

DEMYSTIFYING RACIAL MONOPOLY

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Through analysis of private, public, and state reactions to the Great Depression and northward black migration, this thesis demystifies four key functions of race constitutive of capitalist racial monopoly: historical availability, division of labor, motivation of surplus absorption, and embodiment of false consciousness. Nonetheless, the working class's immanent limitations and transcendent activities in this paradigm later gave rise to the 1950s and 60s racial liberation movement's social constructionist critiques. The following counterintelligence reactions of the Federal Bureau of Investigation neutralized, abstracted, and mystified such racial politics, rendering their truncated identarian form available to a variety of political groups from the anti-racist left to the ethnonationalist right. In this way, capital now appropriates resistant racial politics as part of a commodified and mutually antagonistic multiracial plurality. To resuscitate multiracial coalitional politics that can challenge capital's racial monopoly, today's anti-racism must reassess the historical development of racial monopoly in the mid-twentieth century.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCING RACIAL MONOPOLY TODAY	1
II. RACIAL FUNCTION IN MONOPOLY CAPITALISM	11
III. RESISTING RACIAL MONOPOLY.....	28
IV. THE APPROPRIATION OF CRITICAL RACIAL POLITICS	46
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	62

I: INTRODUCING RACIAL MONOPOLY TODAY

*The circle of identification—which in the end always identifies itself alone—was drawn by a thinking that tolerates nothing outside it; its imprisonment is its own handiwork.*¹

—Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*

Recent scholarship of race in the U.S. crucially centralizes the nonidentity of racialized lives and racial myths. Black life, for example, is not reducible to its degradation; race is not a direct mechanism of subordination, but is ideologically mediated, making possible the social transformation of racial significance.² Thus, anti-racist practice strives to reclaim blackness from its history of subordination to elevate black joy, knowledge, and leadership. As such, this anti-racist approach positively evaluates racial ideology while neglecting assessment of the capitalist condition of possibility for such mediation. As a result, this emphasis on the radical social malleability of race presupposes capital's characteristic division of politics and economics. In identifying race as political in this limited capitalist sense, anti-racism assumes capital's abstract transcendence of materiality, adopting a distorted view of the relationship between race and class proliferated by such institutions as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). At two extremes, this constraint is manifest as the radical separation race and class or their conflation. In either case, race appears to eclipse class as its own causal explanation and justification. This anti-racism therefore presumes the legitimacy of historically given racial categories as the basis of its enriching descriptions and realizations of racial possibilities. Anti-racism is then content to explore questions of racial being inside the bounds of capital's monopoly style control of racial significance without analyzing the ways race functions for capitalism. This politically neutral approach renders anti-racism susceptible to capitalist and white ethnonationalist appropriation. This thesis is a preliminary intervention in this false race and class consciousness of U.S. racial theory and practice. Demystifying the relationship of race and class categories in their historical practical and theoretical development, this thesis diagnoses anti-racism's acceptance of its own appropriation as of one of the most significant problems confronting liberatory racial struggle today. It then points toward a first step in the resuscitation of critical race and class consciousness in the form of multiracial coalitional politics. To establish the problem of abstraction, neutralization, and appropriation to which this thesis responds, I begin with a brief

¹ See Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1973), 172.

² Harry Chang, "Toward a Marxist Theory of Racism: Two Essays by Harry Chang," ed. Paul Liem and Eric Montague, *The Review of Radical Political Economics* 17, no. 3 (1985): 42-43.

analysis of academic, activist, and popular race consciousness today as it pertains to the historical development of what I call the capitalist racial monopoly.

With its passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the U.S. congress formally forbade discrimination in employment practices, thus enshrining racial equality in law. While the act outlawed the state-sanctioned segregation of Jim Crow and thereby eliminated a significant legal barrier to black liberation, it remained beholden to the history and structure of U.S. monopoly capitalism.³ As such, Civil Rights legislation represented an opportunity for U.S. capitalism to adapt its monopolistic determination of racial significance. Importantly, the prohibition of discrimination did not necessitate the inclusion of black people in state-protected white privileges because the Act traced the *relative* equality of the black and white racial groups, rather than their absolute economic conditions.⁴ As such, the legal demand of non-discrimination could be met by private and state abdication of responsibility for white economic security. In this way, the removal of state protections enabled monopoly capitalism to further responsabilize the working class for their own reproduction, then in racially neutral terms.⁵ As all Americans grew increasingly precarious, white people suffered a greater relative loss of financial security alongside the persistence of real racial economic disparity.⁶

The simultaneously class and race conscious sects of the 1950s and 60s racial liberation movement recognized this incapacity of Civil Rights reform to address racial disparity and multiracial precarity. For example, Fred Hampton's 1969 Rainbow Coalition continued to organize against the U.S. capitalist racial monopoly. By forming coalitions that transcended racial boundaries, recognized the immanent salience of race, and challenged capital's reproduction of race, the Rainbow Coalition mobilized the identity of their races with their relative socioeconomic status in a politicized critique of capital's social construction of race. However, the Rainbow Coalition's critical racial politics were not representative of the racial liberation movement in general. While the broader movement had similarly mobilized a politics of racial identity, its lack of a grounding in class struggle had enabled the political abstraction manifest as Civil Rights legislation. Further, private, public, and

³ See Adolph Reed Jr., "The 'Black Revolution' and the Reconstitution of Domination" in *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era*, ed. Adolph Reed Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 57, 64.

⁴ Daniel Martinez Hosang and Joseph E. Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots: Race and the New Right-Wing Politics of Precarity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 10-12.

⁵ Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 29, 38; Nancy Fraser, "Expropriation and Exploitation in Racialized Capitalism: A Reply to Michael Dawson," *Critical Historical Studies* (Spring 2016): 176.

⁶ Hosang and Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*, 50-65.

state reactions mystified the Rainbow Coalition’s liberatory coalitional politics, neutralizing and abstracting their exercise of racial identity. In the wake of this neutralization of racial meaning and resistant racial politics, both anti-racist activists and white reactionaries grieving their loss of state-defended privileges were empowered to demand representation of their respective racial identities in the private and state spheres.⁷ Racial politics thus did not disappear after the 1960s instantiation of abstract equality, but were proliferated throughout U.S. formal politics, commodity production, and popular consciousness, spanning the breadth of the mainstream political spectrum.

Today, conservative and liberal politicians alike celebrate the abstract political equality won by Civil Rights activism to tout the racial identities of themselves and their associates as significations of their party’s liberatory racial politics. For example, Vice President Kamala Harris mobilizes her black racial identity to shield President Joe Biden from racial criticism, while Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas’s blackness mystifies his conservative racist politics.⁸ Responding both to this inclusion of black validity in liberal democracy and increasing white precarity under monopoly-finance capital, the right-wing public interprets post-Civil Rights diversification and affirmative action style reforms as signs of state sanctioned racial invasion and expropriation of white people.⁹ In response, liberal anti-racists reassert that the lives of people of color grow increasingly precarious under threats of police violence and popular legitimation of white supremacist reaction. As a corrective, such anti-racists propose relative quantitative increases in the representation of people of color in media and positions of state and corporate power.¹⁰ Further,

⁷ Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, 175; Hosang and Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*, 65-128.

⁸ Hosang and Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*, 74, 77, 85; Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “Introduction” in *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combabee River Collective*, ed. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 9-10; Adolph Reed Jr., *Class Notes: Posing as Politics and Other Thoughts on the American Scene*, (New York: The New Press, 2000), 121.

⁹ In a 2011 article, John Bellamy Foster, Robert W. McChesney, and Jamil Jonna coined the term “monopoly-finance capital” to clarify the more generalized and globalized evolution of monopoly capitalism. See John Bellamy Foster, Robert W. McChesney, and Jamil Jonna, “Monopoly and Competition in in Twenty-First Century Capitalism,” *Monthly Review* 62, no. 11 (April 2011), <https://monthlyreview.org/2011/04/01/monopoly-and-competition-in-twenty-first-century-capitalism/>. For more on the U.S. right-wing’s use of race, see Hosang and Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*, 65-66; John Bellamy Foster, *Trump in the White House: Tragedy and Farce* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017), 31-44, 72-86.

¹⁰ For example, the Black Lives Matter Political Action Committee is one of the movements’ three entities which focuses on electoral politics and support of black candidates. In her 2017 interview with Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, #BlackLivesMatter co-founder Alicia Garza argues for increased black representation in leadership positions. Further, Kimberlé Crenshaw’s famous heuristic “intersectionality” is a tool by which to render black women’s race and gender claims intelligible; that is, to more adequately represent black women to a legal or popular audience. See Black Lives Matter, *Black Lives Matter 2020 Impact Report*, February 2021, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/2020-impact-report/>; Alicia Garza, “Alicia Garza,” in *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combabee River Collective*, ed. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, interviewed by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 172-175; Yamahtta Taylor – 172-175; Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of

capitalists have been all too willing to accommodate this diversification as an opportunity for market expansion. For example, in response to the summer 2020 nationwide protests of the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, corporations like Netflix and Amazon composed media collections under the banner “Black Lives Matter” to proliferate representation of black struggle, joy, and life.¹¹ Simultaneously, however, these same corporations continued to glorify a nostalgic racist and colonial past in appeals to their aggrieved reactionary audiences. Indeed, it is in response to this duplicity that liberal anti-racists insist on drowning out reactionary representations of whiteness with increased black representation in corporate media, leadership, and politics.¹² Of course, such resources as the privately owned mechanisms of cultural intelligibility like mass media are still disproportionately distributed to white representation due to implicit prejudices built into state and private policies.¹³ As such, quantitative emphasis on the particularity of black experiences can give black people a “fair chance” in the market of cultural intelligibility. In practice, this approach to anti-racism appears as #BlackLivesMatter signs in windows, police budget reform lobbying, and heralding corporate valorizations of blackness as agents of racial liberation.¹⁴

However, this logic of abstract and quantitative representation betrays its own purported ends. Reform to counter black exclusion by requiring abstract black inclusion also legitimates the disproportionate distribution of resources to the relatively privileged white social group. Indeed, it is only because resources are unequally distributed along racial lines that the corrective emphasis on distribution to black people is necessary.¹⁵ Thus, rationalization of affirmative action style reform requires as its foundation the reality of unequal racialized distribution, or at least opposition by another group that vies for the proliferation of their particularity, such as whiteness.¹⁶ Thus, black valorization justifies white reaction as the foundation of black legitimacy, and inversely, racist white reaction legitimates black veneration. Constituted in mutual opposition, black and white valorization are therefore self-legitimizing politics whose persistence depends on their differentiation, division,

Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, no. 1 (1989): 139-167.

¹¹ Ali Rasha, “Netflix curates new collection of ‘Black Lives Matter’ titles, Hulu honors Juneteenth,” *USA Today*, June 10, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/tv/2020/06/10/netflix-curates-black-lives-matter-featured-collection/5333790002/>.

¹² For example, see Patricia Hill Collins, “Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images,” in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 67-90.

¹³ Collins, “Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images,” 67-90; Reed, “The ‘Black Revolution,’” 57.

¹⁴ Reed, “The ‘Black Revolution,’” 70.

¹⁵ Jennifer C. Nash, “A Love Letter from a Critic, Or Notes on the Intersectionality Wars,” in *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 33-58; Reed, “The ‘Black Revolution,’” 57.

¹⁶ Nash, “A Love Letter from a Critic,” 33-58.

and opposition. Consequently, reform-centered anti-racism cannot achieve its purported goal of harmonious and equal racial plurality because such equality is racial; that is, the imagined equality is between distinct races whose differentiation and antagonism are necessary for their respective existences.¹⁷ The logic of quantitative melioration thus hypostatizes races and racial antagonism as the basis of the reality in which it intervenes and produces.¹⁸ Indeed, white reactionaries' identical racial methodology cannot escape this tense cycle either.

However, race and racial antagonism are neither the sole products of this cycle, nor its foundation.¹⁹ Rather, another condition of possibility for quantitative representative inclusion is the capitalist free market because the push for representation is an attempt to shape the racial content of market shares.²⁰ Furthermore, this effort *expands* the representation market, providing new avenues for corporations to produce and sell racially particularized commodities.²¹ While the quantitative increase in black representation increases relative to, for example, white representation, it does not diminish the absolute quantity of white representations. As such, the anti-racist veneration of black representation enables its own proliferation by affording corporations more opportunities to realize their accumulated surplus value. Both black and white racial representation politics therefore operate within the limits of capitalism and are manifestations of it.²²

¹⁷ Alcoff offers an apt example of this drive towards multiracial plurality. She suggests that the meaning of whiteness can be detached from its history if it were to be mobilized differently today. While Alcoff makes the indispensable claim that racial significance is socially constructed, she treats racial distinction itself as essentially meaningless. As a result, her treatment reduces racial ideology to its content as though racial meaning could be separated from its form. Alcoff's social constructionist critique therefore mistakenly posits the racial form as politically neutral, resulting in the occlusion of real racial functions and the abstraction of her critique. It is only in such an abstract paradigm that racial division could be uncritically assumed, and the plurality of those distinct races reconceived as a worthwhile end in itself. See Linda Martín Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).

