “realize the plight of the white laborer, especially the semi-skilled and unskilled worker” (20).

A GLOBAL LENS

Black Reconstruction therefore concerns far more than the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the close of the nineteenth century. Du Bois framed his study in the context of global shifts in capitalism and the corresponding anti-capitalist movements struggling for a better world in the turbulent 1930s, for which the Reconstruction era served as prologue. The simultaneous possibilities, and ultimate foreclosure, of Black Reconstruction in the United States seven decades prior would have world-historical ramifications, transforming the United States into a “reactionary force” globally with the expansion of imperial power. Two years before the publication of *Black Reconstruction* the United States government began drawing a series of now infamous city maps that color-coded neighborhoods—the “riskiest” being red. It partly based its criteria for good and bad neighborhoods on the scientific racism of eugenics. And in the same year Du Bois’s book was published, 1935, Hitler’s Germany would borrow from the American body of eugenicist knowledge and colonial practices to justify the passing of the Nuremberg Race Laws.

This shifting terrain of racial regimes gives rise to Du Bois’s inference that only a global anti-imperialist struggle led by the world’s people of color could prove capable of dismantling the simultaneous specters of fascism and reconfigured colonialism. While *Black Reconstruction* is a story about America, it

is also about the Americas, Africa, and Asia. This is why Du Bois periodically returns to the question of imperialism throughout the text, while insisting in the opening chapter that a key lesson of Reconstruction should be that “that dark and vast sea of human labor in China and India, the South Seas and all Africa; in the West Indies and Central America and in the United States—the great majority of mankind, on whose bent and broken backs rest today the founding stones of modern industry—shares a common destiny” (15). Speaking directly to his comrades in the communist movement and underscoring the centrality of internationalism across the color line, he says simply: “Here is the real modern labor problem” (16). This vision successfully sows chaos not only in our received understanding of the Civil War and Reconstruction but in historical-geographical thinking about the dynamics and agents of social change tout court.

A PORTAL THROUGH OUR PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

In early 2020, as the global pandemic set in, Indian novelist Arundhati Roy offered up the following words of consolation: “Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.”¹⁵ Roy’s insight was exceptionally prescient, as economic instability, health systems in calamity, and the weight of draconian discipline regimes forged a global collective outrage that demanded a new arrangement of social and political relationships. Taking the shape of protests, boycotts, upheavals, and refusals, the response represented an amalgamation of many years of organizing and planning that pointed to the precarious conditions in which people were forced to live.

The pandemic unraveled amid a conjuncture defined by the aftermath of our own generational crisis—the so-called 2008 sub-prime mortgage crisis. In the wake of economic and social devastation, a new range of political movements took center stage in the quest to imagine and develop an alternative future. Beginning in 2011, a series of popular uprisings captured the public imagination in places as far afield as the “Arab Spring” movements in Cairo, Manama, and Tunis, to the anti-austerity struggles in Madrid, Athens and Rio de Janeiro, to the Occupy Wall Street encampments that emerged in New York before spreading across the United States and beyond. These uprisings prompted critical theorists to label 2011 as “the year of dreaming

dangerously”¹⁶ and “the rebirth of history.”¹⁷ First in the United States, but then spreading across the world, we have seen a resurgence of interest in challenging the repressive state apparatus of policing and prisons. The year 2020 witnessed not just a global lockdown but also the culmination of more than a decade of mobilizing in the Movement for Black Lives, as it now spread to Senegal, Australia, France, Nigeria, and Colombia. Participants in these struggles have wisely reached for their bookshelves to decipher the meaning of such struggles in the present.

After all, the political visions contained in our contemporary movements are not entirely new. Their real origins lie in an earlier moment of abolition democracy—the overthrow of racial slavery. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore explains: “I will remind us that, in the archival record of self-organization and world-making activity among the Black people of the South under Reconstruction, the great communist W. E. B. Du Bois saw places people make—abolition geographies—under the participatory political umbrella of what he called ‘abolition democracy.’”¹⁸ The failure to repair the damage wrought by centuries of racial slavery birthed a deadly institutional chain that stretched from sharecropping and convict leasing, through the racialization of crime, to the world of mass incarceration and police impunity we inhabit today. Du Bois’s monumental text *Black Reconstruction in America* is an intervention that historian Robin D. G. Kelley has called “the most important history book ever written, period.”¹⁹ If *Black Reconstruction* helps us decode the present through the past, it is also a portal or gateway toward as-yet uncharted abolitionist futures.

READING *BLACK RECONSTRUCTION* TODAY

It should come as no surprise, then, that as these struggles have celebrated successes and confronted setbacks, many organizers, both on and off college campuses, have turned to forms of political education and study groups that revolve around a close reading of *Black Reconstruction* in an effort to grapple with the challenges we are facing. In doing so, they are following in the steps of previous generations, who similarly turned to Du Bois in moments of crisis. This volume is intended to serve as a companion reader to these ongoing forms of praxis and to Du Bois’s initial text, one that will draw out and extend, for organizers and scholars alike, the geographical breadth, theoretical heft, and temporal reach of Du Bois’s original formulations when applied

to our current conjuncture. It is for that reason that we have included both formal scholarly studies and more informal conversations with scholars and organizers in this volume. We want this collection to underscore and contribute to the forms of praxis that Du Bois's own study was geared toward. Rachel Herzing's longstanding work in the prison abolition movement (chapter 13), Ant Smith's first-hand experience with incarceration together with his organizing as a part of the W. E. B. Du Bois Movement School for Abolition & Reconstruction (chapter 14), and Tiffany Willoughby-Herard's work within and beyond the university to directly challenge the propaganda of history by mentoring generations of Black students (chapter 15) are all emblematic of Du Boisian praxis and abolition democracy.

The polycrisis of the present has seen an explosion of struggles across the political spectrum and around the world. This book explores some of the most prominent of these struggles by asking the following questions: What lessons does Du Bois's framework offer us for understanding contemporary movements in Latin America (Geo Maher, chapter 8) and Palestine (Zahi Zalloua, chapter 7), the return of neo-fascist politics in Europe and North America (Alberto Toscano, chapter 5; Camilla Hawthorne, chapter 10), and the struggles against colonialism and land dispossession in Africa (António Tomás, chapter 9)? What happens to the history of Reconstruction if we triangulate the experience of Black and white workers with those of Indigenous communities on the frontier (Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, chapter 4)? What prospects for radical forms of solidarity exist today? What would it mean to commit ourselves to a global reconstruction in the present, grounded in the forms of abolition democracy that almost all current governments across the political spectrum, regardless of their geopolitical alignment, seem incapable of delivering (Jasmine Noelle Yarish, chapter 6)? In our "post-truth" age, how does Du Bois's theory of the "propaganda of history" help demystify contemporary social relations, and why is the contemporary university too often an ongoing accomplice in the propaganda of the present (Gerald Horne and Tionne Parris, chapter 1; Joshua Myers, chapter 2; Richard Pithouse, chapter 3)? And what relevance does Du Bois's rethinking of "the general strike" have to contemporary struggles (Orisanmi Burton, chapter 11; Joshua Clover, chapter 12)? By asking these and other questions, this volume conducts a "history of the present" that seeks to pry open the door to that other world that slammed shut when the freedom dreams of Reconstruction were temporarily defeated by the bipartisan forces represented by the Ku Klux Klan in the South and a new oligarchy of modern imperialism in the North.

Between the synthetic Introduction and Conclusion, the book is organized into five thematic sections. Part I, “Dismantling Propaganda, Past and Present,” begins where Du Bois ended *Black Reconstruction*, with the question of propaganda. The first two chapters both explore the role of historiography and the history wars, from Du Bois’s time to the present, as a window into the enduring significance of propaganda to both liberal and radical streams of thought. Chapter 3 then travels to South Africa to continue exploring how propaganda works in the present, in this case to mystify the actually existing Black radical struggles among shack dwellers.

Part II, “Indigeneity, Fascism, and Abolition Democracy,” takes up themes that are both somewhat tangential and central to Du Bois’s work. Chapter 4 extends the triangulated geographies in *Black Reconstruction*, where Du Bois highlighted the role of the Confederate South, the Union North, and the Frontier West as relational spaces in his evolving story. Dunbar-Ortiz adds further complexity to Du Bois’s class analysis by centering her account of the defeat of Reconstruction on the frontier states where a third group, Indigenous People, now enter the story much more prominently. Chapter 5 then picks up another loose thread in *Black Reconstruction*, the specter of fascism that profoundly shaped both the rise of the KKK during Reconstruction and the global 1930s when Du Bois penned his text. Toscano asks whether we can mine Du Bois and the broader Black radical tradition he was part of for a theory of racial fascism that also defines our present. Chapter 6 picks up on the central theme of *Black Reconstruction*, abolition democracy, by situating it in the long history of Philadelphia, from the time Du Bois wrote *The Philadelphia Negro* in 1899 to the founding of the Du Bois Movement School for Abolition & Reconstruction in Philadelphia in the wake of the 2020 George Floyd Rebellion.

Part III, “Global Imperialism and the Dark Proletariat,” homes in on the internationalism that was foundational to how Du Bois conceived of the Reconstruction. Chapter 7 modifies one of the most famous phrases in *Black Reconstruction* to explore how the economic and libidinal forces of “the wages of Jewishness” similarly shape the struggle for Palestinian liberation in the present. Chapter 8 appropriately extends Du Bois’s somewhat fleeting but nonetheless consistent insights into the hemispheric ramifications of Reconstruction by focusing on the historical and contemporary resonance and continental reach of the Bolivarian, Haitian, and Cuban revolutions. Chapter 9 brings Du Bois into conversation with Amílcar Cabral and the specificity of Portuguese colonialism on the African continent. Finally,

chapter 10 asks how Du Bois's insights might travel relationally, in conversation with Gramsci, from the Black Atlantic to the Black Mediterranean in order to examine Black struggles, contemporary abolitionist movements, and neofascism in Italy.

Part IV, "The General Strike," pays special attention to one of the most exciting and prescient theorizations of struggle in *Black Reconstruction*. Chapter 11 explores a labor struggle within the New York prison system as a lens to extend theorizations of the general strike onto the terrain of social reproduction. Just as Du Bois took the knowledge of the enslaved Black workers extremely seriously, Burton centers his analysis on the theorization and praxis of captive leaders in the Y2K prison strike for insights into contemporary prison slavery. Chapter 12 takes up the questions of political organization and leadership and their relation to Du Bois's theorization of the general strike. Clover's analysis highlights the necessarily expanded notion of proletariat developed by Du Bois, one that parallels contemporary efforts at highlighting the role of "wageless life" in the riots and struggles that mark our tumultuous present.

Finally, Part V, "Conversations on Abolition, Repair, and Reconstruction Today," deploys a conversational medium akin to the pedagogies of political education where *Black Reconstruction* is most productively engaged today. Chapter 13 contextualizes the contemporary resurgence of the term "abolition" within the three decades of movement work since the launch of Critical Resistance. Along the way, important movement debates around the relationship between privatization and public institutions of repression, solidarity, internationalism, and what it would take to actually win are brought productively to the foreground of forms of political practice that are centered on the role of the local organizer. Chapter 14 examines the incarceration and postincarceration political life of Ant Smith, a leading educator and organizer in West Philadelphia. Smith's reflections focus on his involvement with the W. E. B. Du Bois Movement School and what contemporary abolitionist work looks like when it takes the form of political education outside the halls of formal schools accredited by the state, in a city that was central to Du Bois's own life and early writing. And chapter 15 returns to the volume's opening theme of propaganda, now directly confronted by traditions of unmasking central to Black radical education in the many schools first established in the wake of Reconstruction. Willoughby-Herard shares her long engagement with Du Bois's work and pedagogy in her writings on transnational racial regimes between the United States and South Africa, and in her own

classroom pedagogy and mentoring of generations of Black students whose knowledge is too often discounted by formal institutions of learning.

Rounding out the volume is the Conclusion, by our comrade and coeditor Geo Maher. Maher synthesizes the key threads that permeate both *Black Reconstruction* and *Reading Black Reconstruction Today* by highlighting questions of the relationship between Marxism and racial capitalism, the winding search for a revolutionary subject, the question of force in history, how the dark proletariat might overthrow global racial fascism, and the necessarily conjoined themes of abolition and reconstruction. As he reminds us, the central reason why thousands of us are returning to Du Bois in the present concerns our collective commitment to grapple with and overcome the stubbornly persistent blockages in our vision and praxis that dilute our struggles, leaving us somewhere short of full liberation. It is in the context of this current impasse that we avidly return once again to *Black Reconstruction*, and to its traveling theories of education, labor, capital, and land.

NOTES

1. Dylan Rodriguez, *White Reconstruction: Domestic Warfare and the Logics of Genocide* (Fordham University Press, 2021), 86.
2. Gerald Horne, *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Biography* (Greenwood Press, 2010), 143–44.
3. George Rawick, “Working Class Self-Activity,” *Radical America* 3, no. 2 (1969): 23–31.
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PART I

*Dismantling Propaganda,
Past and Present*

Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* and the History of Twenty-First-Century Propaganda

Gerald Horne and Tionne Alliyah Parris

BY THE TIME HIS PIÈCE DE RÉSISTANCE, *Black Reconstruction in America*, was published in 1935, W. E. B. Du Bois was already an exceptional talent and a prominent Black activist-intellectual in the midst of Jim Crow. Dapper and diminutive, and nattily clad in suit and tie, he was renowned throughout the country. The first African American to earn a Harvard doctorate, Du Bois cofounded the NAACP in 1909 and thereafter helped organize a pan-African movement that bedeviled European colonizers. But what distinguished his close study of slavery and Reconstruction (and does so even today) was its Marxism. Du Bois had been exposed to Marx's penetrating analytical framework in the early 1890s in Berlin, then the site of what was probably the most advanced socialist movement in the world, and became a member of the Socialist Party in the United States about two decades later. With its original lengthy title an indicator of its dense, seven-hundred-plus-page presentation, *Black Reconstruction* was Du Bois's first extended effort to shine Marxism's sweeping floodlight on the tortured history of his homeland. Infusing Marx's materialism and class analysis with his own anti-racism, the book also offered a solid foundation for the emergence of some of today's most well-known like-minded scholars, from Eric Williams to Philip S. Foner and Walter Rodney. Crucially, *Black Reconstruction* also revealed the shortcomings of the popular and scholarly consensus on the era, preparing the ground for subsequent texts that thoroughly rewrote this complex history. In the wake of Du Bois's book, our view of Reconstruction would never be the same.

Despite applying Marxist analysis to his work, Du Bois would not make a firm commitment to the Communist Party USA until he wrote to Gus Hall in 1961 to officially request membership. Du Bois declared: "Today I have reached a firm conclusion: Capitalism cannot reform itself; it is doomed

to self-destruction. No universal selfishness can bring social good to all.”¹ Over almost a century of life dedicated to analyzing and organizing around the uplifting of Black people across the globe, Du Bois passed away in 1963, while the Civil Rights Movement was well underway in the United States. In the years before his death, he had expressed his dismay at the way in which the political landscape seemed to be imploding: “Daily lately as I read the morning news, I find myself asking if age is driving me a bit crazy or if I’m living in a crazy nation.”² Du Bois went on to say that the country was “deliberately distorting history.”³ This is perhaps a familiar feeling for twenty-first-century readers, given the tumult of recent years. The loss of Du Bois in the crucial decade of the 1960s, which saw the coalescing of internationalist, anti-racist, anticolonialist, and anti-imperialist activism that mirrored the momentum of pre-McCarthy era organizing, only magnified the loss of such an intellect. However, Du Bois’s impact remained; he was then and is now a guide for activists who seek an end to the status quo, which upholds an oppressive, capitalist system that not only affects America—but the entire globe. In early draft documents of *Black Reconstruction*’s final chapter, titled “The Propaganda of History,” Du Bois listed some questions that remain thoughtful considerations to apply to current debates and the manufactured hysteria surrounding Critical Race Theory: “Shall we tell each other our various unpleasant experiences or conceal them so as to not increase unhappiness? . . . Shall we minimize the truth in order to save our own necks and gain and encourage the co-operation of others?”⁴

This piece will explore and grapple with the myths that emerged and consolidated oppression of African Americans following the Reconstruction era. Du Bois arguably constructed his closing chapter on propaganda as a reflective exercise, with questions that remained ever pertinent throughout his life and beyond. From the 1860s to the 1960s to today, America continues to be harmed by the myths it tells itself.

BLACK RECONSTRUCTION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF POST-CIVIL WAR MYTHOLOGY

When *Black Reconstruction* was first published in 1935, the ruling consensus on the Reconstruction era—the period immediately following the Civil War, from 1865 to 1876—was that it had been an outrageous failure, virtually justifying the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. Rather than a time during which

the newly emancipated and their allies struggled to create a new democratic order in the South, Reconstruction was described as a tragic period of corruption and misrule; only after it came to an end was the South able to be “redeemed.” The expansion of this redemption narrative can be seen sprawling well into the twenty-first century, but first, to understand how it evolved into our current times, we must start at the beginning.

Du Bois opens the book with a depiction of the horrors of enslavement (thereby anticipating Eric Williams), which laid the foundation for capitalism itself. “Black labor,” he argued, “became the foundation stone not only of the Southern social structure but of Northern manufacture and commerce . . . of buying and selling on a world-wide scale.” In the slaveholders’ republic, the planters dominated the White House and, crucially, “the Army and Navy,” which contributed heavily to the South’s early victories during the Civil War.

In his chapters on the period before the war, Du Bois also investigated the “sexual chaos” that characterized slavery, outlining how the “deliberate commercial breeding” of the enslaved for “profit” was both a part of the country’s capitalist system and something that linked the United States to a global market.⁵ He examined as well how these practices affected the enslaved themselves—for example, the way the system forced “the concubinage of black women to white men [and] polyandry between black women and selected men” (35). At the same time, this chaos became a means of propaganda in which enslaved people were characterized as promiscuous and uncontrollably bestial. In the decades that followed, from the 1870s onwards, economic depression such as that in the 1890s became a catalyst for racial violence which in turn served as a twisted cathartic outlet, as historian Aline Helg writes: “[As] white males’ condition became more precarious, both the destitute black and the more successful black became more threatening. In this context, the myth of the black rapist justified the repression, segregation and disenfranchisement of black men, while simultaneously bringing white women under the wing of white men.”⁶

At the turn of the twentieth century, activists began to protest the abhorrent lynchings that were becoming a regular feature of the Southern states. In 1892, Ida B. Wells—an African American journalist and suffragist—published *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, a pamphlet detailing the rise in public lynching of African Americans. Wells wrote that “many inhuman and fiendish lynchings of Afro-Americans have recently taken place” and that these acts of violence were “meant as a warning.”⁷ In the

case of eight men lynched over the course of one week, five had been charged with raping white women. The concept of Black savagery was once again employed in changing times, and Southerners claimed that the freedom of African Americans would surely lead them to “regress towards their natural bestiality.”⁸ However, Wells’s pamphlet went on to call out the clear manipulation at play as white Americans consistently accepted help from African Americans in times of trouble but whipped up white supremacist frenzy in peacetime to exert control over the population: “The world knows that the crime of rape was unknown during four years of civil war, when the white women of the South were at the mercy of the race which is all at once charged with being a bestial one.”⁹ Racist propaganda was thus invoked to bolster a superiority complex among white Americans, and in doing so reinforced a now well-established American tradition.

In addition to the manufacturing of these racial stereotypes, the popular and scholarly rendering of the Reconstruction era was more than just a matter of factual error. It deliberately upheld a reactionary view of US history, in particular that of the South, and justified the region’s continuing inequalities. To “redeem” the South from the corruption and misrule of Reconstruction required reasserting the previous racial order, depriving Black folk of voting rights and undoing any chance they had to achieve economic independence. Although many had attempted to capitalize on their newfound political agency, Du Bois encapsulated the hopelessness of Black political power, stating “If there was one thing South Carolina feared more than bad Negro government, it was a good Negro government.”¹⁰

Concerning government, the mythological “great man” narratives that have since been constructed around American leaders like President Abraham Lincoln have done great harm to popular perceptions of American history. Du Bois scorned those who would compel us to “forget that George Washington was a slaveowner, or that Thomas Jefferson had mulatto children, or that Alexander Hamilton had Negro blood, and simply remember the things we regard as creditable and inspiring” (722). With pop-culture hits like Lin-Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton* receiving immense praise, even from President Barack Obama, who called the play “a phenomenon . . . a favorite in the Obama household,” it is clear that both sides of the American political aisle are complicit in mythologizing the past.¹¹ Crucially, Du Bois writes the “persons who conceived of the Negroes as free and remaining in the United States were a small minority before 1861. . . . At the beginning of the war

probably not one white American in a hundred believed that Negroes could become an integral part of American democracy (132, 191)."

The deification of presidents like Abraham Lincoln further serves to muddy the waters of popular history. In presidential debates of the 1850s, Lincoln and Stephen Douglas faced off as candidates of the Republican and Democratic parties. Ibram X. Kendi points out that "in the decades before the Civil War, race baiting had become a crucial campaign ploy," as employing inflammatory rhetoric became a tried and tested method of "manipulating the racist ideas of voters."¹² Douglas proudly proclaimed that the idea of racial integration was preposterous and would never be allowed—admitting "this government was made on a white basis," structurally designed from its inception to empower white Americans and deny social and political mobility to outgroups.¹³ Lincoln was eager not to alienate Republican voters by running on an antislavery platform, and as the impending crisis of the war loomed, his own personal ideals ran contrary to his now revised reputation as "The Great Emancipator." In 1858, at the fourth presidential debate held in Chicago, Illinois, Lincoln declared:

I am not nor ever have been in favor of making [Black people] voters or jurors. . . . There is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And inasmuch as they cannot live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.¹⁴

Lincoln's proslavery views extended long prior to and beyond the outbreak of Civil War, yet in popular memory his presidency and attitudes have been revised to create the mythic figure of the Great Emancipator. Even by 1862, as the war raged on, Lincoln placed blame on the race that he claimed had fanned the flames of Southern revolt by their mere existence. Speaking to a delegation of African Americans in August of that year, Lincoln pleaded: "If Blacks leave, all will be well." Advocating they simply convince all Black people on the continent to make the journey to Liberia, Lincoln manipulatively stated that to refuse would be "extremely selfish," holding them responsible for unrest in America.¹⁵

In the war's aftermath, the question of what would happen to the newly emancipated also remained unresolved. The dawning of what Du Bois called

“abolition democracy” was no more predetermined than the outcome of the war itself. In his account, Lincoln’s successor, the pathetic President Andrew Johnson, was the primary Washington villain and was amply aided by his secretary of state, William Seward of New York, while the heroes of Reconstruction—the Radical Republicans, the recently enfranchised, the “carpetbaggers” (sojourners from outside the South) and “scalawags” (the Southerners allied with them)—all sought to resist Johnson’s reactionary intentions.

Yet the villains ultimately won, and for Du Bois, this was not only due to their own efforts. Despite the heroism of people like Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens, Du Bois argued, these Northern “abolitionists were not enemies of capital”; rather they were, Du Bois argued (quoting Will Herberg), “typical bourgeois-democratic revolutionists” unable to lead the promise of Reconstruction to its fulfillment in the face of formidable foes.

CIVIL WAR AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Some of Reconstruction’s most extreme myths were arguably “best” memorialized in an earlier pop-culture phenomenon—the 1915 cinematic defamation *The Birth of a Nation*. This work’s premiere cemented and exaggerated already oppressive attitudes toward African Americans. It depicted Reconstruction as an era in which the South was under siege from corrupt Black politicians and violent ex-slaves. However, in an apt reflection of the revisionism of the time, President Woodrow Wilson was said to have heralded and praised the film’s plot as “like writing history with lightning.”¹⁶ The Ku Klux Klan were presented as the ultimate heroes of the film, with scenes which saw them appear valiantly in the nick of time to rescue a white woman from the clutches of an evil blackface rapist. At a showing in Houston, Texas, audiences chanted “Lynch him! Lynch him!” gleefully, and “nearly one hundred Blacks were actually lynched” in Houston alone that year.¹⁷ The ahistorical propaganda which saw Confederates as fallen heroes of the Civil War was reinvigorated as *The Birth of a Nation* elevated the KKK to the status of superheroes of the South—protecting their people from the tyranny of alien Black invaders that sought to destroy civility and order in society. At what would later become a “perpetual memorial” to the Confederacy, the KKK celebrated their rebirth in the twentieth century at a cross-burning, inaugurating a Labor Day tradition.¹⁸

Public memory seems to suffer from amnesia when the horrors of the Reconstruction era are considered. The Civil War ushered an era of emancipation that until the twentieth century dismissed the ongoing complaints of African Americans who had patriotically defended the Union. In 1865 specifically, the Ku Klux Klan was initially birthed in response to these newfound freedoms awarded to African Americans. In the twenty-first century, the KKK is a well-known facet of the American historical landscape. As historian David Levering Lewis sardonically stated, “Americans bid good riddance to serial aberrations in the civic and social life of our republic repeatedly, only to learn that these phenomena are as American as apple pie.”¹⁹ Reflecting on the failure of Reconstruction, which brought with it immense violence, economic hardship and the continuation of generational trauma for African Americans, Du Bois wrote that “the history of the United States from 1866 to 1876 is something of which the nation ought to be ashamed and which did more to retard and set back the American Negro than anything that has happened to him; while at the same time it grievously and wantonly wounded again a part of the nation already hurt to death” (717).

For Du Bois, the failure of Reconstruction was in many respects not just a national but also an international tragedy. Reconstruction had the potential to unleash an “economic revolution on a mighty scale,” one that would produce a “world-wide reverberation,” and it also served as “one of the most extraordinary experiments of Marxism that the world, before the Russian Revolution, had seen. That is, backed by the military power of the United States, a dictatorship of labor was to be attempted” (346, 358).

Du Bois suggested that a mass movement could have had the potential to wield “political power and organization” under the umbrella of that “protective military power.” But “labor leaders” in the North had faltered, swayed by the perks of becoming “increasingly petty bourgeois,” leading to the point at which they “turned their backs on black labor” (359). In the aftermath of Reconstruction’s defeat, Du Bois argued that the country had turned its back on the purported “abolition democracy.” Instead, Du Bois stated that the United States had since “turned into a reactionary force. It became the cornerstone of that new imperialism” that was to expand across the hemisphere and the sprawling Asia-Pacific region from its earliest years. The underpinning was Dixie itself, which “had built an oligarchy similar to the colonial imperialism of today, erected on cheap colored labor and raising raw material for manufacture” (631, 237).

History does not repeat itself, but as the saying goes, it often rhymes. In the decades after *Black Reconstruction* was published, interracial mass movements coalesced around labor campaigns, civil rights issues, and anticapitalist banners, yet by the 1960s, after more than a decade of government repression against left-wing activists spanning the late 1940s through the 1950s, these efforts were crushed. Surrendering to the pressure, and perhaps reaping the benefits of liberal concessions on race, much of the class solidarity that had built was irrevocably broken.

In the decades that followed *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois was part of a cadre of leftist activists who sought to break down that oligarchy of American imperialism, as well as the oppression of cheap colored laborers. Alongside activists like Ella Baker and Marvel Cooke who famously wrote about the Bronx slave markets, Du Bois and friends rallied against the international forces of imperialism, as well as domestic versions of capitalism and colonialism. What came next was an all-out assault against the growing political awakening inspired by the organizations formed, and rallies held, by proponents of communist ideology throughout America. “Marxist” and “Communist” became a signifier for “un-American” in popular discourse, and in 1949 Du Bois presciently stated that “Communist” has become a “witch-word.”²⁰ In the ensuing witch hunt now known as the Red Scare many activists were forced to publicly denounce their comrades, go into hiding, or were arrested. Such was the case with luminary Claudia Jones, who was imprisoned and then sent into exile. In a fiery response to government repression, Jones aptly denounced the United States Government in 1948: “Instead of prosecuting the Klu Klux Klan [sic], the anti-Semites and the reactionaries, the government is arresting anti-fascists.”²¹ However, the consequences of their activism were swiftly meted out. Alongside Black Communists like Claudia Jones, Benjamin Davis, and Pettis Perry, Du Bois himself was arrested and accused of inciting subversive activities in the United States.²² Fellow comrades rallied around his arrest, most notably in the campaign under the banner of the Sojourners for Truth and Justice in 1951.²³

Undeterred by his persecution, in the very same year, Du Bois and another of his partners in supposed crime, William Patterson, submitted a petition to the United Nations titled “We Charge Genocide!” Again, reflecting on Du Bois’s musings in *Black Reconstruction*, the petition cited the havoc of imperialist campaigns that had started during the Reconstruction era and continued to impact the American political landscape: “It was during this period of American imperialist adventure abroad that most of the state

laws segregating Negroes and illegally denying them the vote were enacted in the Southern states. Disenfranchisement laws were passed in Louisiana in 1898, in North Carolina and Alabama in 1901, Virginia 1902, Georgia 1908, Oklahoma 1910. They but codified what was taking place in life.”²⁴ Again reiterating the description of “sexual chaos,” Du Bois and Patterson also stated that since Reconstruction, and well into the twentieth century, “the spurious charge of rape was elevated into an institution, an extra-legal political instrument for terrorizing all Negroes, particularly those demanding their rights under the Constitution.”²⁵ Patterson, operating within the Civil Rights Congress, knew all too well how frequently falsified rape allegations were levied against Black men across the country.²⁶ What is abundantly clear in the writing of the petition is that Du Bois was still reflecting on his previous work and theories surrounding *Black Reconstruction*. It continued to inform his analysis of the 1950s.

As Du Bois accelerated his campaign against colonialism worldwide, he was persecuted by the federal government at home, forcing him to eventually expatriate to Ghana, where he died in 1963, just as the March on Washington inaugurated a new stage in the freedom struggle. Despite the loss of Du Bois, his impact arguably persisted in spirit. What gives *Black Reconstruction* added relevance to the Civil Rights Movement is that back in the 1930s, Du Bois captured a division that persisted long into the future. There was the “white laborer,” who “joined the white landholder and capitalist and beat the black laborer into subjection through secret organizations and the rise of a new doctrine of race hatred,” as well as a poverty-stricken subset of “white labor” that opposed “the movement . . . to attract black labor with economic concession” with “bitter fear” (608, 670). Irking certain US radicals who have long insisted mechanically on the persistence of class unity across racial lines, Du Bois asserted that “poor whites were determined to keep the blacks from access to the richer and better land” (673). Economic hardship, it’s clear, has often been used as a catalyst to create reactionary propaganda, in a formula that ripples throughout later crises and flashpoints in America’s history. In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson himself remarked on the usefulness of hatred and divisiveness for the capitalist class—“If you can convince the lowest white man he’s better than the best colored man, he won’t notice you’re picking his pocket. Hell, give him somebody to look down on, and he’ll empty his pockets for you.”²⁷ Johnson’s successor, President Richard Nixon, would later build upon this divided foundation when he notoriously inflamed race and class tensions with his “silent majority” rhetoric in 1969.²⁸

Furthermore, in 1972, Nixon was re-elected using the so-called Southern Strategy, under the same ideological banner of men like Stephen Douglas in 1858, who capitalized on the knee-jerk racist reactions he could elicit from voters.

Returning to *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois also did not exculpate Christianity: The “powerful propaganda of a religion which taught meekness, sacrifice and humility,” he argued, was at odds with the militant fortitude that the times demanded. And he was critical of the Black leaders in thrall to this theology, whom he slammed as “petty bourgeois” and “idealists.” This section immediately makes one think of Dr. Martin Luther King, who himself tried to impact the conscience of America by responding to racial violence with humility. Yet King has also unfortunately been sanitized and absorbed into a kind of mythology of the American past which has defanged and distorted his politics. In 1963, he spoke in tribute to Du Bois, saying: “It would be well to remind white America of its debt to Dr. Du Bois. When they corrupted Negro history they distorted American history because Negroes are too big a part of the building of this nation to be written out of it without destroying scientific history. White America, drenched with lies about Negroes, has lived too long in a fog of ignorance. Dr. Du Bois gave them a gift of truth for which they should eternally be indebted to him.”²⁹

As the 1960s progressed, and after almost a decade of nonviolent protests under King and other like-minded leaders, radical youth groups such as the Black Panther Party emerged to advocate self-defense in the face of reactionary violence. When Dr. King was assassinated in 1968, however, this left African Americans with few options. The words of Du Bois, back in 1935, arguably reverberated once more in an urgent, future era of activism: “Shall they use the torch and dynamite? . . . Shall they leave the country? Are they Americans or foreigners?” (703). The Black Panther Party argued that African Americans, at that juncture, represented an “internal colony” in America, and as the FBI ratcheted up its campaigns against the most outspoken Black Power activists, this trapped and cornered minority was imperiled once again.³⁰ The Black Panther Party was quickly dismantled after it was attacked in the same fashion as the earlier Black Communists; protestors were arrested and exiled, and in a horrifying escalation, some were even murdered in the service of quelling their emergent revolutionary force. With the crushing of the most radical aspects of the Black Power Movement, once again a new generation’s most progressive demands were sidelined, the consequences of which are clear to see. Sadly, the explosion of the mass

incarceration system, growing poverty, and the political witch hunts leveled against anyone left of center echoed previous generations.

BLACK RECONSTRUCTION
AND TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY PROPAGANDA

Once again, America faces the reemergence of Klan-like sentiments, although this time in the guise of red baseball caps and black-and-blue-striped flags, rather than white hoods and horses. The Trump presidential campaign marked yet another return to the “aberrations of the past”—as the candidate shamelessly invoked Nixon’s “silent majority” as well as stoking fears of an incoming migrant caravan of “rapists” and “looters.”³¹ He threatened that without his leadership, the country would be overrun by chaos, and while he did not have the wherewithal to know which Reconstruction-era narratives he was wielding, he did so with great success. In the years since the first Trump presidency, his most extreme followers became mainstream political icons, including daytime TV news hosts like Tucker Carlson and previously “fringe” ideologues like Alex Jones, who continually relitigates the mythologized revolution of 1776. Jones argued in 2020 that the Biden presidency had been “stolen” and conjured rhetoric based on a romanticized American past: “The system is publicly stealing this election from the biggest landslide and the biggest political realignment since 1776.”³²

Trump had appeared on Jones’s show *Infowars* while campaigning in 2015, and after winning the presidency, Trump himself seemed to echo Jones’s conspiratorial speeches, promising to “drain the swamp” in Washington, likening opposing politicians to inhuman creatures who seek to corrupt the ideals of traditional white American society. Jones stated gleefully that “it is surreal to talk about issues here on air and then word-for-word hear Trump say it two days later.”³³ Revisiting the redemption narrative of Reconstruction, perhaps unknowingly, Trump peddled promises of returning America to its former glory—which would only be realized once progressive ideals were stamped out and “order” was restored.

Du Bois’s scalding dissection of the country’s fetishized “worship of the Constitution” also remains prescient. A document that “did not forbid” secession, he noted, in a damning indictment to liberals and conservatives alike, was being heralded as the nation’s savior: “No more idiotic program could be laid down than to require a people to follow a written rule

of government 90 years old” (336). Gun legislation, abortion control and freedom of speech are all constitutional rights and amendments that inspire deep divisions in twenty-first-century America. Many on the right argue that despite the Constitution’s often centuries-old context, Americans today have a duty to adhere to it rigidly. Unfortunately, much like previous waves of reactionary response that crashed through Reconstruction, the Civil Rights era, and now the 2020s, the resurgence of fascist and white nationalist movements across the world is a troubling and disorienting development. Lately, a new facet of right-wing protests includes a hyperfixation on the inner lives of LGBTQ+ people. Where once the mythology of “sexual chaos” was leveled against ex-slaves, it has now been reinvigorated and applied to other marginalized communities. For example, extremists now often cite concerns about child grooming, subversive antifascist and leftist protestors, and even “satanic pedophiles” as central parts of their argument against progressive policies.

One needs only a cursory glance at the emergence of conspiracy theorist groups like QAnon to see the influences of past white nationalist narratives—which all centrally hinge on fears of sexual deviants who are supposedly determined to pervert the American way of life.³⁴ In yet another unfortunate echo, an expert on the QAnon movement, Mike Rothschild, has gloomily stated:

After the Capitol insurrection, it was clear that Q and conservatism would be enmeshed for the foreseeable future. . . . After his loss, Trump spoke of forming a “Patriot Party” that would compete with the GOP to fly the banner of true MAGAism. Such a third party, based on populist rhetoric and grievance, would be a 21st century version of the rabidly nativist Know Nothing Party of the 1850s, which used street violence and anti-Catholic conspiracy theories to win dozens of seats around the country, only to collapse in the run-up to the Civil War.³⁵

The United States is again in great turmoil, and with replays of the January 6 rebellion a constant feature of the TV news cycle, we are reminded once more that the history, and subsequent mythology, of Reconstruction and its central concerns remain contested and potentially harmful distortions which continue to have effect over 150 years later. January 6 highlighted that not only has fringe right-wing radicalism bubbled to boiling point among “grassroots” organizers, but Congress itself has been infiltrated by conspiracy theorists masquerading as elected officials. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Green (R-GA), for example, is a fervent supporter of both QAnon and Alex Jones. Recently, Green openly stated that she sees no issue with being a “Christian

Nationalist” and argued the Republican Party should return to a more rigid, fundamentalist position. Green’s shamelessness shows the extent to which America once again stands on the precipice of widespread, revisionist takeover by reactionary elements.³⁶

Of all the lessons Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction* can teach us, his analysis of propaganda and its history in America remains one of its most impactful. Du Bois’s advice should ring clear in the minds of all who continue to revisit his magnum opus today: “Nations reel and stagger on their way; they make hideous mistakes; they commit frightful wrongs; they do great and beautiful things. And shall we not best guide humanity by telling the truth about all this, so far as the truth is ascertainable?” (714).

As eerie continuities of generations past continue to cycle through history and up to the present day, we must keep pushing for the future Du Bois envisioned. By the end of his life, Du Bois had become convinced that a Black Reconstruction in the South would no longer be enough. What was needed was a World Reconstruction—an ambitious goal that remains unfulfilled. But, despite reactionary propaganda that once again empowers regressive social forces, *Black Reconstruction* remains a guide, and a source of clarity for all.

NOTES

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The Incessant Propaganda of American Historiography

Joshua Myers

We shall never have a science of history until we have in our colleges men who regard the truth as more important than the defense of the white race, and who will not deliberately encourage students to gather thesis material in order to support a prejudice or buttress a lie.

W. E. B. DU BOIS

There is a dangerous dichotomy in modern thought which must be recognized and reconciled or we will never contain ethics and science to one unified world. What has a Dream to do with the future? Science says Nothing, it is but unsubstantial shadow floating alongside Fact. Everything, answers Ethics for it is the map of the coming world; drawn right, it guides us to Good; drawn wrong it enthrones Evil and destruction. These two interpretations, instead of admitting their fundamental contradiction, carry on as though they spelled no incoherence: Science admits no happening which was not included in the Past and birthed by unalterable law, while Religion worships all-powerful Will who makes of earth and man whatever man and earth wish it to be.

W. E. B. DU BOIS

I.

At the core of the seemingly endless history wars is the conceit of whiteness. Because at the core of historiography is national belonging and identity, and that is what whiteness promises. This is something liberals are either naive about or are invested in concealing, for it would reveal their own complicity in white supremacy—a term they have managed to relegate to the fringe, the

irrational, the overt. Whiteness, however, grants the nation its coherence. There is no concept of nation that does not begin with and become ultimately reified through the logics of whiteness, no concept of nation that does not have to contend with the global reach of whiteness.¹ So it is no shock that white historians have once again found it necessary to police the boundaries of the national myth—and its convergence with American HistoryTM—in these latest skirmishes.²

What is somewhat peculiar, though, is how in at least one instance W. E. B. Du Bois's "The Propaganda of History" was deployed as covering for such an attack. The right wing's assaults are of course both obvious and devious. Theirs is a political tradition that wants to raise the ire and contempt of that supposedly fringe element. The fascists are not simply coming. They have always been here. Yet American liberalism is just as committed to an American historiographical tradition that protects whiteness and its ability to claim truth and liberty and justice for all.³ To adopt Du Boisian language in service to such an assertion amounts to a curious reading of the arc of his political project. But it may not be dishonest; it might simply just be all that we can expect from this historiographical tradition.

The recent skirmish that I am referring to comes from the pen of perhaps the leading exponent of the liberal tradition within the American historical profession: Sean Wilentz. His target? Perhaps the leading exponent of a Black liberal politics in the public sphere: the journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones and her 1619 Project.⁴ Hannah-Jones's claims around American history are quite simple. First, race mattered a great deal to the construction of the nation. Second, slavery was the antagonism around which major national traditions were forged. And third, despite the mythmaking prowess of the American dream, that antagonism proved to be as enduring as the values and traditions of those responsible for preserving the idea of exceptionalism. So unsurprisingly, the keepers of that exceptionalist ethos balked at such a claim. Many of them were historians who, like Wilentz, could not accept that their country was and remains an unrelentingly racist project.⁵ But not so uncaring as to deny the past and present of racism, they merely relegate it to a dangerous but peripheral extremism that can be defeated with no revolutionary upheaval. Racism is simply another challenge for the American creed to one day overcome. Just let us have more democracy, a more expansive politics as usual.⁶

Hannah-Jones would readily agree. The *New York Times Magazine* version of the 1619 Project did not collect the voices of those who had not only always understood the racist foundations of the American project but had

also imagined something beyond “patriotism” as a solution. The analysis of the editors and contributors was never going to go as far as these others before them. Hannah-Jones’s project rightly condemned the racist past, but there was precious little analysis of those who sought alternatives like marronage or revolt—the paths of the Black radical tradition.⁷ Her conclusions instead left open the door for a kind of conciliation, a gesture of national belonging that simply required that America acknowledge that its Black “citizens” were in fact the “real” torchbearers of democracy. Grounding her framing essay in her father’s insistence on displaying the American flag, she writes: “Without the idealistic, strenuous and patriotic efforts of black Americans, our democracy today would most likely look very different—it might not be a democracy at all.”⁸ Even as she quotes Du Bois’s reading of the ways Black folk worshipped “Freedom,” she reduces that spiritual resistance to the canard of patriotic duty and national progress.⁹ In this reading, the nation’s ideals are what we struggle for. We must make America into what it says it is on paper. And that “we” is everyone, together. In other words, the 1619 Project was not a radical thesis. That it was received as such is more an indication of how rightward the US political spectrum has turned (and how little the general public has read into the literatures of Black radicalism). There should have never been a controversy.

But there was. And liberal historians turned red in the face at the specter of the myth of exceptionalism perhaps losing purchase at the hands of a Black woman. Some even lamented the fact that Hannah-Jones as a journalist was able to have such an impact on their supposed turf. In the pages of *The Atlantic*, Wilentz made their issue with the project “a matter of facts.”¹⁰ Rather than excoriate the mission of the project as such, he asserted that we needed a better adherence to the historian’s careful tending of factual accuracy. Wilentz, a trained historian, we are expected to believe, is a better arbiter of what the facts really are. So too were a coterie of liberal historians, sympathetic to a narrative that takes slavery and race seriously, who along with Wilentz sent an infamous letter to the *New York Times*: James Oakes, Victoria Bynum, James McPherson, and Gordon Wood. The inaccuracies that troubled this august crew were a lesson in the conceptual limitations of American liberalism. They were threefold: 1) In her lead essay, Hannah-Jones had claimed too much of an emphasis on Southern proslavery motivations in their break from Britain; 2) Abraham Lincoln’s more liberal and enlightened views on Black equality were given too short shrift in her analysis of the Civil War; and 3) Hannah-Jones’s contention that Black folk fought “mostly alone”

gives too little credit to the history of white people who opposed racism and oppression.¹¹

For Wilentz, taking care of the facts is most important to securing whatever political victories that project might achieve.¹² The *Times* editors—even as they answer to market forces—would no doubt align with this fealty to objectivism.¹³ Concealed in that pretense of objectivity, however, is the belief that there is some sanctity to the story of the United States. These old stories about the American Revolution and the Great Emancipator have to be preserved. And what about the “good whites”? For her part, Hannah-Jones both acknowledged and in many cases was unmoved by the holy invocation of 1776.¹⁴

But it seems that consensus liberal historians have not moved from this square. Even if we care to examine the nature of racism critically, whiteness must be recentered as the authoritative voice. Wilentz and crew cannot deign to face the possibility that the very discipline that has them searching for facts in white newspaper accounts and white-controlled archives is also responsible for that “objective” history. If Hannah-Jones is at fault, it is in attempting to influence or revise this narrative rather than abandon it wholesale.

This is where Du Bois could have come in. Instead, from Wilentz we received yet another version of what Anthony Monteiro once referred to as the “Du Bois-as” movement. A way to signify on the phenomena of claiming Du Bois for various intellectual traditions, Monteiro’s position is that a real appreciation of the epistemological stakes of his historiography requires that we take the full gamut of his work seriously. From there, we might see that there is very little investment in American exceptionalism as the grounds for Black liberation, even as he sometimes used the founding as a linchpin strategy in the struggle for civil rights. The tragic irony of Black life as the negation of that founding promise rendered him less than faithful to the dominant canon and its narrative-making power as it was enshrined in academic history. Instead, his achievement was an “epistemic break.” For Monteiro this break was not just “with the theory of the social sciences, their accompanying epistemologies or prevailing assumptions about race, but with the practice of the social sciences themselves.”¹⁵

This is far more important than Wilentz’s simplistic insistence that we remember Du Bois as a scholar who was an “upholder of plain, provable fact.” Near the end of his treatment of Hannah-Jones, he writes: “No historian better expressed this point, as part of the broader imperative for factual

historical accuracy, than W. E. B. Du Bois.” In this framing, the chief lesson of *Black Reconstruction* becomes the fact of “Du Bois’s ability to mount a commanding counterinterpretation built on basic facts that the Dunning School had ignored or suppressed about the experiment in democratic government during Reconstruction and how it was overthrown and eventually replaced with Jim Crow.” Pitting Du Bois’s intellectual project against the alleged factual shoddiness of Hannah-Jones, Wilentz asserts that this is the lesson that should “not be lost.”¹⁶

It is a tried and true tactic of both liberal and radical white critics: Use a Black thinker to condemn another Black thinker whose thought needs to be reined in.¹⁷ So the Du Bois whose book upended American historiography through a decidedly radical framing becomes an avatar for the preservation of a liberal interpretation of history that ensures that American exceptionalism and its (even if sometimes muted) investment in whiteness must continue. To fail to do so is to commit a grievous error in a political moment that finds “American democracy” in a “perilous condition” where “more is at stake than the past.”¹⁸ Apparently not getting this right, not adhering to the intellectual standards of an embattled profession, will enable the “bad whites.”

The irony of all of this is that where Du Bois’s marshaling of facts was about vindicating the basic humanity of Black peoples in the history of Reconstruction, Wilentz deploys his warning to vindicate liberal whites. One might read Du Bois’s musings in “The Propaganda of History” as a warning about the epistemological challenge that tellingly still lies at the heart of American and Western historiography. Facts do matter. But so do stories. And framing. And whose stories and whose framing we deploy. And whose we defend.¹⁹ On this Du Bois is clear and unambiguous. The intellectual standards of the discipline of history were not more important than the stories Black folk told about this political order and about themselves in order to liberate themselves. “Propaganda” had in fact revealed that the discipline was a serious barrier to that realization.

II.

Another irony is the fact that despite Wilentz’s exalting of Du Bois, historians both on the left and liberal spectrum launched vitriol at *Black Reconstruction* following its arrival in June 1935. Even Black scholars, enthralled as they were with the prevailing 1930s social science ethos, felt that Du Bois had gone too

far with the “truth,” had stretched Marxism too far to be meaningful. His embrace of Marxism was “too recent and sudden for it to discipline his mental process,” the Howard economist Abram Harris opined.²⁰ And for several of Wilentz’s direct forebears in the historical academy, this study failed the eye test in several different directions. To almost all of them, Du Bois’s reliance on secondary sources was a major flaw. Rather than view Du Bois as working primarily in the vein of reinterpretation (of the very nature of America itself), they assumed that they were evaluating a work of original, detailed research. They were looking for new “facts.”²¹ Far more offended were those who could not countenance Du Bois’s decision to frame Black resistance as a general strike or the ascent of the formerly enslaved to positions of power as a “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Du Bois had gotten Marxian theory all wrong. Black people did not possess the correct revolutionary consciousness to pull all this off. And how can there be a dictatorship of the proletariat if capitalist militaries and governments were never displaced? He had claimed too much, they argued. But it appears *they* may have overstated his claims in their own attempts to displace the “old man” and his outdated racialism.²²

For others there was too much passion, too much poetry. Even some defenders like Rayford Logan reminded his guild that Du Bois was a fellow member after all, despite his militance.²³ Perhaps fed up with the diplomacy of his colleagues, the white historian Avery Craven wrote simply that *Black Reconstruction* was “not history.”²⁴ This is all before the McCarthyism that, as David Levering Lewis describes, led to his further denigration in the ensuing decades.²⁵ It makes what Cedric J. Robinson declared in 1983 all the more prescient:

It was not his range that was at issue with his detractors. The opposition to Du Bois was grounded on deeper reservations: the recognition that his work had origins independent of the impulses of Western liberal and radical thought. Thus, when his contributions to the American historical tradition should have been celebrated by its historians and scholars, the reaction of the academy was often vilification and neglect. And when he should have been recognized as one of the deans of radical historiography—in his seventh decade he became one of the two most sophisticated Marxist theorists in America—the orthodox and “authorized” intellectuals accused him of Marxian heresies, racial chauvinism, and flawed conceptualization.²⁶

Perhaps Wilentz’s and the historical field’s belated embrace was made possible by the evolution of the field. There were many who embraced Du Bois’s thesis in the fifties, and the works of historians John Hope Franklin

and Kenneth Stampp would contain some insights first made by Du Bois before Eric Foner finally crystallized the thesis in his 1988 book titled *Reconstruction*.²⁷ But the radical insights of Du Bois as they concern the nature of capitalism and Black radical agency as a revolutionary ethic arrayed against it remain sore spots for mainstream Americanists.²⁸ It is more likely the case that the Du Bois imagined as a champion of liberalism (as is happening in other disciplines) is the more appealing version, useful for the preservation of the coherence of American national history. In the process of making him acceptable as a father of this or that discipline, he becomes much more digestible if we do not think about those origins that are independent of the impulses of Western liberal and radical thought and, most critically, if we do not see Du Bois's genius as derivative of rather than the creator of those impulses.²⁹

The reality is that precious few historians would follow Du Bois to his larger political and epistemic break. Indeed, as Lewis has shown, beyond initial reviews the academy did not pay attention to *Black Reconstruction* until the Black Studies revolution had renewed the significance of the text. But historians have not followed Black Studies to its radical conclusions either. Where Robinson and other Black Studies scholars have developed a significant analysis of Du Bois's philosophy of history in relation to these more robust conceptions of liberation, American historiography remains mostly wedded to "the noble dream"—a suite of methodologies that generates the facts and only the facts, so the old American democracy can be saved.³⁰

It is true that Du Bois appealed to a fact-based analysis, as Wilentz so wanted to demonstrate in *The Atlantic*. Echoing his training by Albert Bushnell Hart at Harvard, Du Bois indeed shows a clear embrace of positivism in the admonitions contained in "Propaganda." One of the most oft-quoted passages from the chapter is rather emphatic: "In the first place, somebody in each era must make clear the facts with utter disregard to his own wish and desire and belief. What we have got to know, so far as possible, are the things that actually happened in the world" (722). Robinson also seizes on this statement, but to different effect than Wilentz: "I refer to Du Bois' conviction as caution. Though we may debate Du Bois' positivism, the urgency, and priority of his moral assertion must be preserved. And, I believe, it has a most specific applicability to Black theorists. We must quite self-consciously examine our wishes, our desires, and our beliefs."³¹ Turning Du Bois around a bit, Robinson makes the case that self-conscious examination is critical to a tradition of scholarship where our ability to get

at the facts is where “our eventual extinction or liberation is staked.”³² This adherence to positivist method relies on a particular clarity on the nature of the antagonism. It is here where Du Bois is indeed most prescient. The “fact” is that whiteness grants a certain kind of epistemic authority. Breaking through that is critical to his historiographical enterprise. It is *this* deployment of the concept of “fact” that might guide his major concern in “Propaganda”: “One *fact* and one alone explains the attitude of most recent writers toward Reconstruction; they cannot conceive Negroes as men; in their minds the word ‘Negro’ connotes ‘inferiority’ and ‘stupidity’ lightened only by unreasoning gayety and humor” (726).

Robinson’s *Black Marxism* represents an almost decade-long engagement with Du Bois’s historical project. The chapter that became “Historiography and the Black Radical Tradition” began as a longer essay called “Marxist Theory and the Black Savage,” written in 1975.³³ In the revised shorter version for the book, Robinson argues that *Black Reconstruction* was indeed history, but it was “history subjected to theory. The emphasis was on the relation to things.”³⁴ As history, it is radical history, Black radical history. And if it conformed “formally to the methodological canons of historiography,” it was to “subvert the substance of that tradition.”³⁵ For Robinson, Du Bois’s examinations of the nature of slavery and democracy, slavery and racism, and the significance of the slavery and labor struggles are what marks this text as a radical departure from both left and liberal historiographies and their adherents, some of whom would soon cast doubt on his credentials and his method. More important than their reservations was Du Bois’s refusal of both the persistent national myth of the “Negro savage” around which American historical logics had revolved and the desire for refutation of that myth with the simple politics of recognition and representation, or Negro history.

We are beyond simply the presentation of facts. In Robinson’s estimation, Du Bois was practicing a historiography that reframed it all, even what it means to write the past: “His purposeful interrogation of the past had led him to the hidden specter of Black revolutionists. Their revolution had failed of course. And with its failure had gone the second and truer possibility of an American democracy. But until the writing of *Black Reconstruction*, the only mark on American historical consciousness left by their movement had been a revised legend of their savagery.”³⁶ To recognize this as an epistemic dilemma for the writing of history requires us to go beyond viewing “Propaganda” as a critique grounded in factual inaccuracies. The inability to “conceive Negroes as men” also means that they could not be the historical authorities of their

own experience. It meant that their memories could not be “objective.” It also meant that Black thinking traditions are no means for “thought.”

The archival fealty of the historian is of a piece with the savage myth and its preservation.³⁷ As Nahum Dimtri Chandler has written, Du Bois’s thinking recognizes the world of academic thought as it relates to Black—really African—historical experience as a problem for thought.³⁸ And in that same vein, one might find Du Bois’s complicated musings on the nature of Truth a fruitful place to think about the problems of American historiography. The social sciences, for Du Bois, had asserted grounds for thinking that attempted to reduce human action to natural law. Historical movement for Du Bois was far more complicated. It resisted such predictive force. There was nothing in the sciences, he believed, that granted scholars the ability to exactly measure human behavior. Instead, he believed that we might focus on the “limits of Chance in human conduct.”³⁹

Clearly, those limits could be understood through the lens of the social and political structures that were imposed on Black people. *Black Reconstruction* painstakingly documents the terms of Black people’s engagement with the system. But it does not stop there. What makes the text such a beautiful and enduring intervention is its poetic invocation of the self-liberating efforts of Africans. There is little in the fact-based synthesis of archival record and legitimate documentation that might help us understand what Du Bois is doing when he writes from the perspective of the Black freedpeople on the meaning of emancipation:

The mass of slaves, even the more intelligent ones, and certainly the great group of field hands, were in religious and hysterical fervor. This was the coming of the Lord. This was the fulfillment of prophecy and legend. It was the Golden Dawn, after chains of a thousand years. It was everything miraculous and perfect and promising. For the first time in their life, they could travel; they could see; they could change the dead level of their labor; they could talk to friends and sit at sundown and in moonlight, listening and imparting wonder-tales. They could hunt in the swamps, and fish in the rivers. And above all, they could stand up and assert themselves. They need not fear the patrol; they need not even cringe before a white face, and touch their hats (122).⁴⁰

The agency of the enslaved was real. It “had appeared to his Westernized eyes, part legend, part whimsy, part art,” and it was limned as the gift of Black folk to the world. This Black radical tradition was “sufficient to arouse them into mass resistance and had provided them with a vision of

the world they preferred.⁴¹ If these are his terms for thinking ourselves, our relation to the past, then we might agree with Lewis that the historical quibbling over sources and approach were “of little concern to him.”⁴² So they should not be for us.

It is not a matter of facts; it is a matter of “who we can be made to be.”⁴³

III.

If the facts are not the true grounds for the controversy, we must look elsewhere. Conceptions of history structure conceptions of nation. There are only public history wars when that fabric is threatened. Battles over method and minutiae do not concern the layperson, or those in power. As Cedric J. Robinson puts it, the development of a citizenry required more myth than “history.”

These myths were to be recognized in the official instruments of class hegemony: national creeds, social ideologies, philosophical tenets, constitutions, and the like, their function was to legitimate the social orders that had come into being. These myths made the new order a necessary one, an inevitable and benevolent event. They indicated to the national populace that the strains of historical novelty, the insecurities and anxieties accompanying the break with established forms were temporary, that change was natural, organic, and right. Founding myths were substituted for history, providing the appearance of historical narrative to what was in actuality part fact and part class-serving rationales. Endlessly elaborated, these myths were produced by ideologues who identified with the dominant creed and depended upon those classes in the society that possessed power and the capacities to extend social privilege.⁴⁴

Of those myths, liberalism dominates American consciousness. This is a country thought to exist in order for individuals to be free to pursue their ends as far as talent and ingenuity would provide. The history wars continue because that dominant creed is questioned by those whom it intended to dominate. Liberalism requires domination. This links Du Bois’s denigration to Nikole Hannah-Jones’s, though this may be where the similarities end. Still, the latter’s ultimate sin was that of rethinking the supreme American national myth: the circumstances of its founding.

In her claims regarding the American Revolution, Hannah-Jones was following several predecessors, perhaps most recently and notably the Black

radical historian Gerald Horne, whose *The Counter-Revolution of 1776* (2014) sought to overturn the founding national myth.⁴⁵ It was a claim that caused little controversy among scholars whose lens focused on the deep ties that colonial slavery and international geopolitics had with the so-called age of revolution. Most taken aback where the category of historians called “Americanists.” They, of course, would never accept that their conception of the nation was underpinned by myth. But it was clear that there was some uneasiness at the thought that the world’s model democracy could have been really founded on the odiousness of racial slavery rather than democratic liberalism. Or that this liberalism *required* slavery (rarely ever mentioning the settlerism it also required).⁴⁶

While Hannah-Jones and others made the claim that an ideal republic could potentially exist if we truly reckoned with and extirpated the legacies of the former, Horne’s more radical conclusion is that this vexed founding might help explain not only the persistence—or as Derrick Bell put it, “the permanence”—of racism, but also America’s penchant for imperialism and global exploitation.⁴⁷ As Robinson had claimed in his *Black Movements in America*, the supposed American Revolution was “not a solitary insurrection but several simultaneous upheavals,” among them “the war of the Blacks,” which may have resulted in as many as one hundred thousand acts of self-emancipation. All of this action, despite the desires and wishes of the patriots, was at least in 1997 “largely unrecounted in American historiography.”⁴⁸ The contradictions and antagonisms it set in motion would continue throughout the evolution of the nation-state. So what Hannah-Jones’s project had made evident to many others was that the myth of liberalism could no longer be the full story. Black life gave the lie to the shining city on a hill. Americanists, who need their liberalism untainted, were unconvinced. More tellingly, leftists of many stripes had a collective conniption.

IV.

Joining strands of historical methodology, the Black experience, and the structuring myths of America, Lawrence Reddick as a young historian famously lampooned the dominant approach to “Negro history,” arguing that too often Black historians had “written under the prevailing spirit permeating the American mind,” that is, liberalism, which was “the guiding light of the historians.”

If their story of the Negro in America may be paraphrased, it would run along in this fashion: Brought over in 1619, he was soon inducted into the fields of the South with a few as house servants in the North. Later, the democratizing atmosphere of the American Revolution plus the participation in the War for Independence caused a movement for the elimination of the slave system. This was checked in the South by the prospects and profits from cotton. The country was then divided into a slave south and a free north. Led by the Republican party, war was waged to preserve the Union and to free the slaves. Reconstruction was a horror which stirred up ill-will, with the Southerners recapturing control through the Ku Klux Klan and the Democratic Party. Since that time, life has been hard, but talented Negroes through hard work and high faith have leaped over all hurdles to success. Conditions are becoming better and better. If we will but work a little harder, save a little more, establish a few more businesses and get educated, we will some day receive our rightful place at the table of democracy, praise God from whom all blessings flow!⁴⁹

Two years after the appearance of *Black Reconstruction* and fresh off a rather unfortunate period as an advisee of Du Bois detractor Avery Craven at the University of Chicago, Reddick's suggestion that a new reinterpretation of Black life must refuse this compulsory liberalism and focus on those factors that have been "influential" and on Black folk's interior conception of the problem or meanings of their lives mirrored some of the more significant rethinking to come in the wake of the Black Studies movement.⁵⁰ The idea of progress as the inevitable framework for thinking about Black history, however, remains strong. As both Anderson Thompson and Vincent Harding have described it, this element of "Negro history" is responsible for the widespread assumption that Black folk are simply waiting and wishing for, sometimes forging, a place in the American narrative.⁵¹ Insofar as this frame pervades historical common sense, comports with the national myth of liberal progress, it reminds us that all historiography is political.

