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REVIEW ESSAYS / NOTES CRITIQUES

Roots of "Whiteness"

John Munro

BEHIND THE RECENT EMERGENCE of "whiteness" as a prevalent category of scholarly analysis lies the story of two intertwined intellectual traditions and their belated acceptance in the American academy. One of these traditions is antiracist Marxism; the other is the black antiracist tradition. Both have commented on white identity and white racism in ways that presage the insights of the explosion of whiteness studies that followed David Roediger's key text, *The Wages of Whiteness*.[1] In this essay, I will provide a brief overview of the two aforementioned traditions before proceeding to evaluate the post-*Wages* scholarship. Hopefully, my discussion will contextualize the whiteness phenomenon by pointing to its roots. I also hope to demonstrate that although some of the whiteness scholarship is less than perspicacious, the work of Roediger *et al.* constitutes a meaningful intervention into the historiography of race in American history.

Finally, my intent here is to build upon and respond to Eric Arnesen's helpful survey of the whiteness field.[2] For their Fall 2001 issue, the editors at *International Labor and Working-Class History* asked Eric Arnesen to review the expansive whiteness literature; an assemblage of prominent scholars issued responses in the

[1]David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991; revised ed., New York 1999).
[2]Eric Arnesen, "Whiteness and the Historian's Imagination," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 60 (Fall 2001), 3-32.

John Munro, "Roots of 'Whiteness'," *Labour/Le Travail*, 54 (Fall 2004), 175-92.

same issue, and Arnesen in turn answered criticisms and made some concluding remarks about the debate. Rather than repeat Arnesen's overview exercise, I will focus on some central texts in order to indicate how they contribute to our understanding of race in American history, or the extent to which they confirm Arnesen's contention that "the category of whiteness has to date proven to be an inadequate tool of historical analysis."[3]

* * *

I begin, then, with Marxist tradition. In many ways, Marx's materialism, as perhaps most clearly spelled out in his 1859 preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, set the tone of left thinking about race for the next three generations.[4] Among the much quoted passages of the preface, Marx posits that regarding material economic forces, the "totality of these forces of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which there arises a legal and political superstructure and to which there correspond definite forms of social consciousness."[5] In this classic statement of base and superstructure, racial relations are clearly of the superstructural variety.

This approach to race, combined with the temporal linearity of Marx's theory of "primitive accumulation," and his journalistic analyses of "modernization" in India, have earned him latter day critics who have convincingly pointed out the Eurocentric limits of his analysis.[6] These critics have paid less attention to the addendum to the base and superstructure model buried near the end of the third volume of *Capital*, where Marx specifically mentions race, but it is true that for European and

[3]Arnesen, "Whiteness," 6.

[4]Karl Marx, *Preface and Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Beijing 1976 [1859]).

[5]Marx, *Preface*, 3.

[6]For Marx's theory of primitive accumulation, see *Capital, Volume 1* (New York 1976 [1867]), 873-876, 914-930. Edward Said has criticized Marx's *New York Tribune* writing on India in *Orientalism* (New York 1994 [1978]), 153-157. In an argument heavily indebted to Michel Foucault's discussion of Marx in *The Order of Things*, Said contends that nineteenth-century Orientalist discourse rendered Marx unable to equate Indian suffering due to capitalist expansion with that of Europeans. Also see Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York 1994 [1966]), 261-262. Aijaz Ahmad offers a contrasting view of Marx in his *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York 1992), 221-242. For an appraisal of the Eurocentrism of Marx's linear model of time, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton 2000), 47-71. For a more general critique of Marxism's perennial failure to take adequate account of the salience of white supremacy as a world historical phenomenon, see Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983; second ed. Chapel Hill 2000). Finally, for an intriguing perspective about the multiplicity of readings possible in the original works of Marx and Engels, see Daniel Bensaïd, *Marx for Our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique* (New York 2002).

American Marxists of the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th, race was generally held to be of a secondary, if not epiphenomenal, order.[7]

With the partial exception of the Industrial Workers of the World,[8] the tendency to put economics far before racial concerns was true of such diverse Marxists as Karl Kautsky and George Plekhanov,[9] as well as Georg Lukács and V.I. Lenin. For instance, at the very outset of his famous analysis of reification and proletarian consciousness, Lukács rules out the possibility of non-economic explanatory categories, commenting that "there is no problem that does not ultimately lead back to that question [of capitalist economics] and there is no solution that could not be found in the solution to the riddle of the commodity-*structure*."[10] In an equally representative essay, Lenin's outline of imperialism situates empire-building as a response to the exigencies of finance capital, but is totally silent about the racial dynamics of imperial rule.[11]

In the United States, Eugene V. Debs promoted an equally reductionist line.[12] In the 1880s, he realized that white racism in the labour movement hampered organizing efforts, but he always looked at racism as a byproduct of class exploitation rather than as structured oppression in its own right.[13] He exemplified this approach in his 1903 comment that "there is no 'Negro problem' apart from the general labor problem."[14] Debs' biographer Nick Salvatore shows that although Debs' thinking about the relationship between race and class became more sophisticated by the 1920s, he continued to perceive white supremacy and black oppression as secondary issues.[15]

[7]In this discussion of base and superstructure, Marx comments that although the latter was ultimately determined by the former, this "does not prevent the same economic basis...from displaying endless variations and gradations in its appearance, as the result of innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural conditions, racial relations, historical influences acting from outside, etc." *Capital: Volume 3* (Toronto 1991), 927.