¹⁸ As Adorno notes, "The circle of identification—which in the end always identifies itself alone—was drawn by a thinking that tolerates nothing outside it; its imprisonment is its own handiwork." See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 172.

¹⁹ Reed, "The 'Black Revolution,'" 69.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 68, 73.

²¹ Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy offer multiple robust analyses of the American economic and social order, including theorization of surplus absorption through expansion of the sales effort. Through this mechanism, markets are not only expanded, but the qualities of commodities are further transformed by the need to stimulate exchange such that exchange value is even more strongly embedded in commodities themselves. In their analysis of racial hierarchy, Baran and Sweezy focus on its economic motivations and uses. However, they do not characterize the marketing effort and racial division together, as the production of racialized persons as commodities. This intersection is an important aspect of the reproduction of race, capital, and racial monopoly whose significance has multiplied throughout the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries. See Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966), 112-141, 249-280. Adolph Reed notes "Having internalized the predominant elite-pluralist model of the organization of black life, the radical wing could not develop any critical perspective. Internal critique could not go beyond banal symbols of 'blackness' and thus ended up stimulating demand for a new array of "revolutionary" consumer goods." See Reed "The 'Black Revolution,'" 67.

²² *Ibid.*, 71.

The preceding facts should not lead to the misinterpretation that representative politics are empty categories of opposition that are purely instrumentally mobilized by economic interests. Such a view mistakenly defines politics as essentially disconnected from economic reality, such that politics may be puppeted by economic actors.²³ Rather, representative racial politics are inextricable from their real economic operation to not only create a new market for capitalists, but also constitute racial subjects of capital. In other words, abstract representations are also functional productive phenomena.²⁴ For example, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon described the impact of colonial literature on the psyche of black children. Confronted with a racialized narrative, black children identified with the story's white hero against their black antagonists.²⁵ As a result, the black child assumed the white perspective of blackness as signifying antagonistic Otherness, and thus realized black subordination in their behavior towards themselves and others.²⁶

Though their content is characteristically different from the narratives described by Fanon, today's identifications with racial narratives manifest race in the same way. With the success of post-Civil Rights racial inclusion efforts, media like Netflix's Black Lives Matter Collection represent black people with a full range of human characteristics, as protagonists, antagonists, and everywhere in between. Now, the representations to which black people identify themselves are celebrations of black struggle, joy, and life; that is, the legitimacy of black racial particularity.²⁷ At the base of this transformation of racial meaning is blackness itself; black representation is legitimated *because it celebrates* black particularity.²⁸ As a result, broadly positive black representation is prioritized above

²³ Karl Marx suggests that a division of politics and economics is distinctive of capitalism. Nonetheless, politics and economics remain essentially entangled; the attempted division only distorts their relation. Politics therefore cannot be manipulated by economics, but rather express the contradictions of the economic mode. See Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question" in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence H. Simon (Indianapolis: Hackett, [1844]1994), 1-26; Karl Marx, "Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy" in *The German Ideology*, (New York: Prometheus Books, [1859]1998), 1-15.

²⁴ Abstract representations are not exhaustive of the political but nonetheless constitute a significant aspect of politics.

²⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, [1952]2008), 124-126.

²⁶ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 124-126.

²⁷ White people are encouraged to identify themselves in these narratives too, by inhabiting an external perspective on whiteness. For this reason, racial reactionaries misidentify such representations as the cause of white guilt or "reverse racism." This accusation maintains racial categories as the foundation of its logic, and reproduces the same racial antagonism that such representations are meant to counteract. Nonetheless, racial reactionaries unconsciously respond to the contradictory nature of race, recognizing that black valorization cannot accomplish its liberatory aim: only its negative claim against whiteness is affected. However, the accusation of causing white guilt embodies this contradiction itself because it also maintains racial distinction as its unconscious base. Thus, both the original representation and the reactionary criticism participate in the reproduction of race and racial antagonism that results in black subordination. As such, there is no "reverse racism," only the pluralized appearance of the same racism.

²⁸ Indeed, those representations portraying black people as natural Others through racist tropes like the mammy figure and the "magical negro" are rightfully scorned by anti-racists. For more on the glorification of blackness in media, see Reed, "The 'Black Revolution,'" 70. Also see Reed, *Class Notes*, xvi-xvii.

the qualities of its signification, leaving open the probability that racial diversity will be awkwardly shoehorned into media to capitalize on the market's broad demand for racial inclusion. Such characters often lack real character development, embodying a new trope of empty racial signification. Nonetheless, (more) humanizing, realistic, and robust depictions of blackness are also possible in this framework, although this quality remains relatively marginal because it is not necessarily demanded.

However, the particular content of such representations is necessarily limited by the capitalist system that facilitates market diversification.²⁹ Under capitalism, black representation is not altruistically produced to humanize black people and render black oppression intelligible. Rather, black representation is permitted to the extent that its production enables the capitalist class to extract and realize additional surplus value. Consequently, the racial representations to which the American public identifies themselves today, even when narratives are affirmative and realistic, are commodified versions of those representations.³⁰ Black people are thus encouraged to identify themselves as *racial commodities*.³¹ As a result, the critical potential for realistic black representation to engender race consciousness is limited to the constraints of capitalist production. Quantitative racial inclusion thus accomplishes its real function to represent capitalist production and racial competition for market shares as inevitable, subverting its purported manifestation of liberatory racial politics. As the American public identifies with these commodifying racial narratives, they embody a popular consciousness of race that can now read racial myths at their face value, but not critique them.³² Critical race consciousness is thus foreclosed by the capitalist commodification and proliferation of racial particularity.

Furthermore, any content may be mystified in this way, including whiteness. Grieving their loss of state protected economic privileges, right-wing white reactionaries have taken up similar racial identity representation strategies as anti-racists, though in opposition to black valorization.³³ Now, right-wing reactionary groups recognize liberal identarian politics represented by

²⁹ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 154-175.

³⁰ Reed, "The 'Black Revolution,'" 68, 73; Reed, *Class Notes*, 135.

³¹ This is a dehumanizing contradiction of species-being. Marx writes, "the worker sinks to the level of a commodity, the most miserable commodity." See Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts" in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence H. Simon (Indianapolis: Hackett, [1844]1994), 58-59.

³² The myth reader collapses the form and content of myth into one. They know *about* racial myths, but do not know racial myths; that is, the myth reader does not understand the myth in its quality *as a myth*. As a result, they "receive an ambiguous signification." This is the confused state of popular false race consciousness today. Roland Barthes, "Myth Today" in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, [1972]1972), 238-242.

³³ Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, 175; Hosang and Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*, 65-128.

#BlackLivesMatter as abstract and self-legitimizing, and reject it.³⁴ However, they also lack the strategic means to comprehensively challenge their own precaritization. Then, in an attempt to reclaim a nostalgic past of state protected privileges encoded as free market individual success, the right valorizes white particularity with the appearance of multiracial plurality.³⁵ For example, such reactionary groups as the Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer are becoming increasingly diverse, accepting people of color into their ranks and leadership.³⁶ Despite this inclusive appearance, such groups revile anti-racism.³⁷ As a result, they legitimate their anti-racist opposition and enable their racialized commodification. As such, white reactionaries are also represented among a plurality of racial commodities, whose particularity is constructed in opposition to blackness.³⁸ These representations appear as cinematic veneration of U.S. imperialism and colonialism, increasing ethnonationalist sympathy in the U.S. state, and racialized policing of national borders and de facto segregated communities.³⁹

The resistant tool of racial identification and representation has thus been effectively neutralized by capital, rendering it available to progressives and reactionaries alike. Therefore, neither the reactionary right nor the antiracist liberal-left can claim to check or guide the racial politics of capital. Rather, both groups represent a market expansion where capital maintains monopoly style control of racial meaning as commodified abstraction. Anti-racism is therefore arrested by its tension with and legitimation of its reactionary racist opposition. Even anti-racist politics that attempt to exceed the identarian politics of inclusive representation become commodified when they are reinterpreted in the paradigm of capitalist racial monopoly. To the extent that anti-racism maintains an abstract and neutral politics that is commensurate with this system, its appropriation will persist.⁴⁰ To demystify and challenge the capitalist racial monopoly,

³⁴ This rejection is manifest as a vulgar materialism, proclaiming the non-correspondence of abstract identity politics to reality. Inversely, the liberal response is to reassert the priority of the abstract over the material. As such, the right and the liberal-left each represent one half of capital's dialectical movement between a fetishization of the material commodity and a fetishization of the purely abstract exchange value. David McNally insightfully illuminates this dialectical movement. See David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires, and Global Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, [2011]2012), 128-131.

³⁵ Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, 175; Hosang and Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*, 65-128.

³⁶ Ibid, 117-128; Eli Portella Perreras, "How (Not) to Think About Anti-Feminist Women" in *Women in Philosophy, Blog of the APA* (October 2020), <https://blog.apaonline.org/2020/10/07/how-not-to-think-about-anti-feminist-women/>.

³⁷ Hosang and Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*, 1-4.

³⁸ As Reed suggests, this is an "artificial particularity." See Reed, "The 'Black Revolution,'" 70.

³⁹ Donald Trump's celebrity status, presidential cabinet, and political aims exemplify each of these reactionary manifestations. See Foster, *Trump in the White House*.

⁴⁰ David McNally notes the complexity of the term "abstraction" as invoked by Marx. Not only does "abstraction" indicate the transformation of something material into thought, it also means "to draw away", or literally to separate, detach, cut off." In this sense, abstraction is closely related to the supernatural quality of exchange value whereby

anti-racist politics must begin by asking how today's appropriation of anti-racist resistance became possible. Indeed, "since they have arisen out of human relations and since they function in the process of transformation of human relations, the actual process of social evolution becomes visible in their reciprocal relationship with the reality underlying their activity."⁴¹ As such, anti-racists must reexamine the historical and dialectical relationship of race and capital, the liberatory capacity of multiracial coalitional politics, and the mechanisms by which capitalism has been appropriating resistant racial politics. When thus historically informed, anti-racist politics will be empowered to resuscitate the radical potential of coalitional racial politics and adapt them to the current stage of racial conflict. First, a return to the historical operation of racial monopoly is necessary.

Chapter II begins with an examination of the racialized political economy of the mid-twentieth century U.S. Reacting to concurrent housing and black migration crises engendered by the Great Depression (1929-1939), the capitalist class repurposed the historically available tool of race to organize labor, absorb surplus, and funnel radical energy into racial antagonism rather than revolutionary action. These private reactions constituted the historical stage that would both be challenged by the racial liberation movement in the 1950s and 60s and appropriate the movement's resistant racial politics. While many scholars have focused on the undeniable significance of the public and state spheres in the formation of mid-twentieth century racial politics, I center the influential role of private property.⁴² This focus does not deny the salience of public and state participation in Jim Crow segregation, but rather contextualizes their actions amid the private sphere's power to constrain the character of public and state activities. Through analysis of the interaction between private, public, and state racial reactions in the mid-twentieth century, I demonstrate the dialectical relationship of race and monopoly capitalism. In this relation, race serves four key operations for capitalism that together constitute the racial monopoly; race functions as a historically available tool, division of labor, mechanism for the absorption of surplus, and embodiment of false race consciousness. While chapter II most directly characterizes the racial

material differences are erased and the universal equivalence of all things is established. As such, abstract politics are not only divided from economics and therefore ineffective, but also themselves become commodified. In other words, the use value of politics are transformed into an exchange value through their abstraction, which limits their impact to the reproduction of capitalism in different forms. It is in this dual sense that I use the term "abstraction." See McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 122-126.

⁴¹ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* trans. Rodney Livingstone, (Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1971[1968]), 15.

⁴² For examples, see Charles W. Mills, "European Specters," in *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism*, ed. Charles W. Mills (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003). and Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997).

division of labor and surplus absorption, all four functions are inextricably entangled, and are therefore operative in each moment of racial manifestation.