Disciplines are complicated entities, spaces that house both the training of new practitioners and the debates that define the scope and coverage of their content. Their larger function is to work in concert with knowledge-producing apparatuses that support the maintenance and improvement of society. This often means upholding the status quo, offering only revisions of the master narratives of power and order. History, as a discipline, is no different. But we are now in a moment where the production of knowledge no longer attaches to older assumptions around expertise. Now that everyone with a following can be a historian, and now that the university bean counters have discounted the value of undergraduate majors, the discipline faces a

crisis. Departments are decreasing in size or being eliminated. Newly minted PhDs have fewer places to go. So they assume that their only claim to validity is the discipline's grounding in "real" expertise. This requires "real" methods. In the history wars, the best soldiers are those who have been trained properly. Historical knowledge will suffer otherwise. And the problem of the whiteness of the discipline can be overcome with just a little more diversity.⁵²

What these prevailing assumptions occlude is that there has never been an army untouched by the virulent politics of settler colonialism and its investment in whiteness. The historian's methods were forged in that context. Simply averring that better methods will lead to "real" history obscures the real meanings of the war. And it obscures the very politics which have structured the discipline. Liberation will require more than better methods. It will require that we examine the conscious beliefs inherent in those methods, the political terms that have made them. This is a lesson that Du Bois helped make clear, and it should never be lost.

V.

In her *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, Saidiya Hartman plays against the archives' tendency to render the lives of Black girls as deviant. For what had really been archived was a regime of "judgment and classification" that subjected them to "surveillance, arrest, punishment, and confinement." The archives, read without the overdetermination of that "power and authority," might "recover the insurgent ground of their lives."⁵³ In her reading of *Black Reconstruction*, Hartman argues that Du Bois's concept of the general strike should also apply to the ways that Black "collective movement against servitude and debt, the choreographed flight from rape, terror, and lynching was a reiteration, a second wave of an earlier exodus of slaves from the plantation during the Civil War." The children of the Great Migration would experience the "rush to the city" as an attempt to make a new life.⁵⁴ And then they would learn that those attempts would have to be policed. Still, as Hartman shows, Black women lived life on their own terms, as had their mothers and grandmothers. Seeing their lives, writing their lives, requires that we know them.

In a piece written near the end of his life and excerpted in the epigraph of this essay, Du Bois states that the confidence he placed in Black liberation was a confidence born out of the fact of the knowledge he had acquired

“because he knew Black people.”⁵⁵ Perhaps this is what lies between science and ethics—a deep relation. This knowing should make us suspicious of any narrative about us that does not come from the ways we know. Hartman’s vision, like many elements of Du Bois’s, ran counter to the expectations of disciplinary history, but not to Black Studies.

The Propaganda of History lives on. It now rests on history’s claim to know more than us about who we are, where we live, and how we got and will get free. In a moment of political controversy where an Advanced Placement course has caused many to conflate the history wars with the war Black Studies has always been waging, the throughline from Du Bois to Hartman must be understood as the basis for the difference.⁵⁶ We must let this difference animate our beliefs, our desires, our wishes—that is, if liberation is really the goal.

NOTES

This essay is an extended riff and improvisation on some meditations from my *Of Black Study* (Pluto Press, 2023), 42–44. Epigraphs are from W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (The Free Press, 1935), 725, and W. E. B. Du Bois, “Pan-Africa: The Story of a Dream,” ca. 1961, 5, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://creo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b221-i079>. Further citations are parenthetical.

1. On these questions, see Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Harvard University Press, 2004), 15–57; David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

2. This essay is about US history, knowing full well the moniker “American” rightly refers to entire continents. Yet national histories in the United States of America also mirror historical traditions in other American countries. Unfortunately, the conceit of nation and whiteness is in that sense also very American.

3. Singh, *Black is a Country*, 90–96; Lisa Lowe, “History Hesitant,” *Social Text* 33 (December 2015): 85–107. On whiteness and liberalism, see Charles W. Mills, “Racial Liberalism,” *PMLA* 123 (October 2008): 1380–97. The link between liberalism and American social science is significant and the literature vast: see, among others, Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

4. Sean Wilentz, “Touchstone Texts: The Historical Works We’re Reaching for Today, Part I,” panel presentation at the 134th Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, New York, January 4, 2020).

5. In addition to Wilentz, the liberal representative, the 1619 Project has sparked a small cottage industry of response books from the right wing. See, e.g., Peter W. Wood, *1620: A Critical Response to the 1619 Project* (Encounter Books, 2022); Mary Grabar, *Debunking the 1619 Project: Exposing the Plan to Divide America* (Regenery, 2021); Phillip W. Magness, *The 1619 Project: A Critique* (American Institute for Economic Research, 2020). Then there are those elements of the Trotskyite left, mostly associated with the World Socialist Web Site, who have been obsessively critical of the project and staunch defenders of the American Revolution, in particular. They have also produced a book which interviews many liberal historians: David North and Thomas Mackaman, eds., *The New York Times’ 1619 Project and the Racist Falsification of History: Essays and Interviews* (Mehring Books, 2021).

6. Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (Random House, 2018); Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (Tim Duggan, 2017).

7. Cedric Robinson, *Black Movements in America* (Routledge, 1997); Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Sylviane Diouf, *Slavery’s Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York University Press, 2014).

8. Nikole Hannah-Jones, “The Idea of America,” *The New York Times Magazine*, August 18, 2019, 16.

9. Hannah-Jones, “The Idea of America,” 20.

10. Sean Wilentz, “A Matter of Facts,” *The Atlantic*, January 22, 2020, www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/1619-project-new-york-times-wilentz/605152.

11. Wilentz, “A Matter of Facts.”

12. Wilentz writes: “Taking care of the facts is, I believe, all the more important in light of current political realities. The *New York Times* has taken a lead in combatting the degradation of truth and assault on a free press propagated by Donald Trump’s White House, aided and abetted by Vladimir Putin’s Russia, and spun by the far right on social media. American democracy is in a perilous condition, and the *Times* can report on that danger only by upholding its standards ‘without fear or favor.’ That is why it is so important that lapses such as those pointed out in our letter receive attention and timely correction. When describing history, more is at stake than the past” (“A Matter of Facts”). These views are similar to those of Black historian Leslie Harris, who was engaged as a fact-checker for the project, and who “vigorously disputed” the claims regarding the American Revolution that are at the

center of the controversy. See Leslie Harris, "I Helped Fact-Check the 1619 Project. The Times Ignored Me," *Politico*, March 6, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/06/1619-project-new-york-times-mistake-122248>.

13. "We Respond to the Historians Who Critiqued The 1619 Project," *The New York Times Magazine*, December 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/20/magazine/we-respond-to-the-historians-who-critiqued-the-1619-project.html>.

14. Nikole Hannah-Jones, "Preface: Origins," in *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, ed. Nikole Hannah Jones (One World, 2021), xxx.

15. Anthony Monteiro, "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Study of Black Humanity: A Rediscovery," *Journal of Black Studies* 38 (March 2008): 601. See also Anthony Monteiro, "Being an African in the World: The Du Boisian Epistemology," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 568 (March 2000): 220–34.

16. Wilentz, "A Matter of Facts."

17. One should think anecdotally about the ways that John Hope Franklin and Henry Louis Gates have been held up as models for liberal historians. Or how white leftists tend to "use" Adolph Reed when Black leftists emphasize race-based analyses too much for their liking. See Jacob Carruthers, *Intellectual Warfare* (Third World Press, 1999); John Hope Franklin, "The Dilemma of the American Negro Scholar," in *Soon, One Morning: New Writings by American Negroes, 1940–1962*, ed. Herbert Hill (Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 62–76; Michael Powell, "A Black Marxist Scholar Wanted to Talk About Race. It Ignited a Fury," *The New York Times*, August 14, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/14/us/adolph-reed-controversy.html>.

18. Wilentz, "A Matter of Facts."

19. Here, Sylvia Wynter's emphasis on stories is critical. The same is true for Cedric J. Robinson, discussed below. For more on the former, see Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations," in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Duke University Press, 2015), 9–89; Bedour Alagraa, "What Will Be the Cure?: A Conversation with Sylvia Wynter," *Offshoot Journal*, January 7, 2021, <https://offshootjournal.org/what-will-be-the-cure-a-conversation-with-sylvia-wynter>.

20. Abram Harris, "Reconstruction and the Negro," *The New Republic*, August 7, 1935, 367.

21. David Levering Lewis, "Introduction," in Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, x; David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919–1963* (Henry Holt, and Co., 2000), 365–77; Herbert Aptheker, *Literary Legacy of W. E. B. Du Bois* (Kraus, 1989), 228–43; Claire Parfait, "Rewriting

History: The Publication of W. E. B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935)," *Book History* 12 (2009): 282.

22. Though Sterling Brown appreciated the book's study of "radicalism," Harris and the other "Young Turks"—Black leftist social scientists—were critical of the thesis. See Aptheker, *Literary Legacy*, 227; A. Harris, "Reconstruction and the Negro;" Ralph Bunche, "Reconstruction Reinterpreted," *The Journal of Negro Education* 4 (October 1935): 568–70; Loren Miller, "Let My People Go!," *New Masses*, October 29, 1935, 6–7. A close reading would reveal that although Du Bois uses the term "dictatorship," it was not meant to be applied in an exacting way. It was always aspirational and uneven rather than precise. In fact, that this dictatorship had to be produced out of the contradictions of the US military, Northern capital, and an unreliable abolitionist democracy suggests the unease and incompleteness that marks Du Bois's reading. Take, for instance, the following: "It was inconceivable, therefore, that the masters of Northern industry through their growing control of American government, were going to allow the laborers of the South any more real control of wealth and industry than was necessary to curb the political power of the planters and their successors. As soon as the Southern landholder and merchants yielded to the Northern demands of a plutocracy, at that moment the military dictatorship should be withdrawn and a dictatorship of capital allowed unhampered sway." Further down, Du Bois continues: "For a second, for a pulse of time, these orbits crossed and coincided but their central suns were a thousand light-years apart, even though the blind and ignorant fury of the South and the complacent Philistinism of the North saw them as one" (*Black Reconstruction*, 345–46). There are many more contemporary Black leftist critiques and engagements. A recent review by Gerald Horne is representative of how the thesis has sustained an interest in these circles; see Gerald Horne, "Abolition Democracy," *The Nation*, May 3, 2022, <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/web-du-bois-black-reconstruction>.

23. Rayford W. Logan, review of *Black Reconstruction in America*, by W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Journal of Negro History* 21 (January 1936): 61–63.

24. Avery Craven, review of *Black Reconstruction in America*, by W. E. B. Du Bois, *The American Journal of Sociology* 41 (January 1936): 535–36.

25. Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 365.

26. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 185–86.

27. Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 372; Lewis, "Introduction," xvi–xvii; John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction After the Civil War* (University of Chicago Press, 1961); Kenneth Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865–1877* (Knopf, 1965); Eric Foner,

Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877 (Harper and Row, 1989).

28. For current takes on the text among historians, see Horne, “Abolition Democracy”; Eric Foner, “*Black Reconstruction*: An Introduction,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* (Summer 2013): 409–18, as well as others in the *South Atlantic Quarterly* symposium; and Brian Kelly, “W. E. B. Du Bois, Black Agency, and the Slaves’ Civil War,” *International Socialist Review* 100 (Spring 2016): 48–68. Historian Peter James Hudson writes that within the discipline, *Black Reconstruction* “is invoked but not read, cited but not mined, and noted but not engaged. In contemporary history of capitalism, the work, ideas, and arguments of Williams, Du Bois, and other radical scholars are selectively cited, completely ignored, or borrowed without acknowledgment of either the authors or the political-economic contexts in which they were produced and to which they responded.” See “The Racist Dawn of Capitalism,” *Boston Review*, March 14, 2016, <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/peter-james-hudson-slavery-capitalism>. Despite the New History of Capitalism, historians generally do not embody an anticapitalist politic and ethic. The responses of historians at the Future of the African American Past convening in 2016 to the question of whether or not African Americans should be hostile to capitalism remain instructive; see <https://futureafampast.si.edu/sessions/session-4-capitalism-and-making-and-unmaking-black-america>. Also of note is the return of right-wing dismissals in the wake of the Library of America edition of the text; see Helen Andrews, “Reconstruction Revisionism,” *The American Conservative*, December 11, 2021, <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/reconstruction-revisionism>.

29. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 184.

30. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge University Press, 1988). On Du Bois’s philosophy of history from a Black Studies perspective, see also James Stewart, *Flight: In Search of Vision* (Africa World Press, 2004).

31. Cedric J. Robinson, “White Signs in Black Times: The Politics of Representation in Dominant Texts,” in *Cedric J. Robinson: On Racial Capitalism, Black Internationalism, and Cultures of Resistance*, ed. H. L. T. Quan (Pluto, 2019), 185, emphasis added.

32. Robinson, “White Signs in Black Times,” 187.

33. Joshua Myers, *Cedric Robinson: The Time of the Black Radical Tradition* (Pluto, 2021), 179–80.

34. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 185.

35. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 186.
36. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 238.
37. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995); Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26 (June 2008): 1–14; Lowe, "History Hesitant."
38. Nahum Dimitri Chandler, *X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought* (Fordham University Press, 2013); Nahum Dimitri Chandler, *Toward An African Future—Of The Limit of World* (Living Commons Collective, 2013); Monteiro, "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Study of Black Humanity"; Monteiro, "Being an African in the World." For both Chandler and Monteiro, it was a turn toward African being that broke Du Bois out of the conceptual hold.
39. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Sociology Hesitant," *boundary 2* 27 (Fall 2000): 44. On these questions, see Myers, *Of Black Study*, 32–42.
40. See also Thomas C. Holt, "'A Story of Ordinary Human Beings': The Sources of Du Bois's Historical Imagination in *Black Reconstruction*," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112 (2013): 419–35.
41. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 240.
42. Lewis, "Introduction," x.
43. Robinson, "White Signs in Black Times," 192.
44. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 186.
45. Gerald Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States* (New York University Press, 2014).
46. As Horne had anticipated, the American left were even more ardent in their defense of the values of the American Revolution. For a review of Horne's work and larger project amid some of these reactions, see David Waldstreicher, "The Long American Counter-Revolution," *The Boston Review*, December 8, 2022, <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/the-long-american-counter-revolution>, as well as a conversation featuring Horne and others: "The 1619 Project: Slavery and the American Revolution: A Historical Dialogue," *New York Times* Events, March 6, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnLm8dMAqxE>.
47. Horne, *Counter-Revolution of 1776*, 248–52; Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (Basic Books, 1992).
48. Robinson, *Black Movements*, 21–24.
49. Lawrence Reddick, "A New Interpretation for Negro History," *The Journal of Negro History* 22 (January 1937): 23–24.
50. Reddick, "A New Interpretation," 25; David Varel, *Lawrence Reddick's Crusade for Black History and Black Power* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 55–62.

51. Vincent Harding, *Beyond Chaos: Black History and the Search for the New Land* (Institute of the Black World, 1970); Anderson Thompson, “Developing an African Historiography,” in *The Preliminary Challenge: The African World History Project*, ed. Jacob H. Carruthers and Leon C. Harris (ASCAC, 1997), 9–30.

52. See Emma Green, “The Right Side of History,” *The New Yorker*, March 7, 2023.

53. Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (Norton, 2019), xiii–xiv.

54. Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, 108–9. Robinson places migration northward and westward within the genealogy of Black mass political movement; see *Black Movements*, 110–11.

55. Du Bois, “Pan-Africa,” 5.

56. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “The Meaning of African American Studies,” *The New Yorker*, February 3, 2023.

The Propaganda of the Present in South Africa

Richard Pithouse

IN *BLACK RECONSTRUCTION IN AMERICA, 1860–1880* W. E. B. Du Bois, a scholar denied, wrote, from the margins of the American academy and the center of a struggle to recover and affirm a history denied—a history of a people who, he repeatedly stresses, have had their humanity denied. The scale, detail, and brilliance of the work, along with its magnificent passages and moments of luminous poeticism, steadily accumulate an incontrovertible weight, a weight that cannot be denied.

Du Bois worked to bring intellectual rigor to bear on a wide range of matters pertaining to “the color line that belts the world.”¹ The assumption of this task set him against a constitutive feature of Euro-modernity sustained by what Frantz Fanon would later call “delirious Manichaeism,”² racist hallucinations claiming to be knowledge, collective delirium posing as reason.³ The question of who is counted as fully and equally human and the mechanisms by which humanity is denied are at the center of *Black Reconstruction*. “America,” Du Bois writes, “withdrew the name of humanity from the vast majority of human beings.”⁴ He saw the academy as deeply implicated in this and wrote that “a basis in reason, philanthropy and science was built up for Negro slavery” (39),

The idea that authorized sites and modes of reason can function to dehumanize has been central to the work of many of the most brilliant thinkers to have followed Du Bois. In 1952 Frantz Fanon wrote that French medical science approached the North African migrant with “an *a priori* attitude” that, crucially, is not derived “experimentally” but, rather, “on the basis of an oral tradition” in which, “When you come down to it, the North African is a simulator, a liar, a malingerer, a sluggard, a thief.” He observed, “The North African does not come with a substratum common to his race, but on a

foundation built by the European. In other words, the North African, spontaneously, by the very fact of appearing on the scene, enters into a pre-existing framework.”⁵ Writing in 1994 after the Rodney King riots, Sylvia Wynter asked why university-educated judicial officers in Los Angeles—“the brightest and the best”—were using the acronym N.H.I [No humans involved] to “refer to any case involving a breach of the rights of young Black males who belong to the jobless category of the inner city ghettos.”⁶

Du Bois begins *Black Reconstruction* with a statement of method: “I am going to tell this story as though Negroes were ordinary human beings” (“To the Reader”). He takes care to explain the epistemological necessity of this axiom, which is simultaneously ethical and methodological, asking if we can imagine the “spectacular revolution” when “in blood and servile war, freedom came to America.” He answers that we cannot if we do not “think of these people as human beings like ourselves. . . . But assuming the common humanity of these people, [we can] conceive of what happened” (121).

In his biography of Du Bois, David Levering Lewis remarks that contemporary readers will “contemplate with astonishment”⁷ that Du Bois had deemed it necessary to explain that he would tell his story as though its subjects “were ordinary human beings.” Not everyone was so certain that the question of the human, of who is counted as fully and equally human, was an astonishing curiosity of the past or a problem long transcended by university-educated elites. The year after the first volume of Levering’s biography was published, Sylvia Wynter argued that the “classificatory logic” of the academy was sustaining the idea that people could be “more or less human, even totally lacking in humanness.”⁸

Immediately after making his statement of method Du Bois observes that “this attitude”—assuming that Africans are ordinary human beings—“will from the first seriously curtail my audience” (“To the Reader”). He understood that what Jean-Paul Sartre would later call, in the context of anti-Semitism, an “a priori” commitment to “reasoning based on passion”⁹—of racial passion that overwhelms any attempt to ground reason in a serious attempt to apprehend empirical reality—would make a rational engagement with his intervention impossible for many white readers.

Operating from the methodological principle of treating the oppressed as human beings, Du Bois brilliantly excavates records of Black social, cultural, intellectual, and political agency, most famously regarding the general strike and the participation of Black soldiers in the Union army. Agency is demonstrated in many other ways too, ranging from music to collective social

action, such as building and running schools or participation in debates and governance.

A commitment to engaging all people as “ordinary human beings” is a commitment to an immediate recognition of what Jacques Rancière, writing strictly in the context of class, affirms as “the equality of anyone at all with anyone else.”¹⁰ A person’s position in a social hierarchy tells you nothing at all about their capacity for intelligent, effective, and ethically serious behavior. An important consequence of this is that “there is no proper place for thought. Thought is everywhere at work.”¹¹

Two further observations by Rancière are relevant. One is the drive by the rich to negate the capacity for politics by the poor: “There is no part of those who have no part.” He adds that “the war of the poor and the rich is also a war over the very existence of politics.”¹² Rancière presents this observation in transhistorical terms, and the same can be done in terms of oppression organized through race. Michel-Rolph Trouillot shows that the Haitian Revolution “entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable [to authorized forms of knowledge] even as it happened,” and that the contention that enslaved Africans and their descendants could not envisage and realize freedom “was based not so much on empirical evidence as on an ontology, an implicit organization of the world and its inhabitants.”¹³

The denial of politics on the part of those who have no part is not solely a matter of an inability to understand that politics. It also takes the form of rendering it illicit, as consequent to conspiracy and criminality. Lewis and Jane Gordon argue that in anti-Black societies, Black people are rendered monstrous “when they attempt to live and participate in the wider civil society and engage in processes of governing among whites. . . . Their presence in society generally constitutes crime.”¹⁴ Lewis Gordon often uses the term “illicit appearance” to describe this phenomenon in his work. He also argues that when people’s humanity has been denied, the simple assertion of their humanity will result in them being read as “troublemakers to be forced back into ‘their place.’”¹⁵

A second important observation by Rancière is that “Those who think they are clever and realist can always say that equality is only the fanciful dream of fools and tender souls. But unfortunately for them it is a reality that is constantly and everywhere attested to.”¹⁶ There is a long philosophical tradition of understanding that affirmations of equality will be met with ridicule. In 1675 or 1676 Spinoza, who affirmed the axiom “Homo Cogito”¹⁷ (translated as both “Man thinks” and “The human thinks”), wrote that

"Those who confine to the common people the vices which exist in all human beings will perhaps greet my contentions with ridicule. . . . However all men have the same nature."¹⁸

Entering terrain constituted in what Lewis Gordon often calls "unreasonable reason" with a commitment to reasonable reason is no small thing given that it may well be scorned, dismissed as irrational, romantic or unscientific, or even disparaged as fraud. Recall Fanon's anguish: "When I was present, it [reason] was not; when it was there, it was no longer."¹⁹

A PROPAGANDA MODEL

Outside of situations of what Ranajit Guha calls dominance without hegemony²⁰ it is largely true that "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force."²¹ It is, therefore, unsurprising that theories of propaganda often focus on formal forms of material power, in the manner that Noam Chomsky examines issues like media ownership and concentration, the power of advertisers, dependence on official sources and so on.²²

In *Black Reconstruction* Du Bois does offer a materialist understanding of propaganda: "Under race they camouflaged a dictatorship of land and capital" (535); "the dictatorship of capital . . . must maintain . . . ascendancy by controlling the public opinion of the laboring class" (605). But he also examines ideology in other terms, including, famously, "the sort of public and psychological wage" (700) that compensated white workers for their low monetary wages and, as a result, functioned to keep those wages low. Du Bois also notes both formal and informal and open and covert ways in which ideology is made and sustained, ranging from "the power to influence public opinion through the prestige of wealth, news and literature" (605) to the covert exercise of force²³ and "the psychology of vague and unknown ill, the innuendo that cannot be answered, for it is not openly published" (679).

In the records left by white society during the Reconstruction period he notes the relentless "charge of corruption and theft" (206) "reiterated . . . until it became history" (679) along with "wholesale lying" (679), ridicule²⁴, sneering at beauty²⁵, listening "without ears" (124), presenting aspirations for equality as insane (271), and the presentation of white people committed to equality as "sentimental philistines" and "liberty-intoxicated ladies" given

to “poetical infusions” (23). “There was not,” he notes, “a single great black leader of Reconstruction against whom almost unprintable allegations were not repeatedly and definitely made without any attempt to investigate the reliability of sources of information” (348).

Some of this was animated by “the old snobbery of class judgment” (353) and elitism. It is, he wrote, difficult to “remember the great dumb mass” because “historians quite unanimously forget and ignore them, and chronicle only the amazing game of politicians” (478). But racism festers at the heart of the matter: “the black freedmen, has been treated with callous and hardened judgments, cemented with hate” (353). In a sentence that anticipates ideas to come from both Aimé Césaire—“colonization=‘thingification’”²⁶—and Trouillot—“based not so much on empirical evidence as on an ontology”—Du Bois writes that “For several generations the South has been taught to look upon the Negro as a thing apart. He was different from other human beings” (370).

An important dimension of this is the relentless denial of autonomy. “Whenever we see a Negro, we presuppose a master, and if we see him in what is called a ‘free state,’ we consider him out of place” (39). If he has written something of value, it is obvious in the mind of the racist that it was “written by a white friend” (720). Du Bois shows that the propaganda of history, while “written by passionate believers in the inferiority of the Negro” (381), presents itself in the garb of disinterested scholarship but is in fact pseudo-scholarship marked by “libel, innuendo and silence” (723); by “silence and contempt” (721); by “a cloud of charges, exaggeration and biased testimony” (381). It is sustained by books that build a consensus by agreeing with each other, ignoring empirical archival evidence in favor of “selected diaries, letters and gossip” (723); by books that forsake attempts to find new empirical evidence or to develop new evaluations of existing evidence and “simply repeat perfunctorily all the current legends” (381); by books in which Black seriousness and success is “pilloried by a sneer” (721). It is also sustained by the denial of funding to first-class Black students while “white Southerners can get funds to attack and ridicule the Negro and his friends” (725); by an editor who “refused to print” (713).

Much of the literature on the politics of gossip approaches it as a weapon of the weak, as a weapon that, as James Scott notes, is widely accessible and “relatively safe,” as “everyone can disavow responsibility for having originated it.”²⁷ Silvia Federici’s feminist analysis of gossip is indispensable.²⁸ But just as gossip can function as means of “disguising ideological

insubordination,”²⁹ it can also function to legitimate domination and to give license to powerful people to say things that they would not risk saying in formal or professional contexts.

Anticipating a wide set of critiques of colonial archives, Du Bois notes that any attempt to write a credible history must confront the fact that “the chief witness in Reconstruction, the emancipated slave himself has been barred” (721) from the archive. “Little effort has been made to preserve the records of Negro effort and speeches, actions, work and wages, homes and families. Nearly all this has gone down beneath a mass of ridicule and caricature, deliberate omission and misstatement. . . . The loss today is irreparable, and this present study limps and gropes in darkness” (383). “The Negro is refused a hearing because he was poor and ignorant. It is therefore assumed that all Negroes in Reconstruction were ignorant and silly and that therefore a history of Reconstruction . . . can quite ignore him. The result is that most unfair caricatures of Negroes have been carefully preserved; but serious speeches, successful administration and upright character are almost universally ignored and forgotten” (721).

Du Bois concludes that “three-fourths of the testimony against the Negro in Reconstruction is on the unsupported evidence of men . . . [willing] . . . to lie, steal, or kill in order to discredit these black folk” (725) and that he, aiming to write a rational, evidenced based history that assumes that the people that he is studying are “ordinary human beings,” (328) must write in “a field devastated by passion and belief” (725).

Against all this he opposes reason—reasonable reason, reason grounded in serious engagement with empirical evidence insisting, as noted: “We have got clearly to distinguish between fact and desire” (722). And reasonable reason—along with “accurate” history and “scientific” political science—is impossible when it starts with “the gratuitous assumption that the Negro race has been proven incapable of modern civilization” (382). There must, he writes, “be set some standards of ethics in research and interpretation” (714).

Du Bois’s thinking about propaganda takes both the material drivers of ideology and the psychic appeal of inequality seriously. In contrast to much academic convention it does not only focus on formal and public forms of speech and gives due weight to how thuggery, lies, gossip, libel, innuendo, contempt, slander, exaggeration and ridicule within wider society shape academic discourse as unsubstantiated belief, as passion and desire overwhelm commitment to reason, evidence, and basic ethics of research and debate.

His thinking about propaganda is rooted in the ethics and politics of how the count of the human is made and takes the form of an assertion of radical humanism as method and ethic. He acknowledges the likelihood that operating in this way will be badly received by some people and implicitly takes the view that this is a price that must be paid when insurgent reason is asserted against authorized forms of unreason.

SILENCING THE PRESENT

The line of radical critique that runs from Du Bois to Fanon, Wynter, and Trouillot stresses that unreason, unreason predicated, consciously or not, on what Hugo ka Canham calls “unhumaning intent,”³⁰ can fester at the heights of authorized sites of reason. This is not a phenomenon that is confined to the past, and it frequently takes on a particular animus when confronted with forms of popular politics taken as “illicit appearance” by elites. Academic writing is often not grounded in recognition of grassroots activists and impoverished people in general as “ordinary human beings.” In a situation that Du Bois equips us to understand well, a priori frameworks frequently substitute for what he calls “serious” research. Academic texts on popular politics have often reproduced caricatures while simply ignoring records of “serious speeches,” effective organization, and “upright moral character” that are easily accessible in the public domain.

Much academic writing assumes that, in Jacques Rancière’s words, “only groans or cries expressing suffering, hunger or anger could emerge [from site of impoverishment] but not actual speech demonstrating a shared aesthetics.”³¹ It has been routine to assume that where there is undeniably an expression of politics, it must derive from white agency. As Trouillot wrote, “When reality does not coincide with deeply held beliefs, human beings tend to phrase interpretations that force reality within the scope of these beliefs. They devise formulas to repress the unthinkable and to bring it back within the realm of accepted discourse.”³²

Daryl Glaser’s response to the xenophobic violence that swept parts of South African in May 2008, taking sixty-eight lives, is a good example of academic writing marked by “silence and contempt,” an inability to study impoverished African people as “ordinary human beings” and an implicit assumption that they are “incapable of modern civilization.” Glaser, a liberal, writes that “popular democracy in action is not a pretty sight.”³³ This

extraordinary statement not only erases the history of popular democratic politics in South Africa and elsewhere; it also erases the well-documented way in which the popular democratic politics of Abahlali baseMjondolo, the largest and best organized popular movement to have emerged after apartheid, countered both xenophobic ideas and the actions of xenophobic mobs to publicly contest xenophobic ideas and to ensure that there were no attacks in any of the settlements where the movement organized. Glaser's statement renders the oppressed as a threat to democracy, a democracy that was to a very large extent won by popular democratic organization in the 1970s and 1980s and was certainly not won by white liberalism.

An article by Shireen Hassim about the 2006 trial of Jacob Zuma on a charge of rape provides a clear example of academic work marked by simple "misstatement," a failure to note the public statements of the people she is writing about and "caricatures." She states that Abahlali baseMjondolo supported Zuma and accuses it, and other grassroots social movements, of being "willing to trade away women's rights to dignity and autonomy for short-term political gain."³⁴ Hassim provides no evidence for her claim, which is simply false. Abahlali baseMjondolo did not support Zuma while he was being tried for rape, or at any other point, and very explicitly refused the political mobilization of ethnicity in support of Zuma during his trial while sustaining a multiethnic organization with multiethnic leadership. In the same year that Hassim's article came out, the movement was violently attacked by the ANC. The attack was motivated, in part, by the movement's rejection of the politicization of ethnicity that began with Zuma's rape trial.

It is not clear whether Hassim's wholly false statement is based on her own prejudicial assumptions about the politics of impoverished African people or the prejudicial assumptions that are very common in academic gossip. But, either way, her article does not conform to basic "standards of ethics in research and interpretation" when the narrative turns to the self-organization of impoverished African people. On the left flank of the academy, it is often assumed that while the liberal academy is likely to harbor prejudicial views about impoverished African people, left academics provide privileged understanding of popular politics. There is good work on popular politics by left academics, but it can never be assumed, anywhere, that the academic left automatically provides credible accounts of popular politics. In contemporary South Africa it often carries the same set of prejudicial assumptions as the liberal academy. It has been common for dismissive and factually incorrect pronouncements on popular politics to be made without any form of

investigation, on what Fanon called an *a priori* basis, and for work based on exhaustive research—sometimes years of research—that affirms the ethically and politically serious nature of specific instances of popular organizing to be *a priori* dismissed as “romantic” or even fraudulent.

The ability of the left academy to understand popular politics is also often constrained and distorted by *a priori* forms of dogmatism. Fanon’s critique of attempts to “erect a framework around the people that follows an *a priori* schedule”³⁵ and intellectuals that “come down into the common paths of real life” with formulas that are “sterile in the extreme”³⁶ remain apposite. There is another problem. In South Africa, left academics who see themselves as having a rightful place in political vanguards have frequently engaged in slander,³⁷ and on occasion real thuggery, when popular organizations have taken direction from their members rather than aspirant vanguards. These aspirant vanguards are organized in both sectarian organizations and informal networks, both often operating through or in proximity to donor-funded NGOs. This slander has often been enthusiastically taken up in the liberal media, and at times by the ANC and the state too.

To show that this is not a problem unique to South Africa, it is useful to look at a case study from elsewhere with very similar dynamics in terms of relations, often raced as well as classed, between middle-class actors deemed progressive and credible and a popular movement. Peter Hallward’s account of the 2004 coup against Jean-Bertrand Aristide includes a critique of NGOs and a small sectarian left organization that is strikingly resonant with the South African experience. Six elements of Hallward’s critique are particularly relevant to South Africa.

The first is the profound split, often underestimated by foreign observers, between “(wealthy, French-speaking, internationally oriented) NGO professionals and grassroots (poor, Kreyol-speaking, neighborhood-oriented) activists.”³⁸ The second is that “indignant talk about the (uncontroversial) economic evils of neo-liberalism amounts . . . to little more than hot air . . . the real question, the divisive question, concerns the political empowerment of the people” (179). The third is that left NGOs tend not to “organize with and among the people . . . in the places and on the terms [including the question of language] where the people themselves are strong” but prefer “trivial made-for-media demonstrations . . . usually attended by tiny groups of 30 or 40 people” (181–82). The fourth is that what Hallward calls “anti-neo-liberal NGOs” (179) rallied and legitimated the demonization of Aristide and the coup, becoming a key resource for the propaganda of liberal imperialism.

He documents how NGOs like Action Aid worked to legitimate the 2004 US-backed coup against the elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti (239). At the time of the coup, media reports across much of the world, including South Africa,³⁹ repeatedly presented tiny Western-funded “civil society organizations” with no popular support as the “democratic” alternative to both an elected government and the large popular movement that backed that government.

Importantly Hallward’s critique of how “civil society” in Haiti functioned at the time of the coup includes its connection with Batay Ouvriye, a tiny political organization that he describes as “vehemently sectarian” and given to “hysterical polemic” (186–87). It was, he noted, referred to as being part of what grassroots militants described as “the useless left” (186), useless because it had no popular support. It was, Hallward writes, “like any number of neo-Trotskyite sects . . . militant and inconsequential in equal measure” but had nonetheless been prominent on the international left and had produced slander against popular forms of political mobilization as virulent as anything produced by the right. This became, he concludes, “invaluable propaganda for the sector of civil society” (180) most committed to legitimating the US-backed coup against a popular and elected government.

The sixth is the coloniality of all this, in which “enlightened” and racially marked elites offer support to “allegedly ‘superstitious’ blacks,” something that “is part and parcel of an all too familiar neo-colonial pattern” (180). In South Africa all these dynamics are present and have shaped international academic discourse to a significant degree. It is very common, to the point of being ubiquitous, for Western academics visiting South Africa to engage the academic/NGO left professionally, politically, and socially while uncritically accepting their often-hostile views toward grassroots and working-class militants who do not accept their authority and toward autonomous popular organizations and trade unions. This routinely happens without any attempt to seek the views of these individuals or organizations or taking their critiques of powerful actors in the academic/NGO left seriously. This is frequently raced and always classed. When visiting Western academics do meet impoverished and working-class activists, they are almost actors, selected and paid by the NGO/academic left, rather than people who are part of and accountable to popular membership-based organizations.

This is in striking distinction to the generation of the university-trained intellectuals of the 1970s and 1980s. Steve Biko began introducing Paulo Freire’s ideas to the South African left in 1971, and for many of these people

the key text guiding their thinking about the relationship between university-trained intellectuals and the movements of the oppressed was Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, first published in 1968.⁴⁰ Among the most effective university-educated militants and scholars there was a commitment to forms of praxis rooted in respect for the equal humanity of the other and, therefore, dialogical forms of engagement, that aspired to what Fanon called a "mutual current of enlightenment and enrichment"⁴¹ between the university-trained intellectual and the grassroots militant. The fact that this commitment was uneven and imperfectly realized does not mean that it was not politically and academically significant. It was, in general terms, a very politically successful generation in terms of its ability to play a productive role in popular struggles and movements.

After apartheid, there was a significant although certainly not complete extent to which the commitment to mutuality as a basis for praxis was lost, with a range of new and sometimes entangled forms of engagement coming to the fore, including a drift into NGO substitutionism (the assumption that NGOs can and should represent, organize, or give political direction to movements), the growing influence of previously marginal forms of sectarian forms of politics (usually articulated to groups in England and the United States) and a turn away from taking racialized power dynamics within the left seriously. Du Bois's thoughts on the psychological investment in inequality are useful in understanding the deep investment in terms of personal identity that some people have in understanding themselves as part of a revolutionary vanguard, an elect, and the distress, incomprehension and anger that results when, metaphorically, they keep arriving at the Finland Station and finding that there is no one there to meet them. The post-apartheid generation of left academics is, with notable exceptions, a largely failed generation in terms of its ability to engage productively with popular movements and struggles.

A striking feature of the systemic failure of this generation to productively engage popular struggles is the degree to which its understanding of popular struggle is shaped by gossip rather than credible investigation. Two central features of this gossip include the ascription of criminality to grassroots militants and the claim that grassroots agency is directed by white agency. Gossip is central to the propaganda model developed by Du Bois, and in some instances can be more revealing than texts that have consented to a public life. It can be invented and passed on with far less risk of adverse consequences than formal speech and is thus less guarded and, in some ways, offers a better

window into how people apprehend the world than formal speech. Like a dream, gossip can also illuminate aspects of a political unconsciousness.

A serious anthropological study of academic gossip in South Africa is urgently required, but here I will give just one example, selected because it has been repeated so often and for so long that it will be widely recognized and cannot be credibly denied, but also because of what it reveals. The first version of story, repeated for almost twenty years, can be summarized in a single sentence: Abahlali baseMjondolo held a nighttime ceremony on a beach in which an animal was slaughtered and a white man made the king of the movement. A newer version of the story includes the claim that during this ceremony the white man forced a white female graduate student from Canada to drink the blood of the animal that has been sacrificed.

The story is so ludicrous that it is no exaggeration to call it insane in the same way that Fanon described racism as “delirium.” The fact that it has been believed and repeated by academics with significant institutional power illuminates the extent to which rationality has been “devastated by passion and belief.” The fact that the story sounds like it comes straight out of the colonial novels of Rider Haggard illuminates the racist nature of that passion, of its undeniable coloniality. There are also many instances of statements made by university-trained left intellectuals that are patently not true and, in the kindest interpretation, derive from highly prejudicial assumptions rather than evidence. Heinrich Bohmke’s mostly self-published texts on Abahlali baseMjondolo are particularly crass. They are rank with demonstrably untrue statements and well described, to re-invoke Du Bois, as “a mass of ridicule and caricature, deliberate omission and misstatement (383).”

Astonishingly, Bohmke’s texts have been cited by many academics as if they are credible. In most cases no attempt is made to contrast Bohmke’s claims with credible research on the movement, the movement’s own public statements, or even the extensive media reporting on the movement. In most cases no attempt is made to seek the views of the movement or its participants on Bohmke’s claims, with the result that the chief witnesses to the movement, its participants, are barred from the discussion about the movement. Abahlali baseMjondolo is well known for its red regalia and banners, something that is common on the wider left in South Africa, as it is elsewhere. Bohmke writes that “Zikode and his movement only donned red T-shirts . . . because that is what their initial patrons required and, incidentally, paid for.”⁴² In a single sneering sentence he summarily denies the intellectual, ethical, and political capacities of oppressed people and presents a movement of

thousands of people, a movement that had already suffered severe repression at the time of writing, including the destruction of homes, arrests, assault, torture, and assassination, as nothing but an opportunistic expression of the manipulation of “patrons.”

Bohmke had not been present when the movement chose red as its color, nor had he done any research on this matter. The “patrons” he refers to are three academics who participated in the movement and still do. Although often referred to as “white academics” in his writing, two of the three are, in South African racial terminology, “Indian.” None of these people have ever been involved in securing donor funding for the movement. The facts are as follows: When the movement held its first legal march Fazel Khan, an academic and activist well experienced in the practicalities of organizing large marches, was asked for his support in accessing cheap t-shirts to be printed with the movement’s slogans, slogans that had carefully been discussed in a series of meetings. He sourced the cheapest available shirts which, as the photographs of that march show, were powder blue. In the meeting held after the march to debrief and reflect, Khan was warmly thanked for his work. Mzwakhe Mdlalose, at the time the deputy president of the movement, and a trade unionist, suggested that in future the t-shirts should be red, as this is the color of the left. There was a rich discussion about this which made specific reference to the trade union and communist movements and immediate collective agreement that the movement’s color should be red. Bohmke’s claim is wholly false and at best an a priori assumption misrepresented as fact. But it is also animated by a clear desire to deny the ethical and political capacities of impoverished African people, to refuse to engage some people as “ordinary human beings.”

A similar desire is evident in a statement made in a text cowritten by Patrick Bond, Ashwin Desai, and Trevor Ngwane in 2013. As with Bohmke, their statement does not derive from research. It is so flagrantly in direct contradiction to so much publicly available information that it is difficult to think that it could be an a priori assumption. They describe the movement as being animated by a “deep suspicion of non-shack dwellers” and warn of the dangers of “discounting the possibilities of coalition across types of community.”⁴³ The empirical claim here is wholly, demonstrably, and in fact farcically incorrect. Abahlali baseMjondolo has never harbored an automatic suspicion of “non-shack dwellers,” and the record shows that the movement has always sought to build local, national, and international alliances and solidarity across different social locations and “types of community.”

From its first ever public action, a large march on a local councillor in 2005, there was an attempt to build a coalition across various types of community. Photographs of that march show people from a range of communities, including people raced as “Indian” and “colored.” In 2008 the movement, along with three other movements, formed the national Poor People’s Alliance. Prior to the publication of the article by Bond, Desai, and Ngwane, it had also formed public alliances with all kinds of other organizations including migrant groups, most notably the Congolese Solidarity Campaign, and groups representing street traders, farm workers, and others, and had organized solidarity with activists elsewhere in the world such as in Haiti and Turkey. Over almost twenty years the movement has continued this work at local level and built all kinds of national and transnational alliances, perhaps most significantly with the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) in Brazil.

It is true that the movement has, since shortly after its formation, refused to work with Patrick Bond and Ashwin Desai, but this is not because they do not live in shacks. It is, as the movement has explained in some detail, because their behavior has been appalling.⁴⁴ The movement has always had comrades who are not shack dwellers, such as, from its beginning, the now retired Anglican Archbishop Rubin Phillip. The claim by Bond, Desai, and Ngwane is not just patently false. It also conforms to the stereotype of impoverished African people as being uninterested in thinking and acting beyond immediate local and material concerns. This is, of course, a stereotype with wider colonial resonance. As Mahmood Mamdani has shown, under colonialism the “native is pinned down, localized.”⁴⁵ In South Africa the academy has often contributed to the propaganda of the present. Du Bois’s insistence that the oppressed must be engaged as “ordinary human beings” and that there must be credible “standards of ethics in research and interpretation” speaks to us with urgency and power.

NOTES

1. W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind,” in *W. E. B. Du Bois: International Thought*, ed. Adom Getachew and Jennifer Pitts (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 2.

2. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove, 1967), 160.

3. Unreason can take on particular forms and a particular intensity with regard to Africa. Achille Mbembe opens *On the Postcolony* with a first line declaring,

“Speaking rationally about Africa has never come naturally”; see *On the Postcolony* (University of California Press, 2001), 1.

4. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (The Free Press, 1935), 30. Further citations are parenthetical.

5. Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution* (Grove, 1964), 7 & 10.

6. Sylvia Wynter, “No Humans Involved,” *Forum N.H.I.: Knowledge for the 21st Century: Knowledge on Trial*, no. 1 (1994): 42, <https://files.libcom.org/files/Wynter5.pdf>.

7. David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Biography* (Henry Holt & Co., 2009), 583.

8. Wynter, “No Humans Involved.”

9. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*, trans. Kristin Ross (Schocken Books, 1978), 8. Jacques Rancière uses a similar language, writing that “Inequality . . . is a primitive passion”; see *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Stanford University Press, 1991), 80.

10. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 15.

11. Jacques Rancière, *The Method of Equality*, trans. Julie Rose (Polity, 2016), vii.

12. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 14

13. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon, 1995), 73.

14. Jane Gordon and Lewis Gordon, *Of Divine Warning: Disaster in the Modern Age* (Routledge, 2009), 42.

15. Jane Gordon and Lewis Gordon, “African-American Philosophy, Race, and the Geography of Reason,” in *Not Only the Master’s Tools*, ed. Lewis Gordon and Jane Gordon (Paradigm, 2006), 23, 3–50.

16. Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (Verso, 2006), 48.

17. Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics* (Penguin, 1996), 33.

18. Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics* (Verso, 2008), 69–70.

19. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 119–20.

20. Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Harvard University Press, 1988).

21. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (1932), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology>.

22. Noam Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies* (Pluto Press, 1989).

23. “The kind of thing that men are afraid or ashamed to do openly, and by day, they accomplish secretly, masked, and at night” (Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 677).

24. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 106; 723; 601; 602; 708, etc.
25. "A great song arose, the loveliest thing born this side of the seas . . . improvised and born anew out of an age long past, and weaving into its texture the old and new melodies in word and in thought. They sneered at it—those White Southerners who heard it and never understood" (Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 124).
26. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 42; Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 73; Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 42.
27. James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Yale University Press, 1990), 142.
28. Silvia Federici, *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women* (PM Press, 2018), 58–69.
29. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, xiii.
30. Hugo ka Canham, *Riotous Deathscapes* (Duke University Press, 2023), 2.
31. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Bloomsbury, 2010), 46.
32. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 72.
33. Daryl Glaser, "(Dis)connections: Elite and Popular 'Common Sense' on the Matter of Foreigners," in *Go Home or Die Here: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*, ed. Shireen Hassim, Tawana Kupe and Eric Worby (Wits University Press, 2008), 54.
34. Shireen Hassim, "Democracy's Shadows: Sexual Rights and Gender Politics in the Rape Trial of Jacob Zuma," *African Studies* 68, no. 1 (2009): 73.
35. Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (Grove Press, 1965), 89.
36. Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 177–78.
37. This has included outright academic fraud. This is not dealt with here as it is, in the most egregious cases, obviously lacking in credibility and has been refuted, in detail, by Abahlali baseMjondolo in, for instance, "An Old Snake in A New Skin," February 6, 2015, <https://abahlali.org/node/14544>.
38. Peter Hallward, *Damning the Flood* (Verso, 2007), 183.
39. Richard Pithouse, "Haiti, Mbeki and Contemporary Imperialism," *Latin America Report* 31, no. 2 (2015): 1–18.
40. Freire begins with a preface noting that "This volume will probably arouse negative reactions in a number of readers. Some will regard my position vis-à-vis the problem of human liberation as idealistic." See *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (Penguin, 1996), 19.
41. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 2004), 143.
42. Heinrich Bohmke, "From Red to Blue: Abahlali, Survival and Ideology," *The Africa Report*, May 6, 2014, <https://www.theafricareport.com/4457/south-africa-from-red-to-blue-abahlali-survival-and-ideology>.

43. Patrick Bond, Ashwin Desai, and Trevor Ngwane, “Uneven and Combined Marxism Within South Africa’s Urban Social Movements,” in *Marxism and Social Movements*, ed. Colin Barker, Laurence Cox, John Krinsky, and Alf Gunvald Nilsen (Brill, 2013), 233–35, 251.

44. In 2014, following sustained slander and defamation from within the Centre for Civil Society, directed by Patrick Bond, Abahlali baseMjondolo issued a detailed statement explaining, among other things, why they had refused to work with Bond and his center. It is worth noting that when the movement organized its first legal march Ashwin Desai became apoplectic after seeing his mother’s gardener among the protestors and summarily declared the march a white-orchestrated fraud on the grounds that it was impossible that this person could be a genuine political protagonist. See Abahlali baseMjondolo, “An Old Snake in A New Skin”; Abahlali baseMjondolo, “Responses to the Fraudulent Article Published in Politikon,” July 6, 2015, <https://abahlali.org/node/14807>.

45. Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Wits University Press, 2013), 2.

PART II

*Indigeneity, Fascism,
and Abolition Democracy*

The War That Ended Reconstruction

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

THE CIVIL WAR THROUGH RECONSTRUCTION, 1860–1880, is the most deeply researched and written about period in the annals of United States history. Why Reconstruction failed, with the former Confederacy implementing Jim Crow totalitarian segregation for nearly another century, is rarely convincingly explained. The elephant in the room of the query is an absence in historical narrative, including that of the great historian W. E. B. Du Bois. In the decades leading up to the Civil War, the US Army was divided into seven departments, all engaged in counterinsurgent wars against Indigenous nations and a two-year war against Mexico, which ended in seizing its northern half. With the onset of the Civil War, the Army, now the Union army, was repositioned to the Southeast. Upon the defeat of the Confederacy and the implementation of Reconstruction, the Army transferred from the West to occupy the states of the former Confederacy in order to implement an excellent policy of political empowerment of the formerly enslaved Black people, now US citizens. However, by 1870, six of the seven war departments—comprising 183 companies—had been moved west of the Mississippi, again now a colonial army fighting the Native nations to seize their land. That left only one Army department to occupy the defeated Confederate states in order to enforce freedom and equality for the newly enfranchised Black citizens. In the spring of 1877, all federal troops were withdrawn and sent west, marking the end of Reconstruction.

To explain the failure of Reconstruction with the expansion of US warmaking against Native nations, it's important to understand that such warmaking took place during every phase of the Civil War itself, continuing the colonial genocide that had secured for the United States all the territory east of the Mississippi River by 1850. The term "Indian Wars,"

usually used in reference to the late 1800s, names a reality that was in fact constant from the founding of the thirteen colonies that initially became the United States. After nearly three decades of war and Native resistance east of the Mississippi, under President Andrew Jackson all Native nations east of the Mississippi were forced by white settlers and the Army from their farms, villages, and homelands to Indian Territory in Oklahoma, territory that had been acquired by the United States from Napoleon in the Louisiana Purchase. Under US dominance, the so-called Five Civilized Tribes indigenous to the US Southeast had instituted chattel slavery and were allowed to take the enslaved with them to Indian Territory. These were the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek Muskogee, and Seminole nations.

President Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated in March 1861, two months after the southern slavers had seceded from the United States as the Confederate States of America (CSA), seizing the military base at Fort Sumter near Charleston, South Carolina. Of more than a thousand US Army officers, 286 left the United States Army to join the Confederate army. Half were West Point graduates, most of them veterans of the second and third wars against the Seminole Nation in Florida as well as the 1846–48 invasion and annexation of the northern half of Mexico, including Robert E. Lee, who went on to become the head of the Confederate army of Virginia. Three of the seven US Army department commanders took leadership of the Confederate army. Both the Union and Confederate officers had honed their military skills in irregular warfare—that is, attacking unarmed enemy civilians and burning fields, homes, and food storage. It was a brutal and bloody way of war, with high civilian death rates that laid waste to the southern states.

Most non-slaveowning white settlers in the South, who made up 75 percent of the population of the Confederate states, supported and fought for the Confederacy, revealing a near consensus of southern nationalism. On the other hand, Abraham Lincoln's campaign for the presidency appealed to the land-poor white settlers in the Midwest and Western territories and states who demanded that the government seize Indigenous lands. They were called "Free-Soilers," in reference to cheap land free of slavery. New gold rushes and other incentives brought fresh waves of settlers to squat on Indigenous lands. For this reason, some Native nations preferred a Confederate victory that might divide and weaken the United States, which had grown ever more powerful and genocidal. The five large Native American slaveowning nations from the South who had been forced two decades earlier from their homes and rich farms in the South to relocate

to Oklahoma Indian Territory were more directly involved with the Civil War than other Native nations.

In the Indian Territory the southeastern nations rebuilt their townships, farms, ranches, and institutions, including newspapers, schools, and orphanages. Although the elite citizens of each southern Native nation were wealthy and owned enslaved Africans and elaborate and large private estates, the majority of the people continued their collective agrarian practices. The leaders of all five nations signed treaties with the Confederacy, each for similar reasons—deep resentment of the United States because of removal from their homelands, and to maintain slavery.

Within each nation, however, there was a clear division based on class, often misleadingly expressed as a conflict between “mixed-bloods” and “full-bloods.” That is, the wealthy, mixed white, assimilated, slaveowning minority that dominated politics favored the Confederacy, and the non-slaveowning poor and traditional majority wanted to stay out of the Anglo-American Civil War. Historian David Chang¹ noted that Muskogee Creek nationalism and well-founded distrust of federal power played a major role in bringing about that nation’s strategic alliance with the Confederacy, so their alliance with the Confederacy was both a racist defense of slavery and its class privileges and a nationalist defense of Native lands and sovereignty.

John Ross, principal chief of the Cherokee Nation—the largest Native nation—at first called for neutrality but changed his mind for reasons similar to the Creeks and asked the Cherokee council for authority to negotiate a treaty with the Confederate army. Nearly seven thousand men of the five Native nations went into battle for the Confederacy. Cherokee leader Stand Watie held the post of brigadier general in the Confederate army. His First Indian Brigade of the Army of the Trans-Mississippi was among the last units in the field to surrender to the Union army on June 23, 1865, more than two months after Lee’s surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Courthouse in April 1865.

During the war, however, many Native Confederate volunteers became disillusioned and went over to the Union forces in abolitionist Kansas, along with enslaved African Americans who fled to freedom. Another story is equally important, though less often told. A few months after the war broke out, some ten thousand men in Indian Territory, including Indigenous volunteers along with African Americans who had freed themselves and even some Anglo-Americans, engaged in guerrilla warfare against the Confederate army. They fought from Oklahoma into Kansas, where many of them joined

unofficial Union units that had been organized by abolitionists who had trained with John Brown years earlier. This was not likely the kind of war the Lincoln administration had desired—a multiethnic volunteer Union contingent fighting pro-slavery forces in Missouri, where enslaved Africans escaped to join the Union side. African American self-liberation occurred all over the South and led to Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, which allowed freedmen to serve in combat.

In the rest of the West, both Confederate and Union armies carried out wars of conquest against Native nations throughout the Civil War. In Minnesota, which had become a non-slave state a year before the Civil War began, Dakota Sioux farmers were overwhelmed by white settlers seeking free land and were on the verge of starvation by 1862. When they mounted an uprising to drive out the mostly German and Scandinavian settlers that had appropriated the rich Dakota farmlands they had cultivated for centuries, Union army troops crushed the revolt, slaughtering Dakota civilians and rounding up several hundred men. Some three hundred Dakota prisoners were sentenced to death, but upon Lincoln’s orders to reduce the numbers, thirty-eight were selected at random to die in the largest mass hanging in US history. The revered Dakota resistance leader Little Crow was not among those hanged but was assassinated the following summer while out picking raspberries with his son; the assassin, a settler-farmer, collected a \$500 bounty from the Union army.

In order to free the Union soldiers posted in the West to fight against the Confederate army in the East, Lincoln called for volunteers in the West, and white settlers responded, coming from Texas, Kansas, California, Washington, Oregon, Colorado, Nebraska, Utah, and Nevada. Having few Confederates to fight in the West, they attacked people closer to hand: the Natives. Land speculators in the trans-Mississippi West sought statehood for the occupied former Mexican territories in order to attract white settlers and investors. Their eagerness to undertake the ethnic cleansing of the Indigenous residents to achieve the necessary population balance to attain statehood generated strong anti-Indian frenzy and violent actions against them to seize their lands. Preoccupied with the Civil War in the East, the Lincoln administration did little to prevent vicious and even genocidal actions on the part of territorial authorities consisting of volunteer Indian-hating mercenaries such as Kit Carson.

The mode of maintaining settler “law and order” established the pattern for post–Civil War genocide against Native nations in the West. In the most

infamous incident during the Civil War involving volunteer civilian militias, the First and Third Colorado Volunteers carried out the Sand Creek Massacre against unarmed Cheyenne and Arapaho. Although assigned to guard the road to Santa Fe, the volunteer units mainly engaged in raiding and looting Indigenous communities. John Chivington, an ambitious politician known as the “Fighting Parson,” led the Third Colorado volunteers. By 1861, displaced and captive Cheyenne and Arapahos, under the leadership of the great leader Black Kettle, were incarcerated in a US military reservation called Sand Creek, near Fort Lyon in southeastern Colorado. They camped under a white flag of truce and had federal permission to hunt buffalo to feed themselves. In early 1864, the Colorado territorial governor informed them that they could no longer leave the reservation to hunt. Despite their compliance with the order, on November 29, 1864, Chivington took 700 Colorado Volunteers to the reservation. Without provocation or warning, they attacked, leaving dead 105 women and children and 28 men.

Even the federal commissioner of Indian Affairs denounced the action, saying that the Cheyenne had been “butchered in cold blood by troops in the service of the United States.” In its 1865 investigation, the congressional Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War recorded testimonies and published a report that documented the aftermath of the killings, when Chivington and his volunteers burned tepees and stole horses. Worse, after the smoke had cleared, they returned and finished off the few survivors while scalping and mutilating the corpses—women and men, young and old, children, babies. Then they decorated their weapons and caps with body parts—fetuses, penises, breasts, and vulvas. Once back in Denver, they displayed their trophies to the adoring public in Denver’s Apollo Theater and in saloons. Yet, despite the official detailed report of their deeds, neither Chivington nor any of his men were reprimanded or prosecuted, signaling a free field for killing.

US Army Colonel James Carleton formed the Volunteer Army of the Pacific in 1861, based in California. In Nevada and Utah, a California businessman, Colonel Patrick Connor, commanded a militia of a thousand California volunteers that spent the Civil War years massacring hundreds of unarmed Shoshone, Bannock, and Ute people in their encampments. Carleton led another contingent of volunteer militias to Arizona to suppress the Apaches, who were resisting colonization under their great leader Cochise.

Following a scorched-earth campaign against the Apaches, Carleton was promoted to the rank of brigadier general and placed in command of

the Department of New Mexico. He brought in the now-seasoned killing machine of Colorado Volunteers to attack the Navajos, on whom he declared total war. He enlisted as his principal commander in the field the ubiquitous Indian killer Kit Carson. With unlimited authority and answering to no one, Carleton spent the entire Civil War in the Southwest engaged in a series of search-and-destroy missions against the Navajos. The campaign culminated in March 1864 in a three-hundred-mile forced march of some eight thousand Navajo civilians to a military concentration camp at Bosque Redondo in the southeastern New Mexico desert at the Army base at Fort Sumner, an ordeal recalled in Navajo oral history as the “Long Walk.” At least a fourth of the incarcerated Navajos died of starvation and disease. Not until 1868 were the Navajos released and allowed to return to their homeland in what is today the Four Corners area, overlapping the territories of Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. This permission to return was not based on the deadly conditions of the camp; rather, Congress determined that the incarceration was too expensive to maintain. Nor was Carleton punished for his genocidal acts. Instead, he was appointed a major general in the US Army in 1865 and head of the Fourth Cavalry in scorched-earth forays against Plains Indians.

These military campaigns against Indigenous nations constituted colonizing wars carried out during the white settler war between the northern and southern states. With the abrupt end of Reconstruction, the whole US Army proceeded to launch genocidal wars against Native tribes that lasted until 1890, now with added killing technology and more seasoned killers, including African American cavalry units. Demobilized officers and soldiers often could not find jobs after the war, and along with a new generation of young settlers—otherwise unemployed and often seeking violent adventure—they joined the Army of the West, some of the officers accepting lower ranks in order to get career army assignments. Given that war was centered in the West and that military achievement had come to foster prestige, wealth, and political power, every West Point graduate sought to further his career by volunteering for the western campaigns. Some of their diaries echo those of combat troops in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq, who were troubled by the atrocities they witnessed or committed. But most soldiers persevered in their ambition to succeed.

Early in Reconstruction, when the US Army was a significant occupying force in the former Confederate states, Black Republicans were elected to state and local offices and attempted to reform the all-white local and state militias, requiring all males to serve regardless of race. Few Anglo-Americans

were willing to serve with Black people. But African Americans did serve in the state militias, as well as founding their own local volunteer militia groups. Former slavers spread rumors that Black people were forming insurrectionary armies to murder white people. They also created armed gangs to intimidate other white farmers and merchants who traded with Black farmers and artisans, the threats and acts of violence often putting white merchants out of business. Most ominously, elite white Southerners formed volunteer militias under the guise of private rifle clubs. By 1876, South Carolina alone had more than 240 such clubs. This allowed thousands of Confederate combat veterans, along with former Confederate guerrillas, to mobilize quickly. The Ku Klux Klan was the most violent syndicate, its purpose being to subdue the Black population and exploit their labor. The situation was romanticized in the new art of filmmaking, culminating in the blockbuster Oscar-winning “Gone with the Wind.”

Either by their absence in many places or by their actions in others, some of the US Army officers in charge made these failures of Reconstruction possible. One character who stands out, but is also representative, is Union army general Edward R. S. Canby, a Kentuckian who was the postwar occupation commander of North and South Carolina. Canby refused to use the soldiers under his command to enforce the new laws and instead relied on white southern law enforcement to maintain order. Canby had to have known what would happen. Like many officers assigned to the occupation army of the former Confederacy, Canby was reassigned in 1872 to the Army of the West, where he commanded troops to round up several dozen Modoc Nation families in Northern California who refused to be forced into an Oregon reservation. The Modocs waged a yearlong resistance to the US Army’s brutal counterinsurgency, finally killing General Canby.