[8]Philip Foner, "The IWW and the Black Worker," *Journal of Negro History*, 55, 1 (January 1970), 45-64.

[9]For a discussion of the economically reductionist "orthodoxy" of Kautsky and Plekhanov's Marxism in the era of the Second International, see Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards A Radical Democratic Politics* (1985; reprint London 1999), 19-29.

[10]Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, MA 1994 [1923]), 83 (emphasis original).

[11]V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline* (New York 1939 [1916]).

[12]For an overstated but useful argument about the legacy of Debs' insensitivity to white racism throughout the interwar left, see Keith P. Griffler, *What Price Alliance?: Black Radicals confront White Labor, 1918-1938* (New York 1995).

[13]Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Chicago 1982), 106.

[14]Quoted in Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 226.

[15]Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 228.

This situation finally began to change during the interwar period as the Euroamerican Marxist tradition encountered black antiracism. The black radical tradition, as Cedric Robinson calls it, came out of an enslavement that could never be total: "Slavery altered the conditions of their being, but it could not negate their being."[16] As white Marxists, compelled by the admonitions of black comrades, began to think more deeply about the autonomous force of white supremacy in the United States, their earlier insistence on the centrality of economics became increasingly untenable.

Hubert Harrison, a contemporary of Lenin and Debs, had a most advanced understanding of race and class intersectionality, and his influence undoubtedly shaped subsequent thinking on the subject. Harrison was one of Harlem's most eminent black intellectuals in the 1910s and 1920s. Claude McKay remembered Harrison as "a lecturer on the sidewalks of Harlem. He lectured on free-thought, socialism, and racialism, and sold books. He spoke precisely and clearly, with fine intelligence and masses of facts."[17] Although Hubert Harrison died in 1927, his impact resonated throughout Harlem and beyond during his lifetime, as his biographer Jeffrey Perry has made evident.[18] In fact, Perry himself came to see the significance of Harrison through being exposed to Theodore Allen's ideas about whiteness and racial oppression in the United States.[19]

Harrison openly advocated a "Race First" position, especially in the years after World War I, but for Harrison race first never displaced socialism from his progressive agenda. Rather, Harrison's race-first stand was a reaction to the pervasiveness of racist ideas across the white political spectrum. In a 1920 article in *Negro World,* Harrison told white socialists that "[w]e say Race First, because you have all along insisted on Race First and class after when you didn't need our help." But he was quick to remind his readers that "[t]he writer of these lines is also a Socialist."[20] Finally, Harrison's anticolonialism, while always cognizant of imperialism's racial

[16]Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 125. Four important examinations of this tradition among a vast literature are John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (New York 1992); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA 1993); Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA 1998); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston 2000).

[17]Claude McKay, *A Long Way From Home: An Autobiography* (reprint; 1937, London 1985), 41.

[18]Jeffrey B. Perry, "Introduction," in Jeffrey B. Perry, ed., *A Hubert Harrison Reader* (Middletown, CT 2001), 1-30. Also see Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill 1996), 234-260; Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York 1998), 122-134.

[19]Jeffrey B. Perry, "Acknowledgements," in *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, xviii.

[20]Hubert Harrison, "Race First versus Class First," in *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, 109.

contours, foreshadowed the political economy framework that became increasingly attractive among black radicals during the interwar period, who in turn influenced racial theory across the American Left. In Harrison's words, "the lands of 'backward' peoples are brought within the central influence of the capitalist economic system and the subjection of black, brown and other colored workers to the rigours of 'the white man's burden' comes as a consequence of the successful exploitation of white workers at home, and binds them both in an international of opposition to the continuance of the capitalist regime."[21] Harrison's analysis of empire combined aspects of Karl Marx's "primitive accumulation," Lenin's conception of imperialism, and a militant anti-racism; as Jeffery Perry has summarized, "Among African American leaders of his era Harrison was the most class conscious of the race radicals, and the most race conscious of the class radicals."[22] Harrison's ability to advocate that racial oppression and economic exploitation provide equal barriers to human liberation in the United States comprises a key development in race and class theory that the American Left and later whiteness scholars would take up in subsequent decades.

After World War I, the antiracism of African Americans and Caribbean immigrants such as Harrison ultimately led to theoretical reconsiderations within the Marxist camp, as historian Winston James has ably demonstrated.[23] Both within the Communist Party of the United States and outside of it, leftists, both black and white, began to better understand the autonomy of racial oppression and the intersection of that oppression with economic stratification.[24]

The most dramatic example of the coming together of these two traditions within the CP occurred when the Party began its antiracist work in earnest after the sixth Comintern Congress inaugurated advocacy of self-determination in the Black Belt.[25] The Black Belt "thesis" held that majority African American Southern terri-

[21]Hubert Harrison, "Imperialist America," in *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, 222.

[22]Jeffrey B. Perry, "Introduction," in *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, 2.