In chapter III, I continue this analysis to characterize the immanence of racialized history and false consciousness, as well as the concurrent liberatory transcendent capacity of racialized agents under capitalism. Through this investigation, I show that the four racial functions afford capital monopolistic control of racial significance, or what I call racial monopoly. Drawing on critical philosopher of race Charles Mills, I reject popular reductions of racial monopoly to a raceless issue of class to expose the relative structural independence of race and capitalism. Nonetheless, political scientist Cedric Robinson highlights the historical entanglement of race and capitalism, revealing that Mills' accentuation of public working class agency does not sufficiently account for the racialized historical character of capitalist development. Between Mills and Robinson, I suggest that Karl Marx's critiques of capital and alienation can better account for the indispensable role of working class transcendence in capital's monopolistic reproduction of race and false race consciousness. Indeed, such transcendent agency was realized in the 1950s and 60s as the racial liberation movement. Nonetheless, the monopoly character of capital's racial reproduction enabled its appropriation of not only the working class's labor power, but the racial liberation movement's resistant racial politics as well.

Chapter IV then details the role of the U.S. state acting on behalf of private property to intervene in the liberatory potential of the racial liberation movement. The FBI's disruption of organizations like Fred Hampton's Rainbow Coalition neutralized social constructionist critiques of race, rendering the critique available to both the anti-racist left and the reactionary right, albeit in a commodified form. Though the FBI was not the sole proponent of this truncation of liberatory racial politics, its behaviors are nonetheless of great historical importance as a case study of capital's appropriative movement in action. Further, this chapter displays the Rainbow Coalition's mobilization of racial immanence and coalitional transcendence as a significant threat to capital, necessitating the Coalition's destruction by the FBI. Through this historical negotiation of racial meaning, today's abstract neutral racial politics emerged as the ongoing mystification and appropriation of anti-racist politics. The real challenge to racial monopoly posed by the Rainbow Coalition's strategic use of multiracial coalitional politics is informative for the revitalization of anti-racist politics today.

II: RACIAL FUNCTION IN MONOPOLY CAPITALISM

With regard to race prejudice, it has already been pointed out that this characteristic white attitude was deliberately created and cultivated as a rationalization and justification for the enslavement and exploitation of colored labor. But in time, race prejudice and the discriminatory behavior patterns which go with it came to serve other purposes as well... [Racial status] ambitions and fears are of course exaggerated, intensified, played upon by the corporate sales apparatus which finds in them the principal means of manipulating the "utility functions" of the consuming public.⁴³

—Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*

The mid-twentieth century United States is notably characterized by both the maturation of monopoly capitalism and state development of private interests in racial segregation. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, capitalist owners of private property wielded political influence and economic power to entrench racial divisions by negotiating a reconsolidation of whiteness in response to an increase of northward black migration. In doing so, the capitalist class reinforced its monopolistic control of racial function and meaning as a supporting pillar of capitalism. With this influence of private racial monopoly, the state and the working class public also took part in the private sphere's reification of race. This dialectical relation of the private, public, and state spheres during the Great Depression reconstituted and reformed the entanglement of race and capital. The resultant racial division contradicted the universal freedom purported by American capitalism's status quo by constraining the racialized working class to internal antagonism. Analysis of this contradictory history of racial development and agency reveals several key functions that race serves for capitalism:

Race was a **historically available tool** that was commensurate with capitalism and structured social and economic life in the U.S. before the development of the capitalist monopoly stage. As such, monopoly capitalist development happened in an immanent reality that was already racialized. Thus, capitalists found it more practical to adopt and modify the already entrenched socioeconomic mechanisms of race rather than invent new mechanisms of productive and distributive organization. Therefore, capitalists mobilized race towards their interest in surplus value accumulation in new ways, simultaneously modifying the historically particular meanings of race.

Among these capitalist uses of race was the reproduction of a **division of labor**. Such a division of the working class enabled capitalists to eschew responsibility for the reproduction of

⁴³ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 264-265.

human life and thereby distribute resources unevenly, instigate competition internal to the working class, and drive production costs down.

This uneven distribution of resources along racial lines also created new avenues for the *absorption of surplus*. Such surplus is only valuable to capitalists when it can be motivated towards the accumulation of further surplus. As such, capitalists would not invest their surplus in further production unless they could guarantee the sale of those products and further investment of greater surplus. Demand for such consumption could be stimulated by constituting unique and antagonistic racial groups with immanent interests in climbing the racialized status hierarchy.⁴⁴

The racial codification of such relative economic precarity as inevitable and essential to racialized persons inculcates *false race consciousness* by identifying workers with their racial interests against their class interests. This racial identification breaks class unity by representing race as an inherent feature of workers rather than an important factor in class struggle. As a result, differently racialized workers are unable to recognize their common interest in resisting their degradation collectively, instead blaming themselves and each other for problems over which they have little control.

Together, these functions comprise the monopoly character of the relationship between race and capital distinctive of the mid-twentieth century U.S. These racial functions are the practical manifestation of racial ideology, here represented in its demystified form as a unity of theory and praxis, that is, as a really operational aspect of the social totality.⁴⁵ Key to these racial functions are their appearance to accomplish the division of theory and praxis, politics and economics, whereby their realization obscures the class character of political agents in the private, public, and state spheres. This essential contradiction remains mystified when it is abstracted away from its function to appear as contingent falsehood or eternal truth. Thus, the real activity of race must be foregrounded if critical race consciousness is to be achieved in the racialized working class's self-transcendence. Furthermore, this means that these four functions are not wholly separate, but different *aspects* of racial monopoly. Therefore, the four racial functions must be analyzed together. As such, this chapter begins with historical contextualization of private, public, and state reactions,

⁴⁴ Reed, "The 'Black Revolution,'" 59-73.

⁴⁵ As Lukács demonstrates, reality is at once accessed and transformed by consciousness of totality as the unity of theory and praxis. Racial function is the practical expression of race, knowledge of which has been largely repressed by its abstraction. Only its theoretical attributes are accessible in this paradigm, and they are distorted by their incomplete and contradictory division from their practical activity in totality. As such, race consciousness, which is inseparable from anti-racist praxis, requires renewed focus on racial function. See Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 13, 20-23, 39-43.

before demonstrating the reactions' reconstitution of racial significance through the example of New Deal housing policies.

Monopoly Capitalism and the Great Depression

After the collapse of radical reconstruction in the late 1800s, formerly enslaved black people were left with few opportunities for education and labor training.⁴⁶ Because most black people only had the skills for agricultural labor, many continued working on plantations where they had been enslaved or migrated west to establish their own farms.⁴⁷ With concurrent advancements in agricultural technology, black workers' limited skills secured the basic needs of survival with decreasing frequency. After their formal emancipation the black working class was thus practically re-enslaved by and within an impoverished economic condition with few alternatives.⁴⁸ Then, when the U.S. economy stagnated in 1929 commencing the Great Depression, the U.S. working class was thrust into a state of further precarity, a condition exacerbated for black workers.⁴⁹ Many poor black agricultural workers chose to migrate north for industrial labor that would pay enough for survival.⁵⁰ During the Depression economy, however, northern industry was unprepared to absorb the surge of surplus labor.⁵¹ Consequently, newly arrived black labor was thrown into competition with the established northern industrial labor force, which consisted largely in multi-ethnic "white" immigrant labor.⁵²

This competition was structured by the nature of monopoly capitalism to cause stagnations like the Great Depression.⁵³ In their 1966 book *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic*

⁴⁶ Du Bois uses the term "radical reconstruction" to emphasize the radical potential of reconstruction policies to transform the economic and social conditions of black life. As reconstruction policies were ended before accomplishing their goal, most black people were left without the tools to participate equally in American life. See W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1890-1880* (New York: The Free Press, [1935] 1998).

⁴⁷ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 32-54, 325-380.

⁴⁸ In *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois analogizes southern U.S. chattel slavery to European feudal society, suggesting that formerly enslaved black laborers were not freed by their formal emancipation any more than the feudal peasantry had been freed by enclosures. Despite this strong language of re-enslavement, Du Bois investigates the nuances of black emancipation, finding considerable differences between the conditions of slavery and free black life. As such, Du Bois evokes slavery in his articulation of capitalist social relations not as a literal description, but to emphasize the mystified constraints under which emancipated black people found themselves in the late 1800s. Here, I use the language of slavery for a similar effect, foregrounding the agential limitations of the racialized working class. *Ibid*, 189, 580-636, 670-710.

⁴⁹ See Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 267.

⁵⁰ This northward migration of black workers, which had already begun as early as 1910, increased significantly during and after the Great Depression. *Ibid*, 225, 253 256-257.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 160, 261, 267.

⁵² Here "white" is in scare quotes because, historically, this group of workers was not yet codified as white, at least not in the same way that whiteness is popularly understood today. Nonetheless, to characterize the emerging structure of the new black-white division, it is necessary to evoke whiteness. The assimilation of these multi-ethnic immigrant groups into whiteness is discussed later in this section.

⁵³ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 240.

and Social Order, Marxist theorists Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy suggest that the monopoly stage of capitalism emerging in the late nineteenth century and maturing in the mid-twentieth century, is characteristically different from the free market capitalism articulated by Marx.⁵⁴ This stage is a consequence of capitalist development to subvert competition through total control of a market wherein unique problems arise, such as necessary, recurring, and increasingly frequent periods of economic stagnation and crisis. The Great Depression was one such stagnation.

The stagnation crises inherent to this capitalist stage are a consequence of its monopoly character. These monopolies did not exist in a state of “pure” monopoly where a single corporation was the only producer and seller of a given commodity. Instead, multiple large producers competed for market shares.⁵⁵ However, this competition is distinct from unconstrained market competition due to the success of corporate entities at monopolizing a commodity market *collectively*. In this sense, the monopoly capitalist stage is characterized by general rather than sole corporate control of commodity price because all members of each market share a common interest in increasing prices.⁵⁶ While any given corporate producer *could* decrease their price to capture a larger portion of the market and increase their profits overall, competing corporations would be forced to respond by lowering their price. The result is price warfare that threatens to drive prices below the point at which the value returned through commodity sale is greater than production costs.⁵⁷ At such a point, the market, and the corporations which organize the production of the commodity, would collapse. Furthermore, smaller corporate representatives know that larger corporations would be more likely to survive price warfare.⁵⁸ This threat empowers the largest corporation or collection of corporations in each market to determine the price that other corporations also adopt, akin to the monopoly control of a single corporation.⁵⁹ In this way, the threat of price warfare enforces a cultural prohibition on the lowering of price. Thus, the value that is returned to corporations through the sale of commodities tends to only rise in monopoly capitalism, eventually accumulating in surplus.⁶⁰

Such surplus production was precisely the condition leading to the Great Depression. Corporations expanded investment in future surplus accumulation after the First World War to meet the backlog of consumer demands since the war effort had occupied a majority of U.S. productive

⁵⁴ Ibid, 109.

⁵⁵ Ibid, *Monopoly Capital*, 53-56, 62.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 53, 62-63, 67-68.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 57-64.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 61.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 60-61, 73-74.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 62-63, 67-72.

capacity.⁶¹ However, surplus accumulation becomes a problem in the context of an economic system that requires the endless accumulation of further surplus value. For instance, profits are only meaningful under capitalism when their value is realized by their use. Thus, surplus value cannot simply be hoarded; it must be mobilized as capital.⁶² Capital is always in motion, generating additional surplus value, which must also be realized by its investment in a new surplus-generating project, such as housing development or any other capitalist production.⁶³ However, profit growth is not incremental, but continuous, so changes in investment rates necessarily lag behind growth.⁶⁴ Thus, increasingly greater quantities of surplus are accumulated over time and ever-increasing absolute and relative amounts of surplus value must be absorbed and realized through its use.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, increases in production and investment are limited by the real-world impossibility of a perpetually expanding market for consumption.⁶⁶ Consequently, capitalist investment in future surplus value extraction is insufficient to absorb the surplus.⁶⁷ Indeed, the post-World War I boom had generated further surplus with no outlet once the backlog of consumer demands were met. Corporations then recognized that markets were beginning to shrink and attenuated production, knowing that the produced value would not be realized.⁶⁸ The result was nationwide economic stagnation.

With this stagnation of production, workers were no longer needed, and when they were, were not paid a wage sufficient to sustain life. As such, the already precarious working class felt this depression as unemployment and destitution.⁶⁹ To survive, the most vulnerable were forced into degrading living and working conditions. Accordingly, the historical precarity of black labor was intensified along with black workers' need to migrate north in search of industrial work.⁷⁰ This mass arrival of black labor to northern industry triggered private, public, and state reactions that transformed racial categories and reformed the relationship of race and capital.