By 1870, six of the seven divisions of the US Army had been stationed at St. Louis and western Army outposts, a central factor that led to the United States pulling troops out of the South prematurely to lead or fight in the dozens of wars the United States was initiating against Indigenous nations in the Northern Plains, Southwest, Intermountain West and California, led by former high-level Union officers including William Tecumseh Sherman, Philip H. Sheridan, George Crook, Nelson Miles, and George Armstrong Custer. Undoubtedly, engrained white supremacy among these officers contributed to their poor performance as enforcers of desegregation as well as committed killers of Native people who were blocking US “manifest destiny” to control the continent—after which, the world.

After 1865, the Army would make effective use of Civil War innovations to destroy the resistance of Native nations in the West. The rapid-fire Gatling gun, first used in a Civil War battle in 1862, would be employed during the rest of the century against Indigenous civilians, as well as the innovative Winchester rifle. Non-technological innovations were perhaps even more important, the Civil War having fostered an extreme patriotic ideology in the Union army that carried over into the Indian Wars. Now more centralized under presidential command, US forces relied less on state contributions and were thus less subject to their control. The prestige of the Department of War rose within the federal government, so that it had far more leeway to send troops to steamroll over Indigenous peoples who resisted US colonization.

As noted above, at the end of the Civil War the US Army hardly missed a beat before the war to “win the West” began in full force. As a far more advanced killing machine and with seasoned troops, the Army began the slaughter of people, buffalo, and the land itself, destroying the natural tall grasses of the plains with white settlers planting short grasses for cattle, eventually leading to the loss of the topsoil four decades later in fierce dust storms. William Tecumseh Sherman, famous for burning Atlanta, came out of the Civil War a major general and soon commanded the US Army, replacing war hero Ulysses S. Grant when Grant became president in 1869. As commanding general through 1883, Sherman was responsible for the genocidal wars against the resistant Indigenous nations of the West.

Sherman’s family was among the first generation of settlers after the War of Independence who rushed to the Ohio Valley region after the total war that drove the people of the Shawnee Nation out of their homes, towns, and farms. Sherman’s father gave his son the trophy name Tecumseh after the great Shawnee leader who was killed by the US Army. The general had been a successful lawyer and banker in San Francisco and New York before he turned to a military career. During the Civil War, most famously in the siege of Atlanta, he made his mark as a proponent and practitioner of total war, scorched-earth campaigns against civilians, particularly targeting their food supplies. This had long been the colonial and US American way of war against the Indigenous peoples east of the Mississippi. Sherman sent an Army commission to England to study English colonial campaigns worldwide, looking to employ successful English tactics for the US wars against Indigenous peoples.

In Washington, Sherman had to contend with the upper echelons of the military that were under the sway of Carl von Clausewitz’s book *On War*,

which dealt with conflict between European nation-states with standing armies. This dichotomy of training the US military for standard European warfare but also training it in colonial counterinsurgency methods continues in the twenty-first century with undeclared wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Although a man of war, Sherman, like most in the US ruling class, was an entrepreneur at heart, and his mandate as head of the Army and his passion were to protect the Anglo conquest of the West, to move on to conquer the Pacific, with a dream to conquer China. Sherman regarded railroads as a top priority. In a letter to Grant in 1867 he wrote, "We are not going to let a few thieving, ragged Indians stop the progress of the railroads."

General Sherman also wrote to Grant, who was still commander of the Army: "We must act with vindictive earnestness against the Sioux, even to their extermination, men, women, and children." Sherman made it clear that "during an assault, the soldiers cannot pause to distinguish between male and female, or even discriminate as to age." In adopting total war in the West, Sherman brought in its most notorious avatar, George Armstrong Custer, who proved his mettle right away by leading an attack on unarmed civilians on November 27, 1868, at the southern Cheyenne reservation at Washita Creek in Indian Territory. Earlier, at the Colorado Volunteers' 1864 Sand Creek Massacre, the Cheyenne leader Black Kettle had escaped death. He and other Cheyenne survivors were then forced to leave Colorado Territory for a reservation in Indian Territory/Oklahoma. Some young Cheyenne men, determined to resist reservation confinement and hunger, decided to hunt and to fight back with guerrilla tactics. Since the army was rarely able to capture them, Custer resorted to total counterinsurgent war, murdering the incarcerated mothers, wives, children, and elders. When Black Kettle received word from Indigenous spies within the army ranks that the mounted troops of the Seventh Cavalry were leaving their fort and headed for the Washita reservation, he and his wife rode out at dawn in a snowstorm to attempt to talk with Custer and assure him that no armed resisters were present on the reservation. When they saw Black Kettle and his wife, unarmed and approaching the troops with a hoisted white flag, Custer ordered the soldiers to fire, and a moment later Black Kettle and his wife lay dead in the snow. All told, the Seventh Cavalry massacred over a hundred Cheyenne women and children that day, taking ghoulis trophies afterward. In the annals of US wars, this is called the "Battle of the Washita." A few years later, in 1876, Custer's regiment was decimated by the Lakotas at the Battle of the Little Big Horn, where Custer was killed.

Many of the intensive genocidal campaigns against Indigenous civilians took place during the presidency of Civil War General Ulysses S. Grant (1869–77). Some four million formerly enslaved men were free US citizens in 1865. Many African Americans, especially young men, had freed themselves during the war by fleeing servitude and joining the Union forces. Up to 1862, Black men had been barred from serving in their own capacity in the army. Now the Union army incorporated them but at lower pay and in segregated units under white officers. The War Department created the federal Bureau of Colored Troops, and one hundred thousand armed African Americans served in the unit. Their courage and commitment made them the best and most effective fighters, although they had the highest mortality rate. At the end of the Civil War, 186,000 Black soldiers had fought and 38,000 had died (in combat and from disease), a higher death toll than that of any individual state. After the war many Black soldiers, like their poor white counterparts, remained in the army and were assigned to segregated regiments sent west to crush Indigenous resistance.

In 1866, Congress created two African American cavalry regiments that came to be called the “Buffalo Soldiers” by the Lakotas—not an insult, as the bison was the most sacred animal and Lakotas thought the bearded Black soldiers resembled buffalo faces. The Buffalo Soldiers were formidable fighters. Many freedmen opted for army service for survival reasons, as it gave them food and shelter, pay and a pension, and even some glory, as well as land grants in Indian Territory/Oklahoma after the Native nation estates there were subjected to allotment and privatized, in part as punishment for their support for the Confederacy. The United States had its own motives for assigning Black troops to the West. Southerners and the eastern population did not want thousands of armed battle-ready Black soldiers in their communities. There was also fear that if they demobilized, the labor market would be flooded. For US authorities, it was a good way of getting rid of both the Black soldiers and the Indians.

The explicit purpose of the Buffalo Soldiers and the Army of the West as a whole was to invade Indigenous lands and ethnically cleanse them for Anglo settlement and commerce. As Native historian Jace Weaver has written: “The Indian Wars were not fought by the blindingly white American cavalry of John Ford westerns but by African Americans and Irish and German immigrants.”² The haunting Bob Marley song “Buffalo Soldier” captures the colonial experience in the United States: “Said he was a buffalo soldier / Win the war for Amerika.”

Over a hundred military campaigns against Native peoples were fought during the Civil War and Reconstruction. The period of Reconstruction formally ended in 1880, but it had been drained of its effectiveness for a decade, with occupation troops transferred to the Army of the West. While US wars against Natives continued for another decade, in 1879 the US policy of assimilation of Native Americans began with the military establishment of the first federally run Indian boarding school (the Indian Industrial School) at the Carlisle, Pennsylvania, army base. Other boarding schools for Natives, forcibly removed from their homes, were established around the country. Armed Native resistance continued, but the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre marked the end.

NOTES

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1 David Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Land Ownership in Oklahoma, 1832–1929* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

2. Jace Weaver, “A Lantern to See By,” in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, ed. Gerald Vizenor (University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 315.

The Shape of Fear

RACIAL FASCISM
AND THE COUNTERREVOLUTIONS OF PROPERTY

Alberto Toscano

WAS W. E. B. DU BOIS A THEORIST OF FASCISM? In a 1990 talk, drawn from an unfinished book project on *The Black Response to Fascism*,¹ Cedric J. Robinson answered this question unequivocally. Not only had Du Bois sketched out a capacious understanding of fascism informed by his studies of Black life in the United States and of the global color line, but he also stood as an exception among the Black radical theorists of his time for the distance he took from a historical materialist interpretation of fascism that accorded primacy to economy and class. For Robinson's Du Bois, "the essence of fascism was racial," and like "many ordinary black people" his position rested on the belief that "the West was pathological and fascism an expression of that nature."² Robinson, who elsewhere provides a compelling analysis of Black popular antifascism in response to Italy's invasion of Ethiopia,³ quotes Du Bois: "The black world knows this is the last great effort of white Europe to secure the subjection of black men."⁴

But was Mussolini's effort to build a fascist empire on African subjugation ultimate proof of fascism's racial "essence"? The 1936 article from which Robinson quotes—"Inter-Racial Implications of the Ethiopian Crisis: A Negro View," published in *Foreign Affairs*⁵—complicates this perspective. It emphatically foregrounds the hyperexploitation of colonial labor and resources as the motor behind fascism's race philosophy. As Du Bois declares: "The belief that racial and color differences made exploitation of colonies necessary and justifiable was too tempting to withstand. As a matter of fact, the opposite was the truth; namely, that the profit from exploitation was the main reason for the belief in race difference."⁶ Or, in a further variation: "Economic exploitation based on the excuse of race prejudice is the program of the white world."⁷ Profit as the reason and prejudice as the excuse

does not seem to warrant the thesis that Du Bois ascribed to the notion that fascism has a racial *essence*, though it certainly emerged from a racial *history*. Rather, it maps onto a dialectic of race and capitalism powerfully and succinctly encapsulated by Ruth Wilson Gilmore: “Capitalism requires inequality and racism enshrines it.”⁸

Robinson rightly emphasizes that Du Bois placed chattel slavery and anti-Black racism at the core of Europe’s bloody collapse during its twentieth-century rendition of the Thirty Years’ War (1914–45), something which I will explore further below as it pertains to *Black Reconstruction*. In advance of Aimé Césaire’s landmark *Discourse on Colonialism*, Du Bois repeatedly articulated the continuity between the racial capitalist violence of colonialism and chattel slavery, on the one hand, and the rise of European fascist regimes, on the other. As he noted in 1942: “With all our tumult and shouting and pious rage against Hitler, we are perfectly aware that his race philosophy and methods are but extreme development and application of our own save that he is drawing his race lines in somewhat different places.”⁹ Five years later, in *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part Which Africa Has Played in World History*, now fully apprised of the genocide perpetrated on European soil, Du Bois would be even more emphatic: “There was no Nazi atrocity—concentration camps, wholesale maiming and murder, defilement of women or ghastly blasphemy of childhood—which the Christian civilization of Europe had not long been practicing against colored folk in all part of the world in the name of and for the defense of a Superior Race born to rule the world.”¹⁰

But as for theorizing the intra-European fascism that was the most recent and galling manifestation of imperialist white supremacy, Du Bois’s contribution is very limited. In the dispatches sent to the *Pittsburgh Courier* from his five-month stay in Nazi Germany in 1936, two elements stand out. The first is Du Bois’s wrestling with a form of race hate (anti-Semitism) that did not mobilize the color line and that, while drawing on economic themes and fantasies, was not in the main an “excuse” for economic exploitation.¹¹ The second was his contention that Hitlerism was, in however contradictory a guise, a form of state socialism. Indeed, in December 1936, Du Bois identified the contradiction between private profit and socialization, cloaked by the Nazi regime’s rabid anti-Bolshevism, as one of the potential causes for its coming downfall—alongside its inability to navigate the woman question, its efforts to reprise a colonialism based on rank racial subjugation, and the repulsion it had generated in world public opinion. He observed

that “Germany today is, next to Russia, the greatest exemplar of Marxian socialism in the world, and at the same time posing as the bulwark of Europe against the Red Menace! It is the most astonishing sight in modern history, and it spells Hitler’s eventual downfall or it spells nothing.”¹² Du Bois would even provide an inventory of the “likenesses of Hitlerism and communism” (from one-party rule to collective farms, passing through bloody purges and paid holidays for workers).

This is a perspective on German fascism amply refuted by the most substantial contemporary studies of its relationship to capitalism, including Daniel Guérin’s *Fascism and Big Business* (1936), Robert A. Brady’s *The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism* (1937), or Franz Neumann’s *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (1942). It is also a frame that Du Bois did not relinquish, as evidenced by his remarks on the Hitler state in his 1945 *Color and Democracy*, which also betray his own convictions on the inexorability of centralized directorship and indeed dictatorship in modern industrial societies, notwithstanding his simultaneous stress on the need to develop democratic citizenship and participation.¹³ Du Bois sees one of the consequences of the First World War as that of having turned the state into a “source of new capital and absolute master of industry,” giving “German technocracy” the opportunity “to establish the most complete and efficient planned economy that the modern world has seen since the rise of the Industrial Revolution.” Though Du Bois is adamant that Hitler was obliged to divert the energies of labor away from revolution and toward nationalism, racism, and imaginaries of world domination, he retained the belief in a historical and structural continuity between the structures of rule in Germany and Russia that he’d sketched out in his 1936 articles for the *Pittsburgh Courier*. As he observed, under the impact of “revolutionary ideas, started by the Russian experiment,”

the state with Germany changed from a political to an economic organization; and within this new economic state the whole fight for democracy, for the power of the individual to determine policies and for the freedom of individual thought and critical opinion, must be fought again, not only in Germany and in Europe, but in the world. In the dictatorships developed in Russia, Germany, and Italy there was a certain scientific foundation. . . . [T]he production of goods and to some degree their distribution is not a matter of argument, decision, or majority opinion, but an inexorable system which men must follow under the trained guidance of managers and technicians if they would get the necessary results.¹⁴

Du Bois's tendency to treat fascism as a rational command economy that defers class struggle through the psychological wages of race and the promise of empire hampers his ability to capture the persistence of profit and exploitation in Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. A postwar definition of fascism as "oligarchy in control of a socialized state which is run for the benefit of the oligarchs and their friends"¹⁵ is certainly preferable to the claim that Hitlerism was a species of "Marxian socialism," but it suffers from the habits of Stalinist simplification and the sidelining of race, if not as the "essence" then certainly as a critical and necessary component of fascism. But if Du Bois's published reflections on interwar European fascisms do not make substantive contributions to our theoretical understanding of those phenomena, is his contribution to the theorization of fascism only to be sought, with Robinson, in his ability to make us see that "the precondition for fascism was a civilization profoundly traumatized by slavery and racism"?¹⁶

My contention is that Du Bois's theory of fascism is not to be found in in his pronouncements on European regimes, or even in his reflections on the gamut of colonial fascisms, but in *Black Reconstruction*. I am inspired here by Amiri Baraka's reading of Du Bois's 1935 masterwork, which compellingly presents it as an analysis of a US variant of "racial fascism" that antedated its European manifestations. Baraka makes a compelling case for recognizing the fascist dynamics inhering in the counterrevolution that thwarted the effort to turn abolition democracy into a dictatorship of the proletariat, Black and white, in the South, thus laying the grounds for the perpetuation of white supremacy and for the United States' pivotal role in late nineteenth and twentieth-century imperialism. As Baraka writes, in the wake of the First Gulf War and in the context of the ongoing criminalization of blackness:

The overthrow of the Reconstruction actually united fronts of workers and small farmers, heaved Afro America into fascism. There is no other term for it. The overthrow of democratically elected governments and the rule by direct terror, by the most reactionary sector of finance capital, as Dimitrov termed it. Carried out with murder, intimidation and robbery, by the first storm troopers, again the Hitlerian prototype, the Ku Klux Klan, directly financed by northern capital. What the masses of racially twisted white southerners did not understand was that the overthrow of Reconstruction was necessary not just for pitching Black people into American fascism, but for the complete triumph of imperialism. Since the Plantation Owners, "The Planters," were the last force of *competitive capitalism* removed in order for imperialism to shoulder its way into power in the U.S. Du Bois says it was not until it was too late that the mass of working class and middle-class whites realized that the

so-called “Redemption of the South” was actually the defeat of democracy for the entire South and the U.S. nation as well. . . . Andrew Johnson’s point position in overthrowing Reconstruction and imposing a racial fascism on Afro America and the Afro American people readied the whole of the U.S. nation for imperialist rule, which today has moved to complete control of the entire nation. . . . The financial panic of 1873 was the economic ground for the 1876 Hayes-Tilden compromise, in which the ex-slaves and the whole South were officially returned to the fascist rule of the comprador southern middle classes. With the Black Codes, any white citizen could arrest, question, beat and even kill any Black person, like the recent Louisiana legislation that any citizen can shoot any person suspected of trying to steal his or her car.¹⁷

Several elements of Baraka’s discussion are worth highlighting, in view of extracting from *Black Reconstruction* the lineaments of a theory of (US) fascism. First is the notion that the racial fascist backlash against Black proletarian democracy in the South laid the seedbed for imperialism at home and abroad. Second is the catalytic role of crisis (1873) in the consolidation of a counterrevolutionary bloc against emancipation. Third is the suggestion that the terroristic attack on Reconstruction governments, Black social life, and labor organizing stands as a “prototype” for European fascism. Fourth is the self-sabotage ultimately carried out by poor whites conscripted into antidemocratic reaction.

Together these features of US fascism’s rise against Black Reconstruction compose what I would like to explore as a *retrospective typology of fascism*, understood as a modality of that broader process and politics which is the “counterrevolution of property.” I draw here on Bill Mullen’s generative analysis of Du Bois’s work as mapping out “a *typology* of world revolution: a variant mode of historical materialism interpreting global events of the past as templates for a revolutionary present,”¹⁸ while shifting the focus to *counterrevolution*.¹⁹ If Du Bois’s naming of the exodus and uprising of the enslaved during the Civil War as a “general strike” can be viewed as a “retrospective prototype of the present,”²⁰ so, I want to suggest, we can follow Baraka in regarding the assemblage of a regime of terroristic rule and its associated political psychology as a retrospective prototype of (US) fascism, active (albeit in mutated form) in our own present. This is also a manner of performing a certain fidelity to Du Bois’s “transformation of the historiography of American civilization—the renaming of things.”²¹ In order to do this, however, we need to suspend Baraka’s mapping of the theory of racial fascism implicit in *Black Reconstruction* onto the canonical Third International definition of fascism articulated by Georgi Dimitrov at the Seventh Congress of

the Comintern in August 1935—a definition which, as Noel Ignatiev critically elucidated, was central to 1970s Marxist-Leninist and Left debates in the US.²² In particular, we need to attend to how Du Bois’s understanding of the counterrevolution of property that overthrew radical Reconstruction does not identify the dictatorship of (finance) capital directly with the open terroristic assault on multiracial labor democracy. While alerting us to the presence of a latent theory of fascism in *Black Reconstruction*, Baraka elides its specificity in trying to make it fit the mold of Dimitrov’s definition.

How then are we to understand Du Bois’s retrospective typology of US fascism? To begin with, we should note that while in *Black Reconstruction* Du Bois assembles the elements of a *theory* of fascism, he does not delineate a *concept* of fascism. The term appears twice in the book. The first time is in the chapter on “The White Worker,” in a lyrical-ironic mode. Having presented the American “vision of democratic self-government” as “the last Great Battle of the West,” Du Bois breaks his oratorical momentum and interjects: “And then some unjust God leaned, laughing, over the ramparts of heaven and dropped a black man in the midst. It transformed the world. It turned democracy back to Roman Imperialism and Fascism; it restored caste and oligarchy; it replaced freedom with slavery and withdrew the name of humanity from the vast majority of human beings” (30). Corroborating Robinson’s contention that core to Du Bois’s view was the tenet that “the precondition for fascism was a civilization profoundly traumatized by slavery and racism,” the chapter concludes with an account of the way that, bar the tumultuous years of Civil War and Black liberation (from Bleeding Kansas in 1854 to the election of Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876), the dominant theme in US (and world) history was “white freedom as the goal of the world and black slavery as the path thereto.”

We find here one among several iterations of a key argument in *Black Reconstruction*, to wit, that Black liberation and the counterrevolution of property that suppressed it are *global* events, and that a proto-fascism anchored in the terroristic defense of personal and collective whiteness made imperialism possible—thus also laying the conditions for the rise of European fascism as a spawn of intra- and inter-imperialist crises. As Getachew and Pitts have argued, Du Bois’s “international thought” is defined by a “commitment to thinking the domestic and imperial in the same frame.”²³ The fascistic inscription of “the white worker” that brought down radical Reconstruction was thus the prelude to the twentieth-century tragedy of a white proletariat unable to extricate itself from race and nation. As Du Bois declares:

The plight of the white working class throughout the world today is directly traceable to Negro slavery in America, on which modern commerce and industry was founded, and which persisted to threaten free labor until it was partially overthrown in 1863. The resulting color caste founded and retained by capitalism was adopted, forwarded and approved by white labor, and resulted in subordination of colored labor to white profits the world over. Thus the majority of the world's laborers, by the insistence of white labor, became the basis of a system of industry which ruined democracy and showed its perfect fruit in World War and Depression. And this book seeks to tell that story (30).²⁴

The second mention of fascism comes in the chapter on "The Black Proletariat in South Carolina," in the context of a reflection on democracy and dictatorship—with fascism understood as the offspring of a pessimistic political anthropology that treats hierarchy and heteronomy as eternal necessities: "The current theory of democracy is that dictatorship is a stopgap pending the work of universal education, equitable income, and strong character. But always the temptation is to use the stopgap for narrower ends, because intelligence, thrift and goodness seem so impossibly distant for most men. We rule by junta; we turn Fascist, because we do not believe in men; yet the basis of fact in this disbelief is incredibly narrow" (382–83).

These two explicit mentions of fascism remain at the level of Du Bois's broader philosophy of history, though the first, as noted, also suggests a complexly mediated causal relation between the defeat of radical Black Reconstruction and the emergence of the "new imperialism," a recurring thematic in Du Bois. Building on Baraka's sketch and Mullen's methodology, I think we can turn to Du Bois's formidable conjunctural analysis of the period 1860–80 to delineate how he depicts US racial fascism as a particular modality of and moment within counterrevolutionary politics. Baraka's identification of Marx's *The Civil War in France* as a precursor to *Black Reconstruction*, and Michael Denning's likening of Du Bois to Gramsci, point us in the right direction,²⁵ namely that of seeing Du Bois's critical history of America's only true (and failed) revolution in terms of a mutable, contingent, and overdetermined set of class strategies, alliances, and ideologies—something that Du Bois's concurrent attraction to the philosophy of history can often obscure.

Du Bois's limning of Reconstruction's revolutionary character is crucial here. Rather than a linear and virtuous dialectic between capitalist development and revolutionary change, the political emancipation of the Black

worker is inextricably political *and* social, and it is only briefly and impartially synchronized with capitalism's totalizing march. Reconstruction is the paradoxical and unstable conjunction of proto-socialist multiracial democracy and the hegemonic impetus of industrial and financial (northern) capital. As Du Bois writes, with dazzling poetic and speculative verve, in the chapter "The Price of Disaster," which traces how the refusal to replace slavery with labor democracy is at the origin of American ills:

By singular coincidence and for a moment, for the few years of an eternal second in a cycle of a thousand years, the orbits of two widely and utterly dissimilar economic systems coincided and the result was a revolution so vast and portentous that few minds every fully conceived it; for the systems were these: first, that of a democracy which should by universal suffrage establish a dictatorship of the proletariat ending in industrial democracy; and the other, a system by which a little knot of masterful men would so organize capitalism as to bring under their control the natural resources, wealth and industry of a vast and rich country and through that, of the world. For a second, for a pulse of time, these orbits crossed and coincided, but their central suns were a thousand light-years apart, even though the blind and ignorant fury of the South and the complacent Philistinism of the North saw them as one (346).

Baraka's eliding of Northern capital with Southern terror misses the ideological and temporal over-determination, the multiplicity of Reconstruction as a time of revolution and counterrevolution, in which a bourgeois "abolition democracy" could briefly serve as the vehicle of Northern industry and the nemesis of Southern reaction and recidivism without ever cohering into a hegemonic project.

Racial fascism is thus a moment within, and not the totality of, the counterrevolution of property that was crystallized by the Compromise of 1877. One can argue that while northern capital dominates the overall counterrevolutionary process, it licenses and reproduces racial terror in the South (and beyond) as a means of coming to terms with white southern ruling classes while perpetuating and exacerbating divisions between poor southern whites, northern industrial workers, and Black labor North and South, thus snuffing out the very possibility of labor democracy. As it emerges from the counterrevolution of property and the assault on Black Reconstruction, US fascism is a subordinate modality and an abiding potential in the pattern of capitalist rule. This emergence is not a logical but a contingent if well-grounded product of the fierce class struggles (including among capitalists) that Du Bois narrates across two decades.²⁶

It is not that capital directly commands terror, as in Baraka's version, but that the reaction to northern dominance (embodied in the much-disparaged figure of the "carpetbagger") creates the political space for a broad anti-democratic front, giving free rein to racial terror in the South as the cement holding together white workers and the planter class, both wracked by ideological and material crises. As the subheading of the chapter "Counter-Revolution of Property" delineates: "After the war, triumphant industry in the North coupled with privilege and monopoly led an orgy of theft that engulfed the nation and was the natural child of war, and . . . revolt against this anarchy became reaction against democracy, North and South, and delivered the land into the hands of an organized monarchy of finance while it overthrew the attempt at a dictatorship of labor in the South" (580). Crucial to Du Bois's account of the mass politics of race terror, labor subjugation, and white democracy in the South is the sense of the multiplicity of group or class subjects at work in the shifting geometry of political and capitalist crisis in the 1860s and 1870s.

In the end, northern capital used the dictatorial powers of the Reconstruction Acts and the limited emancipatory moves of the Freedmen's Bureau as vanishing mediators for its oligarchic dominance, colluding with a subordinated southern capital to divide southern labor (and *a fortiori* labor in the post-Civil War Union) and quash the fleeting revolutionary possibility of mass multiracial proletarian democracy. Speaking of this democratic opening, Du Bois writes: "When the South realized this they emitted an exceeding great cry which was the reaction of property being despoiled of its legal basis of being" (580). But the countervailing efforts of Black and some white labor in the South to provide itself with adequate political leadership failed "because the military dictatorship behind labor did not function successfully in the face of the Ku Klux Klan and especially because the appeal of property in the South got the ear of property in the North" (581). There was neither enough time, the requisite alliances, or the political will backed by economic power needed for dictatorship to break the racial order of the South and create the conditions for industrial democracy. As Du Bois observed: "Unfortunately, the power set to begin this dictatorship was the military arm of a government which more and more was falling into the hands of organized wealth, and of wealth organized on a scale never before seen in modern civilization. . . . The refusal of the nation was chiefly because the new industry, the money-making financiers and organizers of a vast economic empire, hesitated at a government

guardianship of labor and control of industry on a scale that might embarrass future freedom of exploitation" (345, 328). The emancipation of the Black worker "would have required, after the losses of the war, an industrial unselfishness of which capitalist organization does not for a moment admit" (620). But "both the liberal and the conservative North found themselves willing to sacrifice the interests of labor in the South to the interests of capital" (626).

This future freedom of exploitation was not sufficiently embarrassed by the violent assertion of white freedom as the freedom to dominate²⁷ that it might have felt compelled to mobilize against the destruction of multiracial democracy by the inter-class project of white supremacy and "states' rights." After all: "Industry demands profits and is willing to use for this end Negro freedom or Negro slavery, votes for Negroes or Black Codes" (325). In its dominant lines, the counterrevolution of property was the consolidation and concentration of an unprecedented dictatorship of capital, which retained "forms of democratic government . . . almost fantastic in their travesty on real popular control" (585). Du Bois terms this a "super-government" of "super-capital," predicated on the subdual of the naked capitalist plunder of robber-barons and their ilk—which had incited widespread and angry calls for reform—as well as on "treaties" with the petty bourgeoisie and with an aristocracy of white labor whose privileges were a function not only of the abjection of the Black worker but of "a great reservoir of common and foreign labor which [new capital] kept at work at low wages with the threat of starvation and with police control" (584).²⁸ The Black worker's position was consequently "beneath the white American labor movement" (596). "Profit, income, uncontrolled power in My Business for My Property and for Me—this was the aim and method of the new monarchical dictatorship that displaced democracy in the United States in 1876" (586). What this "vast monarchy of tremendous power and almost miraculous accomplishment" offered to the South was "the withdrawal of the national army and the restoration of political control to property" (584–85). Northern abolition democracy, notwithstanding moments of moral courage, could not truly resist the implantation of the dictatorship of supercapital and the reproduction, in a subordinate role, of a fascistic rule of Southern property predicated on racial terror and labor subjugation. For the bulk of abolitionism "was largely based on property, believed in capital and formed in effect a powerful petty bourgeoisie. It believed in democratic government but only under a general dictatorship of property" (595).²⁹

Ultimately, the abolition democracy played a negligible role in a four-way struggle in the South that involved internally split capitalist and laboring classes: Northern capitalist investors, Southern planters, Black labor, and poor whites. “There ensued,” Du Bois writes, “a fierce fight for mastery characterized by wide-spread graft, corruption, and violence; for what responsibility did any of these parties have to a state they did not own?” (610). If renaming the slave as “the Black worker” allows us to understand radical Reconstruction as a monumental if thwarted revolution and Redemption as counterrevolution, so the position of the “poor white,” “the white worker,” is essential to the intelligibility of the fascistic tendencies seeded in the aftermath of the Civil War, in a situation marked by “the feeling that unless the planters united with the poor whites in a solid racial phalanx against the black voters, anarchy and destruction were preferable to the economic rise of the Negro” (609). Let whiteness be done though the heavens fall.

This fierce fight too was placed not just in the wake of the “general strike” of the slaves, but in a conjuncture where the momentary coincidence of the dictatorships of capital and labor was shadowed by the conjunction of the concentration of industrial capital, financial crisis, the feudal recidivism of the plantocracy and a *sui generis* form of so-called primitive accumulation. For, as Du Bois observed: “To emancipate four million laborers whose labor had been owned, and separate them from the land upon which they had worked for nearly two and a half centuries, was an operation such as no modern country had for a moment attempted or contemplated” (611). In this polycrisis, racial fascism was the southern face of the counterrevolution of property, subordinated to super-capital in the broader scheme of things but still immensely consequential both in the reproduction of white supremacy and in creating the conditions of possibilities for the new imperialism in the United States and beyond.

But the “essence” of this racial fascism for Du Bois remained a capitalist one: “The overthrow of Reconstruction was in essence a revolution inspired by property and not a race war” (622). The racial antagonism of the poor whites was motivated by the fear of a reformist alliance between former planters and former slaves, by the menace of “a reestablishment of that subordination under Negro labor which they had suffered during slavery.” This lent power to the “new philosophy” of trans-class white freedom “which represented understanding between the planters and the poor whites” (623). It bears repeating that the context for the crystallization of the racial and class regime of Redemption and Jim Crow was not the product of an inevitable

development but a conjunctural effect of contingent, and in their own way surprising, alliances. As Du Bois observes: "It is one of the anomalies of history that political and economic reform in the North and West after 1873 joined hands with monopoly and reaction in the South to oppress and reënslave labor" (623).

What Baraka termed "racial fascism" was the offspring of a southern strategy to engineer the conditions of re-enslavement from a position of subordination to northern capital and in an exceedingly volatile and complex class geometry and political geography. The "new philosophy" of white supremacy came to the fore as the South "stopped attacking abolitionists and even carpetbaggers, and gradually transferred all the blame for post-war misgovernment to the Negroes. The Negro vote and graft were indissolubly linked in the public mind by incessant propaganda. Race repulsion, race hate, and race pride were increased by every subtle method, until the Negro and his friends were on the defensive and the Negro himself almost convinced of his own guilt. Negro haters and pseudo-scientists raised their heads and voices in triumph" (624).

Ultimately, it was because a multiracial democracy of labor, as the sequel to the momentary "dictatorship of the proletariat" under military government, would have been "more fatal to land monopoly and industrial privilege" than any kind of corruption that the "white South" "quickly substituted violence and renewal of the war in order to get rid of the possibility of good government supported by black labor votes" (625). Racial fascism could thus be understood as the counterrevolution of southern property, in its enlisting of the poor white into a sectorally hegemonic project of race hate and privilege ("white freedom"), subordinated to but tolerated by and in many ways functional to the counterrevolution of northern "super-capital," understood by Du Bois as the origin of the new imperialism and of the planetary crises of the first half of the twentieth century (historical fascism included). This double counterrevolution was made possible by the fact that "Northern capital compromised, and southern capital accepted race hate and black disenfranchisement as a permanent program of exploitation. . . . It was not then race and culture calling out of the South in 1876, it was property and privilege, and property heard and recognized the voice of its own" (626-7, 630). Racial fascism as the form of the dictatorship of capital in the South was inextricable from "an exploitation of labor unparalleled in modern times" (630), which operated as both matrix and model for the domination of colored labor the world over. This racialized modality of exploitation was

in turn a necessary condition for the incubation of the European fascism that was wreaking its violence in Ethiopia and Germany at the time of *Black Reconstruction's* publication.

As Du Bois explained, "The United States, reinforced by the increased political power of the South based on disfranchisement of black voters, took its place to reenforce the capitalistic dictatorship of the United States, which became the most powerful in the world, and which backed the new industrial imperialism and degraded colored labor the world over" (620). The counterrevolution of property, while anchored in the sometimes granular contradictions, alliances, and tactics of multiple classes in the US North and South, was thus a *global counterrevolution*, of which racial fascism was both an ingredient and a product. The new imperialism was built on the "disenfranchised" racialized labor of the American South and manifested as "a new industrial slavery of black and brown and yellow workers in Africa and Asia" (632), making of the United States both a "reactionary force" and "the cornerstone of that new imperialism which is subjecting the labor of yellow, brown, and black peoples to the dictation of capitalism organized on a world basis; and it has not only brought nearer the revolution by which the power of capitalism is to be challenged, but also it is transforming the fight to the sinister aspect of a fight on racial lines embittered by awful memories" (631).

The unnamed and "secret" second civil war in the South that overthrew Reconstruction, and the racial fascism that undergirded it, is thus of planetary historical import. It constituted a "determined effort to reduce black labor as nearly as possible to a condition of unlimited exploitation and build a new class of capitalists on this foundation," a process in which the violence meted out by "secret organizations" and the "new doctrine of race hatred" played a crucial part (670). Spasmodic before 1868, systematic thereafter, the reaction was brutal: "Using a technique of mass and midnight murder, the South began widely organized aggression upon the Negroes" (674). For Du Bois, this consolidation and acceleration of white supremacist terror—enacted by the KKK, "regulators," mobs and individuals—still has to be understood as a counterrevolution *of property*, "its real underlying industrial causes obscured by political excuses and race hatred" (674). Secrecy and fear characterized the violence that secured and reproduced property's racialized order—not least because "open civil war is difficult, costly, and hard to guide" unlike "the methods of night and mask . . . the innuendo that cannot be answered, for it is not openly published" (679).

While Du Bois's account of the psychological wages of whiteness has justly inspired abundant scholarship, organizing and commentary, his attention to the mass psychology of US racial fascism—the white wages of fear, so to speak—has received less attention. I would like to conclude on this dimension of Du Bois's work, if nothing else to stress the stunning capacity of *Black Reconstruction* to mediate, connect and problematize radically different scales, from the planetary reach of the new imperialism to the anxious confines of the raced psyche. Du Bois presents southern terror against the Black worker and Black democracy as an articulation of the secret order and the mob, sutured by fear.³⁰ The secret method of force “dares things at which open method hesitates; it may with a certain impunity attack the high and the low; it need hesitate at no outrage of maiming or murder; it shields itself in the mob mind and then throws over all a veil of darkness which becomes glamor” (678). Fear is the mob affect, the fascist reactant revealing the pervasive malaise and anxiety that lies behind the social spasms of frenzy and rage, a malaise that also contains, albeit in dissimulated form, an “economic” core:

Before the wide eyes of the mob is ever the Shape of Fear. Back of the writhing, yelling, cruel-eyed demons who break, destroy, maim and lynch and burn at the stake is a knot, large and small, of normal human beings, and these human beings are at heart desperately afraid of something. Of what? Of many things, but usually of losing their jobs, being declassed, degraded, or actually disgraced; of losing their hopes, their savings, their plans for their children; of the actual pangs of hunger, of dirt, of crime. And of all this, most ubiquitous in modern industrial society is that fear of unemployment. It is its nucleus of ordinary men that continually gives the mob its initial and awful impetus.

Racial fascism may have all kinds of thugs or sociopaths at its beck and call, but, Du Bois reminds us, “this is the horrible covering of this inner nucleus of fear” (678). This fear allowed the Klan and other secret orders—as well as the more visible forces of repression and vigilantism—“to fasten the dictatorship of property over labor upon the South,” while also providing the affective core for the production and reproduction of a racist ideology that foreclosed the very possibility of labor democracy in the South and beyond: “The race element was emphasized in order that property holders could get the support of the majority of white laborers and make it more possible to exploit Negro labor. But the race philosophy came as a new and terrible thing to make labor unity or labor class-consciousness impossible” (680). What Baraka termed “racial fascism” was the substance of this second civil war, shaped by fear

and terror, abetted by dominant Northern capital, and preparing the United States' economic dominance over a new imperial order that projected the color line across the globe, while laying the ideological and crisis conditions for the fascist regimes of interwar Europe, and the (momentary) implosion of the capitalist order, as the "fantastic structure fell, leaving grotesque Profits and Poverty, Plenty and Starvation, Empire and Democracy, staring at each other across World Depression" (635). The blood-curdling threnody that ensued was the real Song of the South.

NOTES

1. Joshua M. Myers, *Cedric Robinson: The Time of the Black Radical Tradition* (Polity Press, 2021), 194–95.

2. Cedric Robinson, "Fascism and the Response of Black Radical Theorists," in *Cedric J. Robinson on Racial Capitalism, Black Internationalism, and Cultures of Resistance*, ed. H. L. T. Quan (Polity Press, 2019), 157. For further discussion of this claim in the context of Black radical theories of fascism, see my *Late Fascism: Race, Capitalism and the Politics of Crisis* (Verso Books, 2023).

3. Cedric Robinson, "Fascism and the Intersections of Capitalism, Racism, and Historical Consciousness" and "The African Diaspora and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis," in Quan, *Cedric J. Robinson*.

4. Quoted in Robinson, "Fascism and the Response of Black Radical Theorists," 157; W. E. B. Du Bois, "Inter-Racial Implications of the Ethiopian Crisis: A Negro View," *Foreign Affairs* 14, no. 1 (October 1935): 88.

5. As Adom Getachew and Jennifer Pitts note, the article was published after Du Bois's participation in an American League Against War and Fascism rally against Italian aggression on September 25, 1935. See *W. E. B. Du Bois: International Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 135. The League was an affiliate of the Comintern-sponsored World Committee Against War and Fascism.

6. Du Bois, "Inter-Racial Implications," 84.

7. Du Bois, "Inter-Racial Implications," 92.

8. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Abolition Geography: Essays Toward Liberation* (Verso Books, 2022), 495.

9. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Future of Africa in America," in W. E. B. Du Bois, *Against Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, Addresses, 1887–1961*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 183.

10. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 15.

11. On Du Bois's wrestling with the dis/analogies between anti-Semitism and anti-Black racism and his difficulties in theorizing forms of racism (and racial capitalism) that couldn't be tracked along the color line, see Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford University Press, 2009); Benjamin Ratskoff, "Du Bois Before Warsaw, Fascism Before Racism," January 30, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJ0LkykJMVo>. The problem of racism within rather than across color lines also marks Du Bois's apologetic position vis-à-vis Japanese imperialism (or as some Japanese Marxists termed it, "emperor-fascism"), which he problematically characterized as follows: "[Japan] has used the same methods that white Europe has used, military power and commercial exploitation. And yet in all her action there has been this vast difference: her program cannot be one based on race hate for the conquered, since racially these latter are one with the Japanese and are recognized as blood relatives" (Du Bois, "Inter-Racial Implications," 88–89). As Getachew and Pitts compellingly observe, "the color line now cognized as a structure of global white supremacy provided few conceptual resources to think through racialization and imperial formation that exceeded its binary framework" (*W. E. B. Du Bois: International Thought*, xxxvii). See also Nahum Dimitri Chandler, "A Persistent Parallax: On the Writings of W. E. Burghardt Du Bois on Japan and China, 1936–1937," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 12, no. 1 (2012): 291–316.

12. Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: Christmas, 1936," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, December 26, 1936. In his next column, Du Bois reports a private conversation with a German friend about the waning of the profit motive and the consolidation of state socialism in Germany: "Then I said: 'Granted that Germany and Russia are the two greatest Socialistic states of the Modern World, and are pursuing their attack on private business along essentially the same lines, why is there this bitter and continuous attack of Germany on Russia and things Russian?' 'I have wondered,' I continued, 'if all this talk is a smoke-screen to hide the reason for re-arming Germany. The ostensible reason being Bolshevism, the real reason, colonies'" (Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: What Germans Think," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, January 2, 1937). See also Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: The Hitler State," for further observations on Nazi economic policy as key, alongside propaganda, to the mass consent the regime enjoyed in the mid-1930s. I am grateful to Ben Ratskoff for helping me to source these newspaper columns. For further analysis of these texts, see Ratskoff, "Du Bois Before Warsaw"; Werner Sollors, "W. E. B. Du Bois in Nazi Germany, 1936," *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 44, no. 2 (1999): 207–22.

13. On the nexus of dictatorship, democracy, and education in Du Bois, see Paul Heideman, "Black Marxism Off the Color Line," in *Marxism and America: New Appraisals*, ed. C. Phelps and R. Vandome (Manchester University Press, 2021). Du Bois's Germany visit in 1936 was undertaken for funded research on the lessons to be drawn from industrial education in Nazi Germany for African American efforts in that domain; see Sollors, "W. E. B. Du Bois in Nazi Germany."

14. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Color and Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 292–93.

15. Du Bois, "Speech by Dr. Du Bois at the All-Russian Peace Congress, Moscow, August, 1949."

16. Robinson, "Fascism and the Response of Black Radical Theorists," 157.

17. Amiri Baraka, "Black Reconstruction: Du Bois & the U.S. Struggle for Democracy & Socialism," *Conjunctions* 29 (1997): 77–79. On the panic of 1873 as setting the conditions for counterrevolution, see W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (The Free Press, 1935), 595–96. Further citations are parenthetical. For an earlier polemical use of "racial fascism" as a feature of US, South African, and Israeli politics in the 1980s, see Amiri Baraka, *If Goetz Goes Free Black People Should Arm Themselves!*, https://unityarchiveproject.org/wp-content/uploads/AB_If-Goetz-Goes-Free.pdf.

18. Bill Mullen, *Un-American: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Century of World Revolution* (Temple University Press, 2015), 20.

19. For an extremely rich historical exploration of the link between slavery, counterrevolution, and the crystallization of an American style of fascism, see Gerald Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1836: Texas Slavery and Jim Crow and the Roots of U.S. Fascism* (International Publishers, 2022).

20. Mullen, *Un-American*, 44.

21. Cedric Robinson, "A Critique of W. E. B. Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction*," *The Black Scholar* 8, no. 7 (1977): 45.

22. Noel Ignatiev, "Fascism: Some Common Misconceptions," *Urgent Tasks* 4 (Summer 1978), <http://www.sojournertruth.net/commonmisconceptions.html>.

23. Getachew and Pitts, *W. E. B. Du Bois: International Thought*, li.

24. This argument prolongs the thesis crystallized before the rise of fascism in Du Bois's landmark 1915 essay on "The African Roots of War." See my "'America's Belgium': W. E. B. Du Bois on Class, Race, and the Origins of World War 1," in *Cataclysm 1914: The First World War and the Making of Modern World Politics*, ed. Alexander Anievas (Brill, 2015).

25. Interview with Michael Denning, *The Dig*, January 14, 2023, <https://thedigradio.com/podcast/gramsci-hegemony-w-michael-denning>.

26. The notion of the Jim Crow South as a proto-fascist enclave was recently invoked by Eric Foner in a review of Margaret Burnham's *By Hands Now Known*, though his formulation leaves unaddressed the dynamics of class and capital permitting the "one country, two systems" reactionary resolution to Reconstruction, which are at the center of Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*: "It is unclear how best to describe the United States in the Jim Crow era, when a quasi-fascist polity was embedded within a putative democracy. Some scholars, drawing on the example of South Africa in the time of apartheid, use the term 'Herrenvolk democracy' to describe a situation in which parts of the population enjoy full democratic rights while others are entirely excluded. The political philosopher Jean L. Cohen calls these systems 'hybrid regimes,' while pointing out that the undemocratic enclave can exercise a significant degree of power at the national level and can accustom the larger system to authoritarian practices." See "A Regional Reign of Terror," *The New York Review of Books*, April 6, 2023, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2023/04/06/a-regional-reign-of-terror-jim-crow-by-hands-now-known>.

27. See Tyler E. Stovall, *White Freedom: The Racial History of an Idea* (Princeton University Press, 2021); Jefferson Cowie, *Freedom's Dominion* (Hachette, 2022).

28. Many Marxist and radical contemporaries of Du Bois's would identify this consolidation of the power of Big Business as the core feature of an embryonic American fascism. See Michael Joseph Roberto, *The Coming of the American Behemoth* (Monthly Review Press, 2018).

29. Du Bois was drawing here on Will Herberg's pamphlet *The Heritage of the Civil War*. Du Bois corresponded with Herberg on the Marxist interpretation of slavery and emancipation while preparing *Black Reconstruction*.

30. Du Bois does not really explore the gendered character of racial terror during and after the counterrevolution against radical Reconstruction, including the wielding of rape as a form of counterinsurgency against Black women, as well as the fabricated ideological pretext for terroristic violence against Black men. See Alys Eve Weinbaum, *The Afterlives of Reproductive Slavery* (Duke University Press, 2019), which builds on the pioneering work of Angela Davis, who argues that "after the betrayal of Reconstruction and the accompanying disfranchisement of Black people, the specter of Black political supremacy as a pretext for lynching became outmoded. Still, as the postwar economic structure took shape, solidifying the superexploitation of Black labor, the number of lynchings continued to rise. This was the historical juncture when the cry of rape emerged as the major justification for lynching." See Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (Vintage, 1983), 186.

Abolition Democracy in and out of Philadelphia

Jasmine Noelle Yarish

ENLISTING SECRETARIES, ADMINISTRATORS, AND CHURCH members alongside enrolled students at Atlanta University, W. E. B. Du Bois built a social science lab dedicated to toppling nonscientific beliefs about racial hierarchy.¹ In doing so, he established a political vision for the world over and against social deadlock and reactionary politics. Sixty years after his death, insurgent scholars organized the first cohort of the W. E. B. Du Bois Movement School for Abolition & Reconstruction. According to *Teen Vogue*, the Abolition School is “a political education program based in Philadelphia, PA, for aspiring revolutionaries and movement leaders from those communities most impacted by poverty, policing, and mass incarceration.”² Given its significance in Du Bois’s intellectual horizon, this chapter focuses on Philadelphia by bringing together two often-separated texts—*The Philadelphia Negro* (1899, hereafter *TPN*) and *Black Reconstruction* (1935, hereafter *BR*)—to provide a spatialized reading to his conception of abolition democracy.

While *TPN* is read as a core text in sociology,³ *BR* has been overlooked by many social scientists, supposedly because it has been canonical in the discipline of history.⁴ My intention, as I read them in concert, is not to simply rehash the importance of Du Bois’s scholarship on and emanating from the Reconstruction era. I acknowledge, along with those political theorists who precede and accompany me, that Du Bois literally wrote the book, if not an entire library, dedicated to “rethinking Reconstruction.”⁵ Rather, I ask the following questions. What role, if any, does Reconstruction play in orienting politics today? How does Du Bois’s understanding of the historical placement, epistemological weight, and methodological paradox posed by that era provide us with a more capacious understanding of democracy? And why is it imperative for us to read *BR* in conjunction with *TPN*, especially now?

By exploring the intellectual agency of Black people for the project of Reconstruction, Du Bois theorized the relationship between abolition and democracy beyond the confines of mere emancipation. Furthermore, as a self-proclaimed scientist of politics, his combined insights across *BR* and *TPN* implore us to move our collective analysis away from a fixation on mere individual behavior, the elite halls of government, and perhaps even a latent politics of respectability. Though this last item was a challenge for Du Bois himself, exploring the urban archive of Reconstruction above the Mason Dixon line may offer strategies for us to meet the current socio-political demands marked by burgeoning fascism and extreme economic inequality.

ABOLITION DEMOCRACY: BETWEEN *BR* AND *TPN*

As indicated in the title of *BR*, Du Bois extends the years typically associated with the era (1865–1877) to before the start of the Civil War and through the first decade of the Gilded Age. His analysis centers the political praxis of the formerly enslaved and their comrades “who hated slavery with perfect hatred; who wanted no union with slaveholders; who fought for freedom and treated Negroes as men.”⁶ He coins the term “abolition democracy” as an antidote to racial capitalism.⁷ Racial capitalism is not a specific iteration of capitalism like mercantilism, industrialism, consumerism, or even communicative capitalism.⁸ Rather, according to Cedric J. Robinson, it is the root form of all capital regimes.⁹ Connecting the convergences of economic and political struggles throughout the United States to global trends, Du Bois exposes that the formal abolition of slavery was not enough to achieve collective liberation. Rather, as Angela Davis puts it, he “argues that a host of democratic institutions are needed to fully achieve abolition.”¹⁰ Furthermore, those institutions are not limited to one country, nor are they explicitly guaranteed by the modern political organism known as the nation-state. Du Bois’s attention to political economy pushes both him and scholars attentive to his thinking toward considering what abolition democracy might mean globally and beyond border and settler logics.¹¹

For Du Bois, achieving collective liberation, for all people but explicitly for the formerly enslaved, requires a reorganization of political influence: “Abolition-democracy was pushed towards the conception of a dictatorship of labor, although few of its advocates wholly grasped the fact that this necessarily involved dictatorship by labor over capital and industry” (185).

Here Du Bois notices how the philosophy of abolition, based in a conception of freedom as movement, comes up against a classic paradox in democratic theory. Elsewhere he writes:

In all ages, the vast majority of men have been ignorant and poor, and any attempt to arm such classes with political power brings the question: Can Ignorance and Poverty rule? If they try to rule their success in the nature of things must be halting and spasmodic, if not absolutely nil; and it must incur the criticism and raillery of the wise and the well-to-do. On the other hand, if the poor, unlettered toilers are given no political power, and are kept by exploitation in poverty, they will remain submerged unless rescued by revolution; and a philosophy will prevail, teaching that the submergence of the mass is inevitable and is on the whole best, not only for them, but for the ruling classes (206).

To provide a summary across these quotations, abolition democracy refers to a recreation of the political structure so that the collective experience of freedom becomes unfettered from the prioritization of profit over subsistence, exchange value over human life, and private gain over public necessity. Democratic subsistence would be achieved by the fulfillment of the three top demands those formerly enslaved strove for in the immediate aftermath of emancipation—land, political rights, and schools. Each aimed at the elimination—abolition—of the categories of ignorance and poverty for the realization of democratic participation. Put differently, mere inclusion of Black people into the ranks of wage labor as dictated by the capitalist drive for wealth over human life would leave the democratic promise of abolition unfulfilled.

In *TPN*, the Reconstruction era of the mid-nineteenth century emerges neither as a focal point in the historical overview of Black Philadelphia nor for the assessment of the data Du Bois collected throughout the Seventh Ward in the final years of the nineteenth century. The two decades selected as the era's bookends in *BR* (1860–1880) bridge two historical categories of Black agency in the city: “The Guild of the Caterers, 1840–1870”¹² and “The Influx of the Freedmen, 1870–1896.”¹³ Du Bois's dedication to an empirical method may have influenced his decision to resist the sweeping descriptive temporalization as a marker of “the armchair conjectures and flashes of intuition customary at the time.”¹⁴ This is a sentiment he associated with the Dunning School, as outlined in his presentation at the 1909 meeting of the American Historical Association, an argument that would then be rewritten as the final chapter of *BR*—“The Propaganda of History.”¹⁵

Despite the analysis of *TPN* predating his conception of abolition democracy in *BR*, comparing the effects of sub-national legislation that went into effect during Philadelphia's antebellum era may be illustrative. Historian Tera W. Hunter observes the intense migration to cities throughout the South following the Civil War as follows: "Freedom meant the reestablishment of lost family connections, the achievement of literacy, the exercise of political rights, and the security of a decent livelihood without the sacrifice of human dignity or self-determination. Ex-slave women migrated to Atlanta, where they hoped they would have a better chance of fulfilling these expectations. They were faced with many challenges; uppermost among them were the white residents who were resentful of the abolition of slavery and persisted in thwarting the realization of the true meaning of freedom."¹⁶

In the section entitled "Fugitives and Foreigners 1820–1840," Du Bois makes a similar observation regarding the obstacles Black people faced during those important decades which saw the first generation of emancipated slaves resulting from the Pennsylvania Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery (1780) as they moved throughout the Commonwealth:

If . . . the new freedmen had been given peace and quiet and abundant work to develop sensible and aspiring leaders, the end would have been different; but a mass of poverty-stricken, ignorant fugitives and ill-trained freedmen had rushed to the city, swarmed in the vile slums which the rapidly growing city furnished, and met in social and economic competition equally ignorant but more vigorous foreigners. These foreigners outbid them at work, beat them on the streets, and were enabled to do this by the prejudice which Negro crime and anti-slavery sentiment had aroused in the city.¹⁷

In both these quotations, we find that anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence was the norm in American cities across the border, both between and within the South and North, after moments of emancipation.

In post-Civil War Philadelphia, two more examples of targeted anti-Black violence and their very urban setting are worth noting. In an extended footnote to *TPN*, Du Bois recounts the history of Reconstruction leader Octavius Catto being shot and killed on Election Day in 1871 on South Street, which was populated by streetcars.¹⁸ Briefly mentioned in that same text, Black Philadelphians experienced and fought back against discrimination accessing public transportation, an emerging democratic institution as cities expanded.¹⁹ In the decades preceding Catto's murder, Black women like Caroline LeCount and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper experienced

violence as they attempted to and ultimately did desegregate the city's streetcars.²⁰ While white coagulators like Senator Charles Sumner fought and passed laws ending streetcar segregation in the nation's capital during the 1860s,²¹ violence fatally targeting Black bodies on or in proximity to public transit continues to this day, enacted by vigilantes and state actors alike. Under neoliberal logics, such violence is typically weaponized for the perpetual underfunding of systems like the Philadelphia region's SEPTA.²²

At the end of the historical overview from the first arrival of Blacks to the region that would become Philadelphia in 1638 to the year in which he began to walk the streets of the Seventh Ward (1896), Du Bois asks his readers to keep in mind four characteristics that serve as context for the data he presents: "(1) The growth of Philadelphia; (2) the increase of the foreign population in the city; (3) the development of the large industry and increase of wealth, and (4) the coming in of the Southern Freedmen's sons and daughters."²³ The rush of peoples into the city was a result of two simultaneous phenomena: the immigration that exploded from ever more overpopulating European cities and the movement of internal migrants of all racial backgrounds from rural spaces to urban sites. Many were in search of jobs promised by the American Dream (what Du Bois refers to as the "American Assumption" in *BR*) and spurned by the arrival of the Industrial Revolution to the shores of the "new world." All the while, a racial binary that still underpins the dual American welfare state extended from policies forged during, and against, Reconstruction.²⁴ Combining a reading of Du Bois's assessment of Reconstruction's foreclosure in *BR* and the tensions met by urban residents highlighted in *TPN*, the shifting economic landscape as the United States moved from mercantilism to industrialization during and alongside the formal abolition of slavery comes into focus.

So why have so few people read these texts together? Some insight can be found in philosopher Charles Lemert's comment that *BR* "thinks race through in more enduringly substantial ways than does the famous essay at the beginning of *Souls*, which is oddly indefinite on the nature and upbeat on the prospects of the doubly conscious American Negro. In addition, *Black Reconstruction's* evidence is global (hence, relatively timeless), whereas *Philadelphia Negro's* is local (hence, considerably time bound)."²⁵

Building on renewed interest in *TPN* and paying attention to the text's key spatial element, I push back on Lemert's evaluation of this piece of scholarship from Du Bois's earlier years as "time bound."²⁶ By putting the city in conversation with his theory of abolition democracy, we can see his

timeless assessment of what democracy means when theorized from the embodied differences by which primitive accumulation recurs. Put simply, a philosophical understanding of abolition as an anticapitalist dialectic underscores Du Bois's theory of democracy, which means his attention to the material conditions facing newly freed Black peoples is always two-fold—global and local. Democracy, for Du Bois, is global in the sense that the economic conditions that mapped onto racial anxieties and led to the foreclosure of Reconstruction were exacerbated by wholesale changes in the chains of capitalism: labor (i.e., industrialization), land use (i.e., urbanization), and energy production and consumption (i.e., fossil fuels). Democracy is also local for Du Bois in the sense that the effects of those changes came to inform the everyday realities of ordinary people, from decreased wages due to a growing supply of labor (i.e., emancipation of slaves) and the rising costs of food, fuel, and housing (i.e., enclosure). These are not trivial concerns to democratic thought and praxis. In his centering of the concept of fugitivity, in a similar vein to Du Bois, Sheldon Wolin writes, "Individuals who concert their powers for low income housing, worker ownership of factories, better schools, better health care, safer water, controls over toxic waste disposals, and a thousand other common concerns of ordinary lives are experiencing a democratic moment and contributing to the discovery, care, and tending of a commonality of shared concerns."²⁷ Put differently, the lack of material subsistence has detrimental effects on how ordinary people participate in the decision-making process inherent to democratic politics.

RADICAL RECONSTRUCTION AND PHILADELPHIA: THE PRODUCTION, NOT A REHEARSAL

By depicting the Reconstruction era as the US "dark ages," the godfather of the Dunning School, political scientist John C. Burgess, helped to legitimate segregation, justify the police violence targeting Black bodies to enforce Jim and Jane Crow, and render invisible the widespread practice of lynching.²⁸ Informing the dominant scholarly and cultural depictions of the era well into the 1930s, the Dunning School emphasized "the harm done to the South by Radical Reconstruction."²⁹ For them, the national requirement was merely a need for reconciliation between the previously warring regions with the stipulation that peace would only be achieved when both sides agreed to the racial superiority of whites.³⁰ Hence, the "radical" element to be eliminated

was racial equality. Du Bois likens the foreclosure of the revolutionary period of Reconstruction to a “murdered democracy” (187); however, his own failure to name women, particularly Black women, for their intellectual and material contributions to the project of abolition democracy does not help to resurrect the struggle for racial equality and collective liberation. By tracing four different institutions recognized across both *BR* and *TPN*, this section provides a brief overview of the social impact of Black women extending out of nineteenth-century Philadelphia. Those institutions are the US Colored Troops (USCT), the Institute for Colored Youth (ICY), the Women’s Aid Association of Philadelphia (WAAP), and the Home for the Aged and Infirm Colored People (HAICP).

Active from late May 1863 through October 1865, the USCT were regiments of the Union army composed largely of Black male soldiers. Essential to the North’s victory, their establishment sought to settle the debate regarding what to do with enslaved Blacks who engaged in fugitivity during the height of the Civil War—what Du Bois calls “the General Strike” (55). The first training grounds dedicated to these troops, christened Camp William Penn, were established just north of Philadelphia in Montgomery County on land owned by James and Lucretia Mott.³¹ Du Bois mentions the camp in both texts when discussing the process of emancipation being tied to former slaves being armed (97) and as part of the history of “the Negro in Philadelphia.”³² Though briefly mentioned in *BR* (12, 712), Harriet Tubman’s service to the USCT and her own military leadership up the Combahee River to aid the emancipation of more than seven hundred enslaved people do not figure into Du Bois’s analysis.³³ Earlier, after gaining freedom through Philadelphia, she resided in the city for almost a decade, returning to the South at least fifteen times between 1851 and 1860 to personally rescue more than two hundred enslaved persons. Nowhere is this mentioned in *TPN*. Many she aided came into William Still’s care; in Du Bois’s historical account of the city, Still is named as having “aided the abolitionist cause to no little degree.”³⁴

The second institution, ICY, is related to the demand for education by the formerly enslaved after the peculiar institution’s legal dismantlement. Established in 1837 by Quakers, ICY was a private school run by Black pedagogues with a mission of providing “the instruction of the next generation of black teachers.”³⁵ Du Bois makes note of this institution in the *BR* chapter dedicated to “Founding the Public School” (637, 649), naming this accomplishment as the most successful of the Reconstruction efforts. Here, the contributions made by Black women do not go entirely unnoticed. Du

Bois acknowledges that a mulatto woman, Mrs. Mary Peake, established the first day school in the South for all children regardless of race (642). Since ICY would become Cheyney University in 1902, relocating the school outside of the city,³⁶ he lists it among “the chief Negro institutions” in *TPN*.³⁷ Unnamed in either text, however, are the many trailblazing women who either trained at ICY and traveled to the South to establish these public schools—like Frances Rollin Whipper³⁸—or served as leaders of the school itself, such as Fanny Jackson Coppin.³⁹

With its mission to raise funds, supply teachers, and send nurses and health workers to various parts of the South during and beyond the war, Du Bois lists WAAP among the precursors to the official establishment of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (“the Freedmen’s Bureau”) (78). This outpouring of support became known as the freedmen’s aid movement, which historian Carol Faulkner notes “began in November 1861, when the Union army took control of the Sea Islands and the area around Beaufort, South Carolina.”⁴⁰ Many involved in WAAP were active members of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFASS). From 1833 to 1870, PFASS provided funding for Black schools, raised money for the Vigilante Committee overseen by Still, petitioned Congress, organized abolitionist conventions, campaigned against the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and discrimination on street and railway cars, and assisted formerly enslaved freedpeoples as they migrated to and through the city. Almost a dozen of the founding members counted themselves among the ranks of the city’s free Black elite, including Grace Bustill Douglass (1782–1842), Harriet Forten Purvis (1810–75), and Charlotte Vandine Forten (1785–1884).⁴¹ Their family names, and subsequently their husbands, fathers, and brothers, feature prominently in *TPN*, but the women’s efforts or their societies do not muster a mention.