[23]Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia.*

[24]The three best discussions of this process within the CP are Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (New York 1983); Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill 1990); Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unit Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-1935* (Jackson 1998). For a useful discussion of the ways that the 1931 Scottsboro case brought greater awareness of American white supremacy to Europe, see James A. Miller, Susan Pennybacker, and Eve Rosenhaft, "Mother Ada Wright and the International Campaign to Free the Scottsboro Boys, 1931-1934," *American Historical Review*, 106, 2 (April 2001), 387-430.

[25]For more details and background on the Black Belt thesis, see Harvey Klehr and William Tompson, "Self-Determination in the Black Belt: Origins of a Communist Policy," *Labor History*, 30, 3 (Summer 1989), 354-366; Harvey Klehr and John Earl Hayes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself* (Toronto 1992), 75-77; Gerald Horne, "The Red and the Black: The Communist Party and African-Americans in Historical Perspective," in Michael E. Brown *et al.*, eds., *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S. Com-*

tory comprised an oppressed nation. The thesis made little sense on the ground, where Jim Crow would continue to thrive for over thirty more years, but the new line was notable for two reasons: it brought about greater synchrony between the central strain of American Marxism and the antiracist struggle, and it meant that the Party's new antiracist praxis would set it apart among insurgent organizations outside of the black community. For historians focused on events in Moscow, the adoption of the new line may rightfully appear to be the result of machinations at the Kremlin, but in the US, CP rank-and-filers adapted directives from above to local conditions, thereby solidifying the Party's record as the preeminent antiracist organization of the Depression decade. Theoretically, the Party's discernment of the intersectional nature of social oppression reached its most sophisticated in the contributions of Claudia Jones in the post-World War II period.[26]

The most dramatic examples of this convergence of traditions outside the Party came from the Fourth International and from W.E.B. Du Bois. Max Shachtman's *Communism and the Negro* in 1933 is a key document of radical thinking about race from within the Trotskyist camp.[27] Separated from the CP by differences that were by 1933 increasingly irreconcilable, Trotskyists were themselves struggling to develop theory and strategy about race that would situate them as an attractive alternative to the CPUSA. According to Shachtman, "The bourgeoisie of the United States bases its *special* exploitation and oppression of the Negro upon the theory of its 'racial superiority'."[28] In this analysis, then, white supremacy cannot be explained away by economics, and must be met as a constituent component of the American racial and economic climate. The most significant implication of Shachtman's position is that whites would need to become aware of how their identities position them in American racial and class hierarchies if liberation for all was the goal. For Shachtman, no meaningful progress toward liberation for all is possible "until the white workers become the most uncompromising champions of the Negro."[29] Such an observation might appear to be the unique contribution of current whiteness scholarship; *Communism and the Negro* indicates otherwise.

munism (New York 1993), 199-237; Susan Campbell, "'Black Bolsheviks' and Recognition of African-America's Right to Self-Determination by the Communist Party USA," *Science & Society*, 58, 4 (Winter 1994-1995), 440-470; Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Movements in America* (New York 1997), 119-120; Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*, 68-91, 119-120; Oscar Berland, "The Emergence of the Communist Perspective on the 'Negro Question' in America: 1919-1931," *Science & Society*, 63, 4 (Winter 1999-2000), 411-432, and 64, 3 (Summer 2000), 194-217; Vernon L. Pederson, *The Communist Party in Maryland, 1919-57* (Chicago 2001), 39-40.

[26]Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York 1981), 167-171; Kate Weigand, *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation* (Baltimore 2001), 97-113.

[27]Reprinted as Max Shachtman, *Race and Revolution*, (New York 2003 [1933]).

[28]Shachtman, *Race and Revolution*, 66 (emphasis original).

[29]Shachtman, *Race and Revolution*, 4.

As Christopher Phelps shows in his valuable introduction to *Communism and the Negro*, Shachtman's work almost certainly had an impact on C.L.R. James' thinking on what was then called "the Negro question."[30] Phelps indicates that Shachtman deferred to James after the latter's arrival in the United States in 1938, but the recovery of Shachtman's pamphlet gives a new reference point for tracing the evolution of James' thinking about race in particular, as well as the theoretical evolution of leftist racial theory in general. In his 1938 book *The Black Jacobins*, James wanted to theorize a way forward for contemporary African resistance and thereby develop the position that this resistance would be violent in nature.[31] In his conclusion, James argued that "The blacks of Africa are more advanced, nearer ready than were the slaves of San Domingo."[32] Clearly, racial events on both sides of the Atlantic were inseparable.

When turning his gaze to the United States, James found the connections to Africa no less pertinent. On a programmatic level, James wanted to further promote internationalism among African Americans, as he specifically advocated during his meetings with Leon Trotsky in 1939.[33] In his 1950 work *American Civilization*, James recognized that white supremacy had a peculiar deployment in the US, and he noted that African Americans generally thought of themselves primarily as Americans. But he also situated the "Negro question" as the most significant site of racial struggle because of America's tendency to lead the rest of the world by example.[34] Again, Shachtman's critique of CP advocacy of black nationhood for a population that "felt no *national* attachment to that section of the country, they never have felt it to be their specifically Negro nation" echoes clearly here.[35]

During the interwar years, W.E.B. Du Bois, coming out of the black antiracist tradition, was also writing about white supremacy in ways that challenged Marxists to rethink their terms.[36] Du Bois's thinking on the intersections between race and class has been understandably influential for current whiteness scholars. In 1933, he could share the central Marxist insight that, regarding capitalists and workers in general, "A wage contract takes place between these two and the resultant manufactured commodity or service is the property of the capitalist." Yet he also noted

[30]Christopher Phelps, "Introduction," in *Race and Revolution*, xlii-xlvii.