⁶¹ Ibid, 223-224, 234.

⁶² “[P]rofits which are neither invested nor consumed are no profits at all.” Ibid, 76.

⁶³ See Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, vol 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, [1867] 1990), 247-257, and David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press), 70-78.

⁶⁴ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 80.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 72.

⁶⁶ This is a contradictory premise on which capitalism relies: limitless expansion in a real world of limited resources. See John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Richard York, *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on the Earth* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010), 28-31; Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 81, 108.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 80, 108.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 95, 218.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 76, 109.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 253, 255-256.

Private and Public Reconsolidations of the Racial Labor Division

This movement of capital helps to explain the relationship of black and white workers as more black workers entered the northern U.S. labor market in the mid-twentieth century. As they migrated north, black laborers entered into competition with the largely European immigrant labor force.⁷¹ Both sets of workers lacked the means to reproduce their lives. With only their own human capital and relatively few skills, they saturated the industrial labor market, competing for limited jobs. This material basis of wage labor competition and the racialized history of black impoverishment, combined with the capitalists' accumulated surplus value, enabled capitalists to willfully craft the racial perceptions of the working class. While the white working class chose to react against black labor, their agency was confined by the capitalist system of ongoing accumulation and competition and the real, yet subtle, influences of private owners of capital.

Karl Marx's category of the "reserve army" of labor clarifies the structure of such racialized working class intrarelations and their mutual relationship to capitalist production in general.⁷² This category of reserve laborers is defined by its economic precarity relative to the more reliably employed section of the working class, and consists primarily in "unskilled" labor, or labor that is more easily replaceable. Such replacement typically takes place by way of labor mechanization which requires fewer workers or by using other members of the reserve army.⁷³ This group of precarious laborers thus consists in those who are employed but vulnerable to this loss of work, currently unemployed and searching for work, or have given up searching for work but otherwise could.⁷⁴ Often immigrant or migrant laborers, these workers who are the most economically precarious since their skills are more easily replaced, are turned against one another as they struggle to subsist, competing most directly for limited work.

In this way, black migrant labor represented a boon for northern capitalists: black vulnerability was an opportunity for the owners of private property to extract additional surplus value from their employees. Left uneducated and without resources in the wake of the reconstruction era's shortcomings, then devalued by agricultural advancements and with vanishing means of subsistence, black migrant workers had few skills with which to negotiate a higher wage.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Ibid, 109, 255-257; Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 670; Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: Norton, 2010), 347-348; Hosang and Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*, 26, 158.

⁷² Marx, *Capital*, 790.

⁷³ Ibid, 791.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 788-790.

⁷⁵ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 32-54, 325-380; Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 255.

Rather than starve, black workers accepted lower wages in exchange for industrial labor. Capitalists thus displaced the immigrant labor force by hiring black migrant workers to perform the same labor at lower wages.⁷⁶ When immigrant workers resisted by forming unions, desperate black workers were often hired to break strikes and undercut collective union power.⁷⁷ Alternatively, the threat of cheap black labor was mobilized to pressure immigrant workers into accepting even lower wages, also increasing the capitalist owners' rate of exploitation and surplus value accumulation. As wages are lowered in this way and new technologies introduced, production increases, until the value realized through the sale of a commodity is less than the cost of its production. Marx identifies this as the problem of overproduction, the foundation of the problem of ever-increasing surplus.⁷⁸ Due to the capitalist's interest in extracting ever increasing amounts of value, already accumulated value must be invested in new projects where workers' labor is paid less than the value produced.⁷⁹ However, the capitalist is no longer in need of as many workers when growth has stagnated due to overproduction, throwing workers back onto the labor market to find means of survival elsewhere.⁸⁰ This period of unemployment lasts until such a time as consumption, and thus also production, are stimulated and workers are again needed to produce commodities and generate value.⁸¹ Thus, when expansion is profitable, workers are quickly needed, but as soon as they are not, workers find themselves without the means to survive. During the Depression, the capitalist economy lacked a mechanism to sufficiently absorb and realize the surplus value extracted from workers, so it had no interest in employing additional workers. Consequently, capitalists in the Depression era maintained their surplus as a reserve labor force which internally competed by lowering the price of their labor.⁸²

Public working class reactions against this competition represented black migrants as invaders arriving to steal jobs and unsettle the marginal security of white labor.⁸³ However, this competition was not yet coded in racial terms. Whiteness as it is conceived today, predominantly as a homogenous group with common interests in defending their relative racial privileges, was only beginning to congeal into its present form. Rather, immigrant groups such as Jews, Slavs, Italians, Irish, and Germans who made up most of the established northern industrial labor force were

⁷⁶ Ibid, 256-258; Mills, "European Specters," 165.

⁷⁷ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 264.

⁷⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 792.

⁷⁹ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 76.

⁸⁰ Marx, *Capital*, 788-790.

⁸¹ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 95, 218.

⁸² Ibid, 76.

⁸³ Ibid, 251-252; Mills, "European Specters," 165.

hierarchically organized and regarded as distinct racial groups.⁸⁴ Despite relative inequality between them, all these racial groups were destitute. Their increasingly deteriorating economic security during the Great Depression was challenged by the arrival of black labor as a cheaper alternative to their own labor. To fortify themselves against the devaluation of their labor power, many 1920s and 30s labor unions excluded black workers from their collectives.⁸⁵ Additionally, militant vigilante groups like the Ku Klux Klan continued to police a racialized boundary of employment and reserve labor.⁸⁶ As such, multiracial immigrant labor began to consolidate racial power through the constitution of a newly consistent and intelligible white racial category set against blackness. Historian Nell Irvin Painter calls this racial consolidation an “enlargement of American whiteness” that expanded white ideology beyond Anglo-Saxonism to include a plurality of assimilated white identities as one.⁸⁷

This white racial consolidation was meaningful beyond its recreation of racial hierarchy. It strengthened racial divisions internal to the class of workers who were already enduring both the stagnation of the capitalist economy and the exploitation-or-starvation paradigm of the capitalist market. As such, racialization cut across the conflict of the working and capitalist classes to ally a large sector of the working class with their rulers by reconstituting race, rather than class, as the primary axis of antagonism.⁸⁸ This amalgamation of whiteness thereby explicitly reformed alliances against the interests of the black working class, and more subtly, against the interests of the newly white working class. Though this cross-class racial alliance inhibited the realization of collective working class resistance, the differently racialized members of the working class nonetheless shared a common objective interest in fighting their mutual exploitation and degradation. Thus, the category of whiteness arose as a break from class solidarity to prioritize racial loyalty between the (now) white workers, and the (predominantly) white capitalist ruling class.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Hosang and Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*, 48-49; Painter, *The History of White People*, 311-326, 343-373.

⁸⁵ Mills, “European Specters,” 165.

⁸⁶ Michael Newton, *The FBI and the KKK: A Critical History* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2005), 36-37; Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 626, 674, 680; Painter, *The History of White People*, 325.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 359; Reed, *Class Notes*, 140.

⁸⁸ For example, see Mills, “European Specters,” 155-160, 164-171 and Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 12-14, 21, 82; This reconstruction of a racial axis against class is a historical cornerstone for later theories of oppression like that of Kimberlé Crenshaw. I borrow the term “axis” from Crenshaw as she posits the simultaneous and relatively equal causal force of multiple axes of oppression. However, Crenshaw’s formulation assumes the legitimacy of this historical racial division of the working class and imports its capitalist function as the foundation of her theory. Historical transformations like this one modify immanently apparent meanings of categories like race, class, and gender, enabling their later conceptual flattening by theorists like Crenshaw. See Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” 139-167.

⁸⁹ Hosang and Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*, 52-70; Reed, *Class Notes*, 133.

In this sense, the working class had not transcended the immanent material constraints of competition for wage labor: this mid-twentieth century racial transformation was not autonomously performed by working class immigrants, white labor unions, or reactionary groups like the Ku Klux Klan. Rather, the developing structure of monopoly capitalism constrained working class agency. Further, the U.S. private reaction to black migration also willfully pitted black labor against non-black immigrant labor.⁹⁰ For example, Henry Ford championed assimilationist education programs to proliferate an American ideology of multinational whiteness, distinct mainly in its non-blackness. By participating in this education, immigrants were inculcated with American ideals of abstract equality, individualized work-ethic, sympathy to the capitalist ruling class, and cultural pluralism within the constraints of what was now coalescing as whiteness.⁹¹ Ford's program was thus an implicit reformulation of labor antagonism in racial terms, entrenching a black/white opposition. Like Ford, other capitalists funded explicit propaganda campaigns, often in the form of news articles and comics, representing black migrants as invaders, social parasites, and sexual deviants.⁹² In this way, corporate leaders intentionally crafted workers perceptions to divert antagonism toward a racial Other and away from themselves while simultaneously creating the real conditions of racialized surplus labor army competition and working class destitution.

Such racist cultural and labor socialization methods expanded beyond propaganda programs spearheaded by such corporate leaders as Ford. Private representatives also pushed issues of labor competition and its racialization into the state sphere in search of respite from the Great Depression economy and new markets to absorb their surplus. Under such pressure, the U.S. state designed programs to bolster the racial interests of private property.

Private and State Racial Reconsolidations of Surplus Absorption

Private and state interventions in the U.S. housing market during the Great Depression were among the most significant sites of reinforcement and proliferation of mid-twentieth century racial

⁹⁰ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 42, 251; However, this racial antagonism was not a necessary consequence of the ruling class's intentionality; resistance was possible. For example, early and mid-twentieth century labor unions did often reject racial division by forming multiracial collectives. However, these unions were the most directly and brutally repressed by private and state forces. See Barbara Foley, *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro*, (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 1-69. As a result, their real power and popular intelligibility was diminished. This private-state reaction is also distinct from the FBI's Counterintelligence Programs in the 1950s and 60s in that its aims and impacts were primarily repressive, rather than adaptive. Appropriation and repressive desublimation of liberatory politics are distinctive of this later reaction, discussed later in this essay. See Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, [1964] 1991), 56-83.

⁹¹ Painter, *The History of White People*, 300, 325-326.

⁹² See Barbara Foley, *Spectres of 1919*.

antagonisms. Unchecked housing speculation in the years before the 1929 onset of the Great Depression had nearly caused the collapse of the housing market when Depression inflation skyrocketed.⁹³ In August 1930, then President Herbert Hoover convened the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership to mitigate the impending crisis.⁹⁴ Those invited to offer counsel represented both private and public spheres, such as bankers, realtors, insurers, economists, educators, and social workers.⁹⁵ The representatives of private interests wielded their significant influence on housing matters to promote a racialized market narrative. According to this narrative, housing demand already existed in the racially segregated U.S. market, the market's struggles were a consequence of industry's incapacity to meet that demand, and the free market's racial segregation could not be avoided.⁹⁶ Thus, federal spending could cure market stagnation by stimulating private housing production if the demand for segregated housing was met. However, home buyers did not autonomously call for segregated housing, neither did corporate and state leaders independently institute a capitalist economy.⁹⁷ Private and state behaviors were also both constrained by and effective of the broader structure of monopoly capitalism. As such, the racial market argument of private property should not be interpreted as false or as evidence of prejudicial racial motives. Rather, the racial market narrative naturalized the contingent empirical truth of racial segregation and obfuscated private and state roles in reproducing that reality.

Responding to the Depression stagnation and embracing private representatives' racial market narrative, President Hoover then created the Federal Home Loan Bank system (FHLB) and a corresponding oversight board (FHLBB) to manage the distribution of federal loans in 1932.⁹⁸ However, the FHLB and FHLBB maintained prohibitively high interest rates that blocked consumers from using the loans to stimulate private industry.⁹⁹ Consequently, the surplus value extracted from workers during housing production could not be realized through home sales. Knowing this, private industry continued to refuse new housing development and the working class remained unemployed, struggling to pay for housing. By 1933, almost half of U.S. borrowers' loans

⁹³ David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 103.

⁹⁴ Freund, *Colored Property*, 103.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 103

⁹⁶ Ibid, 106-107, 115, 118.

⁹⁷ "The character of the system determines the psychology of its members, not vice versa." See Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 42.