Along with ICY, Du Bois lists a corollary institution to WAAP among “the chief Negro institutions in the city”—HAICP. With astounding detail he writes: “The Home for the Aged, situated at the corner of Girard and Belmont avenues, was founded by a Negro lumber merchant, Steven Smith, and is conducted by whites and Negroes. . . . It has sheltered 558 old people since its foundation in 1864.”⁴² Even though HAICP is not named in *BR*, Du Bois notes that in response to the General Strike such homes were established under the supervision of the Freedmen’s Bureau and with financial support from similar aid associations (79). Black women, including Coppin, not only sat on the board of HAICP; they also helped to popularize these homes.

In the bibliography to *TPN*, Du Bois includes various poems by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper but makes no reference to the one she dedicated to HAICP's twenty-fifth anniversary.⁴³ Perhaps the most famous Black female speaker advocating for antislavery and featured on the postwar circuit touting the accomplishments of the Freedmen's Bureau,⁴⁴ Harper's name fails to grace the pages of *BR*.

A deeper analysis of these women's intellectual contributions provides us with an alternative trajectory deconstructing the power relations associated with US investment in the home as a site of private refuge for men and a space of perpetual labor for women.⁴⁵ The institutions that Du Bois documents can also be understood as queer projects of democratization.⁴⁶ In order to contain the gender-breaking boundaries associated with these institutions, Black women were pressured to adapt to the nuclear family, the Victorian politics of respectability, and the figuration of their bodies in the marketing of domestic service emphasized by emergent print media. The politics of respectability "equated public behavior with individual self-respect and with the advancement of African Americans as a group."⁴⁷ As a strategy adopted mainly by middle-class Blacks to deflect individual and state violence, it works through a two-tiered logic. First, it attempts to evade sexual stereotypes of Black women as promiscuous by rewarding those who embody asexual lives or conform to hetero-patriarchal marital desire. The call for sexual repression works to cover over the long history of white men's rape of Black female slaves,⁴⁸ while at the same time, it ends up reducing sexual propriety to racial uplift, protecting certain Black women at the expense of others, including sometimes the latter's public shunning.⁴⁹ Second, the politics of respectability narrowly defines feminine behavior as domesticity. Effectively, Black women's contributions to social and political movements are seen as secondary or merely supportive, leaving them out of the cadre of political and intellectual leadership.⁵⁰

It is particularly this second charge that appears to hold sway over Du Bois's theory of Black agency, and by extension abolition democracy. Whether in the figure of the nurse to Union soldiers⁵¹ or schoolmarm to the poor children of the South, he gives relatively no acknowledgment of how Black women attempted to influence, and at times directly challenge, the rising Victorian morality that greatly influenced the agents and policies of the Freedmen's Bureau.⁵² By limiting his assessment to women's involvement in the reproductive labor necessary for the Reconstruction efforts such as food preparation, nursing, and teaching, Du Bois indirectly reinforces

the gendered roles overtly described by a politics of respectability. Last, the singular Black woman named in *TPN* is Sarah Mapps Douglass. Not only does she appear as an afterthought, but she is also misgendered.⁵³ Naming Douglass as a man among prominent others who Du Bois notes “had much influence,” reinforces an oversimplification of the gendered implications of anti-Black violence and promotes a reliance on Victorian decorum to circumvent it.

Postbellum Philadelphia, like antebellum Philadelphia, appears to be more than “a northern version of what historian Willie Lee Rose called ‘a rehearsal for Reconstruction.’”⁵⁴ Put simply, abolitionist agitators laid foundations for institutions defying the drive of racial capitalism in the city of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection, which were later replicated throughout the South under the auspices of the Freedmen’s Bureau. As the nation’s “first city”⁵⁵ and host of the Centennial Exhibition in 1876,⁵⁶ it was also a prime site for the emergence of the counterrevolution to Reconstruction both physically and discursively. Before concluding, I turn to an example of anti-Reconstruction propaganda circulated in Philadelphia three decades before Du Bois’s arrival to the city as a discursive template for both the invisibility of Black women’s social impact during the nineteenth century and the politics of white resentment on full display in the US political landscape of the twenty-first century.

ANTI-URBANISM AND RECONSTRUCTION’S FORECLOSURE: A CASE FOR INTERSECTIONAL ABOLITIONISM

A political advertisement for the 1866 Pennsylvania gubernatorial election features an oversized and lounging Black male with minstrel caricatures surrounded by bolded budgetary figures and luxury goods as congressional “appropriations.”⁵⁷ Its headline reads, “The Freedmen’s Bureau! An Agency to keep the Negro in Idleness at the Expense of the White Man.” The work of Reconstruction is thus depicted as being shouldered by white men who perform hard work and family responsibility in two smaller scenes that descend into the background. The overarching message is clearly racial but also gendered and spatial.

In the top left, a white woman and child occupy a yeoman-like scene, looking on from the farmhouse yard as the husband/father plows the fields. Below them another vignette reinforces a racially exclusive rural masculinity as a

larger white male in front of a fence chops wood. He labors to maintain the border between a rural life appearing behind the fence and the encroaching “expenditures” of the Capitol, which exists in a distinctly urban space set at a distance. Since the Black male figure is seen gazing longingly at the Capitol, one can infer him dreaming of, if not already residing within, the city.

Attaching whiteness to rurality and Blackness to urbanity, the anti-Reconstruction messaging depicted here resonates in the images of the attempted insurrection in Washington, DC, on January 6, 2020, and with what political scientist Cristina Beltrán calls “multicultural whiteness.”⁵⁸ Whiteness informed by white supremacy is not a catch-all term referring to white people writ large, which is why people who are not white can aspire to it and people who want to divest from whiteness can oppose it. Of course, white supremacy is an intersectional project, which is apparent from the references to sexuality, particularly race-mixing, in this anti-Reconstruction advert. The phrase “white women” appears alongside other luxuries like sugar in the columns of the Capitol directly above the groin of the reclining Black male figure. This alignment makes him a representative embodiment of the sexually aggressive “Zip Coon” that provided rhetorical cover for the demographic consequences of sexual exploitation of Black women under enslavement as well as propaganda to justify lynching violence perpetrated against the fictive Black male rapist.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the presence of white women but absence of Black women gestures toward the institutionalization of a racialized national body politics. As Saidiya V. Hartman puts it, “The body was pivotal in representing the transformation of the nation-state and citizenship instituted by the Civil War and Reconstruction and manifested the fears of defilement by the civil equality of Blacks.”⁶⁰ Though the Black male figure is presented as the sexual threat of “defilement,” and in his very depiction that “defilement” is represented as present, the miscegenation practices that would lead to an amalgamated US demographics which were largely the outcome of white men’s sexual domination of Black women under slavery are displaced from the advert. Of course, white women are present in the image, but they are only represented in association with a patriarchal construction of home and nation in which the white male is figured as protector of both. We are reminded that at the moment of Reconstruction white “women are both of and not of the nation,” whereas Black women in their absence are cast as neither.⁶¹ While Du Bois’s attention to gender and sexuality, especially in *TPN*, has received critical attention,⁶² his insistence on Reconstruction as

a flashpoint for the consolidation of whiteness provides foundations for the intersectional analysis of affixing anti-urbanism to anti-Blackness.

. . .

While Du Bois was editing the manuscript of *BR*, whiteness would align with an alternative political ideology that saw democratic projects as effeminate and weak. In Italy, Germany, and Spain, the traditional political ideologies failed to capture the populist anxieties concerning global migration and economic insecurity accompanying yet another shift in global capitalism, this time from industrialism to consumerism. A rise of bothsidesing accompanied articulations of disenchantment with liberalism and conservatism, resulting in ordinary people failing to recognize the difference between having a racial identity and aligning with whiteness. As a result, fascism took hold. As recent US events from Charlottesville to January 6 and the rhetoric of “both sides” employed by politicians and scholars of politics alike make clear,⁶³ returning to the first Reconstruction and Du Bois’s analysis offers another alternative.

Blacks were heavily surveilled in, and at times outright denied entry to, public and thus political life after emancipation. Though the political interests of the white poor aligned with the formerly enslaved and thus against industrial capitalists, property/land/resource speculators, and (racist) political representatives, they ended up aligning with the white elite who populated those segments of society. What they received through their political allegiance along racial lines was whiteness, which they engaged twofold: poor whites retained freedom of movement over and above Black bodies and the freedom to enact verbal, emotional, and even physical violence on those bodies. This is what Du Bois refers to as a “public and psychological wage” (700). Reconstruction’s foreclosure was made possible by a cross-class alliance among whites in which the poor tacitly accepted capitalist exploitation aimed at all lower classes, including themselves, but which would be written directly on the bodies of, and thus felt most intimately by, people of color.

In Du Bois’s attention to the agency of Black people and their comrades during the original Reconstruction era, abolitionism appears as an alternative political horizon beyond the more traditional ideas of liberalism, conservatism, and anarchism that does not require a tradeoff between the three pillars of any democratic project—freedom, equality, and solidarity. Rather, abolitionism is always already a pro-democratic idea. As such it has the best

potential to push back against growing anti-democratic, but correspondingly populist, alternative political projects. However, the gentle criticism of Du Bois offered above suggests that this comes with a warning. Confining women's and especially Black women's contributions to abolition democracy to the kitchen shores up the gendered logics of fascism.

NOTES

1. Atlanta University, established in 1865, merged with Clark College (1869) in 1988. To date, it is the only HBCU other than Howard to grant PhDs in political science. For more information about the roles HBCUs play in the professional development of political scientists, particularly Black political scientists, see Adolphus G. Belk, Robert C. Smith, and Sherri L. Wallace, "Having Their Say, Leaving Their Mark: The Lasting Contributions of NCOBPS and Black Political Scientists to the Political Science Discipline," *National Review of Black Politics* 1, no. 1 (2020): 141–53.

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3. Aldon Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* (University of California Press, 2015).

4. Adolph L. Reed Jr., *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 49.

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6. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860–1880* (Free Press, 1998 [1935]), 83. Further citations are parenthetical.

7. Anthony Obst, "'Revolution of Thought and Action': W. E. B. Du Bois's World Search for Abolition Democracy," *Lateral* 11, no. 2 (2022).

8. Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (Duke University Press, 2009).

9. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 2.

10. Angela Y. Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture* (Seven Stories Press, 2005), 96.
11. George Lipsitz, "Abolition Democracy and Global Justice," *Comparative American Studies* 2, no. 3 (2004): 271–86; Dylan Rodríguez, *White Reconstruction: Domestic Warfare and the Logics of Genocide* (Fordham University Press, 2020); Gerald Horne, "W. E. B. Du Bois's Abolition Democracy," *The Nation*, May 3, 2022, <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/web-du-bois-black-reconstruction>.
12. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (Cosimo, 2007), 32–39.
13. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, 39–45.
14. Morris, *The Scholar Denied*, 47.
15. Paula D. McClain et al., "Race, Power, and Knowledge: Tracing the Roots of Exclusion in the Development of Political Science in the United States," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 4, no. 3 (2016): 475.
16. Tera W. Hunter, *To 'joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Harvard University Press, 1997), 43.
17. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, 30–31.
18. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, 39–42.
19. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, 326.
20. Jasmine Noelle Yarish, "#IfIDieInPoliceCustody: Neo-Abolitionism, New Social Media, and Queering the Politics of Respectability," *National Political Science Review* 19, no. 2 (2018): 50–67.
21. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 562.
22. Andrea B. Korb, "SEPTA, Philadelphia, and Transportation Equity in America Note," *Georgetown Journal of Law & Modern Critical Race Perspectives* 3, no. 1 (2011): 119–41; Menika Belicia Dirkson, "Hope and Struggle in the Policed Inner-City: Black Criminalization and Racial Capitalism in Philadelphia, 1914–1978" (PhD diss., Temple University, 2021); Daniel C. Vock, "On the Edge of a Fiscal Cliff: Transit Agencies Seek Solutions Post-COVID," *Planning Magazine*, September 14, 2023, <https://www.planning.org/planning/2023/summer/on-the-edge-of-a-fiscal-cliff-transit-agencies-seek-solutions-post-covid>.
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24. Linda Faye Williams, *Constraint of Race* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).
25. Charles Lemert, "The Race of Time: Du Bois and Reconstruction," *Boundary* 2 27, no. 3 (2000): 222.
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PART III

*Global Imperialism
and the Dark Proletariat*

Black Reconstruction in Palestine/Israel

ON THE WAGES OF JEWISHNESS

Zahi Zalloua

IN *BLACK RECONSTRUCTION*, W. E. B. DU BOIS introduced the powerful notion of the wage of whiteness, the “public and psychological wage” afforded to the white working class.¹ This wage was detrimental to the efforts of the Left insofar as the enjoyment of whiteness sowed division from within, alienated white workers’ Black comrades, and helped to derail the proletarian revolution in the United States. Drawing on Du Bois’s work, David R. Roediger comments on the ways “the pleasures of whiteness could function as a ‘wage’ for white workers. That is, status and privileges conferred by race could be used to make up for the alienating and exploitative class relationships, North and South. White workers could, and did, define and accept their class positions by fashioning identities as ‘not slaves’ and as ‘not Blacks.’”² In the same vein, Robin D. G. Kelley notes, “A sense of superiority and security was gained by being white and *not* being black. White workers sometimes obtained very real material benefits by institutionalizing their strength through white-controlled unions that used their power to enforce a ceiling on black mobility and wages. The limited privileges afforded white workers as white meant a subordinate status for African American workers. Hence even the division of labor was racialized—black workers had to perform ‘nigger work.’ And without the existence of ‘nigger work’ and ‘nigger labor,’ whiteness to white workers would be meaningless.”³ Anti-Blackness guarantees white labor’s desirable difference, its more *human* labor.

This essay turns to *Black Reconstruction* to elucidate the ways in which the economic and libidinal force of such a wage is equally at work in Palestine/Israel, where, I argue, the Zionist project of settler colonialism (with its blatant anti-Palestinianness) relies on the wage of Jewishness in a way analogous to the dynamics Du Bois analyzed. Du Bois himself didn’t adopt such a

critical position toward Zionism, at least not initially. In “The Ethics of the Problem of Palestine,” published in 1948, Du Bois expressed his unabashed support for Zionism, problematically repeating its distorted and distorting tropes: “Palestine is a land largely of plateaus, mountains, and deserts sparsely inhabited, and could easily maintain millions more people than the two million it has today. Among the Arabs there is widespread ignorance, poverty, and disease and a fanatic belief in the Mohammedan religion, which makes these people suspicious of other peoples and other religions. Their rulership is a family and clan despotism which makes effective use of democratic methods difficult.”⁴ Du Bois accepted wholesale Zionism’s Orientalist vision of Palestine and its inhabitants. And Du Bois wasn’t alone. Many Black intellectuals saw common cause with Zionism: A movement of liberation for the historically marginalized looked quite appealing.⁵ However, Du Bois became more critical of Israel as he came to recognize its colonial ambitions and affinities with Western imperialism.⁶

In the hands of Zionists, Jewishness came to function as whiteness did in America, as a source of racial division and racist oppression. As with the wage of whiteness, the wage of Jewishness is entangled in both political and libidinal economies; it induces attachment to the nation state and its capitalistic operations, while rewarding all Jews psychically. On the one hand, the wage functions as an economic encouragement, offering Jews at home and abroad the advantage of being Jewish in (Greater) Israel. Indeed, economic well-being and nationalist attachment go hand in hand. In the disenfranchised Palestinian worker, the Israeli working class does not find a comrade, an ally in collective upheaval against the capitalist order, but a foe, a fundamental threat to Israel, that is, to the state-sanctioned settler’s expropriation of Indigenous land and usurpation of its resources. In this sense, the exploitation of Palestinians is accomplished “equally” by “Israeli capitalists” and the “Israeli proletariat.”⁷

On the other hand, the wage of Jewishness helps to buttress a feeling of communal belonging, of Jewish unity and solidarity, papering over Zionism’s own racial ranking of its Jewish population, where Ashkenazi or European-descended Jews enjoy the full privileges of Jewishness because of their affiliation to a whiteness upheld as superior since the early Zionist leaders, themselves Ashkenazi, forged their image of Israel in a European settler-colonial mold. Anchoring the wage of Jewishness in broader and shared racial settler-colonial structures stresses “the public quality of the wage”⁸ and mitigates against an individualist account of the pleasure and rewards

of whiteness/Jewishness. If that whiteness was always in doubt in Europe (manifested in the curtailing and denial of European Jews' human and civil rights), Ashkenazi Zionists tirelessly worked to secure the whiteness of Jews by casting Israel as, in the chauvinist words of former prime minister Ehud Barak, a "vanguard of culture against barbarism . . . a villa in the middle of a jungle," a "protective wall" shielding the West from its primitive neighbors.⁹ Israel's other Jews—Sephardim (descendants of Jews from Spain), Mizrahim (Arab Jews, that is, Jews of Muslim countries, of Middle Eastern or North African origin), and Ethiopians—are subjected to discrimination and neglect, the last crushingly so. But the wage of Jewishness affords any Ashkenazi and non-Ashkenazi Jews in Israel and in the illegal settlements, no matter how economically and ontologically impoverished they are, the libidinal gratification that they have better standing, that they are socially better off than the Palestinians—who stand for pure abjection under Zionism's ideological horizon. All Jews are rewarded with "psychological wages" (ensuring capitalist domination)—and Palestinians punished with "badges of inferiority"¹⁰ (ensuring racial domination). The binding to your Jewish kin necessitates, then, either indifference or hostility toward Israel's racialized Palestinian neighbor: The inferior Palestinian either doesn't matter, or she is my enemy.

Ironically, the wage of Jewishness also operates alongside the fact that a majority of Israeli Jews consider themselves either nonreligious or atheists¹¹ and yet are fully committed to the belief that Israel is and should be both democratic and Jewish. We can discern at work here the psychoanalytic notion of fetishist disavowal, which takes the form of, *I know very well, but all the same*. . . . According to Octave Mannoni, this logic accounts for the paradoxical ways "a belief can be abandoned and preserved at the same time."¹² In Israel's collective fetishist disavowal, as Slavoj Žižek avers, "[Israeli Jews] know very well that God doesn't exist, but [they] none the less believe that he gave [them] the land of Greater Israel."¹³ Or in another formulation, we might say, liberal Zionists know very well about the horrors of Nakba and the ongoing Occupation, but all the same they believe in Israel's unique democracy. The wage of Jewishness nurtures the fetish of Jewish exceptionality—the Chosen People, the possibility of a Jewish *and* democratic state. This exceptionality insistently morphs into Jewish supremacy. Zionism weaponizes "Jewishness," transforming it as a communal value, the basis for inclusion in a self-enclosed nation state (Israel as the nation state of the Jewish People), where the Jew/no-Jew distinction guarantees and secures the economic and libidinal borders of who matters and who does not.

Within the Zionist settler-colonial narrative, of course the Palestinian within and without Israel's borders poses a problem. The Palestinians of 1948 who never left after the partition are citizens of Israel but not nationals. They are separate but *unequal*—at best, treated as third-class citizens; at worst, considered bloodthirsty terrorists. Classified by the Israeli government as Arab Israelis, they are stripped of their Palestinianness yet marked as Arabs, as different from Jews and suspiciously tied to the enemy without. Across the Green Line, the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories represent a constant irritant, deemed disposable, beings-waiting-for-disappearance. In the Zionist collective fantasy, the figure of the Palestinian unifies, in principle, all Jews (in Israel and in the Diaspora) and the very category of Jewishness. Thus, when Palestinians or their supporters question in any way the legitimacy of the state of Israel, they are immediately accused of anti-Semitism, of hatefully attacking Jewishness itself. On the one hand, the wage of Jewishness clearly gains strength from the prophylactic charge of anti-Semitism by immunizing Israel from critique and strengthening the phantasmatic unity of Jews through the logic of Us versus Them. This is an enemy that includes leftist activists and scholars under the dubious heading of “new anti-Semitism”; as Bernard-Henri Levy puts it, “the anti-Semitism will be progressive—or nothing at all.”¹⁴ On the other, the sheer presence of Palestinians in Israel is a demographic scandal to the Jewish nation and its committed believers, risking invalidating the Zionist *terra nullius* narrative and the circulation of the wage of Jewishness.

THE (ANTI-PALESTINIAN) STRUGGLES FOR JEWISHNESS

Under prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's 2022 far-right coalition, with its aggressive agenda for “juridical reform” (or “judicial coup,” as detractors call it), the wage of Jewishness appears to be faltering, undergoing a kind of crisis of authenticity. In response to the government's disruptive overreach, the protests of hundreds of thousands of Israelis are halting the wage's smooth operation. Access to the wage is now framed as a question: Who is a Jew? Put slightly differently, who is perceived to be the proper subject of the wage of Jewishness? Who is supposed to be enjoying their Jewishness—and at whose cost? The Law of Return comes front and center in the legal and political deliberations about *belonging* to the state of Israel. Among the proposed changes are challenges to the “grandchild clause”¹⁵ and to non-Orthodox

conversion to Judaism. Secular Jews in Israel and around the world (especially in Western nations) are deeply concerned about the implications of these changes for Israeli democracy and its so-called Jewish character. And in this sense, it might be more accurate to talk about the wages (in the plural) of Jewishness, along with seemingly competing visions of Israel.

Whether or not the coalition eventually implodes because of its unprecedented local and global objections or succeeds in pressing and passing its judicial agenda, an antagonism in Israel's social fabric has been revealed that is now hard to ignore. Collective fetishist disavowal is still functioning, but taking multiple, divergent directions. For the large block of Mizrahi Jews, a commitment to Netanyahu and his far-right religious and nationalist coalition reflects their values, set in opposition to the more secular and liberal Ashkenazi segment of the population. As Laly Derai—a committed Mizrahi supporter of Likud—put it, “We vote according to our culture, we vote for those who do not underestimate our faith, our tradition, those who do not treat us as lacking understanding not able to decide and choose what is really important to us.”¹⁶

But there is no illusion about Netanyahu's religious credentials.¹⁷ The fact that he is “religiously non-observant” does not factor in Derai's decision.¹⁸ What matters is not his (lack of) obedience to the *halaha* (Jewish law), but his “self-definition.”¹⁹ The religious supporter notices a crucial difference between the way Netanyahu and his “liberal” political opponent Yair Lapid frame Israel's birth, or what the creation of Israel is responding to. In Derai's words, “Yair Lapid, head of the centrist Yesh Atid party, visited Israel's Holocaust memorial when he became prime minister in July. ‘He says that Israel was created because of the Shoah.’ But when Netanyahu is elected, he goes to the Kotel [the Western Wall]; it's a Jewish declaration that fits us. The attachment to our traditions remains very strong across generations.”²⁰ Lapid conforms to a Western narrative about Israel; it is the political horizon of the Shoah that helped bring into being the nation state of Israel. But Netanyahu insists on the biblical narrative that answers the Jewish people's longings, that legitimizes Israel, not the United Nations and Western allies. Israel's existence lies in the realization of a “millennial dream” and not in Western guilt for the Shoah; its creation is not conditional, as it were, on recognition from non-Jews.²¹

Yet there is more to the Mizrahi identification with the Likud party than a shared view of Israel's eschatological calling. Economic and libidinal interests also undergird the aspirational Zionist dream of a Greater Israel. This idea,

which puts the illegal annexation of Palestinian land firmly on the political agenda, is after all what Netanyahu campaigned on, although liberal Zionists dismissed it as rhetorical red meat for his base. While it is tempting to fault Mizrahi Jews, who come from some of Israel's most disenfranchised communities, for acting against their economic interests by not voting for the Left (or even seeing common cause with Palestinians), this common objection, an Israeli version of the "what's the matter with Kansas" question, overlooks the material interests underlying the vision of a Greater Israel. Mizrahi Jews are not voting for the far right despite its economic message but *because* of it. As Tom Mehager notes, "Israel's decades-long policies of discrimination and marginalization of the Mizrahi public by the Israeli Ashkenazi establishment has caused many to find an answer to economic hardship in the nationalist camp."²² The ultrareligious and nationalist coalition forged by Netanyahu directly speaks to the economic concerns of Mizrahi Jews who have a clear material interest in living in an anti-Palestinian world, where Palestinian land is readily open for Jewish possession.

In the case of Mizrahi Jews, the wage of Jewishness breeds not only suspicion and repulsion toward Palestinians but also *ressentiment* for the Ashkenazi Jews—whose vision of liberal democracy enabled them to capitalize on the libidinal and economic value of the(ir) wage of Jewishness/whiteness. If Ashkenazi Jews had unequally enjoyed "the bounty of Palestinian land and resources . . . distributed inside '48 lines," Mizrahi Jews see it as their time to enjoy the spoils of Occupation, that is, the accumulated bounty beyond the Green Line.²³ To adapt Du Bois's formulation, the wage of Jewishness, inflected by Zionist right-wing politics, feeds the vanity of Mizrahi Jews because it associated them with the Ashkenazi subjects, positioning them as equals.²⁴ Access to affordable housing, "backed by government loans and subsidized housing," has now finally been awarded to Mizrahi families.²⁵ For this reason, the Mizrahi support for Netanyahu and right-wing parties must be interpreted, at least in part, as a resentful class vote against the liberal Zionism of the Ashkenazi elite.

Lana Tatour draws attention to the constitutive ambivalence of Mizrahi subjectivity, caught within the racial gaze of Ashkenazi Zionism and a desire to reconfigure Jewishness through a chauvinist reclaiming of muscular Zionism:

Mizrahim are simultaneously both victims and perpetrators of Zionism. They are simultaneously racialised not only as inferior Arabs but also as superior Jews. The latter is no less significant than the former. Mizrahim, therefore,

share a Zionist orientalist epistemology that views Jews as racially superior to Arabs. Zionism is not leveraged as a form of strategic essentialism so to gain access to power. It rather reflects the ways in which Mizrahi struggles have internalised and naturalised Zionism as intrinsic to Mizrahi subjectivity. Mizrahi mobilisation and activism is thus about undermining an Ashkenazi hegemony not a Zionist one. It is a struggle to expand the category of Jewish entitlement to ensure Mizrahi Jews are as privileged as Ashkenazi Jews.²⁶

The Mizrahi project of expanding the category of Jewish entitlement and deservingness has everything to do with shaping Zionism (and not simply being shaped by it) and the refashioning of its wage of Jewishness, what binds Jews to one another and to the land.

It is no surprise that Mizrahi Jews are, on the whole, inhospitable to the Israeli peace movement. Peace-loving liberal Zionists, the majority of whom are Ashkenazi Jews, oppose the idea of a Greater Israel. Rather, they dream of an end to the Occupation, but go along with the expansion of settlements; they posit peace with the Palestinians as an abstraction, through the defunct idea of the two-state solution: *I know very well that Palestinian enclaves are being reduced to bantustans, all the same, I believe in the two-state solution, in peace in Palestine/Israel*. They prefer “Occupation on cruise control” (an Occupation that does not draw attention to itself) rather than Likud’s “Occupation on steroids” (an Occupation that seeks the annihilation of the Indigenous population—whom they see as encroaching on what belongs to Jews).²⁷

Mizrahi Jews are choosing the latter, paving the way for a Greater Israel and with it the possibility of class advancement (that is, a lessening of economic anxiety/vulnerability). The wage of Jewishness here gains a more militant, religious, and nationalist dimension. It casts Jewish settlers beyond the Green Line as fulfilling the promise of Israel. They can lay proprietary claim to the land of Israel, including Judea and Samaria (what the rest of the world recognizes as the occupied West Bank). Economic interests open to libidinal enjoyment.

The example of the Huwara Pogrom crystallizes the gratification of anti-Palestinianness. In late February 2023, in retaliation for the deaths of two Israeli settlers shot and killed by a Palestinian as they drove through the Palestinian town of Huwara outside Nablus in the occupied West Bank, hundreds of rampaging settlers set fire to cars and homes, while finance minister Bezale Smotrich called for the village’s destruction (“Huwara needs to be erased”).²⁸ A video of IDF soldiers dancing with settlers in Huwara also surfaced, disclosing to the world Israel’s racial animus and the settlers’ display

of what Du Bois names “vindictive joy,”²⁹ the sadistic enjoyment of religious and nationalist Zionism. In the wake of Huwara any firm distinction between state-sanctioned violence (legal violence) and settler violence (illegal violence) appears as a flat ideological lie.³⁰ The army’s move to investigate cannot but smack of insincerity.³¹ The wage of Jewishness fuels the settler movement, eliciting the sympathies of fellow settlers, and yet, the appeal of the settler movement goes much deeper: There is a hungry settler beneath every religious or nationalist Zionist. Netanyahu’s right-wing government is tapping into this obscene identificatory sentiment, one disavowed by mainstream Zionists (who are repulsed by the vulgarity of the settlers, but tacitly enjoy an Israel without Palestinians), harnessing the wage’s genocidal powers.

THE DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACY, OR NOSTALGIA FOR THE PRESENT

Mainstream media coverage of Israel is informed by what Fredric Jameson has dubbed “nostalgia for the present”: The alarmist storyline is typically filled with admiration for Israel’s singularity, that is, of its status as the only democracy in the Middle East (with its independent judiciary), along with its recent history as a “start-up miracle.”³² It generates an alluring but fundamentally distorted memory of Israel from the mid-1990s to the recent present by recalling a belief in the two-state solution, nostalgia for a Netanyahu before Netanyahuism, and a yearning for the time when capitalism and Zionism complemented one another.³³ Israel as a symbol of both a vibrant democracy and a burgeoning capitalism is in dire jeopardy, under attack from within, from a far-right government bent on changing the nation’s global image for the worse, transforming Israel into an authoritarian regime in the mold of Hungary and Poland. This nostalgia for the present fueling the liberal coverage of Palestine/Israel obfuscates the settler-colonial situation. From the Palestinian perspective, all Israeli governments participated, and continue to participate, in a logic of elimination. This rationality is only now becoming impossible for Israel’s Western supporters to ignore. The same Zionist ideology that legitimized the settler-colonial project—resulting in the dispossession and murder of Indigenous Palestinians in 1948 and the brutal Occupation since 1967—produced the monstrous coalition of today. When liberals like Thomas Friedman decry the situation in Israel, none of the causes outlined for this alleged shift touch the settler-colonial context.³⁴

Nostalgia for the present doubles down on the collective ideological fantasy of a Jewish *and* democratic Israel.

All versions of a democratic and Jewish Israel traffic in the wage of Jewishness to the extent that Jewish unity, resolve, and expansion are needed in the nation's demographic war. The Law of Return played, and continues to play, a significant role in the "righteous" struggle for Jewish majority. This democracy, which Western powers are desperately trying to save, promotes a soft elimination of Palestinians; its believers have resigned themselves to an indefinite Occupation. The story goes that liberal or mainstream Zionists tried in good faith to advance the peace process but got the Second Intifada. *They know very well about the Nakba and the Occupation, but all the same they believe in their democracy.* The fetish of democracy—encapsulated in the chant that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East—aligns them with Western values and whiteness. Netanyahu and his proto-fascist regime are risking the delegitimization of Israel³⁵—for liberal supporters of Israel, the Israeli government in its brutish bluntness is aiding the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. The Israeli protests for a return to liberal democracy are a lure. There was no liberal democracy before Netanyahu. What protesters are after is a "liberal democracy for Jews,"³⁶ for Ashkenazi-style Jewish unity.

Nostalgia for the present marks the liberal Zionist's fear that Israel will lose its international recognition as a democratic nation capable of legal self-governance. The proposed judicial reform, which weakens the checks and balances between the branches of government, exposes Israel to international scrutiny over its Occupation and human rights abuses. The wage of Jewishness, the enjoyment of being Jewish, starts to look different when your nation's democracy—for Western eyes—begins to unravel in real time. If the state of Israel had managed to convince Western powers of the legitimacy of Israeli-style democracy through its aggressive branding campaigns and *hasbara* (propaganda), the political decision to limit the powers of the judiciary troubles this deeply ingrained narrative. Thomas Friedman sounds the alarm, calling for support for the "one major institutional barrier" standing between democracy and a theocratic nationalist state: "Israel's Supreme Court and independent attorneys general, which have long been held in high regard all over the world, and their ability to limit the government's excesses."³⁷

From a Palestinian perspective, Friedman's high praise of the court jars with the international scrutiny that the Israeli government has received from a variety of human rights groups. The least we can say about the repeated

charge of apartheid leveled at Israel is that it taints Friedman's laudatory portrait of the Supreme Court, which let racial segregation take hold under its watch. More generally, ascribing to the judiciary the role of reliably reigning in the executive branch represents an exaggeration, if not a simple distortion of reality. As David Kretzmer and Yaël Ronen extensively document in *The Occupation of Justice*, the far-right hysteria about leftist judges does not align with the actual decisions of the court: "In almost all of its judgments relating to the Occupied Territories, especially those dealing with questions of principle, the Court has decided in favour of the authorities, often on the basis of dubious legal arguments."³⁸

The exceptions prove the rule. But what concerns the far right is the very possibility of an override, that is, the principle of being subjected to judicial review. The court has already legitimized the Occupation (included state-sanctioned—but internationally illegal—Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories), but this is not enough. If there is any chance that courts might curtail the project of a Greater Israel, then far-right Zionists must denounce the activist bench for overstepping their authority in overturning laws passed by the Parliament. From a settler perspective, the court is inhibiting Zionism's "organic nationhood,"³⁹ the realization of a Greater Israel. Upholding a minimum respect for the law earns the court the outrageous label of "pro-Palestinian."⁴⁰ Without the court's powers to overrule, and with the enthusiastic backing of Netanyahu's government, the settlers will be on the frontline, driving the Zionist project of a Greater Israel, which, of course, depends on land dispossession and native elimination.

RENDERING INOPERATIVE THE WAGE OF JEWISHNESS

What preserves liberal Zionists' belief in the permanent exceptional status of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state is, on one hand, their everyday socioeconomic enjoyment of Israel as an LGBTQ+-friendly, start-up miracle nation, and on the other, their "critical" attitude toward the settlers' vulgar racism, from which they can separate themselves, voicing self-congratulatory protests against the unprecedented influence of religion and nationalism on Israeli politics. Though the plight of Palestinians pales in the face of their interest in juridical autonomy (worse: at these anti-Netanyahu protests Palestinian flags are often prohibited by organizers or looked down upon by other protesters), they still abstractly believe in peace with the Palestinians.

Its fetish-role—a state for Palestinians on condition, of course, that it never impedes on Jewish privilege, on the wage of Jewishness—sustains the liberal Zionist moral high ground. Liberal Zionists aggressively mock Netanyahu’s totalitarian ambitions, decrying the racism and brutishness of his coalition, but they share the same belief in Israeli exceptionality, premised on the disavowal of the knowledge that the settler-colonial context must exist in perpetuity.⁴¹

Like other leftist critics of the anti-Netanyahu protests in Israel, Slavoj Žižek laments protesters’ lack of engagement with Palestinians inside and outside the Green Line, observing that they have “more or less totally ignored the plight of the Palestinians (20% of Israel’s population and millions more in the occupied territories) who will obviously suffer most from the new government and its laws.”⁴² Their intervention does not in the least challenge the operation of the wage of Jewishness or its disavowed predication on anti-Palestinianness. Nostalgia for the present (Ashkenazi normality) cancels *ab initio* the possibility of new desires (about Palestinians, Jewishness, democracy, justice, and so on) emerging from the protests. Yet a civil action like a march on Tel Aviv for Palestinian rights would have politicized further the call for democracy and would have presented Palestinians with a genuine alternative to Hamas. It would have advanced the struggle for a just democracy and challenged Israel’s colonial relations of power by centering the plight of Palestinians.

Born Orientalized, always already filtered through an Islamophobic lens, Palestinians live with constant trepidation and insecurity, particularly in the Occupied Territories. The everyday existence for stateless Palestinians is a state of terror. October 7, 2023, introduced that reality to Israel. “In a few days,” Amira Hass writes, “Israelis went through what Palestinians have experienced as a matter of routine for decades, and are still experiencing—military incursions, death, cruelty, slain children, bodies piled up in the road, siege, fear, anxiety over loved ones, captivity, being targets of vengeance, indiscriminate lethal fire at both those involved in the fighting (soldiers) and the uninvolved (civilians), a position of inferiority, destruction of buildings, ruined holidays or celebrations, weakness and helplessness in the face of all-powerful armed men, and searing humiliation.”⁴³ The Israeli military and settlers can kill and terrorize the Palestinian population at will and with impunity (in the name of preserving their settler-colonial and apartheid state), but when an Indigenous people fight back, fight for their liberation, imperialist powers and media can *only* witness wickedness and terror—and

not desperation and hopelessness over the lack of prospects for a future absent the Occupation. There is no consideration of the Fanonian insight that the colonized, psychologically in agony, are returning to the occupiers their own venom—the world-denying violence of the Occupation is visited on Israeli soldiers and civilians.⁴⁴ As Nicki Kattoura and Geo Maher elaborate, “colonial violence has been pumped mercilessly into Gaza for decades. At some point, like a balloon, it can only explode.”⁴⁵ In a similar vein, Norman Finkelstein compares Hamas’s attack to a “slave revolt,” exemplified by the enslaved Nat Turner’s revolt in Southampton, Virginia, in 1831, which “killed a lot of white people, civilians in a rampage.”⁴⁶ Butchery is met with butchery (and butchery is met again with even greater butchery).

While anticolonial counter-violence appears unavoidable and necessary—insofar as “violence is a cleansing force [*la violence désintoxique*],”⁴⁷ as Fanon puts it, a response to the toxicity of the Occupation—Fanon importantly cautioned about unrestrained brutality, which becomes at its core indistinguishable from the colonizers’ dreadful brand of violence: “Because we want a democratic and renovated Algeria, because we believe one cannot rise and liberate oneself in one area and sink in another, we condemn with pain in our hearts, those brothers who have flung themselves into revolutionary action with the almost physiological brutality that centuries of oppression give rise to and feed.”⁴⁸ Undisciplined violence jeopardizes the emancipatory project of Palestinians and risks compromising the universality of their vision.

The Left asks, “Where do Palestinians go from here? What needs to change? What must happen to break this lopsided cycle of violence?” The one thing we know is that the Occupation guarantees Palestinian humiliation and social death. And it guarantees more violence from the Palestinian side. The poison of the Occupation infiltrates all spheres of Palestinian existence. Over two million Palestinians live in the open-air prison that is Gaza, in absolute deprivation, with no freedom of movement—a staggering image of the zone of nonbeing if there ever was one. Many Gazans are in fact refugees from the lands that were stolen from them during the Nakba in 1948. What do they have to lose? What happens when militants, reduced to naked life, no longer fear biological death? The life-draining status quo is marked by Israel’s belligerent unilateralism, and the US-orchestrated rapprochement between authoritarian Arab regimes and the Jewish state. As Jameson might put it, *Why is it easier to imagine the end of hostilities between Israel and Saudi Arabia than the end of the Occupation?*

Since October 7, matters have only gotten worse. Opinion polls show that “Israeli attitudes towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are more hawkish than at any point in recent memory.”⁴⁹ But just imagine if the chants “Not in our name” and “Never again for anyone”—which of course were expressed by a large number of Jews, mostly in the diaspora, protesting the atrocities in Gaza committed by the Israeli state—were to be taken up on a broad scale within Israel. They would delegitimize a racist and fascist state; there is no overcoming the latter without a reckoning with the former. As it stands, though, Israel remains unquestionably colonial to its core. Its vision of peace is either an Israel free of Palestinian insolence or a Greater Israel with a limited Arab population. Indefinite Occupation or a Nakba redux are two sides of the same coin.

When it comes to Palestinians, secular and fundamentalist Zionisms are more and less on the same page. Joseph Massad puts the matter starkly: “There is to date nothing that Zionist Jewish fundamentalists have called for that has not been already committed or advocated by secular Zionism.”⁵⁰ Indeed, the mostly secular protests are not calling for a “new beginning”;⁵¹ they “do not really pose a threat to the Israeli apartheid; [the protesters] act as if they are an internal Jewish affair.”⁵² Israeli indifference to the Palestinian question contributes to the naturalization of the Occupation, to the banality of its violence. These protests pose even less of a threat to Israel’s settler colonialism. “A true act”—a decisive intervention that would effectively render inoperative Zionism’s wage of Jewishness and confront the fundamental deadlock of settler colonialism—“would be to propose a large democratic coalition that would include Palestinians.”⁵³ And it should be clear that these Palestinians would need to come from inside and outside of Israel proper, which is the only way to foreground the settler-colonial framework. It is not exclusively about Palestinian citizens of Israel enjoying full inclusion in Israeli civil society—to be seen as a citizen and a national.

No, a democracy worthy of its name cannot fragment the unity of the Palestinian people. Palestine/Israel remains a ’48 problem, not a ’67 one. Loosening the hold of a religio-nationalist Zionism on the collective psyche of Israeli Jews, along with Jews in the diaspora, necessitates a dismantling of the wage of Jewishness (in all of its versions). The wage of Jewishness transforms “being Jewish” into an exclusionary collective claim over the land of historic Palestine. It produces and reproduces a racial state. If Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews are, in their own ways, struggling over the wage’s meaning, Israeli Jews wishing to change the political landscape would need to

disidentify with the state of Israel, and not only with its current government (and thus block the urge for nostalgia). This disidentification would break the ideological spell of the wage of Jewishness; it would involve a kind of symbolic suicide, a defection of sorts, a self-violence, a decision to go against one's roots and certain forms of self-interest—what the wage of Jewishness actively promotes. And what follows from this disidentification—coterminous with a decolonizing of the settler's mind and lifeworld—is an identification with the Palestinian cause.

Zionists will read this as an irresponsible call for civil war, instead of the call for racial and economic justice that it is. To fully identify with the Palestinians means to check your righteous anger (at Netanyahu's coalition) and over-identify with Israeli democracy, breaking its liberal Zionist fetishist-status by universalizing it and actualizing its radical demands—*equality to all*—and thus rendering democracy basically incompatible with a Jewish state. The Palestinians inside and outside the Green Line are Israel's constitutive outsiders. Though some of them are afforded Israeli citizenship, none are truly part of their world. Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are the recipients of the settler government's necropolitics (the state does not manage and protect Palestine life—but destroys it) while Palestinians in Israel proper—de-Palestinized, de-nativized—live a life of invisibility.⁵⁴ To be a Palestinian in Palestine/Israel is to be permanently “out of place”; it is “to represent the truth of the system, its constitutive injustice and inequality.”⁵⁵ As such, when Palestinians undertake to remedy wrongs, they bear witness to universal concerns.⁵⁶

This is an instance of Palestinian *ressentiment*, but unlike Mizrahim *ressentiment* toward Ashkenazi hegemony, which is caught in spiteful envy and identitarian rivalry, Palestinian *ressentiment* opens a space for a dialectics of *ressentiment*, a *ressentiment* in politicized form. Such a politicization produces a more generative *ressentiment*, shifting it from a Nietzschean model of personal, reactive, and pathologized frustration to a collective *No!*: No, we will not forget the Nakba; no, we will not disappear; no, we will not let you realize the nightmare of a Greater Israel; and so on. Palestinian *ressentiment* seeks out solidarities that avoid any romanticization of the wretched (as superior, self-righteous, redeemed, etc.) but enjoin the excluded to universalize their grievances. This latter *ressentiment* exits its Nietzschean orbit; it undergoes dislocation, and its negative but reactionary energy is canceled and preserved—that is, dialecticized. This anticolonial *ressentiment* enacts a cut in the social fabric and can be characterized as

counter-reactional, as an un-Nietzschean mode of self-affirmation, taking the shape of an insurgent counter-violence, indexing—and not forgiving and forgetting⁵⁷—Israel’s original colonial wounding, its vicious reaction to ongoing Indigenous noncompliance.

Palestinians are not locked in their *ressentiment*, as Fanon might say.⁵⁸ When, for example, Edward Said expressed his motto “equality or nothing,” he never meant it to apply only to aggrieved Palestinians. The emancipatory force of egalitarian justice, “equality or nothing,” lies in its *openness to all*, to “Arabs and Jews” alike. Against the idea of a wage that, at once, divides (Jew and non-Jew) and fetishizes (wounded Jewish identity), Said promotes a vision of political justice that de-exceptionalizes its participants, asserting that “if one people enjoys a right of return, the other one must also. Otherwise the conflict continues—in the real interests of no one at all. No one, not even those who seem to be profiting in the short run.”⁵⁹ Including Palestinians in the coalition radicalizes and universalizes the movement for democracy, and as Žižek further adds, “it would break an unwritten rule of Israeli politics” and would, in turn, “prevent Israel from becoming another religious-fundamentalist racist state.”⁶⁰

At the same time, the newness of the situation can too easily be overstated. From the Palestinian perspective, Israel has always been “another religious-fundamentalist racist state”; the difference is that the obscene excesses of religio-nationalist Zionism have been kept below the global radar through the West’s fetish of liberal Zionism (the Zionism that, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, helps the West rationalize its support of such a cruel regime). The crisis is that now the disavowed settlers are festering on top for all to see. Liberal Zionism’s disavowed belligerent settlers, unmistakably represented politically by the far-right coalition, are imposing their will on Israeli identity. You gave us the wage of Jewishness—the promise of Jewish unity and solidarity, the gratification of Jewishness and the enjoyment of anti-Palestinianness. You wanted a nation state only for Jews, and we’re telling you what that will look like—Western approval be damned. The new government is not only giving up on democracy, but on the *appearance* of democracy. With the former you can still insist on democracy’s unsettling actualization, but with the latter you’ve effectively foreclosed its political possibility.⁶¹ The unleashing of hooligan settlers on vulnerable Palestinian villages encapsulates the disintegration of Israel’s “rule of law.”⁶² Knowledge of the settlers’ doings and genocidal aspirations can no longer be compartmentalized. Liberal Zionists’ identity (being Jewish) and phantasmatic attachment to a democratic state are at stake with

this (new) government. What gives the lie to a Jewish and democratic Israel is not its new fascist coalition, but the settler-colonial situation. Netanyahu is not the problem; a racist Israeli state is.

NOTES

1. This chapter draws on material originally published in Zahi Zalloua, *The Politics of the Wretched: Race, Reason, and Ressentiment* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2024). On the wage of whiteness, Du Bois writes: “The white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated for by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and public schools. The police were drawn from their ranks and the courts, dependent on their votes, treated them with leniency as to encourage lawlessness. Their vote selected public officials, and while this had small effect upon the economic situation, it had great affect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them”; see *Black Reconstruction in America 1860–1880* (Free Press, 1998 [1935]), 700–701.

2. David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (Verso, 2007), 13.

3. Robin D. G. Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow,” *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (1993): 100–101.

4. W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Ethics of the Problem of Palestine” [1948], in W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 1–2, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b209-1090>.

5. Examples include Henry Turner, Edward Blyden, Martin Delany, Marcus Garvey, and Mittie Maude Lena Gordon.

6. See Nadia Alahmed, “From Black Zionism to Black Nasserism: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Foundations of Black Anti-Zionist Discourse,” *Critical Sociology* 49, no. 6 (2023): 1053–64.

7. See W. E. B. Du Bois, “Marxism and the Negro Problem,” in *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*, ed. David Levering Lewis (Henry Holt, 1995), 543.

8. Ella Myers, *The Gratifications of Whiteness: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Enduring Rewards of Anti-Blackness* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 34.

9. Quoted in Jerome Slater, “What Went Wrong? The Collapse of the Israeli–Palestinian Peace Process,” *Political Science Quarterly* 116, no. 2 (2001): 180.

10. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 701.
11. *Haaretz*, “New Poll Shows Atheism on Rise, With Jews Found to Be Least Religious,” *Haaretz*, August 20, 2012, <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/2012-08-20/ty-article/jews-least-observant-intl-poll-finds/0000017f-e2b6-d7b2-a77f-e3b7be450000>.
12. Octave Mannoni, “I Know Very Well, but All the Same. . . .,” in *Perversion and the Social Relation*, ed. Molly Anne Rothenberg, Dennis A. Foster and Slavoj Žižek, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (Duke University Press, 2003), 70.
13. Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (Picador, 2008), 124.
14. Bernard-Henri Levy, *Left in Dark Times: A Stand Against the New Barbarism* (Random House, 2008); for a critique of this line of thought, see Zahi Zalloua, “The Left and (New) Antisemitism: The Palestinian Question and the Politics of *Ressentiment*,” *Crisis and Critique* 9, no. 2 (2022): 390–413.
15. Religious parties in Netanyahu’s coalition have advocated the elimination of the “grandchild clause” of the Law of Return. The clause makes citizenship available to anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent so long as they don’t practice another religion. This proposed change in the law is intended to restore the properly “Jewish character” of the state of Israel.
16. Peggy Cidor, “Why the Right-Wing Mizrahi Vote Is Misunderstood in Israel,” *Middle East Eye*, February 1, 2023, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-why-right-wing-mizrahi-vote-misunderstood>.
17. Jacqueline Rose recalls an exchange with Netanyahu in which the latter put his pragmatics on full display: “I once asked . . . Netanyahu why he accepted the support of the Christian fundamentalists, since they believe that at Armageddon all the Jews will be destroyed or converted? He said that he tells them that he welcomes their support and that when they get to Armageddon, they can argue about it then” (“Nation as Trauma, Zionism as Question: Jacqueline Rose Interviewed,” *OpenDemocracy*, August 17, 2005, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/zionism_2766jsp).
18. Cidor, “The Right-Wing Mizrahi Vote.”
19. Cidor, “The Right-Wing Mizrahi Vote.”
20. Cidor, “The Right-Wing Mizrahi Vote.”
21. The question of Israel’s right to exist—its legal status under international law—is what, in 1977, former prime minister and Likud leader Menachem Begin vehemently objected to; for him, “our very existence per se is our right to exist!” Israel’s existence did not need *human* permission, as if it were a contingent fact of history: “We were granted our right to exist by the God of our fathers at the glimmer of the dawn of human civilization four thousand years ago. Hence,

the Jewish people have an historic, eternal and inalienable right to exist in this land, Eretz Yisrael, the land of our forefathers. We need nobody's recognition in asserting this inalienable right. And for this inalienable right, which has been sanctified in Jewish blood from generation to generation, we have paid a price unexampled in the annals of nations" (quoted in Yehuda Avner, "Israel Does Not Need Palestinian Recognition," *The Jerusalem Post*, June 14, 2006, <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/israel-does-not-need-palestinian-recognition>).

22. Tom Mehager, "Yes, Mizrahim Support the Right. But Not for the Reasons You Think," *+972*, February 27, 2020, <https://www.972mag.com/mizrahim-right-wing-ashkenazi-supremacy>.

23. Mehager, "Mizrahim Support the Right."

24. "Considering the economic rivalry of the black and white worker in the North, it would have seemed natural that the poor white would have refused to police the slaves. But two considerations led him in the opposite direction. First of all, it gave him work and some authority as overseer, slave driver, and member of the patrol system. But above and beyond this, it fed his vanity because it associated him with the masters" (Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 12).

25. Mehager, "Mizrahim Support the Right."

26. Lana Tatour, "The Israeli Left: Part of the Problem or the Solution? A Response to Giulia Daniele," *Global Discourse* 6, no. 3 (2016): 488–89.

27. Zahi Zalloua, *Solidarity and the Palestinian Cause: Indigeneity, Blackness, and the Promise of Universality* (Bloomsbury, 2023), 57–58.

28. Patrick Kingsley, "As Israel's Crises Pile Up, a Far-Right Minister Is a Common Thread," *The New York Times*, March 31, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/31/world/middleeast/israel-smotrich-protests.html>. Smotrich clarified his remark, claiming that he was not giving license to settlers to accomplish this genocidal task: "The State of Israel needs to do that—heaven forbid not private individuals."

29. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (Washington Square Press, 2004), 24.

30. Netanyahu's agreement to create a National Guard under the purview of Palestinianophobe National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir will eliminate the distinction between state-sponsored (legal) violence and settler (illegal) violence altogether. Ben-Gvir's autonomous private militia is set to give further cover to the abuses of the settlers in the West Bank.

31. Rights groups point out that for the period of 2017–2021, "only 11 investigations [out of 248 criminal investigations] . . . yielded indictments against soldiers,

showing the IDF's failure to credibly prosecute itself." See Isabel Debre, "Watchdog: Under 1% of Israel Army Probes Yield Prosecution," *The Associated Press*, December 22, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/israel-indictments-gaza-strip-0c1b864792101b9506c03e1a8f3990do>.

32. Fredric Jameson, "Nostalgia for the Present," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (1989): 517–37.

33. "It's fair to say that no prime minister has done more to transform its economy into a global powerhouse. Yet unless he changes course, Mr. Netanyahu risks throwing all that progress—and his own hard-earned legacy—away." See Michael Bloomberg, "Israel Is Courting Disaster," *The New York Times*, March 5, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/05/opinion/michael-bloomberg-israel-netanyahu.html>. Ok, but how about Netanyahu's legacy as a war criminal? Or again, Bloomberg continues: "Companies are in a global competition for talent. So are countries. The best and brightest want to live in countries where they can be assured they will not be persecuted or discriminated against because of what they believe or whom they love." Apparently, companies also want individuals who rationalize away the settler-colonial situation and Israel's racial segregation.

34. *The New York Times's* coverage exemplifies this trend. See, for example, Thomas L. Friedman, "Netanyahu Is Shattering Israeli Society," *The New York Times*, February 28, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/28/opinion/netanyahu-israel-palestinians-courts.html>; Thomas L. Friedman, "What in the World Is Happening in Israel?," *The New York Times*, December 15, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/15/opinion/israel-palestinians-arabs-jews.html>; Bloomberg, "Israel Is Courting Disaster"; Editorial Board, "The Ideal of Democracy in a Jewish State Is in Jeopardy," *The New York Times*, December 17, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/17/opinion/israel-netanyahu.html>. An outlier to this anti-Palestinian bias is Peter Beinart, "You Can't Save Democracy in a Jewish State," *The New York Times*, February 19, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/19/opinion/israel-democracy-protests.html>.

35. The far-right coalition is not as manipulative as the unprincipled Netanyahu. Their fascist program is in the process of dismantling Netanyahu's international landscape, making it more difficult to gain the unconditional support of Western powers that he and previous Israeli prime ministers have automatically enjoyed.

36. Beinart, "You Can't Save Democracy in a Jewish State."

37. Friedman, "What in the World Is Happening in Israel?"

38. David Kretzmer and Yaël Ronen, *The Occupation of Justice: The Supreme Court of Israel and the Occupied Territories* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 3.

39. Jacqueline Rose, *The Question of Zion* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 82.
40. "In recent years the willingness of the Court to order the evacuation of unauthorised outposts set up by Israeli nationals on private Palestinian land has also stirred antagonism towards the Court in some sections of the public in Israel. Some critics have gone as far as labelling the Court 'pro-Palestinian'" (Kretzmer and Ronen, *The Occupation of Justice*, 3).
41. See Alenka Zupančič, "Conspiracy Theory Without Theory: On *Don't Look Up*," *e-flux*, December 16, 2022, <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/509069/conspiracy-theory-without-theory-on-don-t-look-up>.
42. Slavoj Žižek, "Why Politics Is Immanently Theological, Part I," *The Philosophical Salon*, February 27, 2023, <https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/why-politics-is-immanently-theological-part-i>.
43. Amira Hass, "Arriving Again at the Cycle of Vengeance," *Haaretz*, October 10, 2023, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2023-10-10/ty-article/.premium/arriving-again-at-the-cycle-of-vengeance/0000018b-15d7-d2fc-a59f-d5df4d810000>.
44. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. R. Philcox (Grove Press, 2004 [1963]), 219.
45. Nicki Kattoura and Geo Maher, "Israel-Palestine War: Why Must Palestinians Condemn Themselves for Daring to Fight Back?," *Middle East Eye*, November 9, 2023, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/israel-palestine-war-why-condemnation-trap>.
46. Paul Salvatori, "Q&A: 'What Happened in Israel on October 7 Was a Slave Revolt,'" *TRT World*, October 12, 2023, <https://headtopics.com/us/q-a-what-happened-in-israel-on-october-7-was-a-slave-revolt-46588280>. Haidar Eid and M. Gessen have drawn a parallel between the confinement of Palestinians in Gaza and that of the ghettoized Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. Gessen sees similarities in their living conditions, while Eid extends the parallel, comparing resistance to the occupation to the Warsaw uprising of the oppressed in 1944. See Haidar Eid, "Gaza 2023: Our Warsaw Uprising Moment," *Al Jazeera*, October 10, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/10/gaza-2023-our-warsaw-uprising-moment>; M. Gessen, "In the Shadow of the Holocaust," *The New Yorker*, December 9, 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-weekend-essay/in-the-shadow-of-the-holocaust>.
47. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 51.
48. Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (Grove Press, 1965), 25.
49. Anna Gordon, "What Israelis Think of the War with Hamas," *Time*, November 10, 2023, <https://time.com/6333781/israel-hamas-poll-palestine>.

50. Joseph Massad, "Are Jewish Fundamentalists More Dangerous Than the Secularists? Ask Their Palestinian Victims," *Middle East Eye*, April 12, 2023, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/secular-zionists-threaten-palestinians-much-more-jewish-fundamentalists>.

51. Slavoj Žižek, *Surplus-Enjoyment: A Guide for The Non-Perplexed* (Bloomsbury, 2022), 325.

52. Žižek, "Why Politics Is Immanently Theological Part I."

53. Žižek, "Why Politics Is Immanently Theological Part I."

54. Even in the liberal city Tel Aviv, writes Udi Aloni, Palestinian presence or culture is nonexistent; "it's the only Western city in the world today without an Arab population." See "A Murder Is a Murder Is a Murder: Between Tel Aviv and Bil'in," in *What Does a Jew Want? On Binationalism and Other Specters*, ed. Udi Aloni, Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, and Judith Butler (Columbia University Press, 2011), 100.

55. Jamil Khader, "The Living Dead in Palestine and the Failure of International Humanitarian Intervention," *Truthout*, November 8, 2015, <https://truthout.org/articles/the-living-dead-in-palestine-and-the-failure-of-international-humanitarian-intervention>.

56. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (Verso, 2012), 83.

57. I am drawing here on Holocaust survivor and torture victim Jean Améry's bold vision of *ressentiment*. Writing at a time when Germany was urging its citizens to move beyond its past—the trauma of the Shoah—Améry declined this social imperative to *forgive and forget* in the name of a new Germany. He insisted on the memories of the actions of his "fellows," "who flogged [him] with a horsewhip." See *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities* (Indiana University Press, 1980), 71. The life-affirming negativity of his *ressentiment* served as a foil to the national project to heal without subjecting the nation to a racial reckoning. But Améry betrays the force of *ressentiment* in his ideological support for the state of Israel, substituting the positivity of nationalist identity for the negativity of *ressentiment*: "The only connection between me and most Jews the world over is a sense of solidarity with the state of Israel, a commitment that has long since ceased to be a duty of which I need to remind myself. . . . For me, Israel is not an auspicious promise, not a biblically legitimized territorial claim, no Holy Land. It is simply the place where survivors have gathered, a state in which every inhabitant still, and for a long time to come, must fear for his life. My solidarity with Israel is a means of staying loyal to those of my comrades who perished." See "My Jewishness,"

in *Essays on Antisemitism, Anti-Zionism, and the Left*, ed. Marlene Gallner (Indiana University Press, 2022), 85. Améry's compulsory solidarity is precisely one of the effects of the wage of Jewishness, converting *ressentiment*'s collective appeal to a new identity.

58. "The black man wants to be white. The white man is desperately trying to achieve the rank of man." See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. R. Philcox (Grove Press, 2008 [1967]), xiii.

59. Edward Said, "The Gap Grows Wider," *Al-Ahram Weekly* 471 (March 2–8, 2000).

60. Žižek, "Why Politics Is Immanently Theological Part I."

61. Žižek, "Israelis' SHAME Over What Their State Is Doing in West Bank Would Be Sign of Truly Belonging to Israel," *RT.com*, May 17, 2021, <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/524075-israelis-shame-west-bank-palestinians>.

62. Žižek, "Israelis' SHAME."