[31]Robert A. Hill, "In England: 1932-1938," in Paul Buhle, ed., *C.L.R. James: His Life and Work* (New York 1986), 77.

[32]C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938; reprint, New York 1963), 376.

[33]C.L.R. James, Leon Trotsky, et al., "Plans for the Negro Organization," in *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination* (New York 1967), 68.

[34]C.L.R. James, *American Civilization* (Cambridge, MA 1993), 201.

[35]Shachtman, *Race and Revolution*, 74 (emphasis original).

[36]Obviously, by the 1930s the quantity and quality of Du Bois's intellectual contributions had already established him as one of the major thinkers of the twentieth century. For present purposes, I want to focus on his work from the 1930s because it has been so significant to contemporary whiteness scholarship.

that exploitation comes "from the white capitalists and equally from the white proletariat," thereby imparting his understanding of white supremacy's cross-class nature.[37]

More than a half-century before whiteness came into vogue as a useful category of historical analysis, Du Bois pointed out the economic dimension of racial formation, when he proclaimed that "I am given to understand that whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!"[38] In a 1931 *Crisis* article on African Americans and Communism, Du Bois, in a passage reminiscent of Marx's comment that "[l]abour in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin," once again demonstrated his internationalist perspective on the imbricated relationship between race and class: "Until the colored man, yellow, red, brown, and black, becomes free, articulate, intelligent and the receiver of a decent income, white capital still uses the profit derived from his degradation to keep white labor in chains."[39] Thus, Du Bois advocated an oppositional framework that opposed both white supremacy and capitalism, not only in the name of justice for African Americans, but for oppressed peoples everywhere.

Most significant for whiteness studies, Du Bois also alluded to the psychological component of whiteness in an influential passage of his magisterial *Black Reconstruction*, published in 1935.[40] Nearly seven decades after its publication, the full impact of this book is still being felt at the academy. *Black Reconstruction* was hardly given its due when it came out, but it ultimately set the terms of debate over the Reconstruction period, as well as over the relationship between race and class in the United States and on a global level. The book, of course, inspired David Roediger's theoretical approach to white identity in *Wages*.[41]

For Du Bois, whiteness entailed a "psychological wage" that offered public deference based on race and compensated for the class exploitation endured by white workers.[42] Throughout *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois puts forward a model

[37]W.E.B. Du Bois, "Marxism and the Negro Problem," in David Levering Lewis, ed., *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader* (New York 1995), 539, 543.

[38]W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices Within the Veil* (reprint; 1920, New York 1999), 18.

[39]Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, 414; W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Negro and Communism," in *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader*, 593.

[40]W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1960-1880* (1935; reprint, New York 1962).

[41]David Levering Lewis provides a rich contextualization of *Black Reconstruction* in terms of its reception and the earlier scholarship it addressed. See David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York 2000), 350-378. For a discussion of the ways in which *Black Reconstruction* affected American Marxism, see Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left* (New York 1991), 169-170.

[42]Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 700.

of social stratification that was at once materialist, psychological, antiracist, and anticapitalist.

It is important to see the fullness of Du Bois' thought in light of Eric Arnesen's charge that David Roediger misrepresents Du Bois' argument about white identity formation. For Arnesen, Roediger's invocation of the "psychological wage" is misplaced, since this passage is but a sidebar to Du Bois' materialist argument. In Arnesen's interpretation of *Black Reconstruction*, "the denial of resources, power, and even dignity to nonwhites and the conferral of influence, material benefits, and prestige upon whites are standard operating assumptions."[43] In light of the fact that Du Bois was teaching Marx's *Capital* to his Atlanta graduate students while writing the book,[44] Arnesen's reading is plausible, but ultimately unfair.

When we read through Du Bois' long book, and compare it to his contemporaneous writing, it becomes apparent that Du Bois sought to highlight the material component of white supremacist capitalism and point out the less tangible facet of white racial identity that situates white over black independent of material incentive. For Du Bois, Reconstruction represented "one of the most extraordinary experiments of Marxism that the world, before the Russian revolution, had seen."[45] But Du Bois tempers this materialist insight by reminding his readers that the anticapitalism of the post-Civil War era was always mediated by whites' loyalty to their irreducible racial identity: "the Southern poor white had his attitude toward property and income seriously modified by the presence of the Negro."[46] This sophisticated understanding of how class and race interrelated during Reconstruction also shared affinities with Shachtman's *Communism and the Negro*.[47]

* * *

The encounter between Marxism and the black radical tradition resulted in many thought-provoking exchanges and a heightened sophistication in the Left's understanding of racial identities on both sides of the colour line. Unfortunately, the anticommunism of the Cold War submerged these works and debates from much of historical consciousness within the United States, or forced them offshore, where they remained until they reemerged out of the frustration of a stymied civil rights movement and the counter cultural currents of the late 1960s and early 1970s.[48]

[43]Arnesen, "Whiteness," 12.

[44]Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 361.

[45]Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 358.

[46]Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 248.

[47]Christopher Phelps, "Introduction," in *Race and Revolution*, xxiii-xxvi.