⁹⁸ Freund, *Colored Property*, 108-109.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 109-110.

defaulted and the home finance system was brought to the brink of collapse.¹⁰⁰ When President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1933, the FHLBB, as an amalgamation of private and state power, urged Roosevelt to approve the first New Deal policy: the Home Owners' Loan Act (HOLA).¹⁰¹ Building on the private-state alliance initiated by his predecessor, Roosevelt passed the act, creating the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) and authorizing it to purchase delinquent homes from banks and refinance them at rates more affordable to borrowers.¹⁰²

Simultaneously, private stakeholders argued that the market's independence from state influence was necessary for economic growth, and that the success of New Deal policies like the HOLA to provide housing for struggling Americans would be a consequence of free market operations, not the state.¹⁰³ Direct state intervention would compete with private industry for market shares and offer housing at lower prices than those determined by the private housing monopoly, thereby endangering the private housing market altogether against the interests of the private sphere. For this reason, HOLC assumed the role of an intermediary between consumers and private industry. In this sense, the HOLA allied the U.S. state with private interests by providing federal funding for private developments, thus subjecting the state to the private sphere. However, the U.S. state's private alliance facilitated the *ongoing* cycle of capital, meaning that HOLC loans could not have momentarily resuscitated private production after which the state would retreat to an imaginary non-economic independence. Rather, representatives of private property had ensured the state's lasting dependence on private interests for national economic stability when they negotiated the state's salvation of private producers. As such, HOLC also represented an entrenchment of private property's power to mold and constrain the *qualities* of state policy.¹⁰⁴ Any existing prejudices, or prejudices carefully inculcated by capitalists, could be uncritically assumed as a beneficial part of the market's operations.

Nonetheless, the free market could still be endangered if the state's capacity to relieve private debt holders was inhibited by extreme losses. Because the state was already operating at a deficit by

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 110.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 112.

¹⁰² Ibid, 111.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 102, 108, 119, 140-175. This narrative enabled private industry to portray (white) New Deal beneficiaries as self-made and independent achievers, thereby facilitating their sympathies with "free" market values, private property, and capitalism. This was the constitution of the new values of the American status quo. Also see Reed, *Class Notes*, 125.

¹⁰⁴ This is not meant to imply that the private sphere was not already influencing the qualities of state policy. Given the ideological division of politics and economics characteristic of capitalism, the political realm is subjected to privatized economic power. See Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 1-26. Rather, the Great Depression crisis was a moment when a different path might have been possible, but instead the state recreated and solidified its relationship with the private sphere in a different form.

purchasing debt and only expecting its partial repayment, it discriminated in the amount of risk it was willing to assume. As such, HOLC instituted a set of criteria whereby it would determine the risk of a given property or future project. Notably, one criterion was the racial composition of the community where the property was located. Areas with high concentrations of black people and immigrants, who were still stigmatized despite their ongoing integration into whiteness, were marked as risky investments.¹⁰⁵ In identifying race as a determinant of risk, HOLC assumed that black borrowers would be less able to pay back their loans than white borrowers, even with little attention given to the overwhelming similarities in the economic conditions of poor black and white people. The mere presence of black residents in a neighborhood was sufficient to garner a “high-risk” rating and significantly decrease the likelihood of loan approval.¹⁰⁶ Economically precarious white workers, in situations comparable to that of black workers, were also denied loans, but at a far lower rate than black members of the working class.¹⁰⁷

This discrimination was not mere racial prejudice; private representatives’ argument that the market simply required racial segregation indicates that they were not motivated by a cause external to the market. Private representatives were correct that the operation of the capitalist free market relies on an unequal division of labor internal to the working class. For example, if workers were compelled to sell their labor to produce the housing needed to stimulate the market, those workers would have to be sufficiently desperate. Otherwise, they would demand higher wages and more comfortable working and living conditions. Those members of the working class with more developed skills and the means to maintain their capacity to work, such as adequate housing, have a greater capacity to negotiate a higher wage. This demand would raise the cost of production and limit the surplus value that corporate owners extract from their employees.¹⁰⁸ Particularly during the Depression, corporate leaders could not afford such further threats to their profits, lest other corporations reduce their production costs by depressing their workers’ wages to increase their rate of exploitation. As a result, the corporation would be outcompeted, not through the reduction of prices, but the reduction of labor costs. However, black workers were among the least skilled and most desperate, making them more easily exploitable and less costly for capitalists. In this sense, the

¹⁰⁵ Freund, *Colored Property*, 115-117.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 113.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 113-114, 130-131.

¹⁰⁸ Tithi Bhattacharya, “How Not to Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class” in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. by Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 71-86.

U.S. labor force was already racially stratified, meaning that the labor available to private industry for housing development already bore the character of racial segregation.

Further, buyers are needed to realize the surplus value that is produced by workers and extracted by the owners of the productive means.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, wages needed to be distributed unequally to enable commodity sale. Such distribution traces the categories of “skilled” and “unskilled” labor: the racialized contours of the reserve labor army.¹¹⁰ In this way, domestic surplus absorption in the mid-twentieth century relied on the racial division and stratification of labor. As such, HOLC criteria were not purely based in a prejudicial fiction of black economic inferiority. Race *was* a significant indicator, though not determinant, of economic status.¹¹¹ In fact, black borrowers were not equally as capable as white borrowers of maintaining employment in the free market and repaying debt. Most black workers were poor, displaced by the effects of the Depression, and disproportionately relegated to the most precarious edge of the reserve labor army. This fact was reflected in the private sphere’s racial market narrative, so there was a degree of empirical truth to the implications of HOLC’s racial criterion. In this sense, New Deal policies like the HOLC were not embodiments of malicious racial prejudice, but descriptions and reproductions of the historical fact of racial segregation. As such, HOLC’s racial criterion was motivated by its roots in the FHLB private-state conglomeration, and therefore also the private sphere’s self-serving influence on state activities.

Contrary to the argument of private representatives, however, the empirical fact of racial segregation did not necessarily require its own reproduction and working-class demand for new housing did not already exist.¹¹² Rather, private representatives demanded racial segregation because market stimulation and surplus value accumulation depended on movement to new housing, which required the mobilization of existing antagonisms. As such, private industry only invested their capital after the state insured loans, thereby guaranteeing the value realization of their production.

¹⁰⁹ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 76, 79, 95, 110-111; Marx, *Capital*, 260; Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, (London: Penguin, [1939]1993), 404.

¹¹⁰ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 127.

¹¹¹ In their 2016 debate, Nancy Fraser and Michael Dawson characterize race as marking labor relations and the recourse available to different groups to contest their expropriation or exploitation. In this (non-comprehensive) sense, race is a secondary codification of social location. This signification is not determination. See Michael Dawson, “Hidden in Plain Sight: A Note on Legitimation Crises and the Racial Order,” *Critical Historical Studies* (Spring 2016): 150; and Fraser, “Expropriation and Exploitation,” 175.

¹¹² “The nature of this source of error is that statistics and the ‘exact’ economic theory based upon them always lag behind actual developments.” In other words, descriptive, empirical accounts blind themselves to historical change when they capture, purify, and eternalize a singular moment apart from its context. See Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 6-7.

While suburban housing did not exist before private investment and production, white home buyers whose loans would be federally supported would want the suburban homes that would be built away from the intentionally degraded conditions of the racialized inner city. In this way, the housing market would be stimulated by the creation of a new market for suburban housing.¹¹³ Such movement to new housing could only be generated and sustained if the industrial centers' destitute conditions were maintained as at the same time a select group of buyers would receive state support to pay private industry for better living conditions elsewhere.¹¹⁴ The historical division available to private industry to affect this movement was racial. Thus, the racial market narrative proclaimed, black workers must be denied state support, suburban homes must be built away from the city, and white buyers must be funded to flee inner-city destitution.

Nonetheless, it was only once these homes were built that buyers sought to escape the industrial centers where HOLC disproportionately denied loan refinancing due to the density of risky poor or black borrowers.¹¹⁵ As such, the desire for "white flight" was both predicted and determined by private investments in suburban housing away from industrial centers where the most precarious laborers were concentrated. Therefore, the preservation of private industry, let alone the New Deal's *prioritization* of private production, required the perpetuation of a divided labor structure and the historical use of race to realize that hierarchy. Thus, racial segregation was only demanded due to the combination of its historical facticity and the private sphere's self-legitimizing need to create a new market; that is, it was only necessary within the limits of capitalist production. In other words, private representatives' uncritical observation of historical segregation and their naturalization of their segregated racial market narrative affected the narrative's confirmation in corporate, state, and buyer behavior.

Thus, HOLC criteria for aid simultaneously policed boundaries of class and race by prioritizing concern for loan repayment. Hence, HOLC rejected refinancing applications and new development projects in poor and black areas while providing millions of dollars of relief for suburban projects in white areas.¹¹⁶ Meanwhile, the most precarious members of the working class who constituted the reserve army of labor were left to fend for themselves in the Depression economy. HOLC criteria thereby reinforced and constituted loan recipients as middle or upper class.

¹¹³ Freund, *Colored Property*, 102, 104, 114, 115; Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 117, 128.

¹¹⁴ Production and distribution are both aspects of an ongoing circuit and are therefore not easily separated into distinct spheres. Production informs distribution informs production concurrently. See Marx, "Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy", 1-15.

¹¹⁵ Freund, *Colored Property*, 100, 102, 128; Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 262-263.

¹¹⁶ Freund, *Colored Property*, 104, 128, 142; Hosang and Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*, 48.

As such, the state built on free market racial mandates to actively produce racial segregation as a necessity just as the private sphere directly participated in the constitution of racial antagonisms among the working class. In this way, racial segregation was formally codified by the state, inaugurating the state's active constitution of the segregation era of racial politics.¹¹⁷

Despite the real constraints imposed by private property, this agential participation of the state in racial reconsolidation implies that the truth of the private sphere's racial market narrative was contingent, not inevitable. Otherwise, private representatives' demand that the state facilitate the market's independence would have been unnecessary. Rather, the state's actions through the New Deal and Roosevelt's alliance with private industry determined the preservation of private production as the limit of possibility. In this paradigm, race was necessary. Nonetheless, alternatives were possible. For example, the U.S. state could have directly intervened in the housing crisis by producing and distributing housing in competition with the private sphere. With the private housing monopoly broken, the free housing market would collapse. As a result, the U.S. ruling class would lose power, opening the possibility that the problem of racial degradation could be confronted. While state intervention would not have *required* redress of racial disparity, it would have dramatically altered the economic structuring of race relations such that a racial division of labor would have become unnecessary. Further interventions to overcome racial disparities would have become possible, likely on the part of the black working class. For this reason, the state's potential to realize alternatives to private monopoly motivated private representatives to advocate against direct state intervention so vehemently.

However, the U.S. state affirmed its own general subordination to private interests by forming an explicit alliance with the private sphere. Now, state's role as a mechanism of mediating class antagonisms on behalf of the capitalist class is clear; in the mid-twentieth century, the U.S. state acted as an intermediary to absorb the private sphere's surplus production.¹¹⁸ During the Depression, New Deal policies increased state non-military spending by 70%, absorbing a significant amount of the private sphere's surplus.¹¹⁹ These policies also succeeded in housing and lifting from

¹¹⁷ The famous 1896 court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* marks the beginning of the U.S. state's formal endorsement of Jim Crow segregation after the reconstruction era. However, this was a passive reinforcement of segregation in the private and public spheres, as the state was not yet an active participant in the real recreation of racial segregation. This fact does not diminish the significance of *Plessy v. Ferguson*'s political instantiation of racial segregation. Such political transformations are also important requisite conditions for the state's more active role in the racial socioeconomics discussed here. Rather, the New Deal marks the U.S. state's direct alliance with private industry to reproduce race.

¹¹⁸ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 67, 151.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 160, 175.

poverty millions of the most precarious members of the U.S. population.¹²⁰ However, this stimulation was far from sufficient to pull the U.S. out of the Great Depression.¹²¹ Rather, a variety of mechanisms were needed to increase consumption and belay the Depression crisis.¹²² State spending on civilian projects like the New Deal was one such outlet for surplus. However, within the confines of capitalism, it was necessary that the private sphere limit the qualities of state spending, often along racial lines, to prevent competition.¹²³ As such, private property prohibited the expansion of New Deal spending from absorbing near as much as the private sphere produced. It was not until the U.S. entered World War II that state military spending, which bore no such private limitations, sufficiently stimulated the U.S. economy to end the Great Depression.¹²⁴

By then, however, the racial damage of the New Deal had already been dealt. The New Deal reflected private property's negative division of the working class by legitimating the private sphere's use of black workers as a surplus army of labor. Then, as European immigrant populations competed with black migrants for jobs, New Deal policies offered emerging white groups relative privileges enshrined in law. While immigrants were also discriminated against by HOLC criteria, their loan requests were still accepted at rates relatively higher than black applicants.¹²⁵ As such, New Deal state interventions also constituted a positive influence, offering greater economic security to the group of workers who adopted their codification as white to assimilate with the interests of the American monopoly capitalist status quo. Consequently, the New Deal's successes were performed within the confines of a capitalist system that demanded racial hierarchy.