Black Reconstruction in (Latin) America

Geo Maher

LATE IN THE MORNING OF MONDAY, October 17, 1859, as John Brown and his small band of raiders were holed up in the arsenal's engine house where they would make their last stand, white militia volunteers crested the hills west of Harper's Ferry and poured down toward the armory.¹ Oddly enough, these hills had been named Bolivar Heights in 1825, scarcely a decade after Simón Bolívar, the great Liberator, had freed and united the northern half of South America. Exactly two years after Brown's raid failed, its paradoxical success would be undeniable, as Union troops engaged Confederate forces at the first of what would be several clashes at Bolivar Heights. While the connection between Brown and Bolívar might seem oblique, it becomes clearer once triangulated through Haiti, whose great revolution had rocked the consciousness of slave and owner alike, albeit in diametrically opposed ways—exhilaration for the one, abject fear for the other. Haiti, where flags would fly at half-mast on the day Brown was hanged in 1859, had earlier provided Bolívar both sanctuary and an ultimatum, with Haitian president Alexandre Pétion famously urging him to free his own slaves in exchange for the support the free Black republic could offer, effectively launching Latin American independence in the process.

What does any of this have to do with W. E. B. Du Bois and the ongoing project of a true Black reconstruction *of democracy*—as Du Bois's original title described it—across our broader Americas? And what does the triangle—Brown, Bolívar, and Haiti—have to tell us about the unfinished project of hemispheric abolition, decolonization, and revolution? Everything, as it turns out. This was certainly Du Bois's own position, as made clear by a brutally terse letter that he sent in late 1927 to a Latin American solidarity organization that had requested his support, which *in its totality* reads as follows:

My dear Sir,

I have read over one or two of the circulars of the National Citizens Committee on Relations with Latin-America. I note that they make no mention of Haiti. Is this unintentional or not?²

By this time, the United States had been occupying Haiti for more than a decade, and Du Bois would regularly take to the pages of *The Crisis* to rail vociferously against the occupation. Du Bois, whose own father Alfred was born in Haiti, would travel to the country more than once, and he was consistently attentive to the global importance of its revolution and to the reverberations connecting “the Haytian Terror of Toussaint” to “the terrible Nat Turner”—these early words being from *The Souls of Black Folk*.³

For Du Bois, as this letter makes clear, there is no Latin America without Haiti, and no way to separate its great revolution from the long tradition of struggle in the region—against colonization, against slavery, and for democracy of a type. While this may seem strange to our contemporary ears, trained as they are to hear “Latin” as “Spanish,” the resonances—indeed, dialectical chains—are less surprising in light of the genesis of “Latin America” as a category. A relatively recent invention, the “Latin” in Latin America was the product not of the sixteenth century but of the nineteenth, not of early Spanish colonialism but a belated attempt by the Second French Empire to reclaim a foothold in the Western Hemisphere for Catholicism and absolutist monarchy alike. The French loss of the colonial crown jewel that would become an independent Haiti had effectively forced the Louisiana Purchase, adding insult to injury in a dynamic that Du Bois himself was among the earliest to recognize, writing that “Louisiana came into the possession of the United States because Toussaint L’Ouverture and the blacks of Haiti so broke the French colonial power.”⁴

When independence struggles then swirled across the region like so many tropical storms, driving out the Spanish, the French saw an opportunity to fill the apparent vacuum symbolically and militarily. But in neither case was there truly a vacuum. It was against the North-South hemispheric unity offered by the (Protestant) United States under the heading of “Panamericanism” that the French proposed an alternative East-West transatlantic unity undergirded by Catholicism: *et voilà*, “Latin America” was born. On a material level, however, the victory would be much harder fought, and local resistance far more tenacious. French aspirations in the region culminated in the ill-fated 1861–1867 Mexican intervention, effectively dying by firing squad alongside the young Emperor Maximilian.⁵ But by then, the

category had taken hold, and as US imperial domination solidified across the region—aided in no small part by Marine landings in Haiti, but also Nicaragua, Panama, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba—“Latin America” came to serve as a unifying identity for the region and a shared category for anti-imperial, anticolonial struggle.⁶

In other words, Haiti was not only *part* of Latin America from day one but was moreover a central historical *cause* of its emergence as an idea in the first place. By etymology and origin, by shared conditions of dependency and imperial-colonial domination, and above all through solidarity forged in struggle, Haiti *is* Latin American—this is our starting point. Moreover, Haiti’s own revolution must be understood as a founding moment of what we now know as the Latin American revolutionary tradition, tossing hot sparks of revolt across the hemisphere from the heated Caribbean crucible—Bolívar himself being one. Crucially, however, this first Latin American revolution predated the idea and was also something radically different from many that would follow. Even prior to Latin American independence struggles, Haiti meant *more* than mere independence, a revolution that sought not formal liberation but the substantive transformation of society as a whole. And, if anything, the process moved in reverse: Rather than independence first, followed by substantive transformation, in Haiti it was the demand for permanent abolition that pressed the Black republic toward its final break with France.

Here, the Toussaint-Brown-Bolívar triangle assumes a more critical valence. Like the Latin American independence struggles that would follow it, this demand for substantive transformation stalled in Haiti too, notably in the failure to transform the underlying repressive and militarized architecture of plantation slavery—a fundamental demand of the Black masses who had made the revolution.⁷ What remained unfinished when John Brown hurled himself into the whirlwind, what remains largely unfinished today across the hemisphere, was that thoroughgoing revolution of social organization that we might choose to call, following Du Bois, *reconstruction*.

READING *BLACK RECONSTRUCTION* HEMISPHERICALLY

Too often, *Black Reconstruction* is read narrowly as a historical account of the US Civil War and its long aftermath, and much of what we’re doing in this volume seeks to correct this fundamental misunderstanding. Just

as the Confederacy looked southward toward “a great slave empire in the Caribbean,” the late Du Bois’s own political horizon was also a radically transnational one that sought to confront this reactionary imperial vision through the unity and solidarity of the expansive “dark proletariat” of the Global South.⁸ But fully grasping the breadth of this vision, and its implications for Latin America past and present, means moving through but also beyond the text of *Black Reconstruction*. In what follows, I read *Black Reconstruction* with an eye not only to the question of what Du Bois can teach us about Latin America, but what Latin America can teach us about Du Bois and the struggles looming on our own contemporary political horizon.

To read Latin America, past and present, through the lens of Du Bois, is one thing, however. To read Du Bois in and through Latin America is a different thing entirely, requiring as it does an interstitial and symptomatic reading that plumbs both the apparent absence but also the structural presence of the region in and beyond his text. And it requires something more difficult still: a resistance to—if not obliteration of—the boundaries (national, linguistic, and disciplinary) that we too often take for granted, but through which, if we strain, we can hear the echoing of affinities and resonances. My goal, in other words, is to read Du Bois and Latin America in a sort of productive parallax. In the admittedly preliminary and incomplete sketch that follows, I want to track three deeply entangled questions:

1. How does Latin America figure in Du Bois’s work, and in *Black Reconstruction* in particular?
2. What has been the reception of Du Bois’s work, and *Black Reconstruction* in particular, in Latin America?
3. What does the broad schema that Du Bois offers in *Black Reconstruction* mean for Latin America and for the world?

These are not separate questions, of course, but instead spiral through and rebound off one another in ways that, I hope, will be useful.

LATIN AMERICA IN DU BOIS

Du Bois was acutely concerned with Latin America: This much is absolutely clear. With Du Bois at the helm as founding editor, the NAACP’s magazine *The Crisis*, revealingly subtitled *A Record of the Darker Races*, reported on

the region as early as its second issue in 1910, and covered questions as wide-ranging as racialized labor in Mexico, resistance in the Brazilian military, the virtues of municipal governance in Latin America, and of course questions of racial creolization. Du Bois traveled across Mexico and the Caribbean, consistently opposed US intervention and policies from Mexico to Nicaragua and Haiti, and his *Encyclopedia Africana*, a project he pursued until his death, sought out so many entries on the region that the managing editor later complained that they had *too much* material on Latin America.⁹

Moreover, if Du Bois rarely mentions Latin America and the Caribbean directly in *Black Reconstruction*, the region looms like a specter in the structure of the text—both as an absent presence *outside* the US slave system and as a crucial interface with the broader global circuits he traces. As slavery reached both apex and crisis in the US, and as planters desperately sought both more slaves and more land, those regions to the south of the South seemed to promise both. Latin America was a conduit for both smuggling new slaves *into* the United States after the trade was banned and for smuggling contraband cotton *out* to Europe. Smuggling routes are notoriously difficult to control, however, and many of those entering—particularly amid the Haitian exodus—also brought with them subversive and even revolutionary ideas, the contraband of the contrabands. As for the land required to sustain a plantation system in crisis, Du Bois writes that planters looked first “in the Southeast; then beyond the Mississippi in Louisiana and Texas, then in Mexico, and finally, it turned its face in two directions: toward the Northwestern territories of the United States and toward the West Indian islands and South America” (41).

The annexation of Texas was a key turning point in this sense. Previously a central route in the southbound Underground Railroad, as Du Bois writes, “the foray into Mexico had opened an empire” (29)—and if it even needs to be said, Texas and the rest of the Southwest was and remains Latin America too.¹⁰ This Latin American outside fueled the hubris of secession in at least two ways. First, “Jefferson Davis was ready to reopen the African slave trade to any future acquisition south of the Rio Grande,” and “the South determined upon secession with the distinct idea of eventually expanding into the Caribbean” (41–42). And second, because it arrogantly viewed this already partial conquest as its own doing: “The South had conquered Mexico without help and beyond lay the rest of Mexico, the West Indies and South America, open to Southern imperialistic enterprise” (47). In a passage Du Bois cites, Frederick Douglass himself underlined the South’s hemispheric

vision, naming as the fifth key objective of the Confederacy “the extension of slavery over Mexico and the entire South American states” (53).

But Latin America wasn’t strategically important to the Confederacy alone. It had figured as a pressure release valve for the North as well, featuring prominently in those revealingly named “colonization” or “deportation” schemes that sought to offshore the Black “problem” to Panama or to Île à Vache, off the coast of Haiti—schemes of which Lincoln himself was a key early proponent. Finally, as the war neared its conclusion, Latin America offered potential sanctuary for fleeing ex-planters, many of whom now ironically found themselves smuggling their slaves *out* “to Cuba and Brazil,” and continued bondage (143). “Numbers of Southerners planned to leave the country, and go to South America or Mexico” (384), Du Bois writes, despite denouncing a “mongrel Mexico” in the same foul breath (554).

With the end of the war and subsequent defeat of Reconstruction a decade later, however, things come full circle to Du Bois’s own contemporary concerns with the expansion of US imperial power across the globe. After federal troops were withdrawn and Radical Reconstruction was dismantled through white terror, “the United States was turned into a reactionary force. It became the cornerstone of that new imperialism which is subjecting the labor of yellow, brown and black peoples to the dictation of capitalism organized on a world basis” (631). And, in consequence, “God wept” (634). In other words, the very same US imperialism that Du Bois was himself confronting in his organizing and advocacy during the interwar period—across “the various Americas” (4) and beyond—was unleashed by the defeat of the progressive program of Reconstruction and the return to legally enshrined white supremacy across the US South.

DU BOIS IN LATIN AMERICA

The answer to the question of Du Bois’s importance in Latin America is straightforward: The reception of his work in the region has been minimal, and the impact of *Black Reconstruction* has been close to zero. But beneath the apparent simplicity of this answer, there is much more to say. First and foremost, *Black Reconstruction* went ninety years without a Spanish translation. What explains this delay? The easiest answer would seem to have to do with the book’s *form*. A sprawling tome extending more than seven hundred pages, the scope of the text—more than three times the original contracted

length—posed significant problems even for the book’s original publication in English, amid the high costs and low demand of the Depression era.¹¹ Needless to say, the sheer materiality of the work of translation posed a significant barrier—and prohibitive cost—for its translation into Spanish, or any other language for that matter. But there’s more to say here, as we slide quickly from form to content, since even in the United States, *The Souls of Black Folk* has long been privileged over Du Bois’s other works. Yes, it’s a shorter book with a pithier argument, cheaper to purchase and easier to assign to students—this is undeniable. But equally important is the framing: *Souls* was both more oriented toward the white reader and more agreeable to liberal appetites for mourning and uplift.

Not so *Black Reconstruction*, a sprawling text bursting with historical documentation and local detail, written by a Du Bois already transitioning toward structural explanation, Black self-organization, and socialist politics, and which is prefaced by an unbothered dismissal of the need to appeal to white readers who remain uncertain of the basic humanity of Black people. All of these features, which again hampered the book’s publication, reception, and popularity even in the US, make publication for a Latin American audience doubly difficult. Even *Souls*, whose racial framework would be widely seen as incompatible with the region’s so-called “racial democracy” and whose key term—“folk”—poses important translation challenges, could be translated inexpensively and sold as an exotic account of peculiarly American racial dynamics.¹² But even then, the text only existed for many years in a difficult-to-acquire Cuban edition, with a more accessible edition now only a few years old. Little surprise then that *Black Reconstruction* wasn’t translated for a Latin American audience until very recently: It was as I was preparing this chapter that I received the welcome news that the book was being translated for publication in Argentina, with support from the Mellon-funded International Consortium of Critical Theory Programs (ICCTP).¹³

There’s more to say, however, since the relative silence toward Du Bois’s thought speaks volumes and has everything to do with both the real and perceived divide between nations with incompatible theoretical frames for understanding race—and particularly, the idea that the United States and Latin America are governed by qualitatively distinct racial regimes. Most often, this takes the form of a Latin American exceptionalism that views US-style white supremacy (not entirely unjustly) as the peculiarly severe legacy of a preponderant and late-developing system of racialized chattel slavery. According to this view, which is still prevalent in everyday discourse,

the complexity and variegated hierarchy of Latin American racial regimes—from *mestizaje* to “racial democracy”—means that racial categories are far more nuanced than those of their northern neighbor. At its most absurd, this approach denies the importance of white supremacy for Latin America entirely and views racial categories as a foreign imposition.¹⁴

Hemispheric readings of Du Bois have resisted this exceptionalism. The late Mark Sawyer, for example, insisted that differences in hemispheric racial regimes are overstated and that Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness could be productively applied in ways that, in his words, both “reconnect Latin America to the African Diaspora” and reveal the importance of Latin American struggles against persistent—if veiled—racism.¹⁵ José Itzigsohn has similarly insisted on the need for Latin Americans to engage with Du Bois’s work—*Black Reconstruction* included—writing that even if “we won’t find in Du Bois immediate answers for Latin America’s most pressing political or economic problems,” his work “offers us tools for thinking the role of racism and colonialism in the construction of modernity and Latin American societies” and can even “help us lay out Latin American problems in a different way.”¹⁶ Where Sawyer and Itzigsohn see Du Bois as a resource to be applied to interpreting Latin American realities, Juliet Hooker has gone further by insisting that Du Bois was himself a radically hemispheric thinker. Rejecting both the centering of *Souls* and the “unthinking nationalism” that blinkers most traditional interpretations, she finds in Du Bois “a theorist of *mestizaje*” whose work “prefigure[s] the emergence of a multiracial, decolonized Global South that is still not yet fully realized.”¹⁷

None of this is to suggest that Du Bois’s *ideas* were entirely absent. But the reception and impact of his work was closely related to his own travel to the region for transnational congresses, his expressions of solidarity for Latin American struggles, and the personal friendships he developed and maintained with intellectuals in the region—with contradictory results. Outside of Haiti, Du Bois engaged most directly with racial politics in Cuba and Brazil in the 1920s and 1930s, in both cases building friendships with critical scholars that allowed for mutual exchange and led to the translation and publication of some of his work. The reasons for this engagement were several: These were heavily Afro-Latin countries where Du Bois’s own theoretical approach might find considerable traction, but they were also countries where struggles against racial discrimination coexisted tensely with official doctrines of colorblindness. In both cases, Du Bois’s own profound desire to glimpse possible alternatives to US-style white supremacy and Jim

Crow segregation led him to view Latin American racial regimes with a degree of naivete—for a time.

Recent research at the Du Bois archive at University of Massachusetts–Amherst has shed significant light on Du Bois’s relation to both countries. Jorge Daniel Vásquez, for example, details the relationships Du Bois cultivated with critical Afro-Cuban scholars who had published condemnations of official racism in *The Crisis*, leading to Du Bois himself being profiled in the anti-racist magazine *Adelante* in 1936.¹⁸ Cuba, of course, was at the forefront of the post-Reconstruction US imperial expansion that Du Bois documented in *Black Reconstruction*. US authorities attempted early on to impose Jim Crow-style racial rule on the island, which was seized only two decades after Reconstruction’s defeat. But while Du Bois was aware of persistent racial discrimination, Vásquez deems it a “paradox” that his own writings on Cuba tended to downplay this element in favor of a critique of US neoimperialism. As late as 1941, Du Bois would even write that “Cuba alone knows no color caste. It has no race segregation or race discrimination but does have social patterns along the color line enforced only by general consent.”¹⁹ For Vásquez, this meant Du Bois was ironically “reproducing a narrative challenged by groups such as *Adelante* and other leftist organizations” of Afro-Cubans in particular.²⁰

Similarly, Juliana Góes asks why Du Bois upheld and even contributed to the myth of Brazil as a postracial paradise—a “misleading” and even “dangerous idea” that concealed the violent subordination of Afro-Brazilians.²¹ For a period of more than two decades beginning in 1914, Du Bois painted Brazil as “a racial paradise that proved that segregation could be extinguished”—not only upholding but even *prefiguring* the racial democracy frame popularized by Gilberto Freyre in *Casa-Grande e Senzala* (published in 1933 and translated as *Masters and Slaves*).²² Despite having received accounts of Brazilian racism and encountering it himself, Du Bois continued to uphold this myth, even prioritizing Freyre’s outsized participation in the *Encyclopedia Africana*.²³ Why? For Góes, the reasons were both personal and political: His own Brazilian colleagues and friends were drawn from the white intellectual elite rather than Afro-Brazilian activists, and at the time Du Bois was actively defending miscegenation—albeit for very different reasons than the Brazilian government. This rosy view wouldn’t last, however, and Góes points to an unpublished 1941 speech in which Du Bois reaches the far more skeptical conclusion that “racial absorption in Brazil . . . has not had altogether happy results,” adding that unless “accompanied by economic

emancipation and a real democracy of equals, the solution of the Brazilian problem of African and American cannot be really accomplished.”²⁴

This turn toward the material determinants of racism—and the equally material prerequisites of liberation—was of course the central lesson of *Black Reconstruction* itself, although Du Bois’s own personal friendships and desire for concrete alternatives delayed his realization that his own insights from the US context applied powerfully to Latin America as well. But tracking Du Bois’s own travel helps us to grasp his parallax position as well. Rather than simply applying Du Bois to Latin America, we can see how he was himself *transformed* by contact with Latin America. His (wishful) thinking was overcome and pushed beyond what were originally idealized and even utopian visions of racial democracy in Latin America through confrontation with a reality that paralleled far more closely what he was seeing at home: the persistence of the color line and the limits of a symbolic racial inclusion that left underlying economic structures untouched.

BLACK RECONSTRUCTION IN LATIN AMERICA

Finally, we turn to the question of what it means to read Du Bois and *Black Reconstruction* in and through Latin America past and present, and what analytic and political insights the book can offer the region and the broader hemisphere today. Of course, this means asking, first, what it is that Du Bois *does* in *Black Reconstruction*—a question which, as we see in this volume, brings with it many answers and even more questions. Of the many circuits running through and cutting across Du Bois’s historical narrative—spiraling from the local to the global and back—there are several that strike me as particularly crucial for understanding contemporary Latin America.

First, Du Bois places slavery, and to a certain degree colonialism as well, at the very center of global capitalist accumulation, exceeding Marx’s own account of “so-called primitive accumulation” and laying the groundwork for what often goes by the name of “racial capitalism” today. To do so, or rather *in* so doing, he modifies class exploitation by bringing it into a dynamic relationship with racial degradation or “submergence” in ways that binds race to class without canceling either out.²⁵ Centering slavery analytically should always mean, and certainly means for Du Bois, centering the often-invisible self-activity and agency of enslaved people themselves, in ways that parallel C. L. R. James and prefigure Frantz Fanon’s delineation of racial-colonial

nonbeing—and the often explosive means by which they break out of this condition.²⁶

This agency, moreover, extends to the global level, since the defeat of Reconstruction leaves two transnational projects standing opposed to one another: the Confederate project of global imperialist-capitalist domination, versus the expansive anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist solidarity of the “dark proletariat,” or “that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown and black” (16). Finally, Du Bois binds abolition to reconstruction—tearing down to building up—showing how any true liberation and equality must exceed the formal level and must entail not only economic equality (i.e., reconstruction) but also the expansive political project he calls “abolition democracy”—which is less a quantitative question of inclusion than it is a qualitative question of what *kind* of democracy becomes possible when white supremacy is in retreat. Needless to say, each of these pieces—the global racial capitalist structure, the revolutionary subject that stands against it, that subject’s particular mode of appearance, and the collective and democratic project it seeks to build—has a great deal to offer contemporary analysts and organizers in Latin America.

Recent decades have seen renewed attention to Afro-Latinx realities and struggles, alongside an explosion of interest in reconceptualizing coloniality and the unfinished project of decolonization. In this, theorists and militants alike have built on long traditions of broadening Marxist concepts and regrounding these in Latin American material conditions, or what the Peruvian socialist José Carlos Mariátegui described almost a century ago as a recontextualization according to Latin American “reality.”²⁷ This process of regrounding involves reconceiving the notion of a revolutionary bloc to include not only wage workers but also the peasantry and Indigenous communities—with the latter playing a key role in providing a collective vision for the future, and more recently, a reconsideration of the so-called “marginal” urban informal sectors that have become a majority in many cities across the region. And as these sectors have taken to the forefront of Latin American struggles in a series of explosive rebellions, they have set into motion institutional changes and constitutional reforms that have sought to reimagine democracy beyond the bounds of liberalism.²⁸

This regrounding must also take place at the boundary between the United States and Latin America as well, in that vast southwestern space that is both, with Du Bois but also in ways that give his own account of “Border and Frontier” in *Black Reconstruction* a new resonance—moving in the

process beyond some of Du Bois's own silences on settler colonialism.²⁹ We know today how "deportation" of migrants today finds its historical roots in techniques of removal used against both Indigenous North Americans and enslaved Africans alike.³⁰ We know that the history of Black Americans is marked just as much by borders, boundaries, and forced migrations—two mass migrations in particular—as those of migrants from Mexico, Central America, and elsewhere in the present.³¹ We know that the egregious sleight of hand which Du Bois himself debunked, according to which enslaved people—rather than the *system* of slavery itself—were seen as competitors of white workers and thereby responsible for low wages, is today shamelessly applied to cross-border migrants as well. And we know that, from the south-bound Underground Railroad of the past to today's perilous northward migration on and around the railway known as "The Beast," to Jim Crow's "Juan Crow" analogue in the Southwest, to the simultaneous criminalization in the mid-1990s of Black people and migrants alike—Black and Latin American peoples share a long history of racialized dispossession, displacement, and exploitation.

BLACK RECONSTRUCTION IN VENEZUELA

In recent decades, Venezuela has stood at the forefront of these crucial dynamics, drawing inspiration from Mariátegui's vision for a specifically Latin American socialism to craft what the late Hugo Chávez described as "21st-century socialism." In the all-too-brief sketch that follows, I track some of these resonances in the specific context of Venezuela, past and present, beginning with a fundamental reorientation: Bolívar was not so much a late George Washington but an early Abraham Lincoln, and while this is certainly a compliment of sorts, it isn't without its own ambiguity. By this I mean that while many Latin American independence struggles stalled at the stage of formal independence from colonial rule rather than transitioning to a more thoroughgoing phase of decolonization, and as a result saw Spanish governors replaced by the rule of local-born white *criollos*, they could not escape many of the same substantive dynamics posed first in Haiti and later the US Civil War—and the question of abolition in particular.

In other words, we come back to the triangle with which we began, not in the continuity of a direct lineage but facing the challenges of work left undone. If Du Bois shows how Lincoln only "freed" the slaves after they

had already begun to free themselves, and that he only did so out of sheer military and diplomatic exigency, so too Bolívar in Venezuela. It was not only Pétion's urging that led Bolívar to free the slaves, but also the very practical reality that he was being *defeated* militarily by a marauding army of those same wretched masses who, while operating under the banner of the royalist caudillo José Tomás Boves, were in fact making their own freedom real through violent retribution against the whites.³² In other words, Bolívar only advocated freeing the slaves when he had to and would even retreat from that demand when the threat of mass slave rebellion subsided.³³ In these and other ways, the dialectics of Venezuelan liberation shared much with Du Bois's account of the US Civil War, and with Haiti as well. If Toussaint had overseen the execution of his adopted nephew Moïse for organizing an 1801 insurrection of poor Blacks unsatisfied with his conciliatory attitude to the whites, Bolívar would end up doing much the same, executing his former deputy Manuel Piar in 1817 for allegedly inciting a caste war to institute a *pardocracia*—the kind of rule by non-white *pardos* and *mestizos* that Bolívar and other white elites deeply feared.³⁴

Fast forward to today, when the figure of Boves still terrifies right-wing Venezuelan elites—evoking nothing so much as the ever-present threat of “a new Haiti.” For many, this threat became a visceral reality with the explosive and unexpected appearance of the marginalized and excluded “dark proletariat” of the Venezuelan barrios in the week-long 1989 rebellion against neoliberal austerity known as the Caracazo, setting off a political chain reaction that would bring Chávez to power and set the Bolivarian Revolution into motion. And it is against this terrified and violent right, not to mention deeply colonial economic foundations, that the communal project persists today in Venezuela. Despite many setbacks, the goal of the *comuneros* is to carry out precisely what Du Bois had described as a reconstruction “of democracy”—the building of a radically egalitarian and participatory abolition democracy—that rebuilds society from the bottom up through an expansive network of self-governing communes.³⁵ From Bolívar to Chávez and beyond, the explosive dialectics of anti-racist struggle has proved a central and catalyzing force in Venezuelan history, pulling leaders along the path of historical progress, occasionally against their will.³⁶ As US imperialism once again sets its sights on Venezuela in an explicit return to the violent intervention of the Monroe Doctrine, these lessons will remain more essential than ever.

In other words, in his reconceptualization of the subject of revolutionary change, his reformulation of its specific mode of action and appearance, and

the expansive reconstruction of democracy it sets into motion, Du Bois and *Black Reconstruction* have much to offer for grasping Venezuela's past and present. As Du Bois himself began to recognize in conversation with Latin American thinkers and their movements, racial democracy was no substitute for economic equality, and just as abolition without reconstruction in the United States led to sharecropping, convict leasing, Jim Crow, hyperpolicing and mass incarceration, Latin American independence was partial and truncated at best, leaving unfinished today its substantive reconstructive counterpart: the transnational project of the dark proletariat in all its mobility and dynamism, its surging forth and breaking of boundaries, and the communist project it carries like so much contraband wherever it goes. And Du Bois's own account of this history was itself a partial one.³⁷

"FROM TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE TO FIDEL CASTRO"

Here as elsewhere, we find astonishing parallels between *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins* by C. L. R. James, and here again we spiral back toward where we began, and toward the centrality of Haiti and her great revolution for Latin America, for the hemisphere, and indeed for the entire globe. At the precise moment that Du Bois was toiling on his magnum opus, James was doing much the same, each putting pen to paper in ignorance of the other. The two works appeared nearly simultaneously, *Black Reconstruction* in 1935 and *Black Jacobins* in 1938, and both were re-released in the heady days of 1962 and 1963, respectively, when global Black and anticolonial struggles made them required reading for a generation of militants. And the resulting parallels and resonances—the centrality of slavery in capitalism, the refiguring of Marxist categories in practice, the role of force in history, and the radical self-directed activity and self-emancipation of enslaved people—are astounding.³⁸

For his new 1963 edition, James made important adjustments to the text, but also added a new appendix, revealingly titled "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro." For James, the comparison was not a hyperbolic one, nor was it even a comparison at all, strictly speaking. As he writes, he didn't connect Toussaint to Fidel simply "because both led revolutions in the West Indies." His argument was a far stronger one: "What took place in French San Domingo in 1792–1804 reappeared in Cuba in 1958," and while "Castro's revolution is of the twentieth century as much as Toussaint's

was of the eighteenth . . . both are West Indian.” Both were responses to the two defining features of Caribbean life, namely, “the sugar plantation and Negro slavery,” and in each, Caribbean people sought to solve these Caribbean problems in peculiarly Caribbean ways.³⁹ If Haiti had seen abolition preceding and driving independence, this reappearance was in fact not a reappearance at all for Cuba—“the most West Indian island in the West Indies”—where a long overdue independence struggle was hijacked by US imperialism in 1898.⁴⁰ What we see instead is a sort of compression of formal independence with substantive socialism that would not come to fruition for a half-century still—a reflection of the radical unevenness of global development and resistance diagnosed by Walter Rodney, who was himself, lest we forget, Latin American and Caribbean by way of Guyana.

From these peculiarly Caribbean conditions sprang not only Black consciousness, in James’s assessment, but also an entire cadre of Caribbean revolutionaries that he names: Garvey and Padmore, Césaire and Cipriani, and in Cuba itself, Du Bois’s close friend and collaborator Fernando Ortiz. For James, Cuba promised to offer the region what Haiti had before it—to be an island of liberation and freedom, literally as well as figuratively. Where Pétion had “nursed back to health the sick and defeated Bolívar, gave him money, arms and a printing press to help in the campaign which ended in the freedom of the Five States,” James wondered if Castro might not provide the same level of inspiration and material support for revolutionary struggle across the region.⁴¹ In 1963, he could not have possibly known just how right his instincts would prove to be on this question. Cuba would stand, and continues stubbornly to stand, against the hemispheric and global project of US imperialism that, as Du Bois teaches us, was the great victory that the Confederacy had won in defeat.

NOTES

1. This chapter was presented in different forms at Cornell University and as part of the ARC Fellowship Symposium series at CUNY. I am deeply thankful to participants in both events, and particularly for insights offered by Russell Rickford at the former and Linda Martín Alcoff and Ruth Wilson Gilmore at the latter.

2. “Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to National Citizens Committee on Relations with Latin America,” November 17, 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu>

/view/full/mums312-b040-i093. Du Bois strikes a similar tone in a 1949 book review, in which he contends that the book's discussion of Latin America "avoids the Negro problem" and excludes the Caribbean because there it can't be avoided. See "Review of *Most of the World: The Peoples of Africa, Latin America, and the East Today*" (1949), W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b228-i053>. In 1955, Du Bois offered an article written on Haiti to *Latin America Today* after it was turned down elsewhere. *The Crisis* featured frequent reports on Haitian affairs and regularly categorized Haiti as Latin American.

3. Or, as he puts it elsewhere, "from Toussaint the Savior, through Gabriel, Vesey, and Turner." See W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 78, 40. Du Bois discusses the Haitian Revolution in many places, including extensively in *The World and Africa* (Oxford University Press, 2007 [1946]), where he argues that the Revolution "changed the face of the world" (38). See also Agustín Lao-Montes, "Maroon Nation: Racial Capitalism and Empire in the Pan-African Horizon of Du Bois," paper presented at *W. E. B. Du Bois on Latin America and the Caribbean*, Michigan State University, 2020, <https://clacs.isp.msu.edu/events/past-events/web-du-bois-latin-america-and-caribbean-trans-american-pan-africanism-and-global-sociology>.

4. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (The Free Press, 1935), 451. Further citations are parenthetical.

5. John Leddy Phelan, "Pan-Latinism, French intervention in México (1861–1867) and the Genesis of the Idea of Latin America," in *Conciencia y autenticidad históricas: Escritos en homenaje a Edmundo O' Gorman*, ed. Juan Antonio Ortega y Medina (UNAM, 1968).

6. On the debates shaping this identity, see the texts collected in Mari Carmen Ramírez, Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, and Héctor Olea, eds., *Resisting Categories: Latin American and/or Latino?*, vol. 1 (Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 2012).

7. See, for example, Jean Casimir, *The Haitians: A Decolonial History* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Carolyn Fick, "Emancipation in Haiti: From Plantation Labor to Peasant Proprietorship," *Slavery & Abolition* 21, no. 2 (2000).

8. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 42, 16.

9. David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois, 1919–1963: The Fight for Equality and the American Century* (Henry Holt & Co., 2000), 342, although he adds that *Black Folk: Then and Now* had a "glaringly superficial treatment of Latin America" (627). Du Bois's opposition to US policy in the region was particularly pronounced after a 1915 visit to Jamaica, where he even met a young Marcus Garvey. See Gerald Horne, *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Biography* (Greenwood, 2010), 75.

10. Gerald Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1836: Texas Slavery and Jim Crow and the Roots of U.S. Fascism* (International Publishers, 2022).
11. Claire Parfait, "Rewriting History: The Publication of W. E. B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935)," *Book History* 12 (2009).
12. *Folk* appears in Spanish editions as both *gente* and *pueblo*, the former indicating a more undifferentiated mass of individuals ("people") and the latter something closer to a unity that bespeaks a purpose ("*the* people").
13. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Reconstrucción negra: Ensayo sobre la historia del pueblo negro en su intento por reconstruir la democracia en América, 1860–1880* (Tinta Limón, 2025).
14. While my central concern here is popular racial discourse in Latin America, we can find examples of this exceptionalism at the highest levels of the transnational academy, as with the slightly bizarre critique by two French thinkers of a Black American's scholar's "imperialist reason" for casting critical light on Brazil's racial mythmaking. See Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, "On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason," *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, no. 1 (1999). Their target was Michael Hanchard, who responded in "Acts of Misrecognition: Transnational Black Politics, Anti-Imperialism and the Ethnocentrism of Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant," *Theory, Culture & Society* 20, no. 4 (2003).
15. Mark Q. Sawyer, "Du Bois's Double Consciousness Versus Latin American Exceptionalism: Joe Arroyo, Salsa, and Negritude," *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*, 7, no. 3–4 (2005).
16. José Itzigsohn, "¿Por qué leer a W. E. B. Du Bois en América Latina?," *Nueva Sociedad* 292 (2021), <https://nuso.org/articulo/por-que-leer-a-web-du-bois-en-america-latina>.
17. Juliet Hooker, *Theorizing Race in the Americas* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 2, 198. But while Hooker decenters *Souls* in favor of what she calls the "mestizo futurism" of fictional texts like *Dark Princess*, she also shuns *Black Reconstruction* for the same reason.
18. Jorge Daniel Vásquez, "W. E. B. Du Bois's Global Sociology and the Anti-Racist Struggle for Democracy in Cuba (1931–1941)," *Du Bois Review* 21, no. 1 (2024).
19. W. E. B. Du Bois, "As the Crow Flies" (June 1941), W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b217-i137>.
20. Vásquez, "W. E. B. Du Bois's Global Sociology," 18. On the role of children in Du Bois's shifting racial imaginary vis-à-vis Cuba, see Caroline Levander, *Cradle of Liberty: Race, the Child, and National Belonging from Thomas Jefferson to W. E. B. Du Bois* (Duke University Press, 2006), ch. 6.

21. Juliana Góes, "Du Bois and Brazil: Reflections on Black Transnationalism and African Diaspora," *Du Bois Review* 19, no. 2 (2022): 293.
22. Góes, "Du Bois and Brazil," 294.
23. Góes, "Du Bois and Brazil," 301.
24. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Future of Africa in America" (1941), W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b213-i059>. This document also points toward "the policy of absorption with Negro suppression through the domination of capital as in Jamaica and Cuba" and "the policy of racial segregation illustrated by Haiti."
25. See particularly Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 9.
26. As I have argued in *Decolonizing Dialectics* (Duke University Press, 2017), this anchoring in nonbeing is essential to any decolonized dialectics, and as I argue in *Anticolonial Eruptions* (University of California Press, 2022), emergence from that nonbeing creates an inevitable shock among the powerful.
27. José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (University of Texas Press, 1971).
28. Geo Maher, "Constituent Moments, Constitutional Processes: Social Movements and the New Latin American Left," *Latin American Perspectives* 40, no. 3 (2013).
29. Kevin Bruyneel, *Settler Memory: The Disavowal of Indigeneity and the Politics of Race in the United States* (University of North Carolina, 2021).
30. K-Sue Park, "Self-Deportation Nation," *Harvard Law Review* 132, no. 7 (2019).
31. Daniel Denvir, *All-American Nativism: How the Bipartisan War on Immigrants Explains Politics as We Know It* (Verso, 2020).
32. Boves crushed Bolívar's forces the year before his Haitian interlude. See especially Germán Carrera Damas, *Boves: Aspectos socioeconómicos de su acción histórica* (Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1972).
33. Aline Helg, "Simón Bolívar's Republic: A Bulwark Against the 'Tyranny' of the Majority," *Revista de Sociología e Política* 20, no. 42 (2012): 21–37.
34. As C. L. R. James describes it, "to shoot Moïse, the black, for the sake of the whites was more than an error, it was a crime. It was almost as if Lenin had had Trotsky shot for taking the side of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie." See *The Black Jacobins* (Vintage Books, 1963), 284. See Mohammed Elnaïem, "Bolívar in Haiti," *JSTOR Daily* (December 24, 2019), <https://daily.jstor.org/bolivar-haiti>.
35. Geo Maher, *Building the Commune: Radical Democracy in Venezuela* (Verso Books, 2016).

36. For the centrality of struggles against white supremacy within the Bolivarian project, see Geo Maher, *We Created Chávez: A People's History of the Venezuelan Revolution* (Duke University Press, 2013).

37. From George Jackson and Orisanmi Burton's formulations of the Black Commune to Thulani Davis's mapping of post-Civil War "emancipation circuits," we can see that Du Bois's own account was only part of the story, one centering on the state and internal dynamics of capitalism at the expense of the full contours of communal and non-capitalist life. See George Jackson, *Blood in My Eye* (Black Classic Press, 1990); Orisanmi Burton, *Tip of the Spear: Black Radicalism, Prison Repression, and the Long Attica Revolt* (University of California Press, 2023); Thulani Davis, *The Emancipation Circuit* (Duke University Press, 2022).

38. Later, in 1971, James himself would suggest that in some respects, Du Bois had done a better job grasping the centrality of race within the broader dynamics of "world history," insisting that those who see him as "concerned primarily with blackness . . . are quite wrong." See "Lectures on the Black Jacobins," *Small Axe* 8 (September 2000), 86.

39. James, *Black Jacobins*, 391.

40. James, *Black Jacobins*, 411.

41. James, *Black Jacobins*, 411.

From Du Bois to Cabral

“PORTUGUESE” AFRICA AND THE COLOR LINE

António Tomás

FOR THE SECOND MEETING of the Third Pan-African Congress in 1923, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois traveled to Lisbon to meet with leaders of organizations working to advance African interests in the Portuguese Empire. Among the many activists he was acquainted with, José Magalhães caught his attention. Du Bois mentions him in a few of his essays, such as in the opening of his famous “Worlds of Color,” in which he writes: “You see Magalhães (to give him the Portuguese spelling) is a mulatto-small, light brown and his hand quick with gestures.”¹ Du Bois informs his readership of African Americans unfamiliar with Portugal that Magalhães was a medical doctor, a practicing specialist at the Institute of Tropical Medicine, and a deputy representing São Tomé in the Portuguese parliament. To make the case that such a successful Black man was not an exception in Portugal, he adds that other Blacks were holding similar positions and that hundreds of African students were enrolled in Portuguese universities. According to Du Bois, “Between the Portuguese and the African and near African there is naturally no ‘racial’—no accumulated historical hatreds, dislikes, despisings. Not that you would likely find a black man married to a Portuguese of family or wealth, but on the other hand, it seems quite natural for Portugal to make all the blacks of her African empire citizens of Portugal with the rights of the European born.”²

Fleshing out the contextual meaning of Du Bois’s “citizens of Portugal with the rights of Europeans born” is what concerns me in this chapter. By decoupling Portugal and Europe, Du Bois suggested the possibility of being a Portuguese without necessarily being a European. As I intend to show, this illuminates not only some of the intricacies of Portuguese colonialism but also postimperial race relations. Such a scheme enabled the construction

of the Portuguese colonial racial hierarchy, whereby those born in Africa could claim Portuguese citizenship but were in a socially inferior position to those born in Europe. If, instead of Europeans, we have white Portuguese, it may allow us to phantom the kinds of reconstruction that took place in postcolonial Portugal to accommodate Portuguese Blackness.

Unaware of the intricacies of the ideological formations of Portuguese colonialism, in "Worlds of Color" Du Bois proceeds to explain the visibility of Blacks in mainstream Portuguese society. With the end of formal slavery in the previous century, he intimates, white Portuguese producers of cocoa in Africa, particularly on the island of São Tomé, resorted to practices of labor akin to slavery to accrue and protect their profit margins. Because of this, these producers found themselves under a great deal of pressure: "The cocoa industry was forced by public opinion to boycott Portuguese cocoa; the great Portuguese proprietors were forced to give place to smaller Negro and mulatto cultivators who could afford smaller profits."³ For Du Bois, these pressures and boycotts contributed to the diminishment of profit margins, discouraging white Portuguese from investing in cocoa production and opening the way for Black Portuguese to take it up, thus improving their social standing in the Portuguese Empire.

"Worlds of Color" was written more than ten years before the publication of Du Bois's masterwork *Black Reconstruction in America*. However, in "Worlds of Color" and in a few other essays penned around the same time, the thinking and the argumentative scaffolding that would later allow Du Bois to challenge the main tenets of the literature on American Reconstruction are clearly discernible.⁴ How Du Bois sets up the problem is worth recalling here:

Was the rule of the mass of Americans to be unlimited, and the right to rule extended to all men, regardless of race and color, or if not, what power of dictatorship would rule, and how would property and privilege be protected? This was the great and primary question which was in the minds of the men who wrote the Constitution of the United States and continued in the minds of thinkers down through the slavery controversy. It still remains with the world as the problem of democracy expands and touches all races and nations.⁵

By framing the problem of democracy in America and in the world in such a way, Du Bois provided fodder for what, a few decades earlier, he identified as the main challenge of modern times: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line." The question of the relationship between

democracy and race is still worth asking today, particularly in relation to the accomplishments and fate of Black diasporic communities in much of the Western world. In the remainder of this chapter, I will draw on the American experience, or the American idealized experience, to shed light on the relationship between the universalization of democracy and the stubbornness of the color line that inevitably cuts across it. I will do so by bringing the revolutionary practice of the Guinean-born Africanist revolutionary Amílcar Cabral to my analyses. My point here is not to compare or find any sort of resemblance or commonality between, on the one hand, Du Bois's work and action and, on the other, Cabral's revolutionary theory, which underpinned his quest for self-determination—although there is common ground between them. My ambition in this piece is more modest, for I believe that engaging with the theoretical and sometimes unresolved concerns Du Bois grappled with in much of his life can yield insights into Cabral's practical and philosophical challenges. Here, I am particularly concerned with the question of the extent to which Du Bois's interpretation of and engagement with his time allow us to understand the world in which Cabral crafted his revolutionary practice, and how such crafting allows for grappling with the fate of Portuguese Blackness in postimperial Portugal.

Discussing the later writings of Du Bois, Eric Porter makes the important argument that there is something about the Reconstruction of the United States that begets an understanding of the reconstruction of Europe after World War II. As he emphatically writes, "The problem of the Reconstruction of the United States, in 1886, is the problem of the reconstruction of the world in 1943."⁶ I agree with Porter in general terms. But one cannot fail to notice the tendency in the broad field of American Studies to use the history of the United States to make sense of the rest of the world. It is perhaps not enough to say, as Eric Foner has, that Du Bois had already understood that advancement and liberation in America were intimately interlocked with advancement and progress in the rest of the world.⁷ The question here becomes, to what extent was an engagement with world history, or an engagement with the Negro problem in much of the world, fundamental in Du Bois's attempts to rectify the American history of Reconstruction? On this, I will have to say more later.

This fascination with world history, or this reading of world events from the US standpoint, speaks to the moment when the United States was called to play a larger role in global politics in the aftermath of World War II. Hence, perhaps, the number of studies and literature concerning the United

States in that period that have even, or particularly, come from the Black Studies perspective. However, to provide a more accurate historical context for what I am attempting to do in this chapter, it is perhaps more productive to evoke an earlier historical period—the interwar period. Of importance in that historical period is the notion of empire and the kinds of political possibilities being gauged, for instance, on the forms of association between the empire and the colonized people. These possibilities were irrevocably superseded with the triumph of the nation-state, as the chief way by which the interplay between sovereignty and belonging is politically enacted. Engaging with empire provides a vantage point from which to come to terms with the formation and transformation of concepts such as democracy, equality, and self-determination, particularly in the context of a progressive and undeniable human diversity. To put it differently, it is in the context of the empire—the American empire and its correspondent European empires—as a dominant political framework that the question of what, for lack of a better term, I would call “negative democracy” came to the fore. My usage of the term “negative democracy” stems from the ways in which Du Bois so cogently posed political power as the means through which the distribution of property is arbitrated, on the one hand, and the conservation of property and privilege takes place, on the other. As such, I would like to argue that some of the unresolved business of democracy resides in the tension between the dying empire and the emergent nation-state. As I will show, this cuts through the times and struggles of Amílcar Cabral’s generation and, for the most part, the struggles of Black Portuguese in postcolonial present-day Portugal.

By the time Du Bois visited Black activists there in 1923, the Portuguese Empire, in his eyes, was undergoing a kind of reconstruction similar to that which America experienced after the Civil War. And these sorts of processes speak to the kinds of problems any empire in the world faces: how to expand the empire by incorporating territory and diverse subjects, and how to do so without significant changes at the center of power. These are some of the questions that, for instance, Mahmood Mamdani grappled with in *Citizen and Subject*. Mamdani’s answer to the question of imperial reorganization was indirect rule, which the British, the French, and the Portuguese practiced in Africa. For it always comes down to how to make democracy work in a plural and diverse political environment. In indirect rule, the bifurcation of the state implies the partition of the polity so that two opposite realms for political action can emerge: on the one hand, civil, or more aptly called by Mamdani, civilized society, and on the other, the native authority.⁸

Even though the case of Portuguese colonialism is far more nuanced and complex than Mamdani's classifications, there are still lessons to be learned from this clear-cut duality. With the expansion of Portuguese colonial administration in Africa, following the end of the monarchy and the establishment of the republic in 1910, the question of ascribing rights to the dominated people came to the forefront. Such an ascription of rights was easier to enact when the privileged in colonized societies could be counted in the hundreds, as Du Bois noted, but things became more difficult when the numbers increased. The Portuguese resolved these questions of rights and privilege less through the politicization of culture, or the implementation of the native administration, as Mamdani has it, and more through the inscription of labor in the political realm. Or, in other terms, the politicization of labor.

Portugal's Native Law, the so-called *Lei do Indigenato*, crystallized in the law of 1926, was less concerned with ethnic or tribal ascription than with the imperative to create a category of human beings, "the native," subject to labor conscription. This legal system, which I will refer to as *Indigenato*, rather than merely Native Law, defines the *indígena* as an individual devoid of the qualities deemed necessary to participate in civil society and defines labor as the condition through which the *indígena* can transcend the limitations of their condition.⁹ Implicit here was the idea that the colonial state had the right to use labor as a tool for civilizing the *indígena*.

Coming to terms with conceptual refinement in the spirit of Du Bois's writing, according to Porter, amounts to paying attention to "how European colonialism, U.S. imperialism, and white supremacy in general were maintained through a complex yet complementary system of affirmations and disavowals of race through a multitude of social structures and different modes of racial knowledge."¹⁰ In the 1920s, the period when Du Bois visited Portugal, Portuguese colonial thinkers were coming to terms with the kind of society that produced individuals such as José Magalhães. As such, one may say, Cabral was the product of the limitations and the curtailment faced by the preceding generation, the generation of his father, Juvenal Cabral, who was deeply and severely affected by these transformations, that is, by the coming into being of the *Indigenato* and the legal and constitutional bifurcation in the empire. It was during the republic, the democratic regime that preceded fascism in Portugal, that the *Indigenato* came into being.

For the Portuguese colonial empire, the promulgation of the *Indigenato* was carried out with Angola and Mozambique (and not so much São Tomé,

Cape Verde, and Guinea-Bissau) in mind, for two reasons. First, as I have mentioned, there was a need to create a category of the population from which labor could be extracted without or with minimal remuneration. Second, there was a need to segregate populations based on race as much as possible, particularly because Angola and Mozambique would become the recipients of the largest numbers of Portuguese settlers. As the Portuguese administration expanded, particularly after the end of the republic in the 1910s, Portuguese settlers came to occupy the middle strata, which was in competition with those Africans whose families had prospered with the slave trade and who considered themselves a sort of nobility by virtue of being, in some cases, descendants of Europeans. Those Africans could speak and write perfectly in Portuguese and could wrestle with the fragilities of the Portuguese Empire in their elegant prose. However, they were for reforms from within rather than succession from the empire. This generation's mentality is well captured in the writings of Juvenal Cabral, who, in one of his books, admonished his children for speaking Creole instead of Portuguese. Dubbed by a contemporary of the younger Cabral, Mário Pinto de Andrade, the "protonationalist generation,"¹¹ Juvenal's generation believed in the transformative force of education and advocated for its universalization. The rupture with colonialism, as Amílcar Cabral and other intellectuals such as Pinto de Andrade would fight for, can be seen as a reflection of the empire's failure to accommodate diversity by reducing the space of civil society and raising the stakes for membership in it.

The point to consider here is the extent to which *Indigenato* crept into the living conditions and aspirations not only of those the law was meant to regulate but also those *assimilados* who considered themselves Black Portuguese and navigated practically and symbolically between the African and the European worlds. For them, since the implantation of the *Indigenato* in the 1920s, Indigeneity became not only a category they could fall into but also a class formed by those they were increasingly forced to live with, particularly in the context of the enforcement of zoning rules that separated settlers from natives. Laws promulgated in the 1920s determined the places where Blacks, natives, and *assimilados* alike could build their houses. In Luanda, Angola, for instance, the valuation of primary commodities such as cotton and coffee ushered in new waves of white migration and triggered economic speculation in land and landed property, the indirect consequence of which was that proud members of the so-called creole society lost the right to the city and were left to find and build their houses in the newly formed slums.¹²

Cabral's father was a member of this generation. These experiences are not unique to Lusophone Africa. Anyone who has read Du Bois's "Talented Tenth" is perhaps familiar with such descriptions: "Is it fair, is it decent, is it Christian to ignore these facts of the Negro problem, to belittle aspirations, to nullify such leadership and seek and crush these people back into the mass out of which by toil and travail, they and their fathers have raised themselves."¹³ For Mário Pinto de Andrade, this form of social devaluation was instrumental for the emergence of nationalism in Portuguese Africa.

In broad strokes, this was the world that had formed and informed Cabral and some of his close friends by the time they arrived in Portugal to pursue their higher education. They were legally Portuguese, particularly in the context of the promulgation of the Portuguese Constitution of 1933, which integrated Portuguese colonies into the definition of the Portuguese nation.¹⁴ But they had found themselves in the position of having to prove that they were not *indígenas*. Contrary to what Du Bois had observed among an earlier generation of students on his trip to Portugal in 1923, the group of students of which Cabral was part did not arrive in Lisbon with the financial support of their families, but rather thanks to religious denominations, philanthropy, and the colonial state.

Even though they were considered for the most part *cidadãos de segunda*, second-class citizens, these young people were still thinking about what being Portuguese would allow them to do. Cabral, for instance, was deeply interested and invested in questions of land in Cape Verde, writing a series of pieces on the subject for the recently created *Voz do Povo*. For his dissertation, he decided to investigate the plight of Southern Portuguese white peasants.¹⁵ After receiving his degree in agronomy in the early 1950s, he traveled to Angola several times for work commissions, where he became aware of the plight of the Indigenous people. However, there was still nothing in his life or writings that anticipated his move to Guinea-Bissau to organize the anticolonial struggle.

I have written in my biography of Cabral that all the identity confusion Cabral seems to have experienced up to the late 1950s may have stemmed from the notion that the concept of the nation-state was not available to him at that time in history. Only after Ghana and Guinea-Conakry gained independence in 1957 and 1958 was Cabral's generation able to turn dissatisfaction with colonial rule into organized resistance to end the colonial order. As such, the war for independence in Lusophone Africa, which started in 1961, was not only about Cabral's proposed delinking of colonized Africa

from the empire, but also, I would like to suggest, the crystallization of the condition of the diasporic Black community in what would remain of the Portuguese Empire. I will come back to this point.

In the 1960s, the Portuguese were convinced that they could survive Africa's nationalist moment unscathed by applying cosmetic fixes to the terms of their presence in Africa. They improved the conditions of native farmers and sent troops to Portuguese Africa to subdue the resistance, to such an extent, in fact, that Angola became the most fractious aspect of Kennedy's presidency in the United States, for it brought to the fore the contradictions of an administration that was attempting to support civil rights at home and self-determination abroad.¹⁶ However, more importantly, Portugal abolished the *Indigenato*, thereby granting every person born in the empire Portuguese full citizenship. This is the sort of reconstruction of the Portuguese presence in Africa one can reconceptualize with the help of Du Bois.

Like any book of its breadth and profundity, Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* lends itself to various readings and has been read and appropriated in different ways. For Du Bois himself, the book was about writing history against the grain of the dominant frameworks in the historical literature of American Reconstruction, particularly the Dunning School, which disregarded the critical and enormous contribution of African Americans in the formation of modern American democracy. For Du Bois, African Americans saved the Union. For one of the most careful readers of Du Bois, Charles Lemert, *Black Reconstruction* can be interpreted as a sort of deconstruction, à la Jacques Derrida, rather than a mere reconstruction. Throughout the book, Du Bois not only envisions an epistemological reversal in the way in which the topic was being discussed in mid-1935 but also forcefully makes the case for, or illuminates, the absences in the description of the history under analysis, which, had they been taken into consideration, would allow for a better, if not different, understanding of America's Reconstruction.

In my own reading, *Black Reconstruction in America* is not only about the ways in which African Americans have taken the crafting of their future and aspirations into their own hands. It is also about how democracy worked back then and continues to work through the arbitration of access. Putting it slightly differently, *Black Reconstruction* allows for a less theological reading, but one that comes to terms with the ways in which full political participation is curtailed for certain groups of people on the basis of gender, class, or race. Such an insight is crucial to understanding democracy in most of the world, particularly in what remains of the Portuguese Empire.

As Du Bois abundantly demonstrates, the universalization of citizenship rights in the United States in the wake of the Civil War and the promulgation of the Fourteenth Amendment was followed by reconfigurations of the political system aimed at the disenfranchisement of vast sectors of the population. It was not much different in the Portuguese case. With the creation of the fascist Estado Novo under the leadership of António de Oliveira Salazar in 1933, Portuguese colonies in Africa were integrated into the definition of Portugal itself. This provides the background for understanding the implementation of the *Indigenato* as a means by which labor could be captured, allowing Portugal to assert its autonomy in relation to the rest of the world: *Orgulhosamente sós*, proudly alone, as Salazar famously put it. The granting of Portuguese citizenship to African-born people in the Portuguese Empire could only occur through the reconstruction of the empire itself and the redistribution of privileges. I will give one single example.

With the proclamation of the Estado Novo, its law was very clear on the separation between the state and the government and, correspondingly, the head of the state and the head of the government. Since the Estado Novo emerged from the military coup in 1926, the consensus was that the head of state, the president of the republic, would always be someone from the military with the rank of general, but that this would only be a ceremonial position. Executive power per se would rest in the hands of the head of the government, the president of the council—a position occupied by Salazar for much of the fascist regime in Portugal. One of the few prerogatives bestowed on the president of the republic was the ability to dissolve the government. In the increasingly dwindling arena of antifascist resistance in Portugal, some believed that replacing the country's leadership through general elections could lead to a quiet revolution and regime change. In 1948—a time in which, as in the United States, the struggle for racial equality was a prerogative of the Communist Party—antifascist resistance in Portugal coalesced around the presidential candidate Norton de Matos, a former governor of Angola. This attempt to challenge Salazar was known as the *Movimento de União Democrática* (Movement for Democratic Union), and Cabral was a part of it through his membership in the *Casa dos Estudantes do Império* (House of the Students of the Empire). Over the following years, there was a real possibility that the opposition would dethrone the *Estado Novo*, especially given the nationalization of those born in Africa. Consequently, the constitution was revised: from 1958 up to the end of the Estado Novo, the president of the republic was to be elected in the National Assembly, which was controlled by Salazar's party.¹⁷ The

amendment was convenient because it allowed the citizenship bases to be expanded without affecting the electoral process.

Portugal's expansion of citizenship and simultaneous manipulation of the electoral process are instances of those disavowals and disenfranchisements Du Bois was attempting to come to terms with in *Black Reconstruction*, which I have been using to shed light on the world that Cabral entered and vowed to change. As my final point, to illustrate how these questions remain relevant in what remains of the Portuguese Empire, let me turn to contemporary Portugal and its race relations. In September 2022, the Portuguese newspaper *Diário de Notícias* published a story on a petition organized by a group of African veterans who had been recruited to fight Cabral's insurgency (from 1964 to 1973). These men accused Portugal of being ungrateful "for the service they had given and the blood they spilled in defense of the empire."¹⁸ The petitioners, represented by Amadu Jao, president of the Association of Veterans of the Armed Forces of Guinea, contended that they had been abandoned and left to die by Portugal when Guinea became independent, in contravention of the Agreement of Argel from 1974, according to which Portugal was responsible for their security and their rights. However, with the new Constitutional Law that emerged from the Carnation Revolution in 1974, the meaning of what it meant to be Portuguese had changed: By severing ties with the empire, Portugal also severed ties with those who, since 1961, had been considered Portuguese.

The petition reads (my translation):

We, Veterans of the Armed Forces of Portugal, saw comrades, friends, fathers, and brothers giving their lives for Portugal. We were born and we were raised Portuguese; we have been since 1961 full citizens of Portugal. In the hour of all decisions when Portugal needed us, we were available. We are what is left of these more than 20,000 sons of Guiné that did not refuse what was for us an irrefusable citizenship duty. Because we were born Portuguese, we served Portugal when Portugal asked us to serve. To do so was the highest honor.

It continues:

Never before has a state stripped away a vast proportion of its citizens from the right to citizenship by evoking a strictly racial criterion, or a strictly racist criterion. Out of the 25 million Portuguese who were in 1975, 60% were suddenly, involuntarily, and illegally declared non-Portuguese because they were in apparent contravention of international law, the United Nations Charter, and the constitutional dispensation before 1976.¹⁹

This lament from African-born Black Portuguese is better understood in contrast to other categories of humans vying for Portuguese citizenship. For many years, Portugal and a few other European nations have been quite generous in restoring citizenship rights on religious grounds to descendants of those who had been stripped of them. The reasons are complex, but of importance here is that the criteria behind such restitutions are based on blood rather than birthright. This is to the extent that, in a few cases, it has become easier to claim citizenship based on descent from the Sephardic Jews whose communities were forced to leave Portugal more than 400 years ago than on the grounds of being born in Portugal to foreign parents, let alone being born in the extinct Portuguese Empire to descendants of the enslaved. And yet, Portugal harbors the largest diasporic communities from the empire, particularly from Angola and Guinea, as well as Cape Verde. However, African presence in Portugal does not necessarily translate into visibility. An explanation for this, as I present in the reading of *Black Reconstruction*, is that democracy is not always about inclusion. This does not mean that the meaning of democracy resides in the opposite direction, but rather that democracy becomes the way in which wealth and privilege are distributed.

So, this brings me to my second concluding thought, on the extent to which Du Bois might have misread Portuguese society in the 1920s in his description of its colorblindness.

This question can provisionally be met with two answers. The first one highlights the propagandist nature of Du Bois's work, a characteristic abundantly demonstrated by his most trusted and authoritative biographer, David Levering Lewis.²⁰ Likewise, Charles Lemert has warned us that, in Du Bois, "the theory usually served his politics."²¹ Since Du Bois was an active agent for racial transformation in the United States, his writing is often geared toward demonstrating the extent to which the United States was further behind in terms of the advancement of Black folks than almost every other country he visited or could speak of.

Furthermore, there is something else at play by positing Du Bois's interventions in their proper historical context and, particularly, within the context of global histories. *Black Reconstruction* was written in a particular global conjuncture marked by, in the United States and worldwide, the Great Depression and the rise of fascism, particularly in Europe. Lemert also makes the case for the similarity in terms of the zeitgeist between the period in which the book was written, the Great Depression, and the period the book addresses, Reconstruction. However, reading and writing about *Black*

Reconstruction as an African and from the perspective of one who has written about the life and struggles of Cabral raises another point worth considering. One cannot fail to contrast the pessimism of *Black Reconstruction* with the optimism Du Bois seems to exude in his previous works, such as “World of Color.” In the 1920s, Du Bois was perhaps espousing a more Marxist view of historical materialism, as he could see and document the progress of men and women of color toward equality. In the 1930s, years of not only economic but also moral depression, the possibility of equality was foreclosed, and the violence later espoused by Fanon and Cabral seemed to be the only way out of the abyss.