[48]For analyses of anticommunism's impact on antiracist internationalism and on the silencing of political economy based critiques of racism, see Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *The Journal of American History*, 75, 3 (December 1988), 786-811; Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs*, 1935-1960 (Cha-

By the late 1970s, historians and scholars in cultural studies were beginning to reappraise the notion of white identity. Alexander Saxton, himself a member of the CPUSA in the 1940s, and Barbara Fields, a Marxist scholar who studied under C. Vann Woodward at Yale in the 1970s, both recast race in terms of the base/superstructure model. In a 1979 review essay, Saxton discusses liberal analyses of racial oppression, such as those of Gunnar Myrdal and Nathan Glazer, and goes on to note the relative paucity of ideological frameworks in the extant scholarship on race.[49] Saxton also indicates the historical reason for this lacuna: "Ideological argument does not fit harmoniously into either consensus or progressive outlooks since it stems from a class analysis of historical change. The Cold War drove it underground in America."[50] In proper Marxist form, Saxton bemoans the dearth of economically oriented ideological perspectives, lamenting that their theoretical rigour is much needed, since "the class bases of racist ideology are likely to be with us for some time to come."[51]

The 1980s signaled a heightening of Cold War tensions, Reagan style, but Saxton's call for ideological analyses about race were not quashed yet again. Instead, Barbara Fields clarified the ideological Marxist approach to race in an important 1982 essay.[52] In this piece, Fields argues that race is indeed ideological, thereby forecasting the attention to the social construction of race that would preoccupy much subsequent scholarship. She also, again in classic Marxist fashion, demarcates race and class as each being of different analytical orders: "class is a concept that we can locate both at the level of objective reality and at the level of social appearances. Race is a concept that we can locate at the level of appearances only."[53] Both Saxton and Fields were returning historical practice to the fruitful kinds of political economy-driven critiques of white supremacy that characterized interwar scholarship. They were also recasting race within the superstructural realm that proved to be a limitation, one that the earlier literature sought to overcome.

Meanwhile, developments in Birmingham, England were afoot that would nuance the Marxist paradigm and supercede the limitations of the base/superstructure model. Under the directorship of Stuart Hall between 1969 and 1979, Birming-

pel Hill 1996); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca 1997); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA 2001); Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (New York 2003).

[49]Alexander Saxton, "Historical Explanations Of Racial Inequality," *Marxist Perspectives* 6, 2 (summer 1979), 146-168.

[50]Saxton, "Historical Explanations," 161.

[51]Saxton, "Historical Explanations," 166.

[52]Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, eds., *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, (New York 1982), 143-177.

[53]Fields, "Region," 151.

ham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies focused increasingly on the race and gender intersections with class dynamics.[54] Hall had immigrated to England from Jamaica in 1951 and was influenced by Perry Anderson, E.P. Thompson, and Raymond Williams, but ultimately wanted to look more closely at racial identity.[55] The result was theoretical understandings of race and class wherein one did not precede or explain the other. As Hall puts it in a noteworthy 1980 essay, "Race is ... the modality in which class is 'lived,' the medium through which class relations are experienced, the form in which it is appropriated and 'fought through'."[56] Like Saxton and Fields, Hall is also interested in Marxism and ideology, but his project has been to displace the base/superstructure metaphor from how we understand race and economics.[57] Hall's theoretical insights, as acknowledged in Roediger's introduction to *Wages*, helped historians and cultural studies intellectuals come to terms with the autonomy of race, which in turn led to the renewed focus on white identity in the 1990s.[58]

So, this is some of the background to the publication of Roediger's *Wages* in 1991. Clearly, the precedents to this work provide the political and intellectual context necessary to understand how the whiteness field came to be. With this background, we can read *Wages*, and to an extent subsequent whiteness scholarship, as the inheritors of the two traditions sketched out here: the African American antiracist tradition, best represented by Harrison and Du Bois, and the Marxist tradition in the United States, traceable through Alexander Saxton back to the 1928 Black Belt thesis of the Third international, and to Max Shachtman through C.L.R. James in the Fourth.

[54]Accounts of the Centre's history during this period include Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies," in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York 1992), 277-286; Norma Schulman, "Conditions of their Own Making: An Intellectual History of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham," *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 18, 1 (1993), http: www.cjc-online.ca/viewarticle.php?id=140; Charlotte Brunsdon, "A Thief in the Night: Stories of Feminism in the 1970s at CCCS," in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (New York 1996), 276-286; H. Joseph Carnie, "Talking to the Centre: Different Voices in the Intellectual History of The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS)," *Gateway* (Spring 2002) http://grad.usask. Ca/gateway/archive21.html (25 March 2002).

[55]See Hall's discussion of his own biography in "The Formation of A Diasporic Intellectual," in *Stuart Hall*.

[56]Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance," in Houston A. Baker, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg, eds., *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader* (Chicago 1996 [1980]), 16-60. Quotation from p. 55.

[57]Hall, "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees," in Betty Matthews, ed., *Marx: A Hundred Years On* (London 1983), 57-84.

[58]Roediger, *Wages*, 11.