Thus, another salient aspect of the state's mediation was its formal and lasting codification of a racial hierarchy of labor and housing. After laying the foundation of future labor and housing developments to be realized along racial lines, the private and state spheres' segregation would be reproduced throughout the 1930s, 40s, 50s and 60s.¹²⁶ In this way, the state's formalization of racial

¹²⁰ Freund, *Colored Property*, 134; Hosang and Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*, 48.

¹²¹ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 152, 160-161, 175-176.

¹²² Baran and Sweezy identify capitalist's consumption and investment, the sales effort, civilian government spending, and militarism and imperialism as the four mechanisms by which surplus may be absorbed. Because I focus mainly on the domestic U.S. context in this essay, imperialism is the least treated mechanism here. However, Baran and Sweezy reveal that imperialism is the most effective external stimulant of surplus absorption, and necessary for the extraction of the resources that are used in production of all kinds. As such, imperialism undergirds and structures the domestic U.S. context that I discuss, and even characterizes some relations internal to the U.S., particularly between the northern and southern U.S. after the Civil War when the monopoly capitalist stage was just beginning to emerge Ibid, 178-222; Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*.

¹²³ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 154-175.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 175-175, 222-224, 240-241.

¹²⁵ Freund, *Colored Property*, 113-114, 130-131.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 176-272.

division structured the meanings of race characteristic of the U.S. segregation era. The resultant reconstituted meaning of whiteness was that of a cross-class alliance between a large section of the working class and the capitalist ruling class. Blackness was thus also reconstituted as identical to the relatively degraded subset of the surplus labor army.

III: RESISTING RACIAL MONOPOLY

*[Humans] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.*¹²⁷

—Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

Correcting for a possible misapprehension of the U.S. racial monopoly as the ruling class's exclusive determination of racial meaning, critical philosopher of race Charles Mills emphasizes the structural distinctiveness of race and capitalism by highlighting the working class's agential participation in reactionary racial reconsolidations.¹²⁸ Inversely, political scientist and Black Studies theorist Cedric Robinson emphasizes the historical inseparability of race and capitalism, checking overcorrections like Mills's that mistake the abstract potentiality of non-racist capitalism for a real possibility or attempt to resolve racial antagonisms within the confines of capitalism. Indeed, Mills's and Robinson's interpretations both contradict and complement one another. Between them, the dialectical nature of the capitalist racial monopoly is clarified by the critical historical and structural analysis of Karl Marx. Indeed, the 1930s racial reconsolidation was both a product and functional tool of this dialectical relation of race and class. Its impacts would last throughout the mid-twentieth century, setting the stage for the 1950s and 60s racial liberation movement's later resistance and renegotiation of U.S. racial divisions. However, the transcendent agency exhibited in such politics are not necessarily antithetical to capital's racial monopoly. Rather, capitalism's appropriation of the working class's labor power could also be used to adopt resistant racial politics into the racial monopoly.

History, Agency, and Appropriation

This historical development of the capitalist racial monopoly must be considered as a combination of capitalist, state, and working-class reactions to both the Great Depression and black migration. The two entangled reactions to black migration – of the private-public and private-state

¹²⁷ Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence H. Simon (Indianapolis: Hackett, [1844]1994), 188; Marx's use of the word "mensch" in the original German is often misleadingly translated as "man." At the time of translation, "man" was more commonly overgeneralized to refer to humans, though the term added a gender connotation that is today recognized and then misattributed to Marx. Accordingly, I have adjusted this translation of Marx's words to more accurately reflect his invocation of humans in general. See John Bellamy Foster, "Introduction" in *How to Read Karl Marx by Ernst Fischer* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1996), 17.

¹²⁸ See Charles W. Mills, "European Specters," in *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism*, ed. Charles W. Mills (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 157-160, 164-171. and Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 11, 53-62, 89, 93, 110-112.

alliances – reconstituted the importance of race for U.S. monopoly capitalism. Contrary to the assertions of late twentieth and early twenty-first century scholars like Charles Mills, the 1930s’ “enlargement of American whiteness” was not the consequence of an autonomous reactionary tendency among immigrants and white people.¹²⁹ Rather, this condition of working-class transcendence under the constraints of capitalism is helpfully clarified by Marx; he writes, “[humans] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.”¹³⁰ By this, Marx means that historical development is a dialectical process of interaction between real categories, such as private property, the working class public, and the U.S. state. In this process, immanent reality confronts human actors without their choosing as a constraint on their possible transcendent, productive activity.¹³¹ Development thus takes place under conditions of constraint but is also overcome and transformed with intentionality.

Conversely, in “European Specters,” Mills suggests that race alone is the primary determining factor in the distribution of economic and social resources.¹³² Mills points to policies like those of the New Deal, which used a racial criterion to determine distribution. He argues that blackness had already been codified as external to the state and whiteness identified with the polity, a reality evidenced in the New Deal’s explicit rejection of black home loan requests.¹³³ Thus, when white people actively chose to accept the rewards offered by state policies, their racial interests

¹²⁹ Painter, *The History of White People*, 359.

¹³⁰ Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” 188.

¹³¹ Here, I invoke transcendence in Simone de Beauvoir’s materially grounded existentialist sense to refer to the fundamental human capacity to transform one’s environment consciously and intentionally in one’s own interest, or labor. Beauvoir draws on Marx’s concept of labor power in her development of the existential category of transcendence. Beauvoir juxtaposes transcendence with immanence, which describes the given conditions of possibility for, and limitations of, transcendence, or material conditions. Her articulation of human existence at the intersection of immanence and transcendence is useful for clarifying the agency and limitations of resistant actors as structuring the process by which resistant racial politics are appropriated by capitalism. See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Random House, [1949]2010).

¹³² Mills, “European Specters,” 156-160, 165.

¹³³ Mills argues that black subordination under a political system that purports the equality of its citizens implies that black people are already excluded from citizenship. Inversely, the meaning of whiteness is identified with the polity. Thus, white people embody the U.S. state, and are effectively deputized to enforce the state’s internal black-white racial boundary. Both state and white working class interests are therefore necessarily antagonistic to black interests. Nonetheless, Mills offers critically important insights into on the state-public relation, while I have focused on the private-public and private-state relations. However, Mills’s lack of analysis of private economic influences has led him to postulate racial subordination as the abstract foundation of his argument and thereby verify the racial market narrative and its contradictions. As a result, Mills misses the contingency of the cross-class racial division he articulates. It is my intention to highlight both the immanent limitations and transcendent possibilities embedded in the fraught history of racial development, rather than concede to racial determination. See Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 15-19, 53-62, 89, 93, 110-112; Mills, “European Specters,” 157-160, 164-171.

supplanted their class interest in resisting exploitation alongside black laborers.¹³⁴ Consequently, only white workers could opt-in to the privileges of whiteness, and reliably did so because it was in their immanent best interest.¹³⁵ As a result, Mills claims, multiracial solidarity was, and is continually, foreclosed, and race becomes the primary division along which social and economic life is determined.¹³⁶ Race therefore becomes the driving mechanism of capital.

However, Mills has neglected the real constraints under which the expanding category of white people were empowered to freely choose to reinforce racial hierarchy. The free market conditions which forced black and white labor into competition for the resources of survival, capitalists' explicit manipulation of this fact to break labor coalitions, and state policies rewarding white assimilation constituted the immanent constraints within which white choices were made. Each of these factors narrowed the field of possible options for the white working class. As such, the interests of private property, which were not directly racial but relied on the reflection and reproduction of the racialized labor market, were far more significant in determining racial meaning and subordination. Furthermore, white laborers *did* sometimes choose to act against their racial interests in favor of their class interests, forming multiracial union coalitions.¹³⁷ However, these unions were most directly and brutally confronted by state sanctioned police forces.¹³⁸ In this way, the class interests of the more powerful ruling class constrained working class choices; white workers could not freely choose to enforce black subordination.

Nonetheless, Mills has offered an important corrective to the conflation of race and capital and subsequent reduction of the capitalist racial monopoly to an issue of either race or class. Mills's critique also enables clarification of how the relationship between race and capital, and indeed the term "racial capitalism" functions differently than in Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism*. There, Robinson excavates the entangled history of race and capitalism, showing the indispensable function of race for the primitive accumulation necessary for the birth of capitalism.¹³⁹ In this way, Robinson identifies race as the origin of capital and treats race as the base and enduring characteristic of all

¹³⁴ Ibid, 157-160, 164-171.

¹³⁵ Mills's emphasis on white agency is an important corrective to a strong deterministic account of race, because it adds an additional step: racial division is mediated by choices, made under the constraints of immanently determined interests. Nonetheless, Mills has described and adopted the racial market narrative. See Larry Alan Busk, "From the Epistemology of Ignorance to Rassenwahn: Thinking Ideology with Mills and Adorno," *Constellations*, (2020): 1-11.

¹³⁶ Mills, "European Specters," 157-160, 164-171.

¹³⁷ Barbara Foley, *Spectres of 1919*, 1-69.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 1-69.

¹³⁹ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, (University of North Carolina Press, [1983]2000), 1-28.

capitalist development, that is, racial capitalism.¹⁴⁰ As such, Robinson's use of the term "racial capitalism" is a redescription of capital in terms of race. His account of capital's origin thus relies on a genetic fallacy that collapses race and capitalism into a singular phenomenon. Robinson thus precludes analysis of the interaction *between* race and capital; that is, the functions that race serves for capitalism and the ways that capitalism is invested in reproducing race. Rather, the fact of their historical concurrence is sufficient for Robinson to claim that the two do not constitute a historically distinct and mutually reinforcing dialectic, but an undifferentiated whole. Such an account foregrounds race as the site of class struggle and reduces capitalism to its racial base, thereby portraying race-based liberatory interventions as sufficient to comprehensively challenge the capitalist racial monopoly altogether.¹⁴¹

In a sense, Robinson's account of race and class is precisely the opposite of Mills's, though both offer important insights for assessing the relationship of race and class. While Robinson takes race and capitalism to be from the outset and forever entangled as one, Mills represents the historical supplantation of class by race as the as the new primary mover of history. He suggests that state endorsement of a racial division of labor during and prior to the twentieth century is evidence of the state's foundation in black Otherization, and consequently, white sovereignty. Thus, state conferred privileges like those of the New Deal freed white people to endorse black subordination and enter a cross-class alliance with ruling class whites.¹⁴² For Mills, this means that class was successfully *broken* as a salient category structuring social relations such as race.¹⁴³ Race, as *against* class, then appears as the mover of capitalist development, while for Robinson, race-classes motivate capitalist history. In line with Mills's interpretation, it is true that private and state interventions were not alone sufficient to constitute the segregated racial order; racial segregation must also have been

¹⁴⁰ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 1-28; For a similar argument articulating race, gender, and capitalism together, see Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*, (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, [2004]2009), 11-14, 17, 61-75.

¹⁴¹ As Adolph Reed notes, this conflation "substitute[es] fanciful taxonomy for strategic analysis and assessment," and thereby legitimates opportunistic associations of any resistant race-based politics with the appearance of liberation. See Reed Jr., *Class Notes*, xi.

¹⁴² Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 15-19, 53-62, 89, 93, 110-112; Mills, "European Specters," 157-160, 164-171.

¹⁴³ Lukács asserts, "in the case of social reality, these contradictions are not a sign of the imperfect understanding of society; on the contrary, they belong to *the nature of reality itself and to the nature of capitalism.*" Thus, Mills adopts a concept of freedom distinctive of capitalist political theory. He assesses this situation immanently, examining the effect of state support of white racial interests to divide class not as a contradiction that would be impossible to realize because class struggle remains operative, but as the empirically observable truth. Mills thus explains away contradiction, adopting capital's ideological obfuscation of class even as he is critical of this reality. Mills thus does not unveil the contradictions as contradictions that have been realized in the historical relation of race and capital. "By this stroke the objective economic antagonism as expressed in the *class struggle* evaporates, leaving only a conflict between the *individual and society.*" See Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 10-11.

adopted by the working class. In line with Robinson's interpretation, it is true that race could not supplant class as the primary mover of capitalist development because the two are historically entangled in the immanent reality that mid-twentieth century actors did not choose but nonetheless transformed. As such, race is not reducible to class interests, class is not reducible to race interests, and the capitalist racial monopoly is not reducible to the synonymy of race and class.