For the most part, and contrary to Marx, Du Bois made a clear distinction between Black and white workers. But—central in further discussions on the possibility of Black Marxism—he was still a strong believer in how industrial democracy or the dictatorship of labor could contribute to the emergence of a form of politics that would not only displace prevailing structures that arbitrate through the distribution of wealth and privileges but also bring about a coalition between white and Black labor.²² Cabral might have subscribed to this view earlier, when he worked as an agronomist for the colonial state and believed that the most pressing problem of the empire was fascism and that the alignment of Black and white labor for the destruction of such a political dispensation was still viable. There is of course some of this in Du Bois’s thesis on the General Strike.²³ However, with the implementation of the *Indigenato*, such a redemptive possibility for societal transformation was no longer available, because the *Indigenato* brought something else to modern politics, which Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben have attempted to illuminate in their writings.²⁴ Unqualified labor was brought to the center of politics by denying to such workers the possibilities of caring for the kinds of consciousness they could attain through their work. To put it differently, the *Indigenato* denied the work of conscientization, to the extent that all that was left for the *indígena* was revolution. One question to ask in the effort to understand the different propositions of Du Bois and Cabral is whether present-day democracy is made of contemporary forms of *Indigenato* rather than labor.

NOTES

1. W. E. B. Du Bois, “Worlds of Color,” *Foreign Affairs* 3, no. 3 (1925): 424.
2. Du Bois, “Worlds of Color,” 424.

3. Du Bois, "Worlds of Color," 425.
4. The literature he challenged included the proponents of the so-called Dunning School, and also popular books such as Claude Bowers, *The Tragic Era: The Revolution After Lincoln* (Riverside Press, 1929).
5. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (The Free Press, 1935), 184.
6. Eric Porter, *The Problem of the Future of the World: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Race Concept at Midcentury* (Duke University Press, 2010), 53.
7. Eric Foner, "Reconstruction Revisited," *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 4 (1982).
8. Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject* (Princeton University Press, 1996).
9. Maria da Conceição Neto, "A República No Seu Estado Colonial," *Ler História* 59 (2010), 215.
10. Porter, *The Problem of the Future World*, 52.
11. Mário Pinto de Andrade, *Origens do Nacionalismo Angolano* (Publicações Dom Quixote, 1998).
12. Washinton Santos Nascimento, "Das Ingombotas ao Bairro Operário: Políticas metropolitanas, trânsitos e memórias no espaço urbano luandense (Angola, 1940–1960)," *Locus* 21, no. 1 (2015), 92.
13. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," in *The Negro Problem*, ed. Booker T. Washington (Pott and Co., 1903), 44.
14. In practice they were. Throughout the Portuguese presence in Africa, whites born in Africa were considered second-class Portuguese. See Fernando Tavares Pimenta, *Branços de Angola: Autonomismo e Nacionalismo (1900–1961)* (Minerva, 2005).
15. Amílcar Cabral, "O problema da erosão do solo: Contribuição Para o Seu Estudo na Região de Cuba (Alentejo)" (PhD diss., Instituto Superior de Agronomia, 1951).
16. Thomas Bortelsmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line* (Harvard University Press, 2003), 141.
17. Dawn Linda Raby, "The Portuguese Presidential Election of 1949: A Successful Government Maneuver?," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 27, no. 1 (1990), 68.
18. Paula Sá, "Ex-combatentes da Guiné Exigem Devolução da Nacionalidade Portuguesa," *Diário de Notícias* (September 25, 2022), <https://www.dn.pt/arquivo/diario-de-noticias/ex-combatentes-da-guine-exigem-devolucao-da-nacionalidade-portuguesa-15196722.html>.
19. Sá, "Ex-combatentes da Guiné."
20. David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (Owl Books, 1993).

21. Charles Lemert, "The Race of Time: Du Bois and Reconstruction," *boundary 2* 27, no. 3 (2000), 240.

22. These are notions that have become more complex in times of neoliberalism. See Steven Osuna, "Class Suicide: The Black Radical Tradition, Radical Scholarship, and the Neoliberal Turn," in *Futures of Black Radicalism*, ed. Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (Verso, 2017).

23. Guy Emerson Mount, "When Slaves Go on Strike: W. E. B. Du Bois's Black Reconstruction 80 Years Later," *Black Perspectives* (December 28, 2015), <https://www.aaihs.org/when-slaves-go-on-strike>.

24. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1958); Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford University Press, 1998).

“A Common History and a Common Disaster”

DU BOISIAN DIASPORIC POLITICS
IN THE BLACK MEDITERRANEAN

Camilla Hawthorne

BLACK RECONSTRUCTION IN THE BLACK MEDITERRANEAN

IN THIS CHAPTER, I TRAVEL with *Black Reconstruction* into the Black Mediterranean to consider how Du Bois’s scholarship can help us understand emergent Black political formations in Italy contesting racism, coloniality, labor exploitation, and border fortification. *Black Reconstruction*, which probed the delayed promise of abolition democracy through the possibilities and pitfalls of cross-racial class solidarity, continues to offer profound lessons about the politics of co-conspiracy and accomplicehood¹ in our current conjuncture. After introducing my engagements with the emergent framework of the “Black Mediterranean,” I turn to consider Du Bois’s arguments in *Black Reconstruction* about Blackness, racial capitalism, and the fraught politics of solidarity.

I argue that his analysis prefigured his powerful conceptualization of race as shared social heritage in his later works. In *Dusk of Dawn* in particular, Du Bois articulated a powerful vision of Black politics rooted in the transgressive solidarities of “common history”—solidarities that can subvert essentialisms based on bio-genealogical kinship and territory. From there, I return to the Black Mediterranean to show how Black migrants and citizens-in-waiting in Italy are collectively enacting a Du Boisian diasporic politics that challenges carceral regimes of mobility and state systems of categorization. In much the same way that Du Bois believed the Reconstruction-era South had something critically important to teach us about the future of global capitalism and imperialism, I argue that unfolding struggles in the Black Mediterranean offer urgent lessons for abolitionist struggles in a moment of global neofascist resurgence.

The core of my work involves ethnographic and archival research on the Black diaspora in Italy, with an emphasis on emergent Black Italian political mobilizations. My scholarship seeks to map the geographical and historical specificities of racial formation in Italy, Southern Europe, and the Mediterranean basin—especially as they challenge US-centric understandings of racism and race. I also take up the question of what it means to engage with Italy and Southern Europe not just as sites of bounded *comparison* with North American regimes of racism but also as a starting point for a *relational* and *transnationally interconnected* theorization of global racisms. In other words, my work asks how our understandings of racism and the cultural politics of Blackness might begin to shift when we geographically reorient the global history of racial capitalist modernity to the Italian Peninsula and the broader Mediterranean region.

My work is rooted in emerging scholarship on the Black Mediterranean, which builds on Robert Farris Thompson's² and Paul Gilroy's³ theorizations of the Black Atlantic to capture "the long history of racial subordination and resistance in the Mediterranean region," approaching the Mediterranean as "a space of multiple mobilities, traversed by various frontiers and border technologies, and spanning both colonial legacies and postcolonial conditions."⁴ This work also builds on the prescient analysis of Cedric Robinson, who began his history of racial capitalism in *Black Marxism*⁵ squarely in the Mediterranean basin. Robinson focused on practices of slavery and plantation cultivation across the Mediterranean between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, which served as templates for plantation slavery in the Americas, and did not only subjugate people who would today be racialized as Black, as well as the networks of trade and finance linking the Italian and Iberian peninsulas that created the economic conditions of possibility for colonization, Indigenous genocide, and African enslavement across the Atlantic.

Today, scholars of the Black Mediterranean emphasize that the Mediterranean was not only a defunct *precondition* for contemporary regimes of racial capitalism⁶ but also an ongoing site wherein racisms, Black subjectivities, and resistance are actively reproduced in the present. In my work, I approach the Black Mediterranean in three ways:

1. First, the Black Mediterranean represents an *empirical claim* for grounding the cultural politics of Blackness in Italy in their historical and geographical specificity. Italy's relatively late and fractious process of national unification (which unfolded alongside its colonization in

Africa), the historical racialization of Mediterranean Europe in relation to western/central/northern Europe and the African continent, and the fact that most people of African descent in Italy today are not descendants of enslaved people but instead have family histories tied to postcolonial migrations and border regimes, have all shaped the unique political terrain of Blackness in Italy today.

2. Second, the Black Mediterranean is an *analytical claim*, one that provides a framework for theorizing racism, capitalism, and the nation-state on a global scale. As Cedric Robinson reminds us, the Mediterranean was a “laboratory of sorts for the technologies of dispossession and exploitation that were then exported to the Atlantic.”⁷ As such, the Black Mediterranean invites us to consider the interconnections between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic in the emergence of racial capitalism, as well as historical and ongoing practices of resistance to racialized dispossession across borders.
3. Third, the Black Mediterranean contains an *ethico-political demand*. The Black Mediterranean is a site where many diverse histories of migration, colonization, and racialization have converged, in ways that complicate overly simplistic and mechanistic understandings of solidarity. This is what political theorist Ida Danewid envisions when she argues for abandoning “border-bound definitions of citizenship by challenging the very distinction between ‘citizen’ and ‘non-citizen’” and instead crafting political visions that approach “the struggles of migrants, minorities, workers, detention detainees, and the undocumented within a shared circuit: different fronts of the same war.”⁸

Thus, the Black Mediterranean is not only a descriptive tool, but a set of *political* claims as well. And it is on that latter front that Du Bois’s work has provided me with profound guidance.

LESSONS FROM *BLACK RECONSTRUCTION*

While there are many generative entry points for thinking with *Black Reconstruction* in relation to the insurgent geographies of the Black Mediterranean, here I want to focus on three of Du Bois’s interrelated interventions about Blackness, racial capitalism, and the politics of solidarity. The rigorous method through which Du Bois situates the struggles of Black freedmen in relation to both poor southern whites and colonized people globally

provides a conceptual pathway toward nonessentialist understandings of race, while at the same time refusing to discount the centrality of race as a modality through which capitalist exploitation operates and is experienced.⁹ Du Bois's nonreductive understandings of race and class also provide a nonlinear reading of alliance, solidarity, and coalition-building. Contrary to pessimistic readings of *Black Reconstruction* that uphold his story as evidence of an "intractable white racism"¹⁰ fundamentally irreconcilable with Black freedom, Du Bois's materialist analysis of race actually provides a case study of how race and class articulate at different moments to produce "strange and unexpected encounter"¹¹ in some cases and violent fracture in others.

First, Du Bois's careful attention to the extended and entangled geographies of racial capitalism in *Black Reconstruction*—connecting the US North and South, Europe and the Americas, the imperial core and its peripheries—allowed him to show that the defeat of Radical Reconstruction had far-reaching, global reverberations that ultimately helped to set the stage for the rise of fascism in the early twentieth century. Du Bois's relational geographical analysis refuses both southern regional exceptionalism *and* American national exceptionalism. As he argues in chapter 14, "The Counter-Revolution of Property," Black disenfranchisement and the manipulation of white labor increased the political power of the southern planter class and "reenforce the capitalistic dictatorship of the United States."¹² In this way, the United States would soon become the cornerstone of a renewed global imperialism that was built on the subjugation of racialized, colonized, and migratory labor (631). The ensuing jockeying for labor, natural resources, and markets culminated in World War I, financial collapse, and the rise of fascism in Italy and beyond,¹³ with devastating effects worldwide.

Second, *Black Reconstruction* teaches us that the geographies of racial capitalist domination also contain within them the vital preconditions for the articulation of the new solidarities and practices of community at the heart of abolition democracy, or "the abolition of institutions that advance the dominance of one group over another."¹⁴ In this way, Du Bois alerts us to the complex terrains of struggle that emerge in a historical conjuncture—those cracks and fissures of possibility that can be wrenched open to destabilize seemingly totalizing systems of domination. Du Bois's understanding of Black liberation in relation to internationalism, pan-Africanism, and proto-Third Worldism is based on political comradeship "forged in struggle,"¹⁵ one that emerges from shared conditions of insertion into global racial capitalist hierarchies. These interconnected histories of subjugation become a way to

connect seemingly disparate struggles by foregrounding the racial underpinnings of capitalist exploitation and dispossession.¹⁶ In a powerful and oft-cited paragraph from *Black Reconstruction*'s opening chapter on the Black worker, Du Bois writes: "That dark and vast sea of human labor in China and India, the South Seas and all Africa; in the West Indies and Central America and in the United States—that great majority of mankind, on whose bent and broken backs rest today the founding stones of modern industry—shares a common destiny. . . . The emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor and the emancipation of labor is the freeing of that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown and black" (15–16). Bondage, colonization, and dispossession never foreclosed possibilities for rebellion, as seen in Du Bois's reading of fugitivity as a form of "general strike" (55). Rather, as Katherine McKittrick reminds us, "this process of objectification . . . provided the conditions through which blackness was rearticulated as rebelliously diasporic."¹⁷

And third, *Black Reconstruction* teaches us that the enactment of abolition democracy is a two-pronged project. On the one hand, it requires a challenge to racial essentialisms through a radical understanding of race as a technology of power, a shifting signifier that articulates with capitalism and is made meaningful through religion, culture, and geography to calcify difference and arrange groups into hierarchies. But abolition democracy is not only a project of dismantling the intertwined systems of oppression that constitute racial capitalism. It is also a *constructive* project of "building up," as Angela Davis so powerfully reminds us¹⁸—one that establishes life-affirming institutions through the enactment of new forms of collectivity. Du Bois concludes the penultimate chapter of *Black Reconstruction* by describing the "splendid failure" of Reconstruction as a "battle of all the oppressed and despised humanity of every race and color" (708). His rigorous linking of the fate of Black Americans to the fate of the global *damnés de la terre*¹⁹ ultimately helped to pave the way for his approach to race as shared social heritage in his later work, particularly in 1940's *Dusk of Dawn*.

FROM *BLACK RECONSTRUCTION* TO *DUSK OF DAWN*

Chapter 5 of *Dusk of Dawn*, "The Concept of Race," has profoundly shaped the understanding of racial subjectivity and political solidarity that undergirds my work. *Dusk of Dawn* is a remarkable book, Du Bois's genealogy of race-thinking through the lens of his own lived experience. Du Bois lived

a long life of nearly one hundred years: he was born in 1868 and became an ancestor in 1963. He witnessed multiple significant inflection points and shifts in the dominant racial ideology, with race understood at different moments through the lens of world geography, Social Darwinian “survival of the fittest,” and Hegelian World History. Du Bois thus observes that “the first thing which brought me to my senses in all this racial discussion was the continuous change in the proofs and arguments advanced.”²⁰ He reflects in particular on his 1897 address to the American Negro Academy, “On the Conservation of Races,” observing that since he drafted that “racial creed,” “the concept of race has changed and presented so much of contradiction.”²¹ Disavowing his earlier, neo-Hegelian understanding of race as common blood, spirit, culture, and history,²² while still drawing on lessons from his European experiences, Du Bois argues that “despite everything, race lines were not fixed and fast. Within the Negro group especially there were people of all colors. Then too, there were plenty of my colored friends who resented my ultra ‘race’ loyalty and ridiculed it. They pointed out that I was not a “Negro,” but a mulatto; that I was not a Southerner but a Northerner. . . . In Europe my friendships and close contacts with white folk made my own ideas waver. The eternal walls between races did not seem so stern and exclusive.”²³

Still, this does not entirely address the question of *affective* ties to racial subjectivity. What does it mean to still feel a profound personal and political attachment to one’s Blackness? Or, Du Bois asks, “What is it between us that constitutes a tie which I can feel better than I can explain?”²⁴ What connects him to Africa, he realizes, is not his skin color or hair texture. Instead, Du Bois elaborates an understanding of race as *shared social heritage*, established through what Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes as the Black Radical Tradition of “selecting and reselecting ancestors” to find “in political practice and analytical habit, lived expressions . . . of unbounded participatory openness.”²⁵ This happens through the collective work of movement building and through everyday and intimate practices of social reproduction. In one example, Du Bois describes an African melody his great-grandmother Violet sang, one that he suspects had been passed down through the generations for two hundred years. This connection to West Africa, then, was not some innate, metaphysical connection of spirit—it was *learned*: “My African racial feeling was then purely a matter of my own later learning and reaction; my recoil from the assumption of the whites; my experience in the South at Fisk. But it was none the less real and a large determinant of my life and character.”²⁶

Moving away from arborescent family trees and blood kinship (after all, the genealogy he depicts undermines essentialist understandings of Blackness), Du Bois argues that while ties of biological kinship might vary, cultural connections may have become tenuous, and phenotype serves as little more than a superficial “badge,” these factors are all less important than shared histories of oppression.²⁷ And this conception of race as social heritage in turn allows for more capacious imaginations of political community that extend beyond Africa: “But one thing is sure and that is the fact that since the fifteenth century these ancestors of mine and their other descendants have had a common history; have suffered a common disaster and have one long memory. . . . [T]he real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas.”²⁸ To this day, I still find myself with goosebumps whenever I return to these prescient lines. This understanding of racial capitalism as a form of social kinship that binds together radical political collectivities across material and symbolic borders is an invaluable resource for thinking through the complex political dynamics of Blackness in Italy and across the Mediterranean basin.

RELATIONAL READINGS OF *BLACK RECONSTRUCTION*

Reading *Black Reconstruction* in the Black Mediterranean is not simply a matter of comparing and contrasting the United States and Italy as bounded geographical units, or of uncritically superimposing exogenous theoretical apparatuses onto different historical-geographical contexts. My approach is instead informed by geographer Gillian Hart’s framework of “relational comparison.” As she explains, rather than “comparing pre-existing objects, events, places, or identities,” relational comparison focuses instead on “how they are constituted in relation to one another through power-laden practices in the multiple, interconnected arenas of everyday life.”²⁹ It is important to recognize, for instance, that *Reconstruction* (1865–77) unfolded contemporaneously with the *Risorgimento* period of Italian national unification (1848–71). Both the United States and Italy were embroiled in conflict over the relationship “between an agricultural South and an industrial North, the place of Blackness within the national body, and the potential citizenship rights of long-subjugated, racialized, and economically exploited groups.”³⁰ Within

Italy, supporters of Italian unification even drew questionable comparisons between the plight of Italians and the enslavement of Black Americans.³¹ In this sense, we should approach Reconstruction and the Risorgimento as part of the same global historical conjuncture rather than as two discrete events. Additionally, during and after Italian unification, theories of race and criminality circulated back and forth between the United States and Italy. Italian criminologist and racial theorist Cesare Lombroso opened a museum of criminal psychology at the University of Turin that contained a scale model of Philadelphia's Eastern State Penitentiary,³² and Lombrosian theories of southern Italian racial degeneracy shaped US immigration policy in the 1920s.³³ These interconnections reveal a relational, transnational history of racial capitalism and carceral technology that disrupts methodological nationalism.

By the same token, Du Bois and the Sardinian-Italian Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci made similar arguments about North-South relations, labor, and solidarity from an ocean apart.³⁴ Both thinkers drew attention to the ways elites deployed hierarchies of difference to subvert transgressive political solidarities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, paving the way for imperialism and fascism. *Black Reconstruction* was published in 1935, but Du Bois began publishing on Reconstruction as early as 1901 and requested funding to work on the book in 1930. Meanwhile, in Turin, Italy, Gramsci was filling over thirty notebooks with three thousand pages of handwritten philosophical commentary on Italian history and Marxist theory while incarcerated by the fascist regime from 1926–37. Gramsci also analyzed dynamics of Fordism and racism in the United States, although his views were sometimes colored by a latent Eurocentrism.³⁵

Just as Gramsci was observing political and economic developments in the United States, Du Bois was also deeply concerned with fascism and imperialism in Italy. Indeed, I read Du Bois in much the same way as Paul Gilroy—as a Black diasporic intellectual whose scholarly formation and political commitments were also forged through extensive travels in Europe, including his philosophical studies in Germany, his participation in multiple Pan-African Congresses in European cities, and even time spent in Italy. Scholars of Black Europe have critiqued the overrepresentation of the United States and Black American intellectuals in scholarship on the Black diaspora, noting how this imbalance in the political economy of knowledge production can invisibilize the specificities of Black European experiences and gloss over uneven diasporic power relations.³⁶ At the same time, Fatima El-Tayeb

notes,³⁷ studies of Blackness in Europe are often plagued by accusations from hostile white scholars of a “U.S. cultural imperialism” that imposes American understandings of race onto European contexts where class is (supposedly) a more relevant axis of stratification.

While these two critiques have very different political valences (and I generally agree with the former about the underrepresentation of Black European scholarship), I also believe that approaching Du Bois through a narrowly nationalist lens *solely* as a Black American intellectual risks erasing the global diasporic routes that shaped his theory and politics. As Gilroy notes, “Du Bois’ travels and studentship in Europe transformed his understandings of ‘race’ and its place in the modern world.”³⁸ This is not to paint Europe as a sort of racial utopia that freed Du Bois from the strictures of US racial hierarchy. Rather, what Gilroy suggests is that Du Bois’s visits to many different sites across empire—across (post)colony and metropole—exposed him to both the geographical specificity of racisms (in the plural, as Stuart Hall reminds us), as well as their profound global entanglements.³⁹

Du Bois’s “long and nomadic life”⁴⁰ and his Pan-Africanist politics closely linked him to Italy and the Black Mediterranean. He was part of the global campaign against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia because he believed that “the independence of Abyssinia, Liberia, Haiti, and San Domingo”⁴¹ was central to the abolition of the global color line; George Padmore introduced him to Abdullahi Issa of the Somali Youth League;⁴² he actively urged Italian Americans to oppose Italian imperialism in the Horn of Africa;⁴³ and he even wrote directly to Benito Mussolini on behalf of *The Crisis* for an account of his views on the “connection of Italy with Africa.”⁴⁴ Speaking to the global reach of *Black Reconstruction* specifically, historian Robert Greene II notes that Italian autonomist Ferruccio Gambino has acknowledged Du Bois’s work for helping him understand the cross-Atlantic revolutions of 1968.⁴⁵ Du Bois’s legacy continues to reverberate in Italy today: The title of celebrated Italian-Somali postcolonial writer Igiaba Scego’s 2020 novel *La linea del colore* (The color line) is a deliberate nod to *The Souls of Black Folk*.⁴⁶

ABOLITION DEMOCRACY AND THE POLITICS OF CITIZENSHIP IN ITALY

My 2022 monograph *Contesting Race and Citizenship* examined the politics of the Italian-born and -raised children of African and Afro-Latinx immigrants

in Italy. These new social movements, which started to gain prominence in the 2010s, were organized under the banner of a shared “Afro-” or “Black Italianness,” and took as a primary terrain of struggle the reform of Italy’s *jus sanguinis* citizenship law. According to the current law in force, Law No. 91 of 1992, the children of immigrants who were born and raised in Italy inherit the citizenship of their parents at birth, and only have the possibility of naturalizing as Italian citizens during a one-year window between their eighteenth and nineteenth birthdays *if* they are able to meet a labyrinthine set of bureaucratic requirements. This same law also doubled the time for immigrants to naturalize, from five to ten years. The result is that today, it is easier for a person living outside of Italy who has one Italian grandparent to acquire Italian citizenship than it is for a young person born to immigrant parents who has spent their entire life in Italy. It is no coincidence that this citizenship law was enacted in the wake of Italy’s transformation from a country of emigration to a country of immigration; as citizenship reform activists contend, it can only be understood as a strategy for reinforcing the racial boundaries of the Italian nation-state at a time of growing racial and ethnic heterogeneity. Researchers estimate that this law has disenfranchised at least one million “second-generation” youth.⁴⁷

When I was carrying out the research for my book (2012–19), the citizenship reform movement was unfolding simultaneously with the intensification of Mediterranean border fortification and a resulting increase in migrant deaths at sea,⁴⁸ refugee solidarity mobilizations,⁴⁹ and growing attention to the racialized hyperexploitation of irregular migrant labor, particularly in the southern Italian agricultural industry.⁵⁰ Yet I noticed that the citizenship reform and refugee rights movements seemed to run on separate but parallel tracks, despite the fact that both directly implicated subjects of the Black diaspora in struggles against the symbolic and material borders of the Italian racial state. Many Black Italian citizenship reform activists I spoke to grappled with how to connect their movement to the mobilizations of first-generation immigrants and refugees, who often represented the generation of their parents, at a time when the Right opposed their claims for citizenship on the grounds that they were foreigners (despite having been born in Italy). This raised dilemmas about solidarity and the limits of citizenship. If, to paraphrase Engin Isin,⁵¹ citizenship is a form of inclusion that relentlessly produces exclusion, how then do you mobilize for an expansion of citizenship rights without pushing others (e.g., asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants) further beyond the boundaries of “assimilability”?

How can you demand citizenship rights without becoming complicit in the reproduction of nationalism through the strategic performance of *italianità* or the sedentarist logics of birthplace? Does *jus soli* eliminate the structural racism of citizenship or does it simply rearticulate the racial borders of the nation-state in new ways?

The question of how to organize across difference is central to *Black Reconstruction*. Du Bois is particularly concerned with the missed opportunity of coalition between newly emancipated Black Americans and poor whites.⁵² This has profound resonances with contemporary Left debates about identity politics, as seen in the works of Olufemi Táíwò,⁵³ Asad Haider,⁵⁴ and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor,⁵⁵ as well as the perennial question of why poor whites often vote against their own class interests. Interracial solidarity is not the primary concern of my work; I am more preoccupied with the politics of diasporic Blackness in all the ways they can subvert the racial state's regimes of categorization that fragment coalitional struggle. Still, Du Bois's reflections in *Black Reconstruction* offer valuable lessons. After all, if race is actively made and constantly refigured (as a product of *racism*, or more specifically, *racial capitalism*, which is itself the precondition for "race"⁵⁶), then we cannot take Black diasporic unity as a given either. Du Bois reminds us that Blackness is not a stable and transhistorical referent; rather, it is a political commitment that is constantly rearticulated through struggle. This can be seen, for instance, in Steve Biko's conception of Black Consciousness,⁵⁷ the "political Blackness" debates in Britain,⁵⁸ or the Aboriginal Black Power movement in Australia.⁵⁹ Similarly, scholars of Black Europe have insisted upon the importance of attention to *difference*—what anthropologist Jacqueline Nassy Brown calls "counter/part" relations⁶⁰—within and across Black diasporic communities along lines such as citizenship and class, rather than assuming a naturalized diasporic unity.

Black Italian activists have found many ways to craft Du Boisian diasporic politics that directly challenge the state's binary of citizens-in-waiting and migrants. Eritrean-Italians who grew up in Italy have organized mutual aid initiatives in the historic Eritrean neighborhood of Porta Venezia in Milan since 2013, to support Eritrean asylum-seekers who had been structurally abandoned by the city of Milan's refugee reception system.⁶¹ In doing so, they reject the distinction between those "born here" and those "newly arrived" to organize webs of care centered on shared histories of diasporic struggle dating back to Italian colonialism in the Horn of Africa. And during the Black Lives Matter mobilizations that spread across Italy during 2020, many

Black Italian activists and intellectuals argued that local BLM organizing needed to focus not only on questions of citizenship for Black youth born in Italy but also on the urgent demands of undocumented Black laborers who face exploitation, dangerous work conditions, and violence.⁶² Indeed, my decade and a half of study and involvement in the Italian citizenship reform movement has led me to question whether it is possible to enact an abolitionist form of citizenship or whether the goal should be the abolition of citizenship itself.

We can think of the delayed promise of citizenship reform in Italy as a “splendid failure” much like Radical Reconstruction, one that has nonetheless incited powerful new political imaginings and practices. *Black Reconstruction* is, in many ways, a cautionary tale about the limits of citizenship: Du Bois reminds us that the expansion of citizenship rights without abolition democracy produces a second-class citizenship at best, one that only re-entrenches the forces of exploitation and oppression.⁶³ In this vein, my work asks what political horizons and articulations of community emerge at those moments when activists are confronted with the ethical and political limits of national citizenship as a means of securing lasting racial justice. I have found it useful to think with legal scholar Devon Carbado’s concept of “racial naturalization,” which describes how the experience of racism works as a naturalizing force that produces national belonging through “inclusionary forms of exclusion” even beyond the formal immigration process.⁶⁴ Racial naturalization elucidates the shared terrain of struggle that connects the politics of Black Italian citizens-in-waiting, refugees and asylum-seekers, immigrants, and undocumented migrant workers, all of whom have been differentially “naturalized” into the racial regimes of Italian state—which are in turn shaped by deep histories of Mediterranean racialization.⁶⁵ In this vein, I have noticed many Black activists begin to decenter citizenship as the apex of political struggle, situating it within the context of broader efforts to abolish violent border regimes in all manifestations.⁶⁶

NEW SOUTHERN QUESTIONS AND THE RESURGENCE OF FASCISM

Just as Du Bois famously argued that Black freedom struggles in the US South were central to understanding global political economy, imperialism, and fascism in the first part of the twentieth century, I believe that struggles

against the racial state and racial capitalism in Italy today are of central importance to the world. Southern Europe, and Italy in particular, stands at the forefront of the forces that shape our current conjuncture: mass migrations of people fleeing war, economic instability, environmental destruction, and authoritarian regimes; resurgent racial nationalism; border fortification and restrictions on access to citizenship; rampant economic precarity and the decline of the welfare state. Italy has emerged as a key node in global far-right organizing; the country's current prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, is widely regarded as the country's most far-right leader since Mussolini, and was actually trained in the youth wing of the Movimento Sociale Italiano (the political party that was founded by Mussolini's supporters after the National Fascist Party was outlawed following World War II). At the same time, other powerful mobilizations are emerging, especially in Italy's South, where layered histories of internal and overseas colonization and dispossession dating back to Italian unification meet contemporary struggles over the violence of Fortress Europe, the rights of asylum-seekers, and the exploitation of undocumented Black workers.⁶⁷ These new manifestations of Gramsci's "Southern Question"⁶⁸ echo the southern questions Du Bois explored in *Black Reconstruction*, and offer lessons for how to build social movements that challenge racism, coloniality, borders, and dispossession all as different sides of the same struggle.

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PART IV



The General Strike

Wake Up

SOCIAL REPRODUCTION, MODULAR PRISON
TECHNOLOGY, AND THE Y2K GENERAL STRIKE

Orisanmi Burton

We say that prisoners themselves can do away with the prison system. In order for prisons to exist, it actually entails the participation of the inmates. They are responsible for the running of the prisons with the exception of being guards and wardens. They take care of all the administrative work, the cooking, cleaning. They make shoes. They upkeep the grounds. If the guards came to them one day and said, “all right, come out of your cell for head count” and they refused, then the penal society in this country would collapse.

ZAYD MALIK SHAKUR, NEW YORK CHAPTER
OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY, 1970¹

IN 1991, THE NEW YORK DEPARTMENT of Correctional Services (NY DOCS) circulated a little-known document entitled the “Program Services Action Plan.” It articulated the administration’s intent to increase its reliance on prison labor and in doing so replicate a “free market economy” within prison walls. Mobilizing neoliberal logics of scarcity, competition, and efficiency, the plan marked DOCS’s abandonment of any pretense that its goal was “rehabilitative.” Instead, it identified incarcerated people as little more than commodities to be used to support the functioning of the prison. “Work assignments in the prison community will be based not so much on their ‘rehabilitation value’ as on the real needs of the prison,” the plan states, and “schooling, historically justified for its value to the inmate after his release from custody, will now be provided to *prepare an inmate for a productive and necessary work assignment in the prison.*”²

Not intended for public consumption, the Action Plan provides insight into the systematized exploitation of incarcerated people. I learned about it

through an Albany-based organizer, Dr. Alice Green, who received a copy from Knowledge, an incarcerated man who smuggled it out. Although it makes no mention of race, Knowledge interpreted the document as evidence of DOCS's attempt to organize and intensify an exploitative carceral labor regime along racial lines. Its aim was "to keep Blacks & Latinos in a state of servitude," he explained in a cover letter to Green, and to subject captives to an updated form of "plantation justice that was experienced by our foreparents during the days of slavery in North America."³

In the pages of W. E. B Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction in America*, we find support for Knowledge's reference to incarcerated people as twentieth-century slaves. Du Bois wrote that "slavery was not abolished even after the Thirteenth Amendment" and examined how the Reconstruction government was crushed by a "counterrevolution of property" that weaponized discriminatory laws to hurl self-emancipated Black people "back towards slavery."⁴ But *Black Reconstruction* also helps us understand that the condition of slavery is not determined by forced labor in the absence of wages, but rather by the presence of an asymmetrical power relationship, one in which the slave is forcibly submerged "below the arbitrary will" of the master (9). Understanding slavery as a relationship of domination and undeclared war helps explain why the prisoner class can be properly understood as enslaved even though many of them do not labor.⁵

Like the enslaved "Black Workers" of *Black Reconstruction*, who identified the outbreak of the Civil War as a strategic opening for a new phase of anti-slavery rebellion, Knowledge and others constantly analyzed the dynamics of the prison system for emerging vulnerabilities. "The realities," his cover letter noted, "are that prisons are not safe without the cooperation of the prisoners who are confined. As it stands now, prisoners run and operate the prison [sic] daily functions and order on a day-to-day basis. . . . [I]f the entire state prison system were to shut down because prisoners refuse to participate in any administrative sponsored program or activity, the system as we know it today would crumble." Echoing the sentiment expressed by Black Panther Zayd Malik Shakur two decades earlier, and W. E. B. Du Bois a half century prior to that, Knowledge recognized the exploitative regime's dependency on captive Black labor and interpreted this dependency as an opportunity to exert political leverage.

This chapter explores a little-known labor struggle that occurred within and against New York's prison system during the final years of the twentieth century. It was during this moment that the dynamic described above—systemic

dependence on racialized labor exploitation—was thrown into crisis by collective Black resistance and an incipient general strike. I detail, on the one hand, a controversial prison expansion project through which New York Governor George Pataki (R) shrewdly exploited incarcerated laborers in the assembly of new carceral capacity by using cutting edge “modular technology.” In doing so, I intervene in ongoing discussions about the function of prison labor, providing an explosive modern example of a carceral system coercing incarcerated people into enlarging the infrastructure of their own subjugation.

On the other hand, this chapter elaborates incarcerated Black peoples’ analysis of, and resistance to, this prison expansion project. This resistance culminated in an abortive attempt to launch a Du Boisian general strike at the site of the prison. Popularly known as the “Y2K Prison Strike,” this effort to collectively withdraw captive labor and therefore shut the prison system down, demonstrates that what I have elsewhere termed the Long Attica Revolt—“a genealogy of Black radical and revolutionary struggle that emerged among New York’s captive population during the early 1970s”—has persisted into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁶

To tell this story, I collected oral histories with formerly incarcerated people and gathered a wealth of previously unstudied archival materials. More importantly, I analyze these materials through a Black radical interpretive paradigm that is indebted to the approach put forth by Du Bois in *Black Reconstruction*. One of the key achievements of the text is how Du Bois managed to peer beneath and beyond the “educational and social propaganda” of white supremacist knowledge production and to access the social consciousness of the Black masses in struggle (40). In a similar manner, this chapter elaborates how the incarcerated Black masses mobilized the limited resources at their disposal toward the development of political practices, modes of organization, and what Du Bois terms “a philosophy of life and action” adequate to the monumental task of abolishing the system of racial capitalism that required their captivity (14).⁷ That their efforts were unsuccessful does not negate the significance of their achievement.

SETTING THE STAGE

Governor George Pataki’s prison expansion project emerged within a nationwide context of neoliberal revanchism.⁸ In 1993, President Bill Clinton (D) authorized the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement

(NAFTA), which accelerated the ongoing decline of US manufacturing jobs. Three years later, he made good on his campaign promise to “end welfare as we know it,” signing into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, aptly described by scholar Dorothy Roberts as an attack on “poor women’s mothering.”⁹ These policies intensified the precarity of workers and the racialized poor, rendering them more vulnerable to policing and carceral management.¹⁰

It is therefore unsurprising that with the aid of Senator and future president Joe Biden (D-DE), Clinton oversaw a massive expansion and intensification of the carceral state. Those looking to understand the full scope of this calamity will have to look elsewhere.¹¹ For our purposes, it is necessary to highlight the law’s so-called “truth in sentencing provision,” which enabled the federal government to provide prison construction grants to states that promised to curb their parole policies by holding those convicted of certain crimes for at least 85 percent of their sentences.¹²

As one of his first official acts after being sworn in as governor of the Empire State,¹³ Pataki ratified the Sentencing Reform Act of 1995, which aligned with the crime bill’s truth in sentencing provision. The fact that fewer and fewer people were being released from prison, while more and more were being arrested—the result of another provision in the crime bill, which provided funds for hiring 100,000 new police officers—led to a predictable result. The NY state prison population ballooned from 28,500 (double what it was just a decade earlier) to more than 71,000 at its peak in 1999.¹⁴ Of course, this was part of the plan. In exchange for Pataki’s draconian reform, the federal government sent nearly \$200 million in prison expansion funds to New York between 1996 and 2000.¹⁵

In his public rationale for his “tough on crime” approach, Pataki argued that prison expansion provided security in a dual sense. It would produce security *from* the racialized specter of crime, violence, and rebellion while producing security *for* the rural white working class, who labored in prisons and therefore depended on prisons for their material survival. “As more violent offenders receive longer sentences under my 1995 Sentencing Reform Act and Jenna’s Law¹⁶ the prison system needs more cells to lock up these violent offenders,” Pataki explained. “And further sentencing reforms which I have proposed ensure that these cells will indeed be occupied, and our prison employees will indeed be safe and secure.”¹⁷ By asserting that prison expansion provides two (racially disparate) forms of security, Pataki extended

the narrative strategy developed by DOCS in the immediate aftermath of the Attica rebellion of 1971, when the organization was desperate to regain legitimacy with multiple fractions of the population.¹⁸

On August 4, 1997, after a contentious legislative session, the longest in the state's history, New York lawmakers approved a plan to construct what would later be named Upstate Correctional Facility, a 750-cell prison near the Adirondack Mountains. Also authorized by the plan were eight new 100-cell facilities, later termed "S-Blocks," to be sited on the grounds of already existing prisons, a measure designed to cut costs and save time by utilizing the infrastructure, staff, and services that were already available at these locations. Though it was to employ new financing, siting, and construction methods, the plan continued the prison construction boom inaugurated in the immediate post-Attica context by Governor Nelson Rockefeller (R). Between 1982 and 2000, Governors Mario Cuomo (D) and George Pataki (R) opened thirty-eight prisons.¹⁹

Pataki's plan expanded the state's use of a new kind of prison that went by a variety of names: Control Units, Supermax Prisons, Special Housing Units (SHUs), etc. These terms refer to carceral sites designed for isolation, deprivation, and low-intensity domestic warfare, where captives deemed "rebellious," "incorrigible," and/or "mentally unstable" are confined for *at least* twenty-three hours per day.²⁰ The Empire State's application of "the supermax solution" was a response to the Long Attica Revolt and part of a malignant national trend. However, it departed from the norm in a few important regards.²¹

While most SHUs are built for solitary confinement, New York's approach adopted a somewhat unique cost-saving measure. Captives were to be "double-celled," forced to cohabitate within a 105-square-foot enclosure for months and sometimes years. Each cell was to be outfitted with two beds stacked on top of each other, a combined toilet/sink unit, a desk with retractable stools, a slab of reflective stainless steel that functions as a mirror, and a curtainless shower that is controlled by a console officer stationed at a remote location. All meals, prepared by the three hundred "cadre inmates" inhabiting a separate area of the prison, were to be delivered through a feed slot in the door and consumed inside cells.²² For an hour each day, the rear of the cell would be unlocked by remote, allowing captives to receive their court-mandated daily hour of recreation time in another small enclosure, popularly known as a "kennel."²³

MODULAR PRISON TECHNOLOGY (ASSEMBLY REQUIRED)

Pataki's plan called for construction to begin by late 1997, with Upstate and the S-Blocks coming online by 1999. This timetable was significantly shorter than typical prison construction processes owing to the application of new "modular" prison construction technology that utilized prefabricated materials. Modular prison technology had been growing in popularity since 1984, when the National Institute of Corrections, a federally funded think tank, identified these products as an efficient and effective way to meet the growing demand for carceral infrastructure.²⁴ By 1989, *Corrections Today* magazine reported that the process was "surging to the forefront of prison construction," having already been used to erect carceral sites in Florida, Virginia, California, Oklahoma, and New York City, where officials constructed a 14,000-square-foot infirmary on Rikers Island to quarantine incarcerated people infected with HIV.²⁵

While the broad outline of the expansion project made headlines, the specifics of how the prisons would be built were kept under wraps. To acquire the materials, DOCS entered into an exclusive contract with Mark Solutions Incorporated, a New Jersey-based upstart that leveraged emerging computer technology to mass-produce prefabricated prison cells made of steel rather than concrete.²⁶ Each cell cost an average of \$12,000 to produce, roughly half the price of those made of concrete, and because they weighed only 6,000 pounds, roughly a fifth of the weight of traditional cells, they could be easily transported and installed with the use of cranes.²⁷

Mark positioned itself as the IKEA of prison construction, capable, in the words of one executive, of "adapt[ing] the simplicity of interlocking children's building blocks" to the prison industry.²⁸ After I recounted this quote to Kempis "Ghani" Songster, who at the age of fifteen was sentenced to life without parole in the state of Pennsylvania, he said, "Look at the innocuous language they use to describe these insidious things." In 1990, while Ghani—still a teenager—was enduring a three-year period of solitary confinement, he witnessed the construction of a modular prison from start to finish. Through iron bars and a window Ghani could see that "earth moving machines" were clearing a vast swath of land and that a foundation was being laid. He recalls this being the most time-consuming part of the entire process. "After they laid the foundation, the prison was built in a matter of months. It was a blur," he told me. During the next phase, eighteen-wheel flatbed trucks pulled up. They were loaded with already-constructed prison cells, which were lifted

with cranes, laid atop the foundation, and stacked on top of each other “like Lego blocks,” he recalls. The construction crew then outfitted the cells with doors and light fixtures, and HVAC units were perched on the roofs. Finally, they covered the exterior of the cells with aluminum siding. “Next thing you know,” Ghani said, “the lights came on in there and I seen them start putting people in there.”²⁹

The development and proliferation of modular prison technology is an important, though under-explored, part of the story of how the United States became a global leader of incarceration. Without this process of mass producing the material infrastructure of what Ghani terms “mass human caging,” federal, state, and local governments would have been incapable of developing the capacity necessary to meet the demands of their massive criminalization campaigns.

But modular prison technology is only one aspect of the story of how Pataki’s cell-building project was executed. The other aspect is the state’s use of prison labor to make it happen. Mark Solutions touted that, much as Ghani witnessed, its units could arrive fully assembled and ready to connect to plumbing and electrical infrastructure. However, at a lower cost for the state, they could also arrive as component parts to be assembled by the customer. Here too, New York’s technocrats saw an opportunity to cut costs. Mark’s contract with New York stipulated that 2,455 cells, most of which would arrive as component parts, would be delivered to Green Haven Prison.³⁰

A maximum-security prison in upstate New York, Green Haven was one of the key sites of Corcraft, the prison system’s “industrial” program. Established in 1893, Corcraft is the oldest such program in the United States. Explained in Marxist terms, it aims to exploit the state’s “industrial reserve army of labor” toward the production of commodities such as cleaning products, furniture, clothing, and license plates, and provide services such as telephone support for the Department of Motor Vehicles, trash removal, and asbestos abatement. Corcraft is not a corporate tool of mass labor exploitation. Federal law stipulates that it can only sell its goods and services to other government entities and select nonprofit organizations. Its largest customer has always been DOCS itself, which accounts for nearly one-fourth of total sales. Overall, the function of the industrial programs like Corcraft is to sustain carceral systems within the context of ever-shifting political and economic realities.³¹

The analysis of prison labor as primarily “reproductive labor” contradicts popular misconceptions of prison labor as centrally organized around profit.

Available Corcraft data indicate that between 1980 and 1996 the program reported a net *loss* of nearly \$47 million dollars. Throughout the 1990s, the agency employed around 2,100 incarcerated people, or about 3 percent of the state's total captive population. If its primary function had been generating profit, it would have employed a much larger proportion of the population.³²

If we look beyond the narrow focus on profit, however, we can see that Corcraft performs crucial economic, ideological, and political functions. The revenue (not profit) it generates is funneled into “special revenue fund,” along with proceeds from commissary purchases, telephone charges, and federal assistance. Throughout the 1990s, this special revenue fund accounted for 10 percent of the department's operating budget, with the other 90 percent coming from the tax-supported General Fund. Thus, from an economic standpoint, Corcraft facilitates the accumulation of a significant pot of money that prisoncrats can access with little public scrutiny or accountability, which is why these funds have often been embezzled.³³ Corcraft also performs a crucial ideological function, allowing the carceral system to present itself as an agent of rehabilitation, rather than of race and class war.³⁴ It allows them to perpetuate the useful myth that they are actively turning their captives into “responsible citizens,” even though nothing could be further from the truth. Politically, Corcraft fits into a broader dynamic of counterinsurgency and pacification whereby prisoncrats are always looking for what imprisoned revolutionary George Jackson called “pressure releases” that divert incarcerated people's rage into “empty outlets” designed to maintain institutional stability.³⁵

THE RESISTANCE PACT

There is a long history of using captive labor to build prisons. In 1825, warden Elam Lynds used incarcerated European immigrants to build New York's Sing Sing Prison.³⁶ More than a century and a half later, when DOCS quietly announced Corcraft's collaboration with Mark, the immediate response from the majority Black population was fierce resistance. “We said ‘hell no,’” said Powerful, a Black member of the Five Percent Nation of Islam, who was imprisoned in Green Haven when he heard the news. “We're not building cells for ourselves, nor are we building cells for our kids.”³⁷ Conveyed to me during an interview, Powerful's statement reflects imprisoned men's consciousness of prison expansion as a project of “domestic warfare” that

has intergenerational effects.³⁸ Opposition to the project should therefore be understood as a struggle within the arena of social reproduction. On one side were state actors, who aimed to reproduce capitalist social relations by expanding the state's capacity to incarcerate populations deemed surplus. On the other side was the captive subproletariat, who struggled to break this cycle of domination and find other ways for themselves and their communities to thrive.

Powerful and other Five Percenters banded together with members of various prison-based organizations in a clandestine pact of resistance to the project. Their method of resistance involved what Black Studies scholar Akinyele Umoja terms *unarmed vigilance*, "the use of coercive force by a social movement to assert its authority among its constituency and community and to counter the loyalty its population may have for the dominant power structure."³⁹ Signatories of the pact were authorized to inflict violence on any prisoner who collaborated with DOCS to build cells. Reports would later emerge that members of the pact went so far as to get themselves hired for the sole purpose of infiltrating the program and identifying collaborators. Once identified, these men were beaten, stabbed, and threatened with having their cells set on fire. DOCS branded the resistance a "terror campaign," but these tactics of coercion must be distinguished from the violence of the state in that their aim was to prevent the exploitation of a vulnerable population, not to intensify it.⁴⁰

"You may have a philosophical difference in making license plates," noted a DOCS spokesman who was forced to comment on the resistance, "but if you're an inmate at Auburn you're going to be making license plates and if you're an inmate at Green Haven you're going to be making cells."⁴¹ Prisoncrats responded to the pushback by deploying a Crisis Intervention Unit (CIU), a specially trained team tasked with carrying out various aspects of "disturbance management," including "hostage negotiations," "intelligence gathering," and "monitoring disruptive inmates," noted Dale Artus, the unit's director.⁴² Within this context, the CIU's primary aim was to crush the resistance so that the cell-building project could proceed apace.

The CIU spearheaded the identification and isolation of key movement figures by saddling them with spurious or frivolous disciplinary charges. According to a lawsuit filed on behalf of an incarcerated Black man named Ismaa'l Muhammad, a high-level prisoncrat told him: "This order has come down from on the top, the Governor to the Commissioner that those S-Blocks are going to go online and those cells are going to be built in

Green Haven. And anyone who interferes with that is going to feel the full wrath.”⁴³ Muhammad and others were identified by the CIU and transferred to existing SHUs throughout the state, a fact that underscored the necessity of resisting the cell-building project, which would only intensify the state’s capacity for such repression.⁴⁴

The CIU managed to banish some of the most influential and politically conscious men from Green Haven but failed to quell resistance. The pact had successfully conveyed the message that collaborators would pay a high price. Faced with a dearth of willing participants in Green Haven, DOCS took new measures to recruit workers and protect their anonymity. They began recruiting collaborators from other prisons and housing them within a separate area of Green Haven. They also covered all the windows on the factory floor and organized cell building shifts to begin and end while the general population was locked in their cells.⁴⁵

DOCS’s new strategy worked. By July of 1999, nine S-Blocks, one more than Pataki’s 1997 budget called for, were not only operational, but at full capacity. Meanwhile, Upstate Correctional Facility, also operational by this time, was absorbing a steady stream of the system’s rejects at a rate of forty per day.⁴⁶ Astonishingly, DOCS amended the original plan and began construction on yet another 750-cell, double-occupancy SHU facility using the same combination of modular technology and captive labor. In the summer of 2000, it would open as Five Points Correctional Facility.⁴⁷ The pages of *DOCS Today*, the prison system’s propaganda organ, lauded the progress of the project, while completely ignoring the fact that prison labor was being used and the fierce opposition this engendered.

THE Y2K GENERAL STRIKE

By 1999, the cell-building project was all but complete. However, captives in Green Haven remained determined to grow their resistance. In the winter of that year, they ideated a plan to coordinate a general strike to occur across the state’s seventy-one prisons. According to a handwritten account of the struggle provided to me by an imprisoned organizer named Absolute, the plan was surreptitiously developed during a December meeting of the Nation of Islam. Organizers surmised that if they could manage to simultaneously withdraw their labor from all the prisons, they would force a crisis of social reproduction, thereby compelling prisoncrats to meet them at the negotiating table.

A leadership committee would then be in a position to assert demands for reforms to Pataki's draconian parole laws and other grievances.⁴⁸ Aided by outside organizers like Dr. Alice Green, director of the Albany-based Center for Law and Justice, the idea proliferated within Green Haven and spread to other state prisons.

Slated to commence with the start of the new millennium, the captives dubbed their action the Y2K Strike. Many readers will recall the widespread anxiety that circulated during the final moments of the twentieth century, about the potential collapse of Western civilization due to the so-called Y2K computer glitch. The New York prison system's computer infrastructure, like that of various public and private agencies, contained outmoded software that used two rather than four decimal digits to store dates. Experts were concerned that their computer systems would therefore be unable to distinguish between the year 2000 and the year 1900, fearing that this glitch would generate banking errors, power failures, food shortages, and maybe even an accidental nuclear missile launch.⁴⁹ Powerful told me that amid intensifying carceral repression, decreasing prospects for ever getting released, and the impending collapse of the social order, he and others behind the walls figured that, "If everything else was going to shut down, why not shut the prisons down too."⁵⁰

To spread awareness of the strike, organizers developed and circulated a document called "Wake Up," which was passed along to me by Dr. Alice Green. Produced in multiple versions, including some designed to evade detection by appearing to be Christian material, "Wake Up" discussed Pataki's parole reforms and their connection to the federal "truth in sentencing" provision at length. But it also made a broader argument that connected the expanding carceral system to the nation's rightward lurch in response to the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the CIA's complicity in the ready availability of cocaine in the United States, a fact discussed at length in Gary Webb's controversial book *Dark Alliance*.⁵¹

Arguments made in "Wake Up" analyze the dynamics of capitalism with an eye toward how race fractures what otherwise might develop as a class antagonism. As such, it has deep resonance with the analytical method of *Black Reconstruction*. Another resonance is that the authors of "Wake Up" connected the growth of the carceral system to shifts in the global political economy. "Throughout the US," they wrote, "prisons are being built in economically depressed regions to replace metal mills and manufacturing industries that relocated to Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Caribbean seeking greater profits" from exploitative labor practices.

In making this argument, they correctly diagnosed a dynamic of late capitalism in which America's Black workers were no longer "the foundation stone . . . of buying and selling on a world-wide scale," as Du Bois had argued of the nineteenth-century slave system (5). Rather, they had become a disposable population in need of carceral management. The captives further argued that state legislators were enmeshed within a "symbiotic relationship" with the white workers of New York's rural North Country, which readily backed gubernatorial administrations that supported carceral expansion. This postindustrial economy criminalized Black workers rendered surplus by capital and, by incarcerating them, provided the basis for the employment of the state's mostly white guard force, a new iteration of what Du Bois called the "public and psychological wage of whiteness" (700).

Seeking to actualize the general strike strategy articulated by Knowledge, the Black Panthers, and Du Bois, the authors of "Wake Up" intended to leverage the system's dependency on their labor.

Why should we be the raw materials in the DOCS prison industrial corporation which only serves the interest of politicians to be elected into office, and to provide jobs for rural Northern New Yorkers? Why should we be warehoused in overcrowded conditions, sleeping one on top of each other in double bunks? . . . Why should we work to maintain the prisons as porters, cooks, plumbers, masons, welders, tailors, roofers, painters, tutors, facilitators, prisoners, landscapers, farmers, glaziers, carpenters, electricians, musicians, artists, mechanics, opticians, drivers, instructors, or in any capacity necessary to keep DOCS prison corporation functioning properly?

The captives urged the population to reproduce and distribute the document throughout the prisons and to nurture ideological and political solidarity: "We must all feel the same, think the same, want the same, move together on the same day to lock down all the [maximum and medium security prisons] in N.Y.S. on Jan. 1, 2000." The idea of the strike quickly captured the collective imagination of the population.

The collective strike intended to bring the New York prison system to a grinding halt never came to fruition. After discovering copies of "Wake Up," the CIU launched a campaign of repression that targeted Absolute and hundreds of others with reputations for being politically active. On December 24, seven days before the strike, prisoncrats claimed to have uncovered five rounds of 9mm ammunition in the common room of Sing Sing prison and cited this as evidence that a violent insurrection was imminent. Incarcerated

people maintained that the bullets were planted by authorities in order to justify harsh repression.⁵² Their accusation was never substantively investigated. To crush the strike before it began, captives from across the system were preemptively rounded up and isolated in the state's now-abundant modular SHU infrastructure, much of which had been assembled by prisoners themselves. Sporadic strikes did break out on December 31, but as the architects of the resistance pact had feared, the state had succeeded in using captive labor to stifle incarcerated people's resistance, and in doing so, had created a material infrastructure that would be used against future generations.

This chapter has examined a little-known episode in the history of prison development and resistance. It has shown how New York prisoncrats turned to an emerging technology—modular prisons—in order to meet the rapidly growing demand for racial criminalization and mass human caging in the neoliberal era. Furthermore, it helps clarify the role played by prison labor in reproducing the prison itself, providing a startlingly literal example of incarcerated people being used to construct the prisons that confine them.

Finally, it highlighted incarcerated peoples' consciousness of how this regime of carceral exploitation functions, its connection to the earlier regime of plantation slavery, as well as their experimentation with different forms of resistance. While their attempt to organize a Du Boisian general strike to coincide with Y2K was ultimately unsuccessful, their efforts should be understood as a precursor to the historic National Prison Strike of 2016. Timed to coincide with the forty-fifth anniversary of the Attica rebellion, the strike involved the estimated participation of twenty-four thousand captives held in at least twenty-nine prisons throughout the country.⁵³ Explaining why they were collectively withholding their labor from their keepers, they proclaimed: "We will not only demand the end to prison slavery, we will end it ourselves by ceasing to be slaves."⁵⁴

NOTES

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Proletarian Organization and the Black General Strike

Joshua Clover

THE MATTER OF THE PROLETARIAT and the matter of organization are, like all matters, historical, which is to say, changing; in the United States in particular, their meaning and significance cannot be grasped without passing through the twentieth century's greatest work of history, *Black Reconstruction*. The essay that follows attempts a Black reconstruction of these categories, or rather draws on the reconstructions of Du Bois as well as C. L. R. James. Accordingly, it begins with an account of the poem by Gwendolyn Brooks, "Riot."

THE BOURGEOISIE

A guy walks into a riot. That is the narrative, or at least the setup, for Brooks's poem. The riot in question is historical, following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968.¹ The riot is national; its Chicago instance is also an echo down the years from the Red Summer of Chicago in 1919, about which Claude McKay wrote "If We Must Die." Brooks wrote the text in the immediate aftermath; while it is regularly printed on its own, it was published the next year as part of a longer poem, also called "Riot," with two other parts, "The Third Sermon on the Warpland" and "An Aspect of Love, Alive in the Ice and Fire."

So: a guy walks into a riot. The poem chooses to start with him; the first line is "John Cabot, out of Wilma, once a Wycliffe." We know he is a white guy because the next line is "all whitebluerose beneath his golden hair," and later we learn that "John Cabot / itched instantly beneath the nourished

white / that told his story of glory to the World.” He is so white that he is almost French, with his fondness for “the Grenadine de Boeuf at Maison Henri” and his later cry of “*Que tu es grossier!*” But that’s not quite right. His name is too Brahmin. All that francophony must signify something else, and it does, in concert with the elaboration of his tastes that occupies the opening stanza, his love for his Jaguar and his white suburb, for scotch and art galleries and upscale *boites*, all the things that, confronted with the riot, he “almost forgot.” John Cabot is not French so much as a representative of France’s greatest contribution to our social categories, the bourgeoisie.

The source of this forgetting is the riot itself, arriving in the second stanza, a single line in length. The stanzas in general are uneven; the poem similarly offers no patterning of end rhymes, no regular meter. Free verse and all that, not particularly ordered. From the perspective of John Cabot, this one-line stanza confronts him with *disorder*, that absolute and unvarying historical keyword for riot. What is disorder, what is riot to John Cabot, to the bourgeoisie, in this one-line stanza? “Because the Negroes were coming down the street.” That is all she wrote.

The third stanza describes this approach; the fourth the encounter, pointedly not just with “Negroes” but with Blackness itself, the disorder of riot made flesh and color and spirit. This is anathema to Cabot, who cries out “Don’t let It touch me! the blackness! Lord!” Despite this plea to the heavens, “on It drove / and breathed on him: and touched him.” This is not a contact he will survive. “John Cabot went down in the smoke and fire,” opens the fifth and final stanza, only three lines long, “and broken glass and blood.” In short: all the markers of the riot’s disorder, all in train of Blackness. At his last, he invokes Jesus on the cross with an implacably racist imprecation. There the poem ends.

The poem pivots, technically and narratively, on the third stanza, which provides a descriptive—epic, even, with its armies and oceans—elaboration of that preceding one-line stanza.

Because the Negroes were coming down the street.
Because the Poor were sweaty and unpretty
(not like Two Dainty Negroes in Winnetka)
and they were coming toward him in rough ranks.
In seas. In windsweep. They were black and loud.
And not detainable. And not discreet.

It is a striking formulation, to say the least, to swap the subject, grammatical and otherwise, in that way—as if “the Negroes” and “the Poor” were the same thing, sharing a single meaning. For John Cabot from Lake Bluff, apparently, this is the case. And it is this that bears us backward to *Black Reconstruction*.

THE GENERAL STRIKE OF BLACK LABOR

Though it is by now well-studied and oft-cited, *Black Reconstruction* makes no mention of the “Black General Strike.” It does refer to a “general strike of black labor.” If this essay holds to the latter term, it is not from a desire to be pedantic but because I hear in the distinction a difference. The original arguably does not emphasize a *variety* of general strike, the Black kind. It suggests rather the fact that a general strike, a new idea in the world, becomes possible within Black labor. We might read it as suggesting that, at least as of 1862, race is the modality through which general strike is lived.

As will doubtless be repeated elsewhere in this volume, providing necessary coordinates for thinking about proletarians and organization, the book’s founding insight lies in the identification of slaves as “black workers,” a decisive class fraction. “But this slow, stubborn mutiny of the Negro slave was not merely a matter of 200,000 black soldiers and perhaps 300,000 other black laborers, servants, spies and helpers. Back of this half million stood 3 1/2 million more. Without their labor the South would starve.”² This will lead him to the book’s most dramatic insight, famously summarized by Cedric Robinson as “The slaves freed themselves.”³ Summarizing their “enormous power” to withdraw labor, make war, make trouble, Du Bois concludes, “It was not the Abolitionist alone who freed the slaves. . . . It was the fugitive slave who made the slaveholders face the alternative of surrendering to the North, or to the Negroes” (121). At the same time, Du Bois insists on the slave’s unique status, wherein “the black worker was the ultimate exploited” and “formed that mass of labor which had neither wish nor power to escape from the labor status, in order to directly exploit other laborers, or indirectly, by alliance with capital, to share in their exploitation” (14). Workers, then, but not the working class, as we have generally understood the category—an uncertainty that haunts no small number of debates regarding whether a slave economy is properly capitalist.

Du Bois himself was extraordinarily attentive to this ambiguity in a variety of ways. In 1933, exactly he was completing the draft of *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois taught a course at Atlanta University on “Karl Marx and the Negro.” The exam on *Capital* was five questions long.

What is “Value in Use” and “Value in Exchange”?

What is “Surplus Value”?

If Surplus Value arises only from living labor how can an employer increase his profit by substituting machines for labor?

What effect does improved machinery have on labor?

What effect did the increase of English Cotton spinning have on American imports?

It would be hard to find such an exam in the present that did not inquire after the commodity fetish and so-called primitive accumulation; Du Bois in 1933 leaves them aside. Instead, he gives the exam entirely to drawing forth, in steps, the centrality of value as it rises from the abstract to the concrete until the inner movement of value can account for among other things (without saying so) the entanglement of advances in English industry and the US Civil War. Within this attention the exam has a striking tilt: three of the five questions ask explicitly about machines. And yet he is not simply focusing on *Capital*’s fifteenth chapter, nor suggesting that relative surplus value is the crucial theoretical category.