In *Wages*, Roediger explores class and race dynamics in the antebellum 19th century in order to make five principal arguments: like all other identities, white identity is socially constructed; racial identity is not reducible to economics; racism emanates from "above" through elite divide-and-conquer strategies, as well as from "below" through white working-class racism; psychological benefits from whiteness strengthened a cross-class white identity that precluded interracial alliances based on class; and the formation of and loyalty to white identity were reactions born out of fear of dependency and work discipline. The influence of Harrison, Shachtman, Du Bois, James, and Hall are discernible in all of these arguments. From here, the whiteness field grew exponentially in both historical and cultural studies.

Wages in some ways represents the belated fruition of interwar thinking on race and class. *Wages* draws explicitly on *Black Reconstruction*, but Roediger's book is clearly in keeping with the entire interwar left and antiracist milieu, as well as more recent developments in history and cultural studies. But because we can discern precedents for *Wages*, this does not mean that this volume was not a significant work in its own right, or as David Brody puts it, "there is no denying the enormous achievement of his book."[59] Roediger not only shook up the field of 19th-century American history, and pushed historiographical trends away from the base/superstructure approach (not that Marxists simply capitulated to this development), but he also brought our attention to white identity in ways that were new. Certainly, there had been many sophisticated analyses of race within history before, but they by and large centered on black identity, thereby leaving whiteness unexplored and to a degree naturalized.

Roediger followed *Wages* with a 1994 collection of essays entitled *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness*.[60] In this wide ranging volume, Roediger revisits the 19th century by looking at the 1877 general strike in St. Louis. But this collection also includes discussions of Robin Kelley's *Hammer and Hoe*, George Rawick's *Sundown to Sunup*, plus observations on the state of labour history. Perhaps most interesting is Roediger's analysis of labour history's crisis. Although exceptions are noted, he identifies the cause of the crisis in organized labour's decline and, more importantly, if unsurprisingly, in labour history's general unwillingness to give race and gender equal billing alongside class.[61] Rather than retreat on his earlier divergence from the base/superstructure model, then, Roediger in *Towards the Abolition* deepens his critique and applies it to the labour history field as a whole. By the mid-1990s, it seemed that Roediger was possibly abandoning labour history for the putatively less crisis-ridden cultural studies department across the quad.

[59]David Brody, review of *The Wages of Whiteness*, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 24, 2 (Autumn 1993), 378-380. Quotation from p. 380.

[60]Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (New York 1994).

[61]Roediger, *Towards the Abolition*, 69-81.

In his response to Arnesen's essay on whiteness in *International Labor and Working-Class History*, David Brody argues that Arnesen does not adequately distinguish the achievements of *Wages* from the scholarship that follows.[62] Brody's point is apt both for those works that analyze whiteness from within the Marxian framework that Arnesen contends whiteness studies have abandoned, and those works that exemplify less rigour. Theodore Allen's 1994 *The Invention of the White Race, Volume One* is a striking instance of the former.[63]

Arnesen lumps together *The Invention* with Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White*, without pausing to consider how conventionally Marxist Allen's work is, and therefore how diverse is the range of scholarship within the whiteness tent.[64] Both Allen's and Ignatiev's intellectual formation occurred in the same New Left generation of the 1960s and 1970s, but the psychological and cultural emphasis of *How the Irish Became White* stands in marked contrast to Allen's materialist bent. In *The Invention*, Allen posits that white supremacy came into being in the United States around the end of the 18th century as a way of maintaining class inequality: "Primary emphasis upon 'race' became the pattern only where the bourgeoisie could not form its social control apparatus without the inclusion of propertyless European-Americans."[65] This argument emphasizes the agency of the ruling class in maintaining social control, thereby setting Allen's book apart from approaches to whiteness that are more culturalist in orientation. Indeed, Allen's position on whiteness seems not too distant from Arnesen's, since they both consider racial identity to be driven by the motor of materialism.

[62]Brody, "Charismatic History: Pros and Cons," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 60 (Fall 2001), 43-47. This specific point is made on p. 45.

[63]Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume One: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (New York 1994).

[64]Arnesen, "Whiteness," 14. Also see Noel Ignatiev, *How The Irish Became White* (New York 1995). Ignatiev and Allen have both been interested in race and class for some time. See Ted Allen, "Can White Worker Radicals be Radicalized?" (pamphlet; Detroit 1969); Noel Ignatin (Ignatiev's former surname), "White Worker, Black Worker," in *White Supremacy: A Collection* (Chicago 1970). This earlier work comes out of the context of the radical challenge posed by the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in Detroit during the late 1960s and early 1970s. For more on radical Detroit in this period, see the classic study by Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* (updated edition; 1975, Cambridge, MA 1998). Also see James Boggs, *The American Revolution: Pages from A Negro Worker's Notebook* (New York 1963); Grace Lee Boggs, *Living For Change: An Autobiography* (Minneapolis 1998); L. Todd Duncan, "The Continuity of Living for Change: An Interview with Grace Lee Boggs," *Social Text*, 67 (Summer 2001), 43-73; Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca 2001).

[65]Allen, *The Invention, (V. 1)*, 19. There is a clear and deliberate resonance in Allen's argument with Edmund Morgan's earlier work on colonial Virginia. See Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York 1975).