Yet, both Mills's and Robinson's articulations miss the significant constraints placed upon white people by capitalism's active role in reconstituting racial meanings to serve ruling class interests. It was under conditions of extreme precarity like that of the Great Depression that the white working class endorsed black subordination, because it was in their immanent interest for the reproduction of their lives. Thus, the white working class *did* choose to adopt the cross-class alliance of whiteness; the working class exhibits an inextinguishable transcendent capacity whereby they actively constitute their environment in their interests, whether constrained by ideological mediation or not. However, this transcendent human capacity for choice is both essential to and distinct from capitalist class relations, rather than evidence of class's subordination to race as Mills claims or the identity of race and class as Robinson suggests. This is because the capitalist class exploits the transcendent capacity for labor that enables humans to add value to their objects of transformation, and through their control of the productive means, appropriates the products of workers' transcendent creativity.¹⁴⁴ As such, workers' limited agency is essential to capitalism.

Each moment of alienation articulated by Marx in his "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts" helpfully characterizes this relationship of workers to and under capitalism, a relationship which in the mid-twentieth century U.S., was explicitly racialized.¹⁴⁵ Under capitalism,

¹⁴⁴ See Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts" in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence H. Simon (Indianapolis: Hackett, [1844]1994), 58-68; Marx, *Capital*, 320-416; Bhattacharya, "How Not to Skip Class," 72.

¹⁴⁵ In this excerpt, Marx uses a variety of terms that are often uniformly translated as the word "alienation." The sense of externalization, separation, and *abstraction* is not always conveyed by this translation. As noted above, "abstraction" shares in this sense of division and "drawing away." Indeed, alienation is both a condition and product of capitalist production that converts a worker's particularity and individuality into the universally equivalent form, labor power, which can then be exchanged on the market as a commodity. In this sense, alienation is the process of appropriation by way of abstraction. Nonetheless, a worker's individuality cannot be completely erased in this paradigm. It is only because commodities do still have particular uses that their value is realizable; the contradiction of use and exchange inheres in the commodity. For instance, the particularity of workers is useful for capitalism in the sphere of reproduction: it is by diminishing the value of some workers' labor power in the reproductive sphere that capital drives down the cost of labor in general (through competition) and increasingly expands consuming markets (by creating new needs or perceptions of needs). Racialization is one such division and relative devaluation, and is therefore a mechanism of alienation, or racial alienation. With the rise of abstract identity politics, racial alienation grows increasingly entrenched. Now, racial particularization/division not only facilitates the abstract equivalence of exchange value but is itself consumed as the socially necessary commodity of abstract racial identity. In this way, the racial commodity is made available for working class use to market themselves to potential employers, friends, and lovers as a reflection and extension of capital's use of race to particularize, codify, and devalue labor power. Race is thus parasitic upon its working class human host:

workers are separated from the tools and resources necessary for production.¹⁴⁶ Because workers do not control these productive means, the only commodity they can sell on the market is their own labor power: their transcendent human capacity to transform the world according to their conscious intentionality.¹⁴⁷ When hired to transform the raw materials of production into useful commodities, the value of the materials increases because its transformation into an object of greater use requires the addition of the unique resource that is human transcendence.¹⁴⁸ As such, the worker's choice and intentionality are realized in the product of their labor.¹⁴⁹ Because the object now contains some of the worker's transcendent energy but belongs to the owner of the means of production, that commodity, and thus also part of the worker's intentional self, stand against the worker as private property.¹⁵⁰ The worker's creation has thus been *appropriated*, both serving the contingent and ideologically mediated interest of the worker, as the exchange of labor for the wage necessary for survival, and the interest of the capitalist, whose control dictated the process of production to ensure the creation of a commodity that could be sold to realize the increased value contained in it.¹⁵¹ In participating in capitalist production, the worker thus actively and willfully takes part in the constitution of private property: the product of their labor that stands against the development of the worker's needs and is instead mobilized towards the capitalist's accumulation.

Set in motion by the capitalist, this circuit of production and distribution develops the social totality in the capitalist's interest, which is to repeat this cycle and accumulate further surplus value.¹⁵² In this way, the worker's labor does not contribute to the collective good of the totality but transforms that totality in the interests of private property. The worker is thus divided from other workers, who each contribute to the production of private property.¹⁵³ This process further divides the working class by generating a surplus army of labor, thereby erecting a hierarchy internal to the working class. In the U.S. mid-twentieth century monopoly capitalist stage, this uneven development of the working class was most clearly delineated by race.¹⁵⁴ Further, the worker's own energy comes

consumed, then reproduced until it has grown strong enough to supplant the host's objective interests as embodied false consciousness, and finally stand against the worker as the racial division of the social totality where it again appears as a consumable contradiction of universally abstract labor power and socially necessary individuality.

¹⁴⁶ Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 58.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 60-63.

¹⁴⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 247-257.

¹⁴⁹ Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 60.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 64-68.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 60-63; Marx, *Grundrisse*, 404.

¹⁵² Ibid, 62-66.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 62-66.

¹⁵⁴ For examples of uneven development of the working class, see Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 169-172.

to stand apart from the worker through its appropriation, and *again* as a consequence of the worker's division from the social totality.¹⁵⁵ As a result, the worker's individual and hierarchically organized role in production impresses itself upon the worker as the immanent condition of their survival.¹⁵⁶ Just as the representatives of private property argued in the mid-twentieth century that racial segregation was essential to the free market, the worker feels the identification of their self with their particular position in the hierarchy. This identity is internalized as a narrative wherein the worker's hierarchically situated and immanently necessary social role naturally inheres in the self, for example, as race.¹⁵⁷

Racial Monopoly and False Race Consciousness

Through this process of appropriation, race comes to stand against the working class as a meaning foreign to workers' fundamental human transcendence. Simultaneously, the working class, much like the smaller corporation, shares in the determination of racial meaning. However, because racial meaning is transformed by taking up and modifying this racial alienation, the working class does not control the means and product of production that is race. As such, the interests of the private sphere tend to maintain greater control of racial significance, ensuring that it will continue to support their interest in capital accumulation by serving four entangled and indispensable functions for capitalism.¹⁵⁸

Historically available tool. Because capital is produced by workers under historical constraints, capitalism uses the given racialized historical condition to manifest itself through workers' own labor. In this sense, Robinson and Mills each articulate a key component of the capital-race relation. Robinson describes the historical importance of race for capital, but treats historical particularity as structural necessity, and assimilates race and capital. Inversely, Mills assesses the structural role of race to divide and stratify labor, but treats this function empirically; he separates race from class and capitalism. Together, Robinson and Mills are correct that race and capital are both historically and structurally related, but race and capital are neither equivalent nor wholly distinct. Both Robinson and Mills render the complex dialectical interrelation of race and capital opaque by hypostatizing capitalist racial immanence as reality as such. Mills further

¹⁵⁵ Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 62-66.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 60-63.

¹⁵⁷ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 171. For more on racialization as a form of alienation, see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, [1952]2008).

¹⁵⁸ These four functions are not presented in a causal order, nor are they entirely distinct from one another. Rather, each function operates simultaneously and embedded in each of the others. In this sense, I here offer four attributes of racial function in and for capital.

legitimizes his claim to race primacy by paradoxically emphasizing white freedom and immanent determination of white choice. Rather, race meets capital's need to manifest itself in given historical conditions and is then instrumentalized. For capital, race is therefore logically contingent *and* historically necessary. These two facts cannot be separated (Mills) or assimilated (Robinson, and with a detour through free self-interested exchange, Mills). Their dialectical interaction constitutes the capitalist racial monopoly.

Division of labor. Race embodies and justifies a division of labor because racialization identifies the causes of a worker's particular relative distance from extreme economic precarity with the worker themselves, regardless of the broader socioeconomic system that has shaped their field of possibilities. Race is therefore a manifestation of the differential evaluation of human life that capital depends on to reliably draw on a surplus labor army as needed, accumulate surplus value by lowering production costs below competitors' costs, and prevent working class unity.¹⁵⁹ Such racial identification mirrors the capitalist narrative of individual responsibility for the duties of social reproduction and capitalist irresponsibility for collective social good; this identification process attends only to individuals or groups rather than the level of the social totality where the structuring movement of capital is legible.¹⁶⁰ This location of relative and differential value in workers themselves may be manifest as biological essentialism, common before and during the nineteenth century, immanent economic reductionism, represented by the arguments of mid-twentieth century private property, or abstract constructionism, which has become increasingly common since the post-Civil Rights "cultural turn."¹⁶¹ Race thus reflects the socioeconomic condition of relative precarity to which it refers and naturalizes it, thereby aiding in its reproduction.

Absorption of surplus. Racialization is also one mechanism by which unique needs are created and fulfilled by private property in its ongoing search for new outlets to absorb surplus. The differential distribution of wages and living conditions thus motivates consumptive movement on the part of racialized Others seeking to climb the economic ladder and of the relatively privileged escaping racial "invasions" of their economic status position, for example "white flight". As such, new markets are generated by the negative force of intentional and stratified degradation characteristic of racial division and embodied as race. Just as such a racial division of labor structures

¹⁵⁹ Bhattacharya, "How Not to Skip Class," 73-74.

¹⁶⁰ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 173; Fraser, "Expropriation and Exploitation," 175-177.

¹⁶¹ I borrow the term "cultural turn" from Nancy Fraser to describe the shift in academia and popular consciousness during and after the Civil Rights era to conceptualize social constructions like race as political phenomena, sans grounded economic consideration. See Nancy Fraser, "Feminist Politics in the Age of Recognition: A Two-Dimensional Approach to Gender Justice," *Studies in Social Justice* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 23-25.

capitalist production and stratifies distribution, race enables increased absorption of that produced value. Without such stimuli, monopoly capitalism stagnates.¹⁶²

False race consciousness. The worker's value is purportedly equated with their wage, which is that value that is returned to the worker for the tasks of social reproduction rather than the value they produce.¹⁶³ As such, race encodes relative economic precarity as an unalterable fact of the worker's very existence in terms of phenotype, culture, or immanent truth. In other words, race acts as a mediating factor in class relations resulting in the simplistic reduction of class to a descriptive status hierarchy group categorization alongside race.¹⁶⁴ In consequence, class no longer appears as the fundamental antagonism between workers and the bourgeoisie structuring both their respective objective and immanent interests. Ostensibly transcending their economic structuring, a class's interests then appear to be a sum total of its individual members' pursuits, whatever their presupposed immanent conditions in the capitalist market happen to determine.¹⁶⁵ Class antagonism is thereby either invisibilized or recognized but naturalized. By thus inverting and mystifying an expansive view of class antagonisms as shaping market interests, race codifies class relations as a product of the market interests of the working class. In this mystified sense, class is then a categorization of economic status whose members' economic interests are determined by their immanent situation including that of racial antagonism.¹⁶⁶ For example, Mills adopts this purported market necessity of the racial division of labor and interprets white people as necessarily having an interest in maintaining white privileges and consequently always electing to reproduce racial antagonism.¹⁶⁷ However, race is made real through the movement of capital, that is, working class production structured and directed by the owners of private property, such that racial division appears as a social necessity, rather than a product of the appropriative process.¹⁶⁸ In this way, the racial division of labor fulfills capital's structural need for a stratified working class of producers and consumers whose competition for survival constitutes their mutual antagonism as immanent truth.

¹⁶² Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 79-111.

¹⁶³ Bhattacharya, "How Not to Skip Class," 71.

¹⁶⁴ In their 2002 exchange, Adolph Reed and Ellen Meiksins Wood characterize race as a mechanism of ascriptive hierarchy that mediates class in the civic realm. This mediating function is what enables race not to directly reflect class and therefore appear independent and diffuse. Harry Chang also notes that this dissonance is the fundamental assertion of social constructionist critique. See Adolph Reed Jr., "Unraveling the Relation of Race and Class in American Politics," *Political Power and Social Theory* 15 (2002): 265-274; Ellen Meiksins Wood, "Class, Race, and Capitalism," *Political Power and Social Theory* 15 (2002): 275-284; Chang, "Toward a Marxist Theory of Racism," 42-43.

¹⁶⁵ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 9-11, 51.

¹⁶⁶ For a robust analysis of the flattening of the category of class to, in many cases, articulation of status, see Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New 'True' Socialism* (New York: Verso 1998[1996]).

¹⁶⁷ See Busk, "From the Epistemology of Ignorance to Rassenwahn," 1-11.

¹⁶⁸ Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 60-63.