One possible answer appears in *Black Reconstruction*’s chapter on “The General Strike.” Considering early attempts to reinsert former slaves into the economy now according to the more orthodox sense of workers (“emancipation had enlarged the Negro’s purchasing power, but instead of producing solely for export, he was producing to consume”), Du Bois marks this in contrast to pre-emancipation slavery, saying, “At that time the Negroes were mere machines run with as little loss as possible to the single end of making money for their masters” (75). This is in the first instance a way of naming the brutal subjugation into nonhumanity conducted by the slaver, the planter, the northern industrialist, and the British cotton magnate, chiming at the same time with then-current and future accounts of the slave economy.⁴ It adds usefully if discomfitingly to our sense of how Du

Bois understood the slave as a Black worker, which is to say, as part of the working class and not, recognized as human and not, a part and apart. It was not against but *from* this ambiguity that the general strike of Black labor could be launched.

LEADERSHIP

Cedric Robinson draws forth the strike's character as a strategic action taken by a group.⁵ "Drawing upon reports written at the time," he writes, "Du Bois asserts that the desertion, flight, and sabotage effected by blacks was the substantive event of the Civil War."⁶ But Robinson is decisive about the character of this action.

The General Strike had not been planned nor centrally organized. Instead, Du Bois had termed as a general strike the total impact on the secessionist South of a series of actions circumstantially related to each other. Some two hundred thousand blacks, most of them slaves, had become part of the Union's military force. These and an even larger number of blacks had withdrawn their productive labor and paramilitary services from the Confederacy, transferring a substantial portion of them to the Union. In addition, tens of thousands of slaves and poor whites had emigrated from the South. The former were escaping slavery, the latter their poverty and the demands and ravages of war. The result was to weaken critically the secessionists.⁷

And then his bravura ending, not just conclusion but explication of Du Bois's method in the book: "These events were a consequence of contradictions within southern society rather than of a revolutionary vanguard that knit these phenomena into a historical force."⁸ This is a specific account of leadership, or its absence. It is reiterated and clarified by, for example, Alys Weinbaum, who writes, "Du Bois shows us that slaves need to be neither consciously nor collectively organized in the traditional Marxist sense to make history."⁹ The particular form of liberation struggle that would be the "general strike of black labor" took the form it did not from individual nor vanguard but from real conditions and the uniquely ambiguous circumstance of its subjects.

C. L. R. James's writing in the 1930s (more or less concurrent with publication of *Black Reconstruction*) turns persistently to the matter of the revolutionary "leader of genius." The writing, with the epochal *Black Jacobins* at the core along with *World Revolution, 1917–1936*, directs itself in main to

three revolutions: Haitian, French, Soviet. Nick Nesbitt finds in this inquiry an oddity. While James identifies L'Ouverture and Lenin, he fails to identify such a leader of genius for the French Revolution—when, per Nesbitt, Robespierre was right there. For Nesbitt this stands out even more dramatically when James revisits this account twenty-five years later and, rather than remedying his earlier omission, compounds it further.¹⁰ Revising *Black Jacobins* for a 1963 edition, James reiterates and even emphasizes the headless character of the French Revolution, affirming newly that “the sansculottes themselves worked out and forced upon an unwilling Robespierre the great policies which saved the revolution.” To this he adds, “the sansculottes, of Paris in particular, saw very clearly what was required at each stage of the revolution at least until it reached its highest peak.” Between these two sentences he adduces that “*This was pretty much the position of the revolutionaries of Plaisance, Limbe and Dondon in relation to Toussaint.*”¹¹ Not only has he failed to promote Robespierre, but L'Ouverture has been demoted from his role and Haiti identified as another headless revolution, its circumstance and its masses now given pride of place.

Eight years later, giving a series of lectures on *The Black Jacobins*, James extends this meditation, reflecting as much on method as on the events themselves. Largely admiring Georges Lefebvre's account of the Haitian revolution, James pursues the inner logic of Lefebvre's assessment that the French effort to crush the revolt in San Domingo failed because “It is not enough to have taken away Toussaint, there are 2,000 leaders to be taken away.”¹² To this, James replies, “You see, in 1971, what I have to say about Lefebvre is that he is concerned with the obscure leader—I am not. I am concerned with the two thousand leaders who were there. That is the book I would write. There are two thousand leaders to be taken away. If I were writing this book again, I would have something to say about those two thousand leaders.”¹³

What has brought about this thoroughgoing abandonment of the “leader of genius” hypothesis? For Nesbitt, it is an artifact of the era in which James makes these emendations, 1962-dated appendix through the 1971 lectures; let's call it the Sixties, everyone else does. It bespeaks a vogueish desire “to accommodate *The Black Jacobins* to a model of ‘history from below.’” Nesbitt demurs that “this is not necessarily to the benefit of the argument the book defends.”¹⁴ James himself is, however, forthright about the source of the transformation. Elsewhere in the same lecture, having revisited the sansculottes, he wonders, “Who else among the rank and file saw clearly what was required at every stage of the revolution? Tell me please.” Answering his own

question immediately, he says: "The black slaves in W.E.B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*, they were the ones who saw what should happen," continuing, "I confess, frankly, it is reading Du Bois that I began to understand that this was a genuine historic part of every revolution."¹⁵

Just three days earlier, James had lectured directly on Du Bois and *Black Reconstruction*. Here he is even more explicit in repudiating his own "leader of genius" framework. Speaking to his treatment of L'Ouverture from 1938, he says,

I was out to demonstrate that we had a history, and in that history there were men who were fully able to stand comparison with great men of that period. That was my aim. I wasn't so conscious of it when I was writing, but now when I reread that passage, I see that was my aim.

It was *not* the aim of Dr. Du Bois in *Black Reconstruction*.¹⁶

James, then, had already learned the secret later to be discovered by Robinson, Weinbaum, and others. The leaderless revolution and the "general strike of black labor" are one and the same.

"RETROSPECTIVE PROTOTYPES OF THE PRESENT"

Much of this 1971 lecture on Du Bois attends to his capacity for scope and scale, for allowing the historical stature of the Civil War as a slave revolution to shine through the racial blinders of extant historiography. James lingers in particular over Du Bois's declaration that this struggle founds "the last great Battle of the West," concluding in a Césairean key that if Black revolution is not to rescue the West from itself, "then that civilization will go to pieces."¹⁷ Shortly before this, James makes a more specific but no less dramatic assessment regarding Du Bois's vision that condenses much of his argument.

There was the idea of the general strike, there was the idea that the mass of the workers, the mass of the black slaves had come forward with ideas and procedures which Abraham Lincoln and these others took over. The black slaves did not lead the revolution, they were told what to do by their own instinctive action. That is what Du Bois is saying, and he says that that action has to be called a general strike, which, incidentally, you believe took place for the first time in Russia, in 1905, but which in fact took place for the first time in the United States in 1862.¹⁸

Now *this* is tiger's leap into the past. James makes heavy weather of the double insight, historical and historiographical: The first general strike happens earlier and elsewhere, and it is Du Bois in particular who has made this discovery.

Du Bois's capacity to resituate political concepts and political forms across time is what Bill Mullen names his "typological conception: that all past revolutions inhere in the present and all present revolutions portend in the past." He continues: "In this context, Du Bois's notorious designation of slave rebellions as 'general strikes' resonate logically to their anachronistic sources—New Orleans of 1892, Seattle of 1919, England of 1926—as retrospective prototypes of the present."¹⁹ That is to say, it is not only that Du Bois has transcoded the general strike half a century back and half a world away, but that general strikes may now be found in the slave rebellions that followed. We in turn are invited to conceptualize the present according to these concepts, now freed from their moments—not as transhistorical and frozen forms, as eternal returns of the same, but as elements in a method of concrete analysis. Mullen's full passage deserves attention.

Black Reconstruction also formalized two unfolding typological ideas in Du Bois's thought: that the black working class, beginning with slavery, was what he had first called in *John Brown* in 1909 the cornerstone of the modern global "proletariat" and that Reconstruction was the prototypical anticipation of all twentieth-century revolutions—its revolution, or dream deferred. Hence . . . Du Bois discovered in *Black Reconstruction* the historical subject—or historiographical method—of world revolution for the first time.

Of the many things worth noticing here, the conclusion stands out: that Du Bois has discovered the historical subject of world revolution. But who is that subject? Here we cannot help but notice the frictionless slide within a preceding sentence: from "black working class" through "slavery" to "modern global proletariat." The elision may seem a passing moment. It condenses nonetheless much of the conceptual difficulty presented thus far. Are these distinct concepts for which we have distinct terms, or are they equivalent and exchangeable?

Both, of course.

In this sentence, this elision, we encounter not one but two ambiguities. The first has already appeared repeatedly: Du Bois's own ambiguous sense, to be found in his exam on *Capital*, in *Black Reconstruction*'s first chapter, in history itself, regarding the slave as Black worker, working class and not, human and not, a part and apart. The second, long-standing, takes on particular

force a century after the “general strike of black labor” commences—more or less contemporary to James’s engagement with *Black Reconstruction* and his reassessment of *The Black Jacobins* that unfolds from 1963 to 1971. This is the ambiguity between the working class and the proletariat. These two ambiguities are one.

THE DIFFERENCE

The terms “working class” and “proletariat” are treated, regularly enough, as equivalent and exchangeable. They are not. This confounding of usefully distinct categories has been common across centuries and political traditions, enough so that it cannot be thought of a mere error. Nesbitt provides a convenient version en route to the explanation of James’s Sixties transformation mentioned above. He avers that, “If the proletariat is, in classic Marxist usage, a “free” wage laborer forced onto the market by non-possession of the means of production, James, like Mao in this same period, wishes to refocus hopes for world revolution on a much broader base, that of the colonized masses.”²⁰

The equivalence works in one direction—all members of the working class are proletarians—but not in the other. Proletarians are not all members of the working class. As Marxists, classic or otherwise, have reminded us, the term originates in the description of those *without reserves*.²¹ A great fraction are not—perhaps never have been, perhaps never will be—wage laborers in any formal sense. They will instead embody what Michael Denning has called “wageless life”: “We must insist that ‘proletarian’ is not a synonym for ‘wage laborer’ but for dispossession, expropriation and radical dependence on the market. You don’t need a job to be a proletarian: wageless life, not wage labor, is the starting point in understanding the free market.”²²

Faced with this social fraction, a certain kind of orthodoxy habitually treats the wageless as members of the working class, temporarily embarrassed. The status of the wage laborer is presupposed for all noncapitalists, with variations being deviations from this norm, generally rare and temporary. Marx’s own account of “surplus populations” is often understood to lend support for such a framing, with three of his four categories of surplus imputing at least the potential of a return to wage.²³ History, if nothing else, has demonstrated the limits of this view. In considering this, Denning’s adumbration of bases for life beyond the formal wage might be gently elaborated. It

encompasses the gendered and the global divisions that assigns unpaid reproductive labor across the planet; racialized exclusion; dispossession without ever being absorbed into the labor market; technological unemployment; various kinds of casualization and informalization; and so on. This underscores the extent to which the population in question is not some small class fraction abjectly “below” the working class. Rather it is a vast planetary mass, more and less immiserated.

Importantly, the claim here is not that this population does not work. Within the constraints of market dependency, one must find some secondary access to the wage, or work as a criminal. It is evident that the household member fulfilling domestic duties in support of a wage-earner, for example, or the hustler in the informal economy, both labor mightily. What they lack is regular, formal, or otherwise stabilized wage contracts. Let us now, by way of making stakes obvious, add a third example of wageless life, if you will allow a retrospective prototype: the slave. Here is Du Bois describing his Black worker: “The emancipated slave was poor; he was desperately poor, and poor in a way that we do not easily grasp today. He was, and always had been, without money and, except for his work in the Union Army, had no way of getting hold of cash. He could ordinarily get no labor contract that involved regular or certain payments of cash” (508).

All of this is to say, it is the category of the proletariat that enables the great ambiguity at the heart of things: workers but not working class, a part and apart. The ambiguity, or the regular confounding of working class and proletariat, has meant that this particular fraction—wageless life—can be hard to see even as it is arrayed around the planet. Nevertheless, it is from this position Du Bois founds his analysis, and it is this fraction that concerns us: the *difference*, mathematically speaking, between the working class and the proletariat, what remains when you subtract one from the other.

This fraction is sometimes identified as the *lumpenproletariat*. The term is loaded, of course, and the load it bears shifts over time. Here Nesbitt’s historicization of Sixties James, however foreshortened, captures an important truth, beyond the idealist framing of his being caught up in the popularity of anti-imperialism. A properly materialist account might direct us both to the post-Bandung reorganization of the world-system, notably the ambivalent lurches toward self-determination in Africa, as well as the fraying of the postwar industrial compact in the United States, emblemized less by labor agitation than by mostly urban uprisings. Both of these world-historical

developments would be influentially theorized according to the politics of the lumpen, by figures including Frantz Fanon and Huey Newton. This is the historical context for James's shift, for his reading of *Black Reconstruction*. In this context it is impossible to ignore that this fraction—the lumpen, the *difference*, the mass of humans proletarianized without being absorbed into the working class—is broadly figured as non-white but is more specifically and intensively identified with the Black proletariat.

As a practical matter, this cannot be the case. Considering the history of the North American continent alone, Indigenous dispossession without entrance into the working class (as studied by scholars including Glen Coulthard, Audra Simpson, Rob Nichols, Iyko Day, and others) must be placed at the center of any analysis of proletarianization outside the wage. Nonetheless, alongside the actualities of the global Sixties, the popular (meaning white) imagination, mediated by the figure of the lumpen, renders the *difference* between the proletariat and the working class according to Black racialization. The complementary figure is racialized as well, under the conventional heading of the “white working class.” Again this exists more as imagination than actuality.²⁴

For all those hesitations, there is something historically true in the idea that the line dividing the working class from the proletariat is in substantial part a racial line. As a crudely empirical matter, here in the United States and now in the twenty-first century, Black unemployment is persistently higher, often double that of white. Cyclical crises only intensify the disparities. This is not a new fact. The wageless are less white than the waged. This then is the specter of the Black proletariat, within capital and within regimes of racialization, without the wage and its provisions and its disciplines. The Sixties, decade of decolonization, decade of riots, signals not the new formation of this class fraction but its entrance onto the stage of global politics as a lead player. Or at least its *seeming* entrance, viewed from an orthodox perspective. This has been James's point about Haiti and Du Bois's about Reconstruction—that, long before the sixties and its vogues and its real transformations and the insistent visibility of the Black proletariat, this class fraction possessed, not because of its ontological nature but because of its historical coordinates, unique political capacity. It is from this position, reconstructing the argument in full, that the general strike becomes possible, becomes a new idea upon the world: because it is a “general strike of black labor,” and because the paradigmatic home of Black labor is in *the non-identity of the proletariat and the working class*.

It is a sea change. “The movement became a general strike against the slave system on the part of all who could find opportunity. The trickling streams of fugitives swelled to a flood,” writes Du Bois about the previous century’s Sixties (64). “This whole move was not dramatic or hysterical, rather it was like the great unbroken swell of the ocean before it dashes on the reefs” (65).

WINDSWEEP

That is exactly how Gwendolyn Brooks puts it, describing the incomparable force that will carry the bourgeois under. *In seas. In windsweep*. Some readers will hear in this the “deep sea swell” that similarly unmade memory for a different dead man.²⁵ Here is the earlier passage once more.

Because the Negroes were coming down the street.

Because the Poor were sweaty and unpretty
(not like Two Dainty Negroes in Winnetka)
and they were coming toward him in rough ranks.
In seas. In windsweep. They were black and loud.
And not detainable. And not discreet.

I hope I will be allowed a final and brief turn to a kind of formalism. Previously I suggested the free verse poem seemed largely unpatterned, in accordance with the constitutive disorder of riot itself. Is this really true? The poem’s lines are often ten or eleven syllables in length, if not quite regularly enough to be a rule; the same could be said for the frequent count of five stressed beats per line. The variation is just enough to disguise the ghost of blank verse.

Once one starts seeing patterns it is difficult to stop. The brief passage is also ordered by a bracketing rhyme, *street* / *discreet*. Said rhyme comes with densely accompanying assonance: *sweaty*, *dainty*, *Negroes* (twice), *seas*, *windsweep*, *detainable*. *Sweaty* and *unpretty* provide their own sweaty and unpretty rhyme, *not detainable* and *not discreet* their own double alliteration, itself introduced by the sharp alliteration of *rough ranks*. This is actually quite a lot of patterning for a small space, the sounds not isolated but ricocheting around the six lines, not detainable, not discreet.

In short, the organization is there. It is indeed rather carefully wrought. It is just hard to see, if perhaps less difficult to hear. If you are listening, it is

“black and loud.” It is not the fixed form that we might associate with the sonnet or sestina, any more than it describes the hierarchical form of the army or the party or even the labor union. But the form is there nonetheless, immanent but not rigid. *Rough ranks* is the key, the word “rank” across multiple senses designating form, official form, starting with the military but immediately extending to “a position within the hierarchy of an organization or society.” But rough here, and thus elusive. The organization is there, oceanic but hidden. Some will notice it and some will not.

And has this not been the theme throughout? John Cabot encounters this and does not encounter it as political form, as any politics at all. His is a racialized blindness. Ours too, all too often, when we discuss organization. For John Cabot, “the Negroes” are simply disorder. He loses himself in “blackness,” the inchoate, the formless. He goes down in smoke, fire, broken glass, blood, the bourgeois litany of disorder, when he might have seen something else, might have seen an action taken by a group despite the absence of formal leadership, despite the absence of a vanguard imparting order from above, might have seen instead something given by history, given by the unique conditions and possibilities of the Black proletariat, might have seen a different kind of organization, might have seen the organization of difference, might have seen literary or social or political or revolutionary form, coming down the street.

CODA

It is obviously beyond the scope of this essay to pursue all of the global and historical implications of this analysis. I would like to gesture nonetheless to the brief text by the Marxist revolutionary and writer Ghassan Kanafani, *The Revolution of 1936–39 in Palestine*. It too is an artifact of the 1930s, whose history it covers, and the 1960s, appearing at the start of 1972. Its four chapters (“The Workers,” “The Peasants,” “The Intellectuals,” “The Revolution”) clearly echo the opening of *Black Reconstruction*, with its three chapters on the decisive class fractions and its fourth on the general strike. Among other things this reminds us once more that the dispossessed and colonized too are proletarians in the full sense developed herein.²⁶

Elisions of the Haitian revolution, the Civil War, and the long struggle for the liberation of Palestine should not be made too easily. This is true even when we are considering historical comparisons, commensurations,

correspondences, and the historians who have seen them where others did not. These historians have done so not for the sake of analogy but in some sense its opposite—the discovery of what is unique and original in a situation, a moment, a history. This is true of Kanafani, alongside James and Du Bois. I would not claim to know his thoughts. But for all of that, what is true of Palestine is also true of Haiti, and of the general strike of Black labor: I do not think the revolution is finished.

NOTES

1. NB: the question of how such events are named (riot, uprising, rebellion, insurrection, etc.) is discussed in Joshua Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot.* (Verso, 2016). The short version is, such nomenclatural distinctions often concern the imputed goals or consciousness of participants, and moreover function no more to elevate the moral standing of certain events than to affirm the criminality of others; the question of true intent or legitimacy should not be overvalued against clarity about the conditions in which they arise and how they unfold. The terms are thus used more or less interchangeably herein, with “riot” taking pride of place according to Brooks’s choice.

2. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (The Free Press, 1935), 80. Further citations are parenthetical.

3. Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 275.

4. Various economic analyses have offered formalist accounts of the slave, purchased like a commodity for a single payment that must then be recouped before being exhausted (i.e., worked to death), functioning thus for the planter-capitalist as a living form of constant capital; this further accords with now-accepted accounting showing that the orienting profit source arising from the slave-as-property was not the value of the labor but the sale of slaves themselves qua commodities.

5. While length considerations prevent giving this the attention it deserves, it is worth noting Stephanie Payne’s insightful argument that such actions were taken, decisively so, at a larger scale than the United States. See “‘A General Insurrection in the Countries with Slaves’: The US Civil War and the Origins of an Atlantic Revolution,” *Past and Present* 257, no. 1 (2022): 248–77, esp. 252–53, which echoes Du Bois in asserting that “the end of the Civil War precipitated the abolition of slavery in Cuba and Brazil because of the actions of the slaves,” moving toward the summary conclusion “Yet, until now, contests over the future boundaries of black

political life have been studied almost exclusively as unfolding within the nation state. Breaking with this approach makes it possible to see these contests as a trans-national struggle over the political reordering of the Atlantic World. For this reason, I contend, the end of slavery also marked the beginning of an Atlantic revolution.”

6. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 49.

7. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 48.

8. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 48.

9. Alys Weinbaum, “Gendering the General Strike: W. E. B. Du Bois’ *Black Reconstruction* and Black Feminism’s ‘Propaganda of History,’” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 3 (2013): 452.

10. Nick Nesbitt, *The Price of Slavery: Capitalism and Revolution in the Caribbean* (University of Virginia, 2022). See particularly ch. 3, “The Reinvention of Social Form.”

11. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (Vintage Books, 1963), 276n6, emphasis in original. For an invaluable reconstruction of James’s work and revisions of this book, see Rachel Douglas, *Making the Black Jacobins: C. L. R. James and the Drama of History* (Duke University Press, 2019).

12. Georges Lefebvre, quoted in C. L. R. James, “Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*: How I Would Rewrite *The Black Jacobins*,” *Small Axe* 8 (2000): 108.

13. James, “Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*,” 108.

14. Nesbitt, *The Price of Slavery*, 112.

15. James, “Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*,” 105.

16. James, “Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*,” 84.

17. James, “Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*,” 98.

18. James, “Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*,” 97.

19. Mullen, *Un-American*, 44.

20. Nesbitt, *The Price of Slavery*, 112.

21. See, perhaps most decisively among many such accounts, Gilles Dauvé, *Eclipse and Re-Emergence of the Communist Movement* (PM Press, 2015), 47.

22. Michael Denning, “Wageless Life,” *New Left Review* 66 (2010): 81.

23. See ch. 25 in Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Penguin, 1976). For further discussion of this question, see Joshua Clover, “The Overaccumulation of Humans,” in *Über Über: Zur Überakkumulation von Finanzkapital, fossilem Kapital und Menschen*, ed. Patrick Eiden-Offe (Matthes & Seitz).

24. I do not mean here to give credence to some empirical claim that the working class comprises white workers foundationally or even as a majority, nor to affirm accounts of racial ordering within the working class of the sort that culminate in ideas of a kind of internal predation. There can be no doubt that racial hierarchies

exist in all strata of US life; it is similarly certain that the working class is stratified internationally according to the proceeds of imperialism. It is more significant, in my opinion, to recognize the ways that superexploitation in one place enables exploitation in another, toward the immiseration of both for the profit of capital. The kinship of the exploited with each other and with the immiserated more broadly, as ground for analysis and for political activity, is as true as it is vital. For one of the more useful glosses on this, see Ted Allen and Noel Ignatieff, "White Blindspot," *Students for a Democratic Society Radical Education Project* (1969), <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1/whiteblindspot.pdf>.

25. Phlebas the Phoenician. Ezra Pound, a mentor of Eliot's, helped him edit *The Waste Land*. Pound cut so much that he joked about performing the "Caesarean Operation" for the poem's birth; the section cut most deeply was this fourth section, which became the shortest. After his friend's edits, Eliot questioned whether he should keep Phlebas the Phoenician at all, but Pound was adamant he remain. Phlebas is connected not only to the tarot cards of Madame Sosostrius but also to Ferdinand from *The Tempest* and the Smyrna merchant Mr. Eugenides: "a fortnight dead, / Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell / And the profit and loss." See T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," in *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (Faber and Faber, 2020). Cf. Gwendolyn Brooks, "The Third Sermon on the Warpland," in *Riot* (Broadside Press, 1969).

26. It is worth recalling that Du Bois was the only non-Native voting member of the first national organization run by Native Americans, the SAI. There are paths within *Black Reconstruction* that would doubtless bear further investigation, as in his recognition of the complex postwar dynamic wherein the white worker, "equally poverty-stricken," nonetheless might have been a landholder through state-orchestrated dispossession of Native peoples.

PART V

*Conversations on Abolition, Repair,
and Reconstruction Today*

The Beautiful Struggle: The Abolition of the Prison-Industrial Complex

AN INTERVIEW WITH RACHEL HERZING

Rachel Herzing and Damien Sojoyner

THE RISE OF THE TERM “abolition,” as associated with prison abolition and the abolition of the police, has sparked regional, national and global campaigns whose efforts have sought to undo violence caused by the buildup and maintenance of the prison-industrial complex during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As a means to better understand grassroots efforts, strategies, and movement-building tactics against the prison-industrial complex, we share the following interview that Damien Sojoyner conducted with Rachel Herzing. Herzing’s work on movement building has spanned three decades, and she has been a part of a broad spectrum of organizing efforts to dismantle the multiple forms of violence emanating from the prison-industrial complex. Most recently Rachel, along with her collaborator Justin Piché, coauthored the book *How to Abolish Prisons: Lessons from the Movement Against Imprisonment* (Haymarket, 2024).

DAMIEN: *Over the past five years, there have been numerous terms and phrases to describe something closely related to what you described as the prison-industrial complex. As a grounding question, why do you use the term prison-industrial complex?*

RACHEL: When I use the term what I’m talking about is a symbiotic relationship between both public and private interests that use surveillance, policing, imprisonment, sentencing, and execution to maintain power and control while claiming to provide safety. It is the whole spectrum of things that make up what we sometimes think of as the criminal legal system or the punishment system. Agents of the prison-industrial complex use those things as remedies to what I think are more properly understood as social, political, economic inequities and in doing so, understand those responses as the

legitimate responses to dealing with any kind of situation that might come up. I believe the term was first used by Mike Davis, but many people have used it since. I use the term in part because I think it highlights the complex nature of all of those systems and that symbiotic relationship. It doesn't focus simply on imprisonment or simply on policing. We draw from the phrase "the military-industrial complex" when we use prison-industrial complex. I find those resonances between the military-industrial complex and the prison-industrial complex amplify an encroaching use by the private sphere of the public sphere where everything gets kind of driven into the same funnel regardless of the problem. I feel like there are a lot of parallels there although they're obviously two separate systems. For those reasons I think it is still the best term. I don't use "carceral state" because I feel like that's too limited to talk about the breadth of things. I don't use "the criminal legal system" these days in an effort to avoid anything that has to use legal as legitimate in the description of it. For me, this works really, really, well and I know people have tried to screw with it and make it seem like it's only about privatization, but I still find it to be dramatically more useful than most anything out there. I choose this term for those purposes, but I'm not going to be too precious about language either. I think if we can communicate across different phrases we're doing just fine.

DAMIEN: *As a follow-up to your mentioning of privatization, can you talk about and discuss those dynamics with regards to privatization? In particular an understanding and teasing out the nuances of privatization within the prison-industrial complex, but importantly, the notion of the public. Specifically, speaking to things that are linked to public funding such as taxes and things of that nature.*

RACHEL: The private sector of imprisonment and policing in particular, those are the two big parts of the prison-industrial complex that get attention when they get privatized. However, they still make up an incredibly small portion of the prison-industrial complex. I know that is different if you think about migrant immigrant detention, for instance. I know that there are lots of overlaps there, but for the sake of answering your question in a discrete way, that's very negligible when we compare it to everything else out there.

The question of whether or not imprisonment or policing are privatized and the specific focus on that issue diminishes the overall harm of the prison-industrial complex. It suggests that somehow if they were public they would be all right. In fact, there are some people who have organized against private imprisonment, suggesting that imprisonment is a public good and the problem is that prisons have become privatized. Not that people are locked in

cages, not that there's kind of a systematic deprivation of people from their liberty and their communities in very disparate ways, but that a corporation runs it rather than a county, for instance.

It also distracts our attention from how much of the system is run by public entities such as municipalities or counties or states or the federal government. Those resources come from our tax base and so things that we could be funding such as really good schools or public housing or libraries or parks, wind up having to compete with caging people or policing people. I think that really is a testament to the priorities of these different scales of the state. The priorities around imprisonment supersede a priority on what we know actually brings safety to communities.

DAMIEN: *To your point, the myths of privatization surrounding the prison-industrial complex have been thoroughly discussed, but amazingly they keep coming up, they are pernicious in that way. Relatedly, the first time that I heard the phrase abolition used in conjunction with the prison-industrial complex was at the 1998 Critical Resistance meeting at UC Berkeley. A lot of what I have learned about the abolition of the prison-industrial complex as a praxis was largely informed by you and your colleagues at Critical Resistance, and for that I am forever in your debt. In the roughly twenty-five years since that conference, the invocation of abolition as a concept has been employed in a variety of ways ranging from academic settings to social media and other forms of popular consumption. Can you please situate what the abolition of the prison-industrial complex was during that time period in which Critical Resistance was developing strategy and how if at all you have seen it change?*

RACHEL: I was not one of those people who coordinated that 1998 conference. I did attend it and was influenced by it, as you were. I can't say what was on their minds at the point when the conference was coming together. I have heard retroactively that there was a sense that there was a bit of a lull in the anti-prison movement, and specifically the prisoners' rights movement. In 2002, the prison population exceeded 2 million for the first time, and that was a big deal. I think people could see the march up to that big number, and those of us who were paying attention to those things at the time could also see that the movement had really been constrained in a lot of ways. The 1980s and '90s were really rough on the movement and it seemed to me that the 1998 conference offered a spark. It was a nostalgic setting for a lot of people too. I heard lots of stories of people encountering each other after decades. People who hadn't seen each other for years encountering each other in the halls. People who had gotten out of prison seeing people they had written to or who had organized or litigated on their behalf. There were all kinds of new

organizing opportunities, plans, and schemes that got hatched out of that conference too.

I started working with Critical Resistance in New York and at the end of 1999 we started scheming a regional conference in New York City. For our part those schemes were largely inspired by the 1998 conference, and we also wanted to think about what would be useful where we were, the northeast region which we designated from Washington DC all the way up to Maine and as far west as Pennsylvania. We wanted something that reflected the regional nature of the prison-industrial complex, and also the regional fights against it, and so you know there were things such as the imprisonment of Mumia Abu Jamal, which loomed very large on the East Coast, and other political prisoners who had been locked up in New York State prisons. The issue of policing was also more on our minds, so we very intentionally integrated ideas about the evolution of policing into the New York conference.

To situate what Critical Resistance was thinking about strategically and politically during that period, it was regional in scope. When we were planning the New York conference, some of the people who planned the initial conference also began fighting the construction of a maximum-security prison in Delano California, Kern Valley State Prison. The prison was colloquially called Delano II, as it's right across the street from a medium-security prison called North Kern State Prison. California was in the middle of a prison-building boom. However, in New York things were not in the same building scheme, and importantly New York was in the wake of police violence cases like that of Amadou Diallo, Abner Louima, and Sean Bell. These cases drew a lot of attention in New York City and really shaped how people thought about policing. There were openings after the so-called cleanup of Times Square under Rudy Giuliani that dominated a lot of the thinking about policing, and because we were based in New York dominated a lot of *our* thinking. In my experience, the development evolved out of the expansion of Critical Resistance to become a national organization. It wasn't just the concerns of people in the Bay Area of California and the concerns of people in New York City, but became the concerns of people in the southern region, particularly in New Orleans, Atlanta, and across the state of Florida. As the organization grew over time, the concerns of the people of Los Angeles or the people of Kentucky or of Chicago or Portland where chapters started to be developed also grew. We began to address key issues, such as to figure out how does the prison-industrial complex move and look in these places and what are the appropriate ways to fight it? Is it continuous or not continuous in how it operates and how it is shaped? Ultimately we decided that regional matters were

important, because we stayed regionally focused for years through a chapter-based model.

DAMIEN: *Focusing on the aspect of building that you described, you as masterful organizer, thinker, and strategist have explicitly stated that politics has to be connected to movement building. Can you explain the importance of situating the political next to movement building?*

RACHEL: You don't have any change if you don't have movements. I think it's really as simple as that. If you don't have movements that are willing to enact good ideas then they just remain good ideas. They don't take shape and transform conditions, so you need people who are willing to put ideas into action and test them out and then come back and say, "OK we tested this out, we have to make this adjustment." You then take the new ideas and put them back out and test them again. It really is that proving ground of ideas or theories that the movements are good for, and without strong movement organizations working together to test those things out I don't really see the point to it. Otherwise it's pure theorization. I see a point to theorization, but it's a very different one from trying to enact material change. Unless you're interested in ideological games or puzzles, then you need people who are willing to go out and put your things to work. Hopefully there's a little bit of overlap between the thinkers and the doers. That's when they work best—when they're not completely separated from each other. The strongest movements have thinkers who actually get to work testing things out, and they also have doers that are pretty high-level theorists. Those people don't necessarily have to exist inside of the academy to be high-level theorists, but many of them also do exist inside the academy.

DAMIEN: *With regards to politics and organizing against state repression, one of the more tested terrains has been around Blackness. We have witnessed a rash of well-funded Black forward-facing platforms across the political spectrum that have attempted to achieve political and ideological buy-in and Black communities into what our colleague Dylan Rodriguez has described as a domestic war-making enterprise. From your vantage point, how does Blackness figure into the political analysis and organizing strategies against the prison-industrial complex?*

RACHEL: From my vantage point, it doesn't factor in nearly enough. I think it factors in sloppy ways, in the broadest sense. There are some organizations and some groupings that have really taken up trying to articulate what the specific impacts of a wide variety of political impulses are on Black communities. Then there is a very broad brush that gets used by many other groups. Frequently I hear assumptions about what Black people want, what

Black people need, what Black people will tolerate, that I'm not sure are well tested out. They don't necessarily resonate with my own experience, which is just one experience, but make me curious about how well they've been tested out.

The question of prison-industrial-complex abolition is one of those things. We hear that prison-industrial complex abolition is for white people, as if Black people don't have time for that or Black people don't want that. We hear that imprisoned people, in particular Black imprisoned people, have no time for that or don't want that. In my experience that is not so at all, and if you actually talk to people about what the politics entail, what they look like in practice, then they articulate that they would prefer not to live in a cage than to live in a cage. They prefer to figure out a way to deal with harm when it happens that doesn't hinge on a very limited set of responses at every single turn.

We saw a lot of this after the Floyd rebellions in the summer 2020. Suddenly everybody was telling us all the time what Black people wanted, and I didn't have the sense a lot of people were asking Black people. However, there are some organizations and some groupings out there that are being very thoughtful, very rigorous and very intentional about how Blackness intersects with environmental injustice, with the prison-industrial complex, with how the economy is structured and how people participate in the economy, who has access to food and land and shelter. When people are doing that kind of rigorous analysis and political activity, I've been so impressed by what they're coming up with, because what they're generally coming up with is that the status quo is not going to hold.

Such work bears out that from the perspective of Black people there are intersecting needs between Black people and other marginalized communities. There are many opportunities for us to join forces and build much more powerful fronts against the people who would do us harm when we can think strategically and join with other marginalized communities who are also helping us understand how essential it is for Black people to continue to be internationalists, as Black people have always been. Not to be too reductionistic about it, but for many Black people, Blackness shapes everything. The fact of being Black shapes how you understand the geography that you exist in, shapes how you understand your gender or your sexuality or your body in the world. I don't think it can be underestimated, but that doesn't mean that it should be loose and sloppy either, like an add on. It needs to be understood in relationship to lots of other dynamics.

DAMIEN: *I have a follow-up question building on the point that you made about internationalism. In the wake of the tenth anniversary of Critical Resistance, you coauthored a piece with Isaac Ontiveros where you stated,*

Our ability to understand where we come from and where we are headed, and to develop new goals, strategies, and tactics, is strengthened by engaging critically with related struggles—slave insurrection and slavery abolition movements, Indigenous resistance to colonization, anti-colonial and Third World Liberation struggles—both inside and outside the United States, the Civil Rights movements, labour movements, arts-and-culture organising, to name just a few. Our strong affinities with these movements are also rooted in the fact that many people involved in our movement come directly from the ranks of the above-mentioned struggles, making these historical connections more than just educational or metaphorical.¹

To these points, can you expand on how and why an internationalist perspective became critical to your framework of understanding and developing strategies against the prison-industrial complex?

RACHEL: Internationalism is just essential. Especially if you live inside of the United States. The United States is a really odd place and an empire in decline. We would do well to understand where we are as an odd place and to look beyond the made-up borders that comprise the United States in order to see where we have affinities but also where we can learn lessons from other struggles. The left in the United States does not have very much figured out at all. There are very strong movements all across the world of people working under dramatically worse conditions than we have here or similar conditions to what we have here. We are trained in the United States to believe that things that happen outside the geopolitical borders of this place are not relevant to us, but they are incredibly relevant to us and they can be really instructive.

There are some interesting experiments, such as the big movements coming out of India or the big movements that are coming out of Brazil or the very instructive strategy coming out of South Africa. It is important to note that these are not instructive just as interesting historical examples, but instructive as in there are many organizers working today who could be of service to us, or we could be in a more reciprocal relationship with than we are right now, and getting that perspective from outside of your block or your town or your state or your country helps you put things into perspective. It helps you see a broader context for what goes on in the United States, and that broader context also then often suggests a broader range of strategies or

tactics that you could bring to bear on your specific situation. In a straightforward manner, we're missing out if we don't take advantage of the broad world out there to help us make sense of what goes on locally.

DAMIEN: *Your understanding of the connection between internationalism and the fight against the prison-industrial complex comes from a particular type of political education practice. Can you please expand on how political education has been critical to the development of your own political analysis and also how political education has been a crucial aspect of organizations that you have been a part of?*

RACHEL: I'm going to say something that may be controversial to some people. I get into certain kinds of fights and I want to win. I fight to win. That might be controversial because there are some dynamics in different movement spaces right now where people feel like a concept of winning is too aggressive or it's too capitalistic, and I reject both of those things. If you get into a struggle, you should want to win, because otherwise I'm not sure the point of being in that struggle. At that point it seems a little bit academic to me.

In order to win you have to be highly skilled. For a lot of the fights that I have been lucky enough to be involved in over the years, we are much smaller, much less resourced, much less powerful than our opponents and have to be really crafty. You have to be able to really think in creative ways. You have to be able to scope things out steps and steps ahead. You have to be able to put tools to unusual purposes. You have to know how to understand your enemy well. You have to be able to identify who your actual enemy is and not just kind of who's annoying you in any given moment or who you don't like. All of those are skills that you develop if you take political education seriously. This is related to the earlier question about movements. I believe that movements need to be strong and the best way to make movements strong is make organizations strong and the best way to make organizations strong is to skill up the people who are inside of them. Teach them organizing basics, teach them movement history, teach them power analysis, and teach them foreign languages. Political education helps organizations get in their best fighting form, and I mean that very seriously. That is the impact that political education has had on me. It is an essential part of doing any kind of political activity well. If you want to avoid making the same mistakes over and over, if you want to get an advantage on your opponent, you need to have some knowledge and you need to have some skills. In a more definitive way, there is not a way to gain an advantage just from your own personal experience. Personal experience will only get you so far. Being an expert in your one little thing probably is

not going to radically transform the conditions of hundreds of thousands of people. When I was working at the Center for Political Education I was always really surprised how many organizations would lament what they needed to be doing: “We need to study together.” “We need to put together a political education plan.” But it was often an afterthought. I just couldn’t help but to think that you could be winning more stuff and fighting much more effectively if this was an integrated part of how you thought about doing political activity.

DAMIEN: *In doing this over the long term and then you discussing that you enter into campaigns with an objective to win, when you look at the many twist and turns that have taken place within the fight against the prison-industrial complex, what do you think were some of the missteps or missed opportunities that have occurred, and do you have concerns that these same issues could be repeated, or are you confident that there are concrete channels to pass on lessons to others?*

RACHEL: There have been so many missteps, so many wrong turns, we did so much wrong. We also did a lot of stuff right, and I mean this in the biggest sense. There are a lot of different players in the movement against the prison-industrial complex and a lot of different political tendencies and a lot of different strands of work and when I say we, I mean the biggest we possible. We’ve all made a lot of mistakes and we’ve also accomplished a lot of good work.

In reflection, I’m not sure that all of the pitfalls were mistakes. Some of those we couldn’t exactly get purchase on, and we couldn’t overcome the obstacles in some of these cases. For instance, people have put in really good work on the divide between places where prisons, and also jails in some cases, are sited and the people who get sent to those places. There’s a lot of fearmongering that goes on around people who get imprisoned in order to make locking them in a cage seem like a reasonable thing to do. There’s a lot of mess that people get sold when a county or a city or a state or the federal government wants to put a prison or jail somewhere. In that mess is included a kind of mythology about these kinds of bogeymen who imprisoned people are, but also what having a prison in your town might get you.

However, despite the fact that such a myth has been debunked over and over and having it proven that prisons are drains on local economies, there are still geographic communities across this country that are fighting to have prisons put where they live. We’ve never been able to get around that obstacle and I don’t think that’s only our fault. It’s not a mistake on anyone’s part. It’s not a missed opportunity. That mythology is very thoroughgoing, and the machine that produces that mythology is really big and powerful and durable.

We need more people spending more time in rural communities where prisons get sited; spending time in those communities before prisons are actually built. Spending time talking to people about why this is not a good thing for them, what they could be advocating for instead, and there are some people who do this incredibly well, such as Craig Gilmore, who has taught me and a lot of other people over the years, but more people need to be doing that work. We can see when people put in the work that it's effective. This has happened up and down the State of California, recently in Kentucky where we are fighting off yet another federal prison. There are lots of good examples of this working.

Additionally, I think we haven't completely figured out how to get away from the boutique imprisonment craze. That is prisons or jails for children, or for women, or for so-called mental health, as if mental health could be nurtured in a locked environment. We haven't been able to get under that impulse and make a good enough case for why it's just garbage. In Los Angeles they love these boutique approaches and in Harlem they recently tried to build a so-called feminist jail, which is a laughable thing to think about. Yet these two places are not unique, rather that is a scheme that justifies having to build more new cages.

Those are a few of these kind of tough nuts that I don't think we've cracked around imprisonment. The energy around the abolition of policing is more recent and there are a lot of lessons to learn about how policing works, about how deeply ingrained the logic of policing is in US culture, and how much of a bag of liars cops are. They're allowed to lie in their jobs, and they will lie in political fights. So again, those aren't sets of mistakes, but I think those are big challenges and obstacles that we need to get around.

We have made some mistakes, and I'll speak for my little mini generation, I'm a Gen Xer, we are small but ornery. My generation did not do a great job of engaging elders in our movement to learn some good lessons. That's a thing that I do see repeated—younger generations don't do nearly enough to go back and talk to previous generations and ask critical questions such as: What did you try? Why did you try it? Why didn't that work? Do you think it would work now even if it didn't work then? Really trying to figure out how to not make the same mistakes over and over or continually bump up against the same obstacles without being able to push them anywhere else.

There have been a lot of really important thinkers, crucial to our movements, inside and outside of cages, who have been doing this work for a very long time, and we have not sufficiently engaged them in doing general cross-generational education.

Focusing on a core aspect of your question, I am really concerned about the state of the movement against the prison-industrial complex. There's a lot of new energy, particularly after 2014 and 2020, there has been a surge in interest. I am encouraged by the fact that with each one of these cycles the organizing starts from a progressively better place. So if I look at 2020, the demands compared to 2014 were dramatically better demands coming out of Minneapolis than we saw initially coming out of St. Louis or Baltimore. But I also don't feel like there's enough coherent strategy. There are lots of little strands of work that appear to be happening independently of the others. I'm not suggesting everybody needs to get together under a single national campaign. That does not make sense given how the prison-industrial complex operates at different scales. However, a more integrated movement that recognizes itself as a unified movement could leverage more power than individual strains.

There is a national movement, but it's not as coherent, as powerful, as aligned as it could be. It needs to not fight itself. It needs to not fight over, for instance, if abolitionist politics are legitimate to mobilize around or not. It needs to understand that there's a spectrum of politics and a spectrum of strategies and tactics, and that they can operate in a somewhat coherent way. Currently, there are not mechanisms that are helping the movement to share methods by which it could become more coherent and develop a set of aligned politics. I also have a lot of concern about the number of people who are taking on the politics as an identity, rather than operating from the politics to win.

DAMIEN: *Thank you so much for that insightful response. I have one last question that is related to the academy. One of the more pernicious developments during the advent of the modern prison-industrial complex has been the complicity of the academy in its development, maintenance, and enhancement. Ranging from predictive policing schemes emanating out of anthropology and criminology departments to sociological and political science theories that have informed violent carceral policy, the tentacles of academia have been ever-present within the prison-industrial complex. Regarding this connection, I have two inter-related questions. First, if it is at all possible, how can we organize and/or develop effective theorization from within the confines of Western academia? And second, have you seen effective strategies to root out and make plain the violence-making capacity of the Western academy?*

RACHEL: I do feel like at some level, that is a question for academics to figure out. There are a lot of protections for academics that provide a buffer from organizers who would like to critique them. I am not a fan of callouts

and public shaming, and I know there have been some attempts to do that. Those can be effective, but they're not my favorite because they don't last. They provide a flash in a moment, but then people come back around and are sneakier the next time.

There have been some interesting organizing efforts on campuses that have the potential to engage university professionals of all sorts, including faculty and staff. Participating in them can shift how people understand their own roles or understand what they contribute to the problems more generally. Particularly during the Occupy movement, there was a lot of activity on college campuses across the country that integrated people from all different parts of the institution and really made a case for uncovering university investments or their labor policies and other kind of economic things about the institution and those kind of joint efforts I thought were really interesting at raising up some of the fundamental contradictions of the institution and really pressing on those contradictions, making those contradictions untenable. More recently, the campus encampments in solidarity with Palestine have generated many new lessons about structures, demands, messaging, and multifront alliances. They have also opened up new conversations about the intersections between the academy, the prison-industrial complex, militarization, and climate injustice.

There have been a variety of police-off-campus campaigns that have tried to make university and college campuses “no go zones” for the cops of the cities where they are based. Also, there has been an effort to try to prevent there from being school cops as well, and then understanding how to set up different kinds of supports that might help students in the absence of those institutions. I think there are roles for theorists to play in those campaigns, and if you really get into thinking about what it means to remove this violent institution from your campus and applying your professional skills to that, those could be really effective to people who organize on campuses. Ignoring academics or pushing them all into the “bad bin” and saying there's nothing that they can provide movements is just throwing a bunch of tools into the garbage, and I don't want to throw any tools in the garbage, I want all of those to be at the ready. So if there's somebody who's really good at researching or if there's someone who's really good at understanding statistics and there's somebody who's good at understanding how to communicate ideas or somebody who a legislator will pay attention to when they won't pay any attention to me, then I want all of those things to be available to me.

Reflecting back on the initial question, what academics need to do is to ask how they could be of service to movements and not wait until an invitation is made, but you follow the same path that organizers do. You join something, you figure out how to be of service, and then you contribute what you

can. You don't try to take it over, you don't try to redefine somebody's strategy, but you figure out how you can apply what your skills are to the problem at hand. It seems like a basic organizing question to me at some level: What can I do? Academics can get to work on the problem, they can act with humility, and they can contribute.

DAMIEN: *Thank you very much, your insights have been extremely helpful and brilliant as always. Would you like to add anything to close?*

RACHEL: Yes, I want to make one request. Please thank your local organizer. It is through organizing that shifts in the movement against the prison-industrial complex have happened. Those shifts did not just occur because somebody wrote a good book or had a good idea and talked about it on social media. That happened through organizing. Organizers showing up, making the case, launching campaigns, and doing the work. There is no change without movements; there is no change without organizing. So anytime that you can show up somewhere and say "I believe in prison-industrial complex abolition" and not get laughed out of the room, you have organizers to thank for that, and I can't say that enough.

NOTE

1. Rachel Herzing and Isaac Ontiveros, "Building an International Movement to Abolish the Prison Industrial Complex," *Criminal Justice Matters* 84, no. 1 (2011): 42–44.

Social Antagonisms/Abolitionist Tensions

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANT SMITH OF THE W. E. B.
DU BOIS MOVEMENT SCHOOL

Ant Smith and Geo Maher

ANTHONY “ANT” SMITH HAS LONG been a fixture of West Philadelphia organizing. A natural educator, he spent years teaching some of the city’s most vulnerable and excluded youth while participating at the forefront of movement campaigns across the city. In October 2020, federal agents raided his home, setting into motion years of harassment and house arrest, after which he was formally banned from teaching in schools for a decade and sentenced to a year and a day at FCI Fort Dix. This interview was conducted after his release in September 2024.

GEO: *I want to begin by asking what the past few months have looked like for you. We first tried to schedule this interview by email when you were incarcerated at Fort Dix, but then we suddenly lost email contact because you had been thrown in the hole without explanation. Then you were suddenly released to a halfway house, again without explanation, and then just as unexpectedly released. Could you speak a bit to the conditions under which we’re doing this interview?*

ANT: Yeah, this period is pretty much like the post-incarceration, picking up all of the pieces part of this ordeal. So in that regard this is probably the most regular level of stress that I’ve undergone in the last three to four years. But everything prior to this part was ridiculous, it was an amalgam of nonsense. Even talking to other people who have been incarcerated for shorter or longer periods of time, it’s really hard to relate, because the nature of my incarceration was just so nonsensical. The transition from anticipating a non-incarceration, which it was a federal indictment so the odds of that happening was very low. And then, getting sent up to the Federal Camp, and then randomly getting sent to the hole where they were talking about raising the security level of the prison I should be held in and shipping me off

somewhere, and then randomly being dispersed from the hole into a halfway house, and then I was randomly released. And now I'm here, like, everything has been really strange. So that's pretty much the context of where I'm at right now.

GEO: *That must have been so disorienting, and we're so glad to have you back, but the absolute arbitrariness of it is something that's always so striking, right? In the wave of executions that have taken place over the past week, and particularly Marcellus Khaliifah Williams, which I know has weighed heavily on you, I was really struck by this tweet by Dorothy Roberts, who wrote that, "The horror of the US criminal punishment system isn't only that it wrongfully imprisons and kills innocent people. It is that it imprisons and kills regardless of guilt or innocence. It is designed to uphold power, not morality," which is a very different function. So you were incarcerated for organizing in Philadelphia, targeted by federal investigators under the Trump administration, and of course nothing changed under the Biden administration despite all the rhetoric. You were among a group, a small group of about seven people who were ultimately charged and jailed by the feds for organizing around the 2020 rebellions.*

There's a lot to say about that moment, but you're from Philly, and we've known each other from organizing here for more than a decade. Today, we work together as part of the facilitation team at the Du Bois Movement School, and our work is anchored here, in a city that we often describe as a crucible of abolition. So, I just want to ask: Why does this location matter to you? How do you experience it and how have you experienced it? I know you bring that into the classroom a lot, like the way we confront the contradictions built into the city. So how does Philly matter, and how does it matter for understanding Du Bois, for understanding abolitionist history and the contemporary struggles that enrich and contribute to the vision of the Du Bois School?

ANT: I think being in Philly, which you know is one of, if not *the* poorest big city in the US along with being hypersegregated, you really just develop some sort of like class consciousness, even without political education, along with sensitivities around race and culture. I think living here where you can walk from the skyscrapers in Center City to Broad and Girard where you can see some economic abandonment, you really see the contradictions. As Walter Rodney talks about, the contradictions are crystallized. You can very clearly see the differences between who you are and who you aren't in the same hour. You can be ten minutes from Center City, and everybody around you is housing insecure. And then you got, like, you

know, \$300,000 condos a ten-minute walk away from where you can't pay rent at. So I think growing up here is a very large driving force into why I wanted to organize in the first place.

And then going to college and seeing this discrepancy, being around a bunch of rich white kids made me hyperaware of class and race. I went to school at Harrington in West and then I moved to Sharon Hill and went to school up there. Both were fairly diverse, albeit primarily Black. But when I was at Arcadia University, which is twenty minutes away from Olney, it was different. So, drug epidemic over here, gun violence over here, and then I'm with like random white students no older than nineteen who drive a Porsche to and from class, like real wild stuff. So all of these things really helped me figure out how I see the fairness and realities of the world. Police violence, which further crystallizes that you live in a different world, was my actual calling into organizing, and it was a hyperemotional calling. I think I had to do it to salvage my own soul. Me being politicized in a very formal, community sort of way happened much later. Originally, I was much more driven by just pure rage.

As I was moving through my anger and trying to figure out how to navigate a lot of these systems, Du Bois was definitely one of the key figures for contextualizing the rage and then giving me a little bit of direction for where I wanted to go. When we think about Du Bois's depiction of the distinction of Black and white working classes, it contextualizes the weight of Black struggle and the opportunities, and/or limitation of class solidarity. Obviously if you are in leftist spaces you hear a lot about working-class struggles. But I had never heard it articulated in such a way. Particularly in Philadelphia, where you have a history of, for example, the Lombard Street riots in 1842, where riots between, or really against, Black folks in the city who are coming out of the era of chattel slavery and finding refuge in the north, by these white working-class folks who are primarily immigrants fearing competing for shitty wages. In the middle of Black folks celebrating the emancipation of the British West Indies, you're looking at Irish immigrants leading a riot and destroying Black property and killing Black people at a time when Irish people themselves were not even fully accepted into the white apparatus yet, you know? Like a really strange sort of condition to be existing in.

But that's really the backdrop of Philadelphia, a lot of like working-class traitor elements, where you've got working-class Italians in South Philly who love the police and do weird shit like protect the Christopher Columbus statue during the uprisings. Many of which own no property for them to have protected themselves.

GEO: *And that's been the story of Philly for a long time, right? Going back to Du Bois's analysis in The Philadelphia Negro, but right up through Black Reconstruction and beyond. And we can think of that incorporation of different ethnic groups into whiteness as the story of Philadelphia history and political power right up into the 1980s, right up to Frank Rizzo, who apparently hated Irish people more than he hated Black people, because they were standing in the way of Italians entering the power structure.¹ And the history of abolitionist struggles is crucial to that grounding as well, with Philadelphia being the South of the North, the sort of entry point to freedom, and a key hub for the Underground Railroad. At the Abolition School, we take Black Reconstruction seriously as you've mentioned, as a kind of starting point for analysis, not as the endpoint. And you've mentioned the Black worker and the white worker, so how else do you see Black Reconstruction helping us grasp the contours of US history and how we understand the world?*

ANT: Yeah, a lot of the tools that we've been developing aren't useful because they start from an inaccurate analysis point. So I think that, one, identifying that our main common denominator, our main oppressor is the capitalist state, and the arms of the state is the violence and coercion that makes us perpetual victims. The development of capitalism is what brought Africans here in the first place, and it is what interrupted Reconstruction. If you think our common enemy is something amorphous like general greed, bad energy, or particular identities, then I think it's very easy and understandable to see how people develop the wrong tools because they make sense at the time. Those things aren't necessarily wrong conflicts to engage in but they aren't THE conflict.

So there may be struggle because the *cause* of strife is seen to be, for example, members of the white working class. Who are complicated and participate in state violence for sure, but can be replaced by another group should capitalism find it necessary. Or maybe East Asian immigrants who have been able to utilize loans that Black families had never been able to get, and then operate in predatory ways by setting up shop in Black communities with low rent, which creates all of these disparate elements in Philadelphia. We start our consciousness at that point. We start at the point in which we engage with the conflict because it's the visible part. But if we stay there, we never get to the solution, because we aren't addressing the *reason* why immigrant families have to set up in Black communities. You know there is a shared oppression with the inability to set up shop in white neighborhoods, and a misunderstanding of *which* Asian immigrants are able to set up shops and which Asian immigrants live here in very terrible conditions that are parallel to Black people.

Or immigrants and white poor folks who have gone through deindustrialization in the nineteenth century when all the textile factories closed, and you know, white families were left in desperate conditions. And as we can see with Kensington today, which was a so-called workshop of the world, responsible for so much military technology and the deployment of ships and all of that, a booming factory town, has been decimated by drugs and abandonment. A familiar story for Black folks. If we're not identifying the things that put us in these conditions, and we're just sort of like reacting to the conditions that we're in, we'll be in this perpetual sort of cycle of deprivation. And I think that what Du Bois gives us is the ability to say: Let's look at the conditions that put you in this situation, instead of the reactionary elements. Although once again, I do want to reiterate that the reactions are understandable, if you know how segregated Philadelphia is. All of those antagonisms are very, very understandable. However, at the end of the day reactions alone are not going to get us to a liberation project.

GEO: *Absolutely, and part of the story of Philly's history, part of the story of Black Reconstruction, is this question of how white workers and poor whites in the South who Du Bois says were absolutely excluded, lived in squalor, and were not benefiting from the system of slavery at all. How was it that they were then strategically incorporated into the political project of whiteness? And that's a political project, right? Whiteness doesn't exist on a racial or biological level, only on the political level. And these are the same rules that govern migrants, who arrive and are expected to be anti-Black, or expected to ally themselves with policing of other poor communities as a way of being incorporated into that power structure.*

So as you know, one of the really interesting things that I underline about Black Reconstruction is how the same argument used against enslaved people is also used against migrants today. It's like we don't want you free because you'll be competing with us for jobs. But it's based on a mistake, which is that you're already competing with the system, right? It's this system of slavery that was driving down working-class wages, not enslaved people. That same argument is deployed against migrants today. Which is to say, migrants crossing the border aren't driving down your wages. The system of migration enforcement which prevents migrants from being documented and having access to union jobs and protections—that's what's pulling down wages, but the exact same ideological logic is being reproduced.

You mentioned Walter Rodney, and this all points toward one of our guiding principles at the Du Bois School, which is internationalism. The idea that abolition and reconstruction are and need to be understood as global phenomena

grounded in a long-standing colonial project, and that our struggles require and demand solidarity across borders. How do you see the importance of colonialism? How does Du Bois and Black Reconstruction help us think about this global struggle of what he calls “the dark proletariat,” and what does that look like today? I know you’re very much an internationalist, and so I’d love to hear you speak to this.

ANT: Yeah, this is pretty much connected to what I was just talking about. Those antagonisms that we confront are manifestations of how the US is interacting on a global scale. And that’s exactly what I mean with the inability to identify proper solutions. The conservative backswing you mentioned that we are currently experiencing in many oppressed communities are partly manifestations of how people sort of inherit the state’s ideology. Like, as time goes on and crises worsen, oppressed communities clinging to any defense, who are living in the US, are seeing their own interests as synonymous with what the state’s interests are. It’s similar to the Islamophobia many oppressed folks bought into post 9/11. We think the state can provide us with defense and it is the main perpetrator of violence. That is creating all these unusual xenophobic elements in communities that are also not accepted by the state, which is a really unusual contradiction.

So what we are seeing now is people will be more upset at an influx of Syrian immigrants than the state creating a crisis of Syrian refugees, you know? So that’s part of what we’re dealing with. And the dark proletariat, as Du Bois would say, are connected in the fight against imperialism, because that is the common thread that, one, pulls us all together, but also creates all the antagonisms. And in Philadelphia, you can see the manifestations of all these things occurring at once. Philadelphia has a very large African diasporic community. There are Somalis here, Ethiopians here, Haitians here, people from all over the Caribbean. Jamaicans, Trinians, and so on and so forth. Most of these places have been dominated through European international market exploitation or good ol’ fashioned political violence. So truthfully we share this space mostly as victims. This is a better place to be only because other places were made worse. People believe that they’re coming to the US out of some work-hard theology, but you’re coming to the US because you were a victim in your own land, and you don’t have the conditions that you need to safely raise a family. But the place that you’re going to is exploiting the place that you are coming from.

So in terms of internationalism, there’s a necessary solidarity that comes from simply just being in good standing with the people of the world, and I don’t think that has to be overexplained or anything. But there’s a real

tangible impact of being anti-imperialist. If you're actually so concerned about starving children, the amount of refugees, or whatever, you're worried about your wages or the outsourcing of labor, these things are a manifestation of imperialism. That is the destruction of Black and Brown people all over the world. It is not some accidental consequence of some mishandled domestic or international policy. It is not this partisan issue where this party is working through this better than this other party. It is *how* the US sustains itself. So if people *are* really concerned about whatever crises they see locally, domestically at your papi store or your Korean store, or what's your wages, or all of these things, your primary issue is likely with imperialism, and that's what we'll continue to see.

GEO: *Yeah, and just quickly, you have Jamaican family, right? Did that play a role in in you sort of inheriting a kind of internationalist perspective? Or is that something you developed on your own?*

ANT: Yeah, so my grandfather is real like straight-up anti-American capitalism, man. I don't know how long he felt like that, and it's not super grounded in some rigid political theory. It's really just the idea that you know he came here, my grandfather worked in a bread factory here, Amoroso's. and that bread factory closed in Philadelphia. So he was obviously unable to work and he retired. So he talks a lot about how he brought his whole family here to live in better conditions, and all they do is work. Every member of my family is working, so nobody has any time to see each other, so I brought my family into a place where we are now more dysfunctional and more disjointed, because everybody is so consumed with an everyday struggle to pay rent or pay mortgage, or whatever. So that is the impact of my grandfather living here.

GEO: *A lot of migrants say that today, where they're like "okay, I'm making more money, but shit is expensive," and the style of living is very different, the housing costs, there's no health insurance, no benefits, all of which speaks to broader questions. At the Du Bois School we often say there can be no abolition without reconstruction. How do you understand the reconstructionist imperative? How does it complement or complicate abolitionist organizing? And what does reconstruction look like concretely today?*

ANT: Where I see the importance of reconstruction now is that the systems that have always been in play are so much more powerful now. We are going to need powerful forces of restoration. Or transformation. The depths of development of imperialist projects and domestic oppression is just so grotesque now that we are in a far worse position in many ways than we were in the nineteenth century. And we are closer to feeling like most things just have

to be completely destroyed, and then we can build them up. To destroy while building something new, or make the adjustments within the framework we have until we turn it into something new, is the question.