One point of commonality among Roediger, Allen, and Ignatiev that Arnesen pays little attention to is their shared sense that whiteness ought to be placed into history's dustbin at the earliest possible convenience. The very title of Roediger's 1994 collection, Allen's contention in his second volume that the invention of whiteness represents a "monstrous social mutation" that we'd clearly be better off without,[66] and Ignatiev's editorship at the journal *Race Traitor* illuminate this commonality.[67] In another review essay of whiteness studies from a cultural studies standpoint, Homi Bhabha applauds this stand against privilege, but issues a worthwhile caution:

> the stentorian tone of soul-searching, accompanied by its rhetorical rectitude, comes uncomfortably close to the way in which 'nationalist' discourses of the state frequently address the people or the troops as a homogeneous mass waiting to be mobilized. Such a disciplinary political program makes it impossible to exert one's right to make a nuanced response, to suggest a variation in terms or tone. One is obliged, more or less, to answer passively, in the affirmative.[68]

Regarding political consciousness, then, the politics that animate important sectors within whiteness studies have aided their push for theoretical insights, but they are also potentially alienating.

David Brody's point about Arnesen's failure to differentiate *Wages* from subsequent work is also relevant for some of the weaker analyses from within the whiteness camp. For example, Annie Gilbert Coleman draws our attention to how white supremacy operates in the skiing industry.[69] Her essay highlights how labour is racially coded and stratified in one sector of American tourism, but moves from this helpful observation to make the startling claim that "Ski tourism has been an economic force in the West since World War II. It has equally significantly, however, (re)shaped western culture."[70] But perhaps the worst offender when it comes to fantastic claims is Daniel Leonard Bernardi's book about whiteness in the television show *Star Trek*.[71] Bernardi offers the following reading of the series:

[66] Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume Two: The Origins of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (New York 1997), 13.

[67] *Race Traitor*'s editorial stance on this question is the least ambiguous: "The key to solving the social problems of our age is to abolish the white race." "What We Believe," (15 November 2003).

[68] Homi K. Bhabha, "The White Stuff," *Artforum*, 36 (1998), 21-24.

[69] Annie Gilbert Coleman, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing," *Pacific Historical Review*, 65, 4 (25 November 1996), 583-614.

[70] Coleman, "The Unbearable Whiteness," 584.

[71] Daniel Leonard Bernardi, *Star Trek and History: Race-ing Toward A White Future* (New Brunswick, NJ 1998).

> There are moments of beauty and resistance in Trek. Contrary to the claim of the undifferentiated Borg collective, resistance is not futile. The white paradox is not always already a given; there are chinks in its armor. The task, it seems to me, is to historicize the history in and of whiteness, with the goal being to create an alternative universe that is more honest about the past and more open to a truly different present. At stake in such an undertaking are our very identities. As Edward Said imagines, 'Just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities.' For me, Spiner [an actor on Star Trek]'s performance, coupled with my own historical sense of identity and race, provides an opportunity — complete with its own ironies and contradictions — to realize a different space-time.[72]

Here, the culture industry provides our models of resistance and Edward Said's thought is reduced to an exercise in channel surfing. This might make for interesting discussion at science fiction conventions, but in terms of scholarship it is a clear indication of how far some of the work on whiteness has strayed from the insights of the traditions from which it is derived. Clearly, in some cases, Arnesen is right to call whiteness "a blank screen onto which those who claim to analyze it can project their own meanings," but he is wrong to make this claim about the field as a whole.[73]

Some of the historical post-*Wages* work on whiteness is encouraging in its thoroughness and its subtlety. Two works stand out in this regard: Matthew Jacobson's *Whiteness of A Different Color* and Bruce Nelson's *Divided We Stand.*[74] Adolph Reed, who shares Arnesen's opinion that the dissent from Marxism within the whiteness field constitutes one of its major shortcomings, writes that "Jacobson's interpretation essentializes whiteness as a phenomenon that transcends and directs history even as he wants to construe it as the product of social relations."[75]

I disagree. By using the European immigrant experience to explore what he terms "divisible whiteness" from the early republic to the mid twentieth century, Jacobson is able to demonstrate precisely how notions of whiteness changed over time.[76] For instance, in his discussion of the gradual decline of northern European supremacy within the overall category of whiteness, Jacobson convincingly situates the1924 Johnson Act as a watershed moment that marks "the beginning of the ascent of monolithic whiteness."[77] If historians are looking for an empirically guided and theoretically clever analysis, *Whiteness of A Different Color* provides

[72]Bernardi, *Star Trek*, 181-182.
[73]Arnesen, "Whiteness," 8.
[74]Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of A Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA 1998); Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Princeton 2001).
[75]Adolph Reed, Jr., "Response to Eric Arnesen," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 60 (Fall 2001), 69-80. Quotation from p. 73.
[76]Jacobson, *Whiteness*, 89.
[77]Jacobson, *Whiteness*, 93.

one by way of an examination of non-Nordic European immigrants' gradual assimilation into whiteness from an earlier, despised, social position. Reed is correct to note that this work could have benefited from more attention to "the discrete dynamics of social relations, political economy, power, and political institutions," but these dynamics are present, if not always prominent, in Jacobson's discussion.[78] Most importantly, however, Jacobson is able to historicize relations of whiteness, and thereby add to our understanding of this historical category of identity.

