

## Untangling Race and Capitalism

There are multiple theories posited about the relationship between the construction of white/black identities and capitalism. DuBois(1935) and Anderson(1983) outline structures that attempt to cover the origins of racial identity based on shade of skin rather than genetic heritage.

DuBois(1935) brainstormed over how after the civil war, a proletariat revolution between poor whites(clay eaters) and newly freed slaves never occurred. Instead, the plantation owners(displaced socially by loss of slaves, the means of production) identified with other poor classes based on having a light pigment of skin. This sense of racism was not based on necessarily biological embeddedness, but rather based as a strategy to regain a larger role within the hierarchy. With thus construction of Whiteness, although the slaves were freed, black Americans were discriminated against legislatively until about a century later.

Anderson(1983) attempted to describe the rise of nationalism as a result of print culture. In a sense, the nation is an imagined community based upon the idea of similarity between the nations individuals despite a lack of direct interaction between such individuals. The large presence and faster means to replicate and spread print, creates an idea of a public perceiving the same world. Even though this world is an imagined perspective seen concretely through symbolic representation, there are essences of knowledge that concatenate overtime to bring an eventual ideology shift, however such shifts are not necessarily linearly associated with moral progression. Thus, the key point here is that the replication and spreading of print created an idea of a public sphere interacting with the same cornerstones of reality despite regional, cultural, and dialectical differences.

Out of these two perspectives, it is difficult to point to one as more compelling, both seem to have threads of truth spread across the discursive theories. But alas, I contend that DuBois(1935) creates a more compelling argument for the construction of race within capitalism. Anderson(1983) makes a case that imagined communities, sped up by the industrial revolution and print technology, allowed for such a wide sense of nationalism to be seeded and harvested within multiple generations of american history. Anderson(1983) traces a finger on a theory that could contribute to the widespread racist mindset, but not the origins of such mindset itself. DuBois(1935) posits a “why” to the question of how capitalism and race are knotted together. Anderson(1983) posits a “how” to the question of how a racist mindset was able to find itself in the status quo as one would call it. Both authors ideologies are able to concatenate and be used as explanative tools of how we arrived within our current historical position.

DuBois(1935) contends that the civil war did not reconstruct the black race as a valid entity, but rather as, “a determined effort to reduce black labor as nearly as possible to a condition of unlimited exploitation”(p. 670). One of the most problematic aspects of capitalism is that, “labor could become emancipated from the necessity of continuous toil and that an increasing proportion could join the class of exploiters”(p. 17). In our material culture of surplus, there must always be a class dedicated strictly to the gathering of raw materials, and the transmutation of such materials into worthy goods. The goal in capitalism is to reduce the amount of toil while increasing the amount of profit. This seems ethically bulletproof in a market of mutual transactions and volunteered labor. However, always present within capitalism is a sense of exploitation of the weak and lower caste people within society, who lack the power to resist the material and social exploitation. Thus a foothold is used within capitalism (lower class

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exploitation) to gain a higher position within the social hierarchy. Essentially, DuBois(1935) is supposing that the construction of the white identity was to reclassify the post-civil war population to allow plantation owners to regain former social positioning. This can be referred to as a sort of romanticism, returning to a former state that is pulled up into the experienced present.

Anderson(1983) theory of imagined communities can be explanative of how this exploitation of the lower classes is able to be separated from the theoretical conception of the first world, as the print created public is not necessarily educated on the level of exploitation that occurs to keep an industrial behemoth well oiled and running, as these world events are kept out of the public sphere and mind.

Thus, DuBois(1935) makes a more compelling case for the origins of race within capitalism. Anderson(1983) lays out the means to how such mindset was widely replicated across generations. Therefore, race and capitalism seem to share a historical and imagined relationship to social hierarchies and the modes of communication within the modern world.

Work Cited

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