This conflict has always existed. There was this tension between Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison and this idea of what they called Garrisonism now which is just what we would call abolition today. The situation was like: Douglass, you escaped slavery, this system is grotesque, and who could see that better than you? So we don't have to abide by the system. So let's refrain from acknowledging the Constitution or the legitimacy of the state at all, let's refrain from engaging with the system all together. But for Douglass, what was real was the very pressing massacre and hanging of thousands of his people during this time period. These were people in a condition that he could relate to. Garrison did not have that experience. And Douglass was like: I have a choice to make, I can either look for immediate relief from white mob violence for my people by pleading for the intervention of the state because these lynchings are going to continue on, or I can take on what feels like a lofty ideological struggle for a so-called better tomorrow. And today, people who call themselves abolitionist would, for the most part, say that Garrison had the correct analysis. And the masses would instead sympathize with Douglass. So what Douglass ended up deciding to do was to reinterpret the founding fathers' documents as documents of freedom that are supposed to apply to all of us. So he became very critical of the Declaration of Independence instead of abandoning it, and all of those things as a way to say America is a hypocrite, in order to move American consciousness.

So we get into a place of either the complete abolition of the state on the one hand—we don't worry about it at all, we don't need it, we don't interact with it at all—or on the other hand, we need to leverage the power of the state so we can better live our lives. That's the balance we are talking about when it comes to no abolition without reconstruction; I understand both of those elements. The idea is that we can't just allow people to die outright, and in this revolutionary struggle people need guiding lights to keep up the struggle. So while we are breaking down the state, which is a necessity, we also have to be finding ways to develop institutions, different forms of power, in order to develop the world that we want to see. I think that weirdo right-wing people, or even centrists, see abolition primarily as this pipe dream that's not grounded in anything, and that says get rid of all the prisons right now and then nothing happens after that.

But the prison abolition movement wasn't advocating for a society with *no* accountability, it's asking for accountability that actually makes people's lives

better, that actually lets people transition back into the community after going through a process of rectifying some sort of social, emotional, and spiritual harm. It is not, get rid of the police and just let whatever happens, happen. It is developing the things that make police obsolete—which they’re essentially completely useless at this moment anyway, so I don’t really see much difference of not having them right now, anyway. That’s an aside, but the misconception is that abolition is just this weird, dead-end project that isn’t well thought out, instead of like an elongated century-long struggle in which people are trying to deal with how the state interacts with their lives *and* how to get the state *out* of their lives.

GEO: *No, and I think that’s true, there is an idealistic approach to abolition by some proponents, who say: just get rid of the police and everything will be fine. But it’s very difficult to explain that to folks on your block in West Philly, because again, the police are useless but at the same time we haven’t built alternatives for people to call. People don’t have anyone to call when they feel vulnerable, they feel endangered, and I feel like particularly vulnerable communities have always sought to leverage exactly that kind of hypocrisy that you mentioned. There were students at the Abolition School just last week in our session who said: Why are the Black Panthers quoting the Declaration of Independence? And I was thinking about how Fidel Castro in his 1953 speech “History Will Absolve Me” does the same thing, he quotes the US founding fathers. But not because they believe the same things ultimately, it’s because they’re trying to leverage that kind of hypocrisy that says you claim to believe in equality, but where does that take you? You know Douglass of course, famously asked, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” Which can take you down the path of “it means nothing,” or can take you down the path of trying to reconstruct and rebuild. And reconstruction isn’t a simple thing, it means many things. It means demanding things from the state as you pointed out, but it also means building things on our own and getting resources back from the state that we can use to then build things on our own.*

ANT: Yeah, I just really thought a lot about that when I was inside, I was reading a lot of Douglass and I thought about it, like, damn, it can be considered that Douglass really strayed from absolutist abolitionist practice, and he was one of the most revered Black men in the country at the time. But then you have to think about the fact that there was no apparatus set up, there was nothing in place to stop the mass lynching of Africans. There was nothing outside of some small acts of collective self-preservation. You want me to just divest from the state, but you have not developed anything, and that’s why reconstruction is imperative. You cannot go into the post-Reconstruction, KKK-crazy South and say let’s stop demanding

safety from the state, we don't need to get the National Guard in here. When the National Guard, which is also pretty useless today, was sometimes one of the only reasons the KKK didn't just straight-up burn down every Black town they saw.

CEO: *That's one of the bizarre tensions of Black Reconstruction and of the story of Reconstruction, right? That it's Northern troops? It makes me think of school integration in the South in the '60s. It makes me think of the fact that federal troops were playing this historically progressive role, which is a contradiction. But it also is a reminder to think of what other forces could have existed. And of course, armed Black self-defense movements existed then, they exist now, and they were the first target of the Klan in the Colfax Massacre in 1873, right? That was to disarm Black people because they knew that, as Marx puts it, material force defeats material force.*

I just want to close by asking about 2020. Abolition School was born out of the long energy of 2020, which posed a serious threat to the white supremacist capitalist system, and which provoked a years-long wave of repression that we're still living through, and that of course impacted you directly. Where were you in May and June of 2020? What was the importance of that moment? And where are we today, in that long wake of those struggles?

ANT: Yeah, this is obviously for the interview, but still, let me just say: It's so weird to just be understood primarily as the 2020 dude who lost his teaching job. Like, I have been doing a bunch of abolitionist work forever, and now I'm just the 2020 dude, which is mad annoying. But also because, prior to 2020 so much was happening that you know my folks were involved in. Philadelphia was literally on fire already before cop cars were. There were two very large encampments ran by houseless people during this period due to the housing crisis and PHA housing practices, there were plenty of police violence victims in Philadelphia who obviously don't get as much national attention as others. We had been advocating for somebody who was murdered named Khalil Lawal forever, working with his family, and that had very little media attention. We were the only people talking about Joyce Quaweay's murder. We had been following the tradition of the international community and our folks at home in tearing down racist monuments. For us it was the Frank Rizzo statue. And then we had the issue with getting our so-called most progressive district attorney in the country with Larry Krasner, and the contending struggle to save Mumia's life. This is all REAL Justice, Philly Black Radical Collective days.

So all of this was happening when the state murdered Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, which helped propel a lot of energy forward. But these fires were already burning in Philadelphia. "2020" didn't start in May really, 2020

was wild from January 1. So, I think that it's best to characterize what happened in Philly in 2020 as an accumulation of all of those events, this housing crisis, this drug crisis in Kensington which they only attempt to address through more policing, more state violence, increased police violence, communal violence. The mental health crisis among young people and shooting victims and shooters becoming younger and younger—all of these things occurring and people just reaching their boiling point is what occurred. And that moment had a lot of potential, and the state really worked its best to squash that immediately.

And they *did* in part do that. Obviously, my incarceration was a part of that weaponizing of the law to find a way to charge people who would usually get petty misdemeanors for property damage through full federal indictments. Like, no people were seriously harmed in the 2020 uprisings *on our end*, other than some police vehicles—who are people according to the police for whatever reason. But I'm a felon, and I did more time than police officers who murder people. And they successfully characterized a lot of what was happening as the work of "outside agitators," as if people in Philadelphia had no autonomy to make the decisions that they made. You know, these are some weird kids from out of town who are doing this, and they're the reason why all this stuff is happening. They did a really good job at the characterization of the uprisings, and then the actual incarceration of people who were well-known and affiliated with it.

And the reality is that all those tangible things they did interrupted the uprisings because the uprisings were actually going to hit another level once they murdered Walter Wallace Jr. There was, apparently, another mini-uprising after they murdered Walter Wallace in October, and I was incarcerated the morning directly after those protests for Walter Wallace occurred. So we were entering a new wave, even after all the repression started. I'm sure the feds had been on me forever at this point by the time that protest was occurring, and comrades had already been incarcerated, so this repression had already been started. But the real issue came when a sort of right-wing, conservative, wave after 2020, and people became very scared of Republicans again. People entered this very neoliberal phase where they rolled back almost every single demand made during 2020 that had actually begun to grow some teeth. It wasn't super crystallized, it wasn't super well-knit formal organizations, but the demands were very loud. And the power structure had to adhere to almost all of those, but within one year almost all of those began to be rolled back. And what we saw was this very aggressive neoliberal push and the regressive version of identity politics where you saw so many Black senators, Black mayors, Black city council members getting elected all

over, but the demands were not being met. So you were getting Black representation, but all the Black demands were out the window.

And what we have now obviously is our man [Eric Adams] in New York that just got indicted, and you know, in Philly, [Mayor] Cherelle Parker has been a disaster. Everybody that does harm reduction work in Kensington has been talking about how the conditions of people have gotten worse after her reign. Obviously she brought the National Guard in, but even after that was the defunding mobile crisis responders, and all of that about the 76ers arena, which is not something that's only unpopular with leftists or quirky college kids or whatever. Nobody wants that stadium here. Like the Sixers players and the Eagles players are like: I don't see why they would build that stadium. And Cherelle Parker was adhering to these racist unions who don't care what's happening to Chinatown, they just want a contract so they can build. And then, obviously, waving her Israeli flag in the middle of the genocide—not right now, when people are sort of normalizing the violence like they did with Iraq, but at a time when emotions were very high, she was waving a Philly Stands with Israel flag, championing Zionism, and obviously emboldening police violence.

So now we have all those things occurring, and this is part of the struggle that we have to engage and fight now. So, the Abolition School, which was built off of the fury of the 2020 uprisings, now has the job of really confronting neoliberalism, which is extremely rampant. You know we've talked about this before, but my understanding of how I engage with this neoliberalism reminds me of the so-called postracialism of the Obama era. I experienced this, but the neoliberalism we're engaging with now still feels unprecedented. Resistance will become fringe again. So the Abolition School has a massive amount of work to do in combating this right now.

NOTE

1. "Philly Black Power with Matthew Countryman," *The Dig*, September 3, 2020, <https://thedigradio.com/podcast/philly-black-power-with-matthew-countryman>.

The Limits of Propaganda: Unmasking Fabricated Truths and Moving Beyond Hardened Beliefs

AN INTERVIEW WITH TIFFANY WILLOUGHBY-HERARD

Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, Yousuf Al-Bulushi, and Damien Sojoyner

THE MYTHICAL CONSTRUCT OF WHITE POPULISM as a political and social organizing tool of nation-building and its itinerant violence has been the foundational underbelly of Western thought and statecraft. During the past twenty years, white nationalism (and its attendant antisocial fanaticism and sycophancy qua religious devotion) as a formation of global thought and political ideology has sprung forth in a variety of shapes, ranging from state-supported clandestine militias to the highest rungs of the electoral political structure. As a means to unpack the historical and contemporary implications of nation-building, mythmaking, and social movement strategy with particular attention paid to the specter of white populism/nationalism/supremacy, Yousuf Al-Bulushi and Damien Sojoyner had the pleasure of interviewing Dr. Tiffany Willoughby-Herard. Professor Willoughby-Herard is an award-winning author, phenomenal mentor, compassionate organizer, and dynamic instructor and has written, taught, and thought deeply about the internationalist dynamics of race, gender, and sexuality with respect to political thought and movement-building.

YOUSUF: *When you think of the breadth of Black Reconstruction in America—ranging from the contested terrain of academic debates to Black internationalist social movements—what is the significance of Du Bois’s classic text for you?*

TIFFANY: An educator can begin an introduction to the study of institutions or policies or social relations with Comte or Weber, but you could also start with Du Bois and a conception of a world that is bigger than justifications for subjection. It’s not even that Du Bois has the most radical notions

about the interrelations of the world in his time. In *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs*, American historian Brenda Gayle Plummer detailed the dozens of other organizations that were organizing, mobilizing, and tracking the enduring passion for and skill with which everyday Diaspora African people intervened in the geopolitical ambitions of the United States.¹ They championed effective interventions into these ambitions by refusing their basic premise that the nation state was the only gathering worthy of their attention. Such organizations were moving and experimenting with global Black Consciousness and according to Plummer were constantly calling Du Bois's vision of statecraft to task. They did not believe in trusteeship. Some were dissident Victorians, and far more often they were anti-Victorians. Most important, many of Du Bois's contemporaries believed in one person, one vote, in ways that it took Du Bois a really long time to come to.

And yet, the question I'm always accountable to is: What would it mean for every student, particularly in a place like California, to read Du Bois at the outset, because of the portal capacities, the epistemological capacities, the methodological capacities that get brought to bear when you work with Du Bois? The methodological capacities that make him such a wide-ranging renaissance scholar, and a polymath. The methodological capacities that make him look at things like textbooks in one chapter, and social history of warmaking in another chapter, and a social history of abolition in another chapter. Those are really different scales of question, and it's about method. When I think about *Black Reconstruction*, it's about how we produce knowledge and what things are worthy of knowledge production and with what.

To think that something like the syllabus of American History is a contested site, takes an enormous amount of epistemological gumption and rigor, and that for me is still the space of power.

I kept saying to students that the Palestine solidarity encampments for me were active learning classrooms, and they were art installations, and they were expressions of Bloom's taxonomy of learning, not just comprehension and scholasticism, but actually application: What you do in the laboratory when you learn? They are self-guided, and you get to decide how much thinking you do.

I've been asking this question for a very long time because I know there are places where folks are being trained in African American Studies where you encounter them and they have in fact read all of Du Bois. It's part of the training. There's no way that they could move forward without learning all of the Du Bois. And I don't mean just reading it by themselves, I mean reading it as part of a graduate seminar. It's a question about epistemology and pedagogy that is of great concern to me.

I also think it's really problematic to associate the collective unconscious and meaning-making with an individual person, and not with collectives that are trying to think new thoughts and give narratives, and provide usable histories of the present and of the past and of the future. That kind of intellectual history treats insights and meaning-making as the study of knowledge as a commodity and a type of property. Peter Hudson vs. Cedric Robinson on racial capitalism to me reads like 1980s East vs. West Coast rap battles, and that's not effective, it's not compelling to me.

You will recall I read a poem at the Robinson's Archive Launch Conference. I wrote it specifically for the setting.

When Peter Met Cedric: An International Song

There I was
Wrapped in a Seana Marena blanket
The royalty of the Sotho
on a United airline cargo carrier
The cargo being people—always people
I had cause to ponder
(While burning up the sky, the air, and the planet itself, a regular
ecogenocidaire)
The map of the journalists deployed by the
Black Press in the 1930s
In Brenda Gayle Plummer's *Rising Wind*
The seeking voice,
hungry printers blocks
Insatiable pages waiting
For black letters to inscribe truth
If we are to be internationalists
We must understand both the
Cosmological and material
Groundings of the words
There is a deep river
That finds us and brings
US
into conversation with each other
That Black Radical Tradition
That anti-imperialist fervor
Of course, we are citing each other
Because we are hungry for each other
We carry
Mouths that can only be satisfied
With that riverine wisdom
There is no rap battle
Of East Coast vs. West Coast
There is only a river drawing its droplets

Into conversation
 With each other
 Are you surprised
 That David Walker
 With books sewn into coat linings
 Was killable
 Or that Audre and
 Barbara and June
 Found love and language
 In the same places.
 That Ralph Bunche and Lida Clanton Broner
 Were in Azania at the same time
 Criss-crossing the same roads.
 Is it ridiculous that
 They called their manifesto
 Combahee?
 Or that Oyewumi and Richardson
 Were trained by Barbara Christian?
 Or that Dr. Motsoko
 Pheko cited John Henrik Clarke.
 Bundles of love
 Swaddled at the
 m/othering waist
 of Africa
 Learning their names in Twi and Pula and
 Wolof and Shangaan and
 Geez and Gullah
 To be Black Internationalists means that we who
 Are water
 Share and seek the source
 Wherever it surfaces
 Sweet honey in the rock of our souls or the rock of our tongues
 Ben E. King called
 Our love language of citations
 A rose in Black in Spanish Harlem
 Therefore, to speak this language
 Solidarity must become more than metaphor
 More than action
 More than encampment
 We must be like Poto Mitán
 In one whole voice
 Spoken in every language
 Expecting sacred accompaniment
 Either we are internationalists
 Or we are hopelessly entrapped
 And captive and liable to sell each other
 Again
 Down the same rivers

That are calling us to be
 Together
 But not as cargo
 Not as chattel
 Either we are internationalists
 Or we are some of us
 Enslaved, some of us citizens, some of us refugees, some of us asylum seekers
 Some indentured long past the date of our Birthing Persons
 Free Wombs protected by laws that seek to disappear the Womb Carriers
 Either we are satisfied only by the echo and sonic boom
 Of each other's songs
 Or else
 There is nothing exceptional about Palestine
 Or Detroit or Oakland or Lesotho
 Or the Poqo Rebellion
 Except that
 A deep river spoke in these places
 And the people heard the echo
 And could carry a tune
 Listen to the beats
 coming through the streets
 Soft sweet and dreaming
 "It's growing in the street right up through the concrete
 But soft and sweet and dreaming . . .
 La la la, la la la, la la la la
 La la la, la la la, la la la la"²

Tiffany Willoughby-Herard

Let me give an example, the thing that makes rap music for example, meaningful in Brazil, and in France, and in many parts of the United States is a set of material cultural conditions that are linked. If you're just focused on the "he said, she said" or who's the actual owner of the product—of liberation—you just miss something. It's coming up increasingly, more and more, because I keep having these encounters with folks where they're trying to either "preserve the Black radical tradition" or "make sure that the Black Americans don't steal their stuff [racial capitalism] and run down the road." Robinson's work was a Du Boisian contribution methodologically because Robinson demonstrates capaciousness. Robinson and Du Bois, it seems to me, would both agree that there is much yet to find in the world *Of Black Study* (to use Josh Myers's book title) and that there are innumerable methods that can be used by the curious. We can argue about the need to preserve word for word Robinsonian concepts of the Black Radical Tradition. We can fuss at each other about being imprecise with his definitions, or we can use the invitation that Robinson gives us to get on with engaging the living archive.

I try to remember, on my best days, that any diaspora or continental African that I encounter who is trying to teach themselves any piece of Black knowledge has damn near eaten glass to be able to acquire that knowledge.

They have had to fight their own psyche, their family, every type of social relation, and perhaps even learn to accept the people seemingly arrayed against them who mean to be of assistance. None of us enters the world of Black study unscathed. Most often we have fought every fight known to the spirit of the living simply to be in the room. That doesn't mean that there aren't clear ideological distinctions, and some readers and interpreters of Black thought and of African thought who are just completely useless and violent people. But at the very least we have to encounter each other from a position of generosity and curiosity and understand that people are eating glass—by choice—to be in a conversation as diaspora Africans and as continental Africans. It doesn't happen accidentally, people are trying desperately to inhabit groundings with each other as African people, as ascendants of African cosmologies. This is one of the legacies of Du Bois's approach for me. His work is yet another example of a vast tradition of groundings and longings for each other. I imagine Du Bois sitting at a desk writing pieces for *The Crisis* and course lectures and reports for research findings about Atlanta and just dreaming that some of those words might form the ritual space for Nyabinghi for somebody somewhere. Nobody works like Du Bois worked without a sense that their wildest dreams are conjure work to get Black people free. To make way for liberation.

Whether the desperation is around who gets to claim credit or whether the projection is about trying to recover what the ancestors left us in places like Oakland and Kibera, there are certain sentiments or ways of beginning the research that I don't think serve anyone. It certainly doesn't make things easier for most of us. On the sidelines pleading for grounding. Let me be plain, factionalism can be useful pedagogically for giving people a canon. But at some point it is just a pedagogical framing device. In the final analysis when Black Consciousness comes through and clarifies its role in healing all of us, we find that we need each other far more than we may have realized earlier in our journey. That's why I called the poem "When Peter loved Cedric" because only love—unrequited though it may be—causes someone to spend that much time with another's work. Love that is seeking grounding.

I would urge all of us to keep that in mind.

Black knowledge is extant and ubiquitous.

And, at the same time, it seems that each moment one can steal to focus on tarrying with it one faces distractions, digressions, distortions, physical violence, and forgeries of memory and meaning with five centuries worth of apparatuses arraigned against study, reflection, and coming into understanding. It is on this basis that I am constantly urging that we encounter each other in intramural conversations with extreme generosity. None of us can ever know how just much glass the other person you are sitting beside is still digesting just to have made it into the study space. We bear throats lined with shards speaking colonial languages, eager to ground with each other, but we don't even speak languages that our own ears can use without pain—let alone the ears of the people sitting across from us.

YOUSUF: *Right now, one of the many ways that Black Reconstruction operates potentially as a portal, as a window into our current moment, is through J. D. Vance and Hillbilly Elegy, in the latest iteration of a “transubstantiation of the poor white,” as Du Bois puts it. And you open your book, Waste of a White Skin—which is an extended rumination on the poor white in transnationally constituted racial regimes—with the following statement:*

Critiques of whiteness studies have warned that attention to white identities displaces examination of the roles that Black people have been made to play in the making of the modern world. In the tradition of C. L. R. James's “small whites” and W. E. B. Du Bois's “transubstantiation of the poor white” and foundational to my response to these critiques, I argue that construction of the abject black other and the construction of white poverty are inextricably bound together, but not the same.³

I was wondering if we could ask you about that, and that framework, and your particular conversation with this notion of the transubstantiation of the poor white, and how you make use of that concept as it travels to think more expansively, internationally, in other parts of the world, but still in relation to the United States as well.

TIFFANY: One of the things I was trying to work through was that the poor white phenomenon, and the obsession with it that the Carnegie Corporation funded, for such a long time, is that it is a perennial bind. It's a perennial social problem that gets served up as a bogeyman to erase the role of the settler. The role of the settler can either be reframed as autochthony—“it's really just an empty place and we came here!”—as the great modernizer, an empty desert, a timeless place, an empty place, it wasn't a place. . . . We built a pier where there wasn't one. It's all these fantastical stories to cover over that relation of occupation. The first thing I wanted to do was wrestle with the fact that this is something that happens over and over again and is rediscovered as a way to make settlement sympathetic. And I wanted to say,

settler conditions are sympathetic, but for different reasons. They're not sympathetic because poor whites came to consciousness as workers after long hardships and Black people or Chinese people are scab labor (not workers) trying to steal the jobs from the real workers. This is literally the trope, poor white people struggled to achieve worker consciousness, and racialized labor tries to skip some generations of ideological struggle and scab their way into worker consciousness. Poor whites are not sympathetic because poor whites were indentured or because their conditions as captors on slave ships were bad. They are sympathetic because these are people who have come from slave societies and societies of settler colonialism in other contexts, and they have forgotten their own history. And so that is what that moment of being in conversation with James and the transubstantiation, because I don't feel like the whiteness literature admits to the presence of red legs. It's as if those things don't exist, and they find a figure like a J. D. Vance, and it's of interest, but it's so old and yet it always resurfaces.

I have a really good scholar friend, Jasmine Noelle Yarish, who teaches at the University of the District of Columbia, and Yarish gave this incredibly impassioned paper at NCOBPS [National Conference of Black Political Scientists] 2024 in Los Angeles where she did an extended reading of *Hillbilly Elegy*. I wrote her as soon as I saw the vice-presidential candidacy of J. D. Vance, and I just said, "you were right about everything." Specifically, she made an argument that was so cogent and familiar: Poor whites go hand in hand with advanced bureaucratic speedups of fascism.

But when I talk about them being inextricably bound, it's because I'm trying to remember the history of enslavement and sterilization that punishes and disciplines and makes this wide array of people become racialized as poor whites. I'm trying to track the project of the Herculean efforts to create white children's books, women's magazines, agricultural catalogues, all the print culture possible, to suggest that this group somehow has a uniqueness that is separate from the Rockefellers and Carnegies, but it was the Carnegies and Rockefellers who were marshaling and deploying tropes about poor whites.

It's inextricably bound, because what typically happens is this kind of low-level proxy war where the big capital class around the world can create a mythology around Black workers and a Black labor force, not only Black as African, but Blackened, a thingified labor force, and can say of that labor force: "You are not workers. You need to give us tribute because of your status in the world." And then say of whites, "these are the real workers," when that same power group, that big capital group has been using the same kind of really hellacious racist tropes about poor whites that they have been using about the thingified Blackened population.

They are inextricably bound because there is a lot of work that gets done to make these groups of people into stagnant and unrelated communities, when they are much more related. And it's really quite easy to see it in the South African case because the documentation around ethnicity, around race, around origin, around language and after World War II is just marked in such a profound way. You don't have to only look at cultural production. Every single person is carrying around a passbook that tells you a mythology about their history.

We have this logic of the TrekBoers who move from one part, from the coast, into the inland and of course they take enslaved people with them. Of course they're multilingual, they're multilingual for a hundred years! When you look at the actual demographics of Orange Free State and you say "this is an Afrikaner republic." I mean it's an Afrikaner republic inasmuch as Virginia was a white republic, or inasmuch as South Carolina or Louisiana was a white republic. They don't even have a demographic singularity. They are such a demographic minority that it's laughable to say that just because they have a will to political power, that they actually are the ones in power.

That is part of the inextricably bound part, and I have to say I was quite shocked when the white fragility stuff was going around, that *Waste of a White Skin* didn't get called into those conversations. Because the thing about the notions of white fragility is that they forget that there is a material basis, an actual material basis, there are social scientific propagandists who are paying for this. You know, J. D. Vance doesn't just come out of the woodwork from nowhere. He is made. And if it were not him, it would have been Sarah Palin. These are people who are constructed. A Bill Clinton. It's a construction of that identity. I have a profound disdain for the notion that there are people who are "cheap labor." I recognize that as incredibly racializing language that makes some people into perpetual slaves and makes some people into perpetual workers. As if somehow being a worker is so different from being enslaved. These racializing tropes come into the world at the same time and they deserve to be historicized, interrogated, dispensed with, and struggled with. The legacy they leave us with does not actually advance our political economy analysis.

That's some of the stuff I was trying to work out. There are so many things I wish I could have done differently. There's a huge body of philanthropic literature that is very, very sophisticated. Maribel Morey did a wonderful book entitled *White Philanthropy* about Carnegie's Africa work across the continent which I would say is far more sophisticated than my book because of the reach across so many countries.⁴ There are a number of books that looked at Carnegie and Rockefeller and did comparative case work across

Africa and Latin America that are historically more robust than mine. Mine does more of like: “look at this trope, let’s dig down into this trope.” . . . Another chapter, “look at this trope, let’s dig down into this trope.” The point of looking at the tropes is because they give light to these hints that can be operating in plain sight, that make us preach some things as normal data points that are just ideological claims, they’re not real. It’s like the claim that Israel and Palestine are at war. There is no material basis to say that Israel and Palestine are at war. There is a material basis to say that Israel is prosecuting a genocide. One, for me, is a more analytically satisfying account to my heart, because of what the material basis is.

To that point, you can’t say that African people were not true workers when Clements Kadalie in the 1920s was organizing unions. You can’t say African people did not envision themselves as actual workers when Keletso Atkins talks about protest and removal of work. You can’t say that Black women didn’t understand their condition as migrant workers when in the 1880s, Nomboniso Gasa documents, Black and Colored women were having pass protests and burning the documents, because the first set of documents, they were levied against women. The material basis gets stuck in my craw, and I try to figure out, why am I understanding this in a way that is so different from the normative understanding? And again, I think that’s what is Du Boisian about the project.

When you think about even something like Du Bois’s earliest writings, some of it is purely vindicationist. There is that strain. I don’t know how anybody can be in a Blackened body and not have a sense of vindication around proving “we are human.” Even if you are doing all the work that you can to decolonize yourself with mantras like “I don’t have to prove I’m human!” and “Claiming that I am human reproduces a horrid legacy of claims of white male self-fashioning rationality that must dominate the planet!”—and I do not want to graft onto that.

But, that’s not the only thing that’s coming through. What’s also coming through is a material basis for trying to understand how it is that these supposedly completely uneducated illiterate, unable to do anything, empty cargoes that populated the US society could so easily pick up arms and so easily remove themselves from enslavement. There has to be something more than being empty cargoes. There has to be something more. Of course it takes us until the 1980s and 1990s to document Gee’s Bend quilts outside of the region, but there is a material basis for that mapmaking. You know, it takes us until the 1960s and 1970s to document how these songs people were singing were literally maps. That doesn’t mean that there is not a material basis for people mapping their way out of slavery.

I saw when Du Bois was doing the Atlanta research in the early 1900s, much of it at the National Museum of African American History and Culture exhibition . . . they have these wonderful maps. There's a couple books that have come out now from the Atlanta Project, the urban geography stuff. They draw these maps that resemble the work of Juli Mehretu. It'll be a map of a certain part of Atlanta, and there'll be bubbles to indicate how much illness there is . . . and I think those books are really important technological and artistic interventions. He is making that point to a material basis as well as a cultural basis of doing research.

YOUSUF: *In chapter 1 in *Waste of a White Skin*, called "Forgeries of History: The Poor White Study," you open with this discussion of the Carnegie Corporation-funded poor white study. And you note in a footnote to this discussion that "Du Bois rewrote the historiography of the US Civil War and the nation-rebuilding project of the radical reconstruction, by challenging the ahistorical trope/analytic about an epic sibling rivalry between white men made spatial through the geographic analytics of political conflict between north and south. Rewriting the historiography of South Africa should foreground gendered black identities and struggles within racial capitalism."⁵ And there you cite specifically the chapter from *Black Reconstruction* on "The Propaganda of History." Can you elaborate a bit on that and this notion of propaganda and the material basis for the construction of all kinds of figures? Can you please elaborate a bit on the utility of that notion of "the propaganda of history" for your own thinking?*

TIFFANY: The majority of white people who moved to urban areas among poor whites were young white girls who were being sent to the cities by heads of household who were their fathers. When Carnegie is wandering around helping South African elites trying to figure out why there's so much interracial connection, and so much residential house sharing and stuff like that, they literally are asking white women who have Indian husbands and who have Colored husbands, and African boyfriends: "Aren't you ashamed? Don't you know you're white?" And they're like: "What does 'white' mean? There are three of us, we sleep in one bed, it's me, my sister, and my Indian husband. What's the problem? And then we send all our salary home to some loser with short pants on in the rural areas, and we've been doing that since we were 12!"

One of the founders of the Federation of South African Women, Fatima Meer, someone who experienced segregation as a child and as a college student, had to go to the segregated part of the University of Natal. Her mother was a

white Russian woman who was working for a white man who was very brutalizing. She ended up marrying Fatima Meer's father, and disappearing as a white woman, and becoming Amina who spoke Gujarati and lived and kept Purdah, and became an Islamic woman, because there was no way in a society that could literally burn down an entire Indian community because they were harboring a fourteen-year-old white girl, and her brother, her white brother, who also changed his name, he went from being Leo to Kassim.

There was no way to talk about the fact that that base level of brutality and authoritarianism, and patriarchal racialized terror that was happening on farms, and among various types of white tenant farmers and various types of white transport workers toward the women in their household, was making them flee the white rural areas to go elsewhere. So where there was a draw for African men from all over Southern Africa to work in the mines, there was a similar kind of pull for white women born in Southern African and born in Europe to move to those urban areas, to work in factories, in secondary industries, tertiary industries, to provide domestic labor as well. And the stories those women had to tell were not Victorian stories, they were basement of the basement of the basement stories. And there was no language for articulating that that whole strata of people existed.

The closest we get to it was Coetzee's early-1990s, again mis-memory of the Rainbow Womb, in his famous award-winning book, *Disgrace*. The arc of the story is a white male professor and his white daughter, who is living in a rural area. She is raped brutally and is almost burned to death by Black men who were farm workers around their land. He always had a warning for her: "Please don't go back, because the men are so predatory and they're so dangerous." The book wins all of this acclaim because it speaks to this persistent white fear that Blackness exists just to seek revenge.

What I'm trying to get to is that Coetzee points to this close relation between a white daughter who is a landowner and who these Black men around her can be imagined to be. But the white professor who is the father, who really is like a narrative confessor of Coetzee, he is the #1 predator, he's on that campus sleeping with every Black and Colored female student. He's got like eighteen different Susie, Sarah, Thembeke people running beneath him all the time. That's why I call it a mis-memory and mis-history, is somehow the connection between who owns the land and who owns that reproductivity becomes about competition with these Black men who live in that rural area and whether or not she is going to abort the child that is going to come from this rape, or whether she is going to bear what Dee Marco has called a rainbow womb. She keeps the child and gives the men the land. But that's not the arc of the demand for land that African people have—it's not, let's rape our way back to our land. It's

much more serious than that. It's like: Here is international law from 1600, 1800, 1900, you're violating your own law. The land is ours because we have a spiritual, cosmological obligation to it. Our ancestors live in it. Not our ancestors vs. your ancestors. But literally we have been planting the umbilical cords of our children since time immemorial all around this land. It's ours. That's not about a competition between Black and white, it's much more than that. It's another mis-memory.

I'm telling you the Coetzee story because in 1990, it's one of the places you can go all the way back and try to understand why you'd tell a story about competition between Black and white people. It's a ridiculous thing. It's as ridiculous as saying it's cheap labor. There can be no competition over something that you literally have no claim to whatsoever. You literally have no claim to any of it. You have no moral claim, no ethical claim, no financial claim. You literally have no claim to any of it. And your claim can only be adjudicated through creating massive poverty, dispossession and rape for everyone else around you.

One of the things I would have liked to have been able to do in the book is spend much more time with Nell Irvin Painter's *The History of White People* and the themes that Stephanie Jones Rogers published in *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South*.⁶ I was fortunate enough to be able to tarry with Painter's scathing "Introduction" to the journal of Ella Gertrude Glanton Thomas. It was so insistent on truth-telling and upending lies. David Roediger pointed me to that text, and it anchored me and grounded me and equipped me.

DAMIEN: *I would like to go back to a statement that you made earlier on in talking about the importance of Du Bois with respect to methodology and knowledge production. Specifically, you had noted that Du Bois was an important point of departure that should be taken up within the social sciences. In thinking about Black Reconstruction with respect to that, I couldn't help but think that Du Bois is here wrestling with these primary documents that the same historians who were apologists for slavery were using as a way to justify why slavery and the plantation economy were needed. And then Du Bois is looking at these documents and says, "Actually, there's something completely different happening here," and he lays out a brilliant argument about how Black people themselves looked at the situation and were like: "No, we're done with this," and what springs forth is the radical potential of Reconstruction, of what could have happened from there.*

And related, I think about your own formation of mentorship that you have with graduate students, that you have cultivated through the HBCU-UC pipeline program, and your radical insistence that Black

students within this context bring with them so much knowledge that they can look at the exact set of documents or social phenomena that supposedly everybody else has been looking at, but their perspective [changes how they can understand them], because of their experiences, and also because of the knowledge that gets passed down from generation to generation, and also because of the intimate links to processes of political education or social formations and how Black people were able from all over the diaspora have been able to connect and link social movements to the everyday. You have consistently stated that these relationships are important in order to change the basis of knowledge production in the academy itself. And so I have a twofold question: The one part of that is, what was the impetus for you to develop that pedagogical strategy that became a point of emphasis for you? Second, is there any way in which you could see that developed as a model that could be used both within and outside of the US?

TIFFANY: I have to start with an incredible amount of humility and grief because the students that we recruited to UCI, who were literally the best students on their campuses—they were summa cum laude, and magna cum laude—but they have not done as well as the students who came through our program and then moved on, went to Emory, and Oxford, and UConn, and Howard. It's because so much of the institutionalized white knowledge production here was about proving to them that they had nothing to offer, and that they were indeed empty cargoes and they knew nothing. I have a lot of grief around that. Because if anyone had just been like "this is a program to help people go somewhere more illustrious," then I could have followed that mandate. But the way it's written is, "This is a program to bring people here." I wish I had known that remit, that it was not a place to bring people to. That would have made everybody's place easier. And that is a real, real, real material concern because even a cohort in a sundown town is going to suffer more than it needs to. And Ida B. Wells was like, "Don't go to sundown towns!" Stop on through, get their wine, buy a horse, and keep it pushing! Don't stay and try to build a life there. And I want to be really honest about that because that is a really important lesson. When people send students to Rhodes University—they're not going to get the same experience as they would get at Makerere, or any university in Ghana or Nigeria or any university in the West Indies. You send someone to University of Toronto or University of Witwatersrand, some will thrive and survive, but you'll waste a lot of potential. The professors see them coming a long way off, and they recruited them deliberately to destroy them. I mean to eat all the places that their family put umbilical cords in the ground for every generation. I would like us to stop lying about the kind of spiritual warfare that conquest is actually motivated by.

What it was we were trying to do is to start from Cedric's premise that people are not empty cargoes. They are not empty cargoes having come through the middle passage. They are not empty cargoes having come through what Raoul Peck says are places that shouldn't even exist because everybody lives on \$1 a day. They are not empty cargoes having come through the highest levels of a population experiencing drug addiction and recovery in a country or in a state. They are still not empty cargoes. We are not empty cargoes. Those experiences, the bad ones, the good ones, are met alongside the social vision that the communities have. And so, I mean I wish I had been able to use the language—similar to what the City University of New York had established with an open-door free education after World War II. You just showed up and got to go to school. Not everybody, obviously, as the GI Bill didn't mean nothing for some people. . . . But that is the kind of institution I would be most effective at. Because I really do think about higher education in a super comprehensive kind of way. I hate going through admissions and hiring processes because it introduces a level of scarcity that's not real. And suggests there are only a few people who can think and the rest are just dust for the bottom of your shoes, and that's just not true. That's just not the truth.

That doesn't mean that we all think the same way or that our capacities show up in the same way. It doesn't mean that it's easy to live together. But everybody, in my mind, should get a PhD and should do a PhD. It's not the same thing as saying everybody should work in a tomato field, but two miles from campus on Triumph and Jeffrey there are actual fields right next to Irvine Valley City College and on any day, there are fifty people out there doing stoop labor. And I don't want to romanticize, but I think that is harder to do than a PhD. And I would like everyone in the society to have access to gain the familiarity with the methods. It's not just critical thinking, it's the methods for answering problems, or making meaning with problems. With a sense of systematicity. It's a skill set. It's an important skill set. And there is a lot in this society and in the world, that is part of the inheritance of being alive at this moment, and we get to have that. We don't get to have that if you go to school for twenty years and they all tell you is "you can't think." You don't get to have it if the community you live in literally tries to starve you to death, or jail you because you're poor. Those are genuine concerns for me, and I believe it when they say this is a public university. I believe that. And I don't believe it in the sense that some do who believe such axioms such as—"these are poor desperate disadvantaged people, and they deserve to have the highest quality available to them. I went to Stanford, or Johns Hopkins, and therefore I have

a mission to do something, to lift these poor racial epithets up and make sure they get to have some little piece of something.” No. That’s not it. It’s a public good, like roads. It’s easier to push a car down a road than over cobblestone. So how about we all have access to roads, or mailboxes, or postal service, or clean water? So how about that? It doesn’t feel like rocket science to me.

And when I look at Du Bois’s work in Atlanta, they were actually quite mundane, almost social work kinds of research questions. He wasn’t alone in this. The Brown book project, the work that Carter G. Woodson was trying to do that Carnegie didn’t fund because they thought he laughed too loud and had too big of a mouth, and wasn’t complicit and compliant and pacific enough. They were really: “How do we do something together that improves community life and is pro-social?” That for me is what the PhD offers. Now, I would love it if all the public research universities could reproduce the kind of experience that happens for somebody at Mississippi Valley State University. This really intense, rigorous, liberal arts training that starts from these seemingly impossible standards, but manages to get everybody who graduates into two quintiles higher than where they were when they started. For me that’s not just a middle-class-making thing, but an anti-poverty thing. But public universities don’t do that. A whole bunch of our graduates graduate, and they have been made into a middle class, but they can’t vote. They literally don’t know how to make sure that the people who represent them on the school board are not robbing them blind.

And I want to go back to the poor white thing, because I was having a conversation with a friend of mine about *Hillbilly Elegy*. I’m think I’m really, really sick of being worried about poor white people and their sense of entitlement. Because I’m like: “You want to have a 90K job being a police officer, and you have a second grade reading level?” Right? That’s not OK. Like, why would you be willing to accept that for yourself? And why do you expect everybody else should pay for it? You got people who are willing to walk through the Darién Gap, or send their children through the Darién Gap. Naw, we are not paying for you anymore.

It was really in response to the data that said that African American income has gone up so much and white income has gone down. But the data was real spurious, because they didn’t talk at all about wealth. The *New York Times* has it on the cover, and it was big news. Meanwhile the *Journal of Black Education* has produced the same data, as has the census, as has all these other agencies, and why is their data completely the opposite of that in the same time frame? Because they’re including wealth! Why do you want us to have dumb conversations? As I said before, the people who are Blackened

around the planet are eating glass, they're eating glass to be able to survive. We cannot pay for the leisure life of Trump. We can't pay for the leisure life of Senator McConnell. We can't pay for the leisure life of Sarah Palin or J. D. Vance. I'm waiting for a Democratic ad that says: "Why the hell did Usha Vance have to marry J. D. Vance? Her mother is the provost!" What is the special thing about a hillbilly that made it possible for her—named Usha—being a practicing Hindu and a vegetarian to be legitimate in this society. I don't want to pay for Usha Vance's social aspirations. I don't want to pay for J. D. any more. No more J. D. J. D. doesn't want to do it? He wants to stay sitting on the farm, or in the opioid clinic, he can do it.

DAMIEN: *That sentiment echoes much of Du Bois's point throughout Black Reconstruction, and in particular, regarding the white worker and specifically the farcical tragedy that was Andrew Johnson. On behalf of Yousuf Al-Bulushi and myself, I want to thank you many times over for your careful, thoughtful, and rigorous analysis. It has been an honor and pleasure to speak with you.*

NOTES

1. Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
2. Ben E. King, *Spanish Harlem. Unforgettable Hits! 1950–1960* (Atco Records, 1961).
3. Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, *Waste of a White Skin: The Carnegie Corporation and the Racial Logic of White Vulnerability* (University of California Press, 2015), 1.
4. Maribel Morey, *White Philanthropy: Carnegie Corporation's An American Dilemma and the Making of a White World Order* (University of North Carolina Press, 2021).
5. Willoughby-Herard, *Waste of a White Skin*, 212n41.
6. Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (W. W. Norton, 2010); Stephanie Jones Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (Yale University Press, 2019).

Conclusion

BLACK RECONSTRUCTION AS ROSETTA STONE

Geo Maher

WHEN IS A BOOK MORE THAN A BOOK?¹ When is it a lens for seeing or a prism for refracting differently? When is it a portal to an alternative past, present, or future? When is a book not a book at all but a door? And when is it the key that unlocks that door? “A concept is a brick,” Brian Massumi wrote as a gloss of *A Thousand Plateaus* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. “It can be used to build a courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window.”² What to make then of this literal brick of a book? Is *Black Reconstruction* for reading, or is it for throwing?

We might be tempted to ask, here moving *with* Massumi, what is *Black Reconstruction*’s relation to reason? This is a question Du Bois himself raises in his diagnosis and dismantling of the brutal *unreason* of his present—what he calls in his last chapter the “propaganda of history.” We could, and in this ostensibly post-truth age we *must*, in fact wonder whether Du Bois’s stated goal, “simply to establish the Truth, on which Right in the future may be built,” is plausible, whether his tactical distinction between reason and science on the one hand and propaganda on the other is sustainable, and whether he himself fits neatly into the different roles he lays out in that final chapter: namely, historian, propagandist, philosopher, and prophet.³ My answer, if it isn’t obvious already, is *no*. But moving *beyond* Massumi, we also need to ask about *Black Reconstruction*’s relation not to the “courthouse of reason” but to the very real courthouses that Du Bois had identified, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, as the “universal device” for “reenslaving

the blacks”—courts not of reason but of *color*, which in his words “settled a man’s conviction on almost any charge.”⁴ Du Bois’s own racialized cleavage between courts and reason—and his diagnosis of the systematic unreason of race—can be seen as pushing back on and beyond the cavalier dismissal of both that is somewhat characteristic of post-structuralism.

But some stones, as it turns out, are not for throwing at all. As I sifted through all the many metaphors we might productively seize upon to describe *Black Reconstruction*, there was one I could never fully shake: that of the Rosetta Stone. A massive stele, or slab, the Rosetta Stone was inscribed on its different faces with the same royal decree in multiple languages. As a metaphor, then, the Rosetta Stone underlines the importance of translating words and aligning meanings across time as well as space—and the radically expansive, even universalizing implications of doing so. But, here speaking as a translator, to decipher and align signifiers, signifieds, and referents in this way is never simply translation, never a pure and precise rendering. In fact, the original Rosetta Stone did not contain precise translations and instead helps us see how language bears content and context, and how *recontextualizing* language sheds new transformative insight. “To speak,” Fanon reminds us with more than a bit of ambivalence, means “assuming a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization.”⁵ Translation is not simply for decoding but for viewing differently, and turning the Rosetta Stone creates a sort of productive parallax that can be jarring and destabilizing, shaking our common sense through contact with the unfamiliar and the uncanny. Moving between languages is a giving but also a receiving. It is a form of travel, and travel, as we know, has set many of our best thinkers into motion—not least Du Bois himself.

Written in the registers of history, philosophy, prophecy, and yes, propaganda, *Black Reconstruction* is all of this and more. Looked upon from different angles and toward different ends, it provides us new and powerful insights for deciphering reality—and the reality of our collective present in particular. What is the nature of this present? For many, Donald Trump’s first four years in office seemed an eternity, spiraling forth like a tense double-helix of white supremacy and its opposite. The heated crucible of the Trump quadrennium rekindled sharp debates about the fraught tangle of race, class, and gender, as scholars and organizers sought to grapple with resurgent white supremacy both inside and outside of government. Movements for social equality and Black liberation that had erupted spectacularly under Barack Obama came up hard against the resentful politics of white victimhood,

before exploding from pandemic lockdown onto the streets in 2020 in ways that shook our political foundations still further.

If there is a single byword around which these movements coalesced, it is *abolition*. But as abolitionist scholar-activists like Angela Davis, Mariame Kaba, Robin D. G. Kelley, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore insist today, abolition—past and present—is about far more than simply tearing down repressive institutions. Instead, despite the name, abolition is best understood as a creative and prefigurative process of imagining and building the kind of new world that would make carceral and punitive systems *obsolete*. Abolition, in other words, is always about reconstruction as well. The insistence on this twin process of abolition and reconstruction, demolition and repair, is nothing new, however, but harks back to the abolition of slavery itself and the destruction by white supremacist terror of the ambitious attempt to build a society of equals after the war.

We stumble into Trump's second term in search of political coordinates. Our moment needs urgent decoding, and we have no Rosetta Stone more suited to the task than *Black Reconstruction*. If there is a single book that can help us regain our collective footing and chart a path forward, I argue, this is it. On the surface of things, *Black Reconstruction* appears to be a straightforward if ambitious historical account of the Civil War and its repercussions, correcting the archive to counter what Du Bois denounces as historical propaganda. Below the surface, however, Du Bois is doing much more than that, and in fact it is precisely by telling this story the way that he does that Du Bois offers a potent reconfiguration of US history that unfolds toward an expansive revisioning of past, present, and future. From race and class to the birth of policing, Jim Crow, and global imperialism from the ashes of Reconstruction, Du Bois paradoxically points us toward the future by training our eyes on the past.

Now, I should admit that I have never seen *Black Reconstruction* as anything but a guide to the present. I first encountered Du Bois's masterwork two decades ago, not in the academy, but in a study group for movement organizers. I was a member of the revolutionary cadre organization Bring the Ruckus (BTR), and we had inherited an intensive study program on dialectics entitled "How to Think" from the Sojourner Truth Organization (STO), an anti-racist new communist organization most active in the 1970s.⁶ There's a long prehistory here: the conduit between the two organizations was none other than the late Noel Ignatiev (or Ignatin), author

of *How the Irish Became White* and cofounder of the journal *Race Traitor*, where he would collaborate with the late Joel Olson, who went on to found BTR. For his part, Ignatiev had been a young member of the Communist Party before accompanying the ultra-left and anti-revisionist current that would eventually leave the party under the name of the Provisional Organizing Committee under the leadership of Harry Haywood, Ted Allen, and others.⁷

The reading that *Black Reconstruction* offered of US history was central to this entire trajectory—and for Ignatiev in particular—not only for the analysis it provided of the deep structures of American society, but also for grasping the ability of Black struggles to destabilize those structures, that is, as a guide to strategic action. By this I mean that STO's politics differed in fundamental ways from what many traditional communists would understand as the “unite and fight” strategy. Whereas this approach emphasized an *existing* basis for multiracial class unity—crafting lowest-common-denominator demands based on what *all* workers already agreed upon—STO sought to *build* class unity by confronting divisions within the class head-on and prioritizing the autonomous struggles of Black and Brown workers. BTR would echo this dynamic orientation, which Olson himself later applied to the Occupy movement in a published pamphlet. Rather than taking either side of the debate over whether the Occupy slogan “We Are the 99 Percent” was an accurate material reflection of existing society or the correct ratio for struggle, Olson rejected Occupy's tendency to downplay autonomous Black struggle in the name of class unity and urged organizers to view the 99 percent as a project to be built by attacking white supremacy directly.⁸

Steeped in this trajectory, my own study of *Black Reconstruction* coincided with—and found concrete confirmation in—the explosive rebellions that greeted the murder of Oscar Grant in Oakland, California, in January 2009. Just as Du Bois observed in the “general strike,” young Black residents of Oakland took spontaneous action that seismically shook the Bay Area and beyond—forcing the state to first arrest, then charge, and finally convict Grant's killer, albeit on a predictably reduced charge. As we collectively documented at the time, these lessons in power didn't stop with the conviction—which some abolitionists wrongly opposed then, as they do today—but saw potent aftershocks locally and nationwide.⁹ As a result, I have never viewed *Black Reconstruction* as a dusty historical text but have instead seen it as a

handbook for guiding thinking and action in the present, the relevance of which has unfortunately only increased in the years since.

Reading *Black Reconstruction* as a Rosetta Stone for deciphering our collective present, reading it today and reading it *for* today, opens up many crucial lines of sight and parallax perspectives. At each turn, the stone reveals more and different lessons for the present, depending on how we approach it and what we're looking for. There are many possible angles, many different ways we could choose to turn this particular stone, this brick of a book, and I'm constantly struggling with and revisiting the question of how best to compress these contributions down or to explode them outward. But here are just a few that strike me as among the most important:

1. MARXISM AND RACIAL CAPITALISM

From the very first pages of *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois is engaged in a process of radically transforming Marxist categories in the process of deploying them, using concepts like “the Black worker” to describe enslaved people and “the general strike” to explain the effectiveness of their action in ways that cut against certain versions of Marxism and certainly against the politics of many Marxist organizations of his time. If we zoom out from this refiguration of Marxist categories, moreover, we can see how Du Bois speaks to something far larger, namely the centrality of slavery within a broader global capitalist system as an essential structure for underwriting primitive accumulation, determining susceptibility to hyperexploitation, and on a political level, dividing and weakening struggles.

Centering race within capitalism is becoming increasingly common, particularly under the heading of what often goes by the contemporary name of racial capitalism—a terminology and approach profoundly inspired by Du Bois. Less noted, however, is the way that doing so short-circuits Marxism's teleological, linear, and universalist assumptions and introduces a conceptual and historical chaos into those categories and historical vision.¹⁰ Here we find Du Bois's analysis resonating powerfully with that of contemporaries like C. L. R. James and José Carlos Mariátegui, and with later revolutionary Third World Marxists like Walter Rodney and Amílcar Cabral. And the racial capitalist frame has crucial implications for decoding the relationship of race to class in US history, including sharp but impoverished debates around Trump's first election,

which often counterposed economic anxiety to racial fear in the most wooden of terms. What Du Bois offers to these debates is a *dynamic* view of how race is deployed to discipline and divide workers, of how it operates in *both* psychological and material terms, and of what the project for building class unity would require.

2. WHO MOVES HISTORY?

While the negative implications of this fraught question are clear in the tragic betrayal of Black workers by poor whites and white workers—a betrayal of class unity but also of their own best interests—Du Bois also underlines what we could see as the positive side of slavery’s centrality for global capitalism, namely the agency and autonomous transformative capacity of enslaved people, and by extension of other exploited and oppressed communities in struggle. In other words, to center slavery is also to center the enslaved and their world-moving and world-making power, their ability to transform not only the outcome of the Civil War but crucially its *meaning* as well—in short, the central role of what we could call Black self-activity as a driving force of history. Here and throughout, we find astonishing parallels between *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins* by C. L. R. James, two texts written almost simultaneously, each without the author’s awareness of the other.¹¹

Now, the strategic centrality of Black labor was in some senses particular to the material arrangement of production in the specific moment Du Bois was describing, and this arrangement has changed a great deal since. While Black workers were central to production during the Civil War and after, and this centrality momentarily increased during World War II, the post-war period saw Black labor pushed out of production and into a surplus condition. While this new reality demands an updating of Du Bois’s framework, this is a reconfiguration, not a rejection, of the overarching frame. For example, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense reconfigured this analysis in practice by relocating their struggle (from the factory to “the streets”) in response to these material shifts. And more broadly, the centering of the self-activity of the oppressed serves as a crucial methodological lesson in the need for attentiveness in tracking the often unforeseen power and unexpected impact of struggles from below, and from what lay still further below.¹²

3. THE ROLE OF FORCE IN HISTORY

In this centering of Black self-activity, but also crucially in explaining its downfall a decade later with the defeat of Reconstruction by white terrorism, Du Bois reconsiders the crucial question of force in history, and the limitations of political suffrage absent the force required to uphold it. Here again we can think back to long-standing Marxist debates—and specifically to Engels’s “Theory of Force” discussion in *Anti-Dühring*—which sought to correct the erroneous view that slavery was the result of an act of force rather than underlying economic motives. In the process, however, Engels bends the stick too far toward the economic in a way that threatens to downplay the autonomy of those themselves resisting slavery and colonialism by force. Third World revolutionaries, which I take to include Du Bois himself, but also Fanon, Césaire, Rodney, Cabral, and others, have long struggled to correct this overstatement. Fanon in particular found the economic argument to be a defeatist one—that the poor rebels in underdeveloped countries could *never* defeat materially superior European colonizers on the battlefield—and so took aim at both “the puerile position” of Engels but also “that mountain of puerility, Monsieur Dühring.”¹³ Force, he argued, was a far more complex thing.

In the context of the Civil War, the stakes seem clear: Reconstruction was made possible by and *only* by dictatorship, and more than a century of liberal scholarship has utterly refused to register the implications of this fact, which raises important challenges to how we understand the world and social change more broadly. But here too force is not as simple as it seems. Recall that Du Bois himself was tempted to call his chapter on South Carolina “the dictatorship of the Black proletariat,” and with good reason. The history he was telling posed all the key questions of that classic conception in terms of the unavoidable temporality of a transition to socialism, the role of education in that process, and above all the need for Black self-defense as an alternative to Union troops. All of which invokes Marx’s own insistence, which a stubbornly abstract and suicidal liberalism insists on forgetting, that “material force must be overthrown by material force.”¹⁴

4. GLOBAL RACIAL FASCISM VS. THE DARK PROLETARIAT

Arguably the most overlooked element of Du Bois’s analysis of both the Civil War and its aftermath is his account of their transnational scope. For Du

Bois, this spatial leap to the global level is in many senses a result of his straddling different historical moments. What do I mean by that? That Du Bois was writing about the 1870s, but that he was doing so with one eye keenly trained on his own 1935. And his moment was marked by two elements in particular: full-blown institutionalized Jim Crow racism on the domestic level, but also the dramatic expansion of US imperial power globally. Du Bois's great contribution was to underscore the complicities between the two, domestic white power and global empire, and to see how the two are not only complicit but how the former enabled the latter, how "the United States was turned into a reactionary force" and "became the cornerstone of a new imperialism" (631). If white supremacy was tolerable at home, why not deploy it abroad as well?

Here as always there are two sides, however: reaction and resistance. If white supremacy was both domestic and global, so too were abolition and revolutionary struggle—something our provincial frames tend to forget. So this is of course where we find Du Bois the revolutionary internationalist, perhaps best expressed in his insistence that "the rebuilding, whether it comes now or a century later, will and must go back to the basic principles of Reconstruction in the United States during 1867–1876—Land, Light, and Leading for slaves black, brown, yellow and white under a dictatorship of the proletariat" (635).

5. ABOLITION AND RECONSTRUCTION

Finally, this unfinished project of rebuilding points us toward what is arguably the most powerful lesson that abolitionists today have taken from and must continue to take from reading and rereading *Black Reconstruction*: namely that there can be no true abolition without reconstruction, no tearing down of repressive or carceral institutions without a simultaneous project of building new institutions from below. So when we hear Ruth Wilson Gilmore say that abolition is *presence*, or when we hear Angela Davis talk about making prisons *obsolete*, we're hearing the lessons of the past ringing powerfully in the ears of the present. Slavery was abolished in name, but capitalism, white supremacy, colonialism, and patriarchy all remained. This failure to repair the damage wrought by centuries of racial slavery birthed a deadly institutional chain that stretched from sharecropping and convict

leasing, through Black codes and criminalization, to the world of mass incarceration and police impunity we inhabit today.

And when we read George Jackson's account of the "Black commune" or hear Robin D. G. Kelley suggest today that reconstruction means communism, we know why: because rebuilding the world on radically different foundations is the only possible antidote to the brutally carceral capitalism we confront in the present. All of which makes *Black Reconstruction* a critical corrective for a political moment that once again sets race against class, seeks to excise Black struggles from broader anti-imperialist and anticolonial circuits of solidarity and struggle, and frames abolition today in terms that are either narrowly focused on police and prisons or utterly impoverished by liberal commitments and the blind spots they bring.

That's why we're reading *Black Reconstruction* today, that's why you have this book in your hands, and I want to briefly conclude by uplifting a more concrete counterpart to this book and this project of reading Du Bois for the present. At the W. E. B. Du Bois Movement School for Abolition & Reconstruction in Philadelphia, we are building a project for revolutionary political education that integrates these insights and transforms them into a participatory education project geared toward developing a new generation of abolitionist organic intellectuals, leaders from communities for communities. In this task, we view *Black Reconstruction* as not only a Rosetta Stone, but also as a cornerstone and foothold for moving forward collectively toward that vast process of social reconstruction without which abolition remains an empty phrase. Our slogans in this process are two: "We study the world to change it," and there can be "no abolition without reconstruction."

A book and a school. If one piece is more intellectual and the other more concrete, however, we know perfectly well that the distance between the two should never be overstated. While it's true, as we have already mentioned, that material force defeats material force, we can't forget what Marx immediately adds: namely, that "theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses." From which he immediately proceeds, in a sort of theoretical cascade:

theory grips the masses when it becomes radical
it becomes radical when it gets to the root,
and it gets to the root when it realizes that the root is humanity itself.

Finally, it needs to be said that we bring this book to the reader with the defeat of the Reconstruction project ringing deafeningly in our ears and its wreckage piling ever higher around our feet. As Trump wreaks havoc on worm-eaten liberal institutions, dismantles all semblance of multicultural inclusion, and underwrites a renewed project for the radical disenfranchisement of poor communities in the South and beyond, the long Civil War creeps steadily from a cold conflict toward a hot one.

It's long past time to finish the work begun by Turner and Vesey, Brown and Tubman. Long past time to finish Sherman's March to the Sea, tearing up the foundations of Confederate power like so many train rails. Long past time "to be communist about communism, to be unreconstructed about reconstruction, to be absolute about abolition."¹⁵ Long past time to complete the unfinished project of the most radical reconstruction imaginable.

NOTES

1. This chapter was presented at the University of California, Berkeley, as part of the Banned Scholars Project organized by the Department of African American Studies. My thanks to Michael Mark Cohen and all those present for their useful feedback.

2. Brian Massumi, preface to Gilles Deleuze with Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xii.

3. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction* (The Free Press, 1935), 725. Further citations are parenthetical.

4. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Penguin, 1996 [1903]), 145.

5. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove Press, 2008 [1952]), 2.

6. Michael Staudenmaier, *Truth and Revolution: A History of the Sojourner Truth Organization, 1969–1986* (AK Press, 2012). The original "How to Think" curriculum was published in *Urgent Tasks* 7, and is included in our own revised edition at: <https://files.libcom.org/files/How-To-Think-2009-Small.pdf>.

7. See Ignatiev's own reflections on this period in "The POC: A Personal Memoir," *Theoretical Review* 12 (1979), <https://www.marxists.org/history//erol//periodicals/theoretical-review/19791202.htm>.

8. Joel Olson, "Whiteness and the 99%," November 2016, <https://joelolson.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Whiteness-and-the-99.pdf>.

9. Raider Nation, Volume 1: From the January Rebellions to Lovelle Mixon and Beyond (Raider Nation Collective, 2010).

10. Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: the Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
11. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (Vintage Books, 1963). Interestingly, James felt that Du Bois had done a better job of accounting for many of these dynamics. See C. L. R. James, "Lectures on the Black Jacobins," *Small Axe* 8 (2000): 83–98.
12. This is something that I deal with at length in *Anticolonial Eruptions: Racial Hubris and the Cunning of Resistance* (University of California Press, 2022).
13. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 2004 [1961]), 25.
14. Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*" (1843), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>.
15. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Autonomedia, 2013), 82.

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