Bruce Nelson's *Divided We Stand* also historicizes race on both sides of the colour line while paying close attention to political economy. In phraseology that could have appeared in a Stuart Hall essay from two decades ago, Nelson explains that "class has meant the long-term negotiation of identities and allegiances that have always been conditioned by race, gender, and emergent ethnicity."[79] Nelson's study of dock and steelworkers at times makes even the most progressive white workers and activists appear ineluctably racist, but overall this book does the needed work of indicating the ways in which the American workplace and working-class culture have been infected by racism and white loyalty to their racial identity. By framing moments of interracial solidarity in these work settings as essentially exceptions to generally entrenched white supremacy, Nelson begins to move away from the labour history project that seeks a usable past upon which an anticapitalist and antiracist future can be envisioned.

* * *

It seems appropriate to round out this review with a few comments about Arnesen and Roediger's latest work. Shortly after the scholars' debate in the pages of *International Labor and Working-Class History*, Arnesen published an important study of African American railroad workers from the rise of the railway until the industry's decline in the post-war era.[80] In this book, Arnesen examines the class and racial dynamics of work on the trains. In keeping with his argument in the whiteness debate, he finds that for workers on either side of the colour line, "Informing their perspectives, of course, were their respective economic interests."[81]

Of course. But Arnesen also finds that the struggles of Pullman porters and dining car workers led union leaders and leftists to forge "a unionism that was as much, if not more, about race and civil rights than it was about class."[82] This observation does not contradict Arnesen's brief against whiteness studies. As we have seen, and as Arnesen himself argues, historical modes of inquiry that precede the recent proliferation of whiteness studies provide all of the tools required for a sophisticated

[78]Reed, "Response," 72.
[79]Nelson, *Divided We Stand*, xlii.
[80]Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (Cambridge, MA 2001).
[81]Arnesen, *Brotherhoods*, 40.
[82]Arnesen, *Brotherhoods*, 101.

understanding of how American workers shaped their identities and workplaces along both class and colour lines. But surely the best whiteness scholarship has only added to that understanding.

In other works not specifically indebted to whiteness scholarship, such as Thomas Sugrue's study about how whites rallied around their racial identity to prevent residential desegregation in post-war Detroit, or Daniel Walkowitz's book about how social workers thought about themselves and their work differently in terms of race, class, and gender in different moments of the 20th century, the contributions of Roediger and others have sharpened our understanding of white identity in ways that help account for the emergence of this exciting new scholarship.[83]

In his latest collection of essays, *Colored White*, Roediger treads further from historical analysis and closer to political commentary.[84] His essay "Mumia Time or Sweeney Time?" is an example of this shift. In this piece, Roediger demonstrates the depth of support for Mumia Abu-Jamal by pointing to the range of declarations and solidarity actions from organized labour. Roediger then goes on to counterpose "Mumia time" to "Sweeney time" in an effort to emphasize the apparent naivety of organizing for social justice under union banners.

By pointing to the top-down nature of the AFL-CIO leadership, Roediger indicates the continuities between John Sweeney's approach to unionism and that of his reactionary predecessors.[85] He also makes clear that organized labour must take account of the needs of its non-white and female membership if it is going to continue to be relevant. But Roediger's essay presents a false dichotomy, as even his own evidence about labour support for Mumia indicates. The challenge for contemporary organizing both in and outside the house of labour is to make it both Mumia and Sweeney time. In his recent *The Next Upsurge*, sociologist Dan Clawson shows how antiracist organizing must encompass labour struggles and vice versa.[86] Reading Clawson's valuable handbook alongside "Mumia Time or Sweeney Time?," we see that the politics of Roediger's essay come across as unnecessarily divisive in contrast to the grounded program for change offered in *The Next Upsurge*. Like Clawson, Martin Oppenheimer, in a recent theoretical review of socialist approaches to racism, advocates a leftist position within contemporary debates that accords race its full experiential and theoretical weight while recuperating the eco-

[83]Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton 1996); Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Working With Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity* (Chapel Hill 1999).

[84]Roediger, *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past* (Berkeley 2002).

[85]For a critique of AFL and AFL-CIO leadership under Sweeney's predecessors, see Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland, and the Tragedy of American Labor* (New York 1999). For a more detailed study of the Gompers years, see *David Montgomery, The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, The State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (New York 1987).

[86]Dan Clawson, *The Next Upsurge: Labor and the New Social Movements* (Ithaca 2003).

nomic dimension of racial oppression.[87] In short, we cannot afford to give either race or class short shrift with the stakes in the struggle against global racial capitalism being as high as they currently are.

"Mumia Time or Sweeney Time?" might appear to divert us from the topic at hand, but this essay is relevant beyond the fact that it was penned by one of the main characters of this review. Roediger's unnecessary dilemma betrays his distance not only from "regular" historical work but also away from one of the central insights of worthwhile whiteness studies: we don't have to choose between class and race. Indeed, we choose at our detriment since, as Hubert Harrison, W.E.B. Du Bois, Max Shachtman, C.L.R. James, Stuart Hall, and David Roediger himself have taught us, we need to fight on both fronts, which are often the same front, at all times to win the struggle for democracy. Whiteness studies, if nothing else, have reinforced that important message.

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[87]Martin Oppenheimer, "The 'Minorities Question': Does the Left Have Answers?," *New Politics*, 9, 4 (Winter 2004), 121-135.