Consequently, race functions to foreclose critical consciousness and potential unity that could challenge capitalists' control of workers' transcendent productive energy. If workers did not understand their relative social positions as immanent necessities internal to themselves, this condition would instead reveal itself as an antagonism between the working and ruling classes. Hierarchies within the working class would thus lose their racial justification and multiracial class unity would become possible, enabling the working class to collectively refuse active participation in the creation of their own racial alienation. Under monopoly capital, this demystification would also disrupt the differential development used during the Great Depression to form a new housing market that would stimulate surplus absorption. As a result, capital would then enter a crisis.

In the senses of each of these four entangled functions, both race and class are aspects of immanent reality, available for investigation and critique. As such, the fact that race serves these functions for capitalism does not indicate that race simply occludes class struggle. Rather, the function of race for capital is to translate class struggle into terms favorable to the ruling class by forming cross-class alliances, such as whiteness, that divide the working class against itself. This is not only a linguistic change, but a real transformation of class struggle. Therefore, race cannot obscure class because race is a real manifestation of class antagonism; race is an essential *part* of class struggle.¹⁶⁹ Race thus constitutes part of the immanent reality that the racialized working class is unavoidably confronted with.

Like the commodity form, this immanent reality of race is the culmination of its process of production: the capitalist class's use of prior historical conditions to evaluate human life unevenly in order to meet the ends of surplus value accumulation.¹⁷⁰ One would not say that the commodity is not real; rather, the commodity embodies the contradictions of capital.¹⁷¹ Race similarly embodies capital's contradictions; capitalism relies on workers to produce surplus but diminishes their capacity to reproduce their lives to extract increasingly greater amounts of value; to direct workers' productions in the interests of private property, capitalism constrains the human creative intentionality it relies on to produce privately-owned commodities. As such, race essentially embodies a division of human life and labor into distinct market-necessary categories, also

¹⁶⁹ For more on the function of myth and ideology to distort rather than obscure, see Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," 227, 231-233.

¹⁷⁰ Marx, *Capital*, 125-177.

¹⁷¹ This is the very reason that Marx begins his analysis of capital in *Capital* with an examination of the commodities workers produce and consume: the embodiment of capital that most directly confronts the working class. See Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 83.

legitimizing the capitalist mode of production and its racial division of labor as empirical fact.¹⁷² Therefore, race is neither hidden by capitalist production, nor itself simply hiding capitalist production. Rather, race is strikingly obvious, but nonetheless mystifying, rendering itself as the natural and normal state of human life. In this sense, race is a commodity: a coalescence of productive energy in the particular form that enables its use by the racial monopolist to divert critical attention away from the productive mode whereby surplus value is accumulated and race itself is created. In this paradigm, race encodes the differentially evaluated socioeconomic positions of workers as biology, immanent economics, or abstract identity. By thus embodying and naturalizing the capitalist mode by which it is produced, race operates as social tool of capital's reproduction. Nonetheless, race is not such a natural, inevitable given; rather, it is constructed through real historical processes. It is these processes of capital that are hidden *within*, not by, the immanent appearance of race.

Race and capitalism therefore cannot be neatly collapsed into a singular system or wholly separated from one another. In this sense, the entanglement of race and capitalism in and beyond the mid-twentieth century can be more aptly framed as a monopoly relation. Accordingly, U.S. capital's racial monopoly indicates that multiple private, public, and state actors participate in the recreation of race. Like all social constructions, race inhabits an ambiguous space as both a part of the immanent constraints "given and transmitted from the past" and a transcendent mechanism that actively constitutes capitalist socioeconomic relations, including racial antagonism.¹⁷³ However, the private sphere maintains its racial monopoly through its control of the means of production. For example, if workers withheld labor so the private sphere could not mobilize capital towards new surplus-accumulating projects, the owners of the productive means would refuse to enable production at all. Private, public, and state spheres would all suffer as a result. Further, because the private sphere controls the means of production, they have a greater capacity to endure such a collapse. A social prohibition against multiracial resistance thus emerges, as all spheres are, at least immanently, interested in their own immediate capacity to gain the resources necessary for their

¹⁷² Reed suggests that racial ideology was "formulated in terms of the predominant ideology and thereby [was] readily integrated as an affirmation of the validity of the system as a whole:" the production of both capital and race. In this sense, race itself is also a commodity, just as workers are transformed into commodities by their participation in their own alienation. Marx writes, "the worker sinks to the level of a commodity, the most miserable commodity," and later, "[labor] produces itself and the worker as a commodity." See Reed, "The 'Black Revolution,'" 60; Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 58-59.

¹⁷³ Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire," 188.

survival.¹⁷⁴ In this way, the meaning of race as hierarchical, internalized, and self-causal is enforced by a monopoly-style determination of differential labor value and the concurrent threat of nationwide degradation without a working-class victory. Thus, in the 1930s, by way of the New Deal, private property maintained its relative power over the public and state spheres. As such, the New Deal reinforced the prohibition against class unity through the formal codification of racial division in state policy and its maintenance of an economically precarious racialized surplus labor army. While the public and state spheres were *politically* free to resist racial reproduction, they were *economically* constrained by the determining power of the private sphere's racial monopoly.¹⁷⁵

Despite this historical entanglement, the particular meanings of race have changed over time and will continue to change. This was evidenced in one instance by the 1930s “expansion of whiteness” in reaction to the Great Migration of black workers.¹⁷⁶ Race and capital are therefore also distinct; analytically, race and capitalism can be separated and their particularities investigated. As such, race functions as a *tool* for capitalism, such that the end of racial reproduction is incidental to capitalism's accumulative aim. In this limited sense, it may be possible to imagine a future of capitalism that is not racialized. Nonetheless, if capitalism could be modified to no longer rely on or reproduce race, capitalism must still meet its structural need for a naturalized and internalized division of labor if it is to maintain the working class's acceptance of a divided and stratified labor force, market expansion to stimulate surplus absorption, and avoidance of outright class conflict. If capital were to then create or adopt a new tool to perform these same essential functions as race, there would be little reason to call that function by a name other than “race.” Further, if the phenomenon that is currently called race were modified such that its operative significance was other than its four functions for capital, it would no longer be worthwhile to call that phenomenon “race.” To continue calling this new phenomenon by the name of race would therefore trace a historical lineage on the basis of the phenomenon's appearance rather than its real function, and consequently maintain the real phenomenon in its mystifying operation—precisely the function that race now serves.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, it is unclear why such a hypothetical detachment of capital from race

¹⁷⁴ This is the stark reality of socially necessary false consciousness.

¹⁷⁵ See Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 1-26.

¹⁷⁶ Painter, *The History of White People*, 311-326, 343-373; Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness*.

¹⁷⁷ It was the revolutionary transition from feudalism to capitalism that distinguishes today's phenomenon of race from earlier intra-European concepts of race despite some similarities in name and attribute. Because capitalism revolutionized the real function of race, its significance was also transformed, although not instantaneously. Similarly, while race would likely persist in a socialist period of transition for some time, its function would be revolutionized, eventually resulting in its obsolescence and abolition. Because demythologized language refers to objects themselves, tracing the mystified appearance of race across revolutions in its real operation reproduces its mythical quality.

would be desirable: exploitation, expropriation, alienation, and impending total environmental collapse are abhorrent aspects of capitalism even if they are not colored by race. Thus, while race, in its historically particular manifestation, is not essential to capitalism, the form of race is commensurate with capitalism's essential needs. Consequently, race-based interventions that do not account for capital's structural independence of historically specific racial meanings cannot comprehensively challenge race and capitalism together.

Yet, this discussion of the hypothetical future of race is itself an analytical abstraction. Rather, race and capitalism are developed historically, by drawing on the resources that are immediately available for their reproduction or transformation. Indeed, mid-twentieth century monopoly capitalism, and perhaps even capitalism from its very inception, has been racialized by its adoption and development of race as a tool of its own reproduction.¹⁷⁸ Future transformations of race, capitalism, and their mutual entanglement will be no different because race continues to meet capitalism's needs. As such, it is more practical for capitalists to adapt the existing tool while maintaining its essential function, even in the face of resistance. Therefore, capitalism will continue to mobilize race towards its end of surplus accumulation. Consequently, the significance of an analytical separation of race and capitalism is transformed when it is contextualized by the historical stage upon which racial and capitalist development takes place. Therefore, both the form of race and its historical particularity are of great importance to capitalism's operation. Anti-capitalism thus requires racial interventions if capitalism is to be comprehensively challenged, and anti-racism requires class interventions if race is to be comprehensively challenged. The structural and historical attributes of race and capital must therefore be analyzed in dialectical relation to one another.

However, race and capital are not of equal weight such an analysis. Class analysis is universal; it reveals general operations of systems that organize production and distribution of basic resources needed for survival. Any further analysis must be rooted in class analysis. Racialized subjects are therefore included in the category of class, even though class does not automatically capture all of its own internal divisions.¹⁷⁹ Racial analysis thus characterizes one axis of particularity within a class analysis and is therefore of great importance for a robust analysis of class. Contrary to Robinson's conflation of race and capitalism, and Mills's transposition of race for capitalism, I thus use the term

¹⁷⁸ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 1-28.

¹⁷⁹ "[T]he category of totality does not reduce its various elements to an undifferentiated uniformity, to identity. The apparent independence and autonomy which they possess in the capitalist system of production is an illusion only in so far as they are involved in a dynamic dialectical relationship with one another and can be thought of as the dynamic dialectical aspects of an equally dynamic and dialectical whole." Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 12-13.

“capitalist racial monopoly” to invoke this dialectical structural and historical entanglement of race and capitalism.

Emergence of the Racial Liberation Movement

In the mid-twentieth century, this entanglement of race and capitalism was characterized by U.S. capital’s racial monopoly. Although 1930s New Deal policies did assist many precarious Americans, the U.S. economy did not emerge from the Great Depression until the private sphere’s surplus could be absorbed by the external stimulus of World War II.¹⁸⁰ Then, with the wartime expansion of industry and backlog of domestic demand after the war, New Deal domestic projects expanded beyond the constraints of the Great Depression.¹⁸¹ However, racial discrimination still determined the distribution of New Deal benefits. As such, the concurrent public, private, and state legitimations of racial segregation would characterize American social relations throughout the 1940s, 50s, and 60s.¹⁸² Indeed, in the wake of World War II, the U.S. increasingly developed standing domestic policing institutions on local, state, and national levels to enforce the racialized private property relations of the New Deal.¹⁸³ As such, the U.S. state progressively assumed greater responsibility for racialized mediation of private and public interests during the mid-twentieth century.

As both Mills and Marx point out, however, the working class took part in the active construction of mid-twentieth century racial segregation.¹⁸⁴ This also meant that resistance to the racial social order was possible. Throughout the mid-twentieth century, racialized Others increasingly recognized contradictions in the U.S. racial monopoly. In particular, the popularized racial market narrative and its police enforcement embodied the state’s endorsement of racial segregation in conflict with purported American values of freedom and equality. Recognition of this contradiction delegitimated the New Deal’s appearance to operate in the interests of its citizens rather than private property.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, the fact that racial segregation was managed by the state discredited private representatives’ pivotal claim that the free market was inherently segregated. According to this narrative, racial subordination was the natural state of racial Others, implying that

¹⁸⁰ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 175-175, 222-224, 240-241.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 223-224, 234.

¹⁸² Freund 177, 182, 197.

¹⁸³ David Cunningham, *There’s Something Happening Here: The New Left, The Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 23-29.

¹⁸⁴ Mills, “European Specters,” 157-160, 164-171; Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts,” 58-68.

¹⁸⁵ Nancy Fraser, “Legitimation Crisis? On the Political Contradictions of Financialized Capitalism,” *Critical Historical Studies* (Fall 2015): 167-189.

that economic degradation inheres in the black self as an unalterable condition of black existence. In turn, this narrative legitimated the racialized stratification of the working class and the racialized capitalist market which produces that hierarchy. However, as the state explicitly managed such racial boundaries, black people increasingly recognized that their racialization was not essential to their biology or their socioeconomic status. Rather, racial subordination was constructed by social actors in the private, public, and state spheres. When it was clear that this racial subordination was a contingent reality, resistance was possible. As such, the contradiction of the racial market narrative and the state's management of racial segregation was among the main contradictions around which the racial liberation movement coalesced in the 1950s and 60s, posing a challenge to U.S. capital's racial monopoly.¹⁸⁶

Nonetheless, the racial liberation movement was still constrained by the immanence of race. The movement could not have cohered if such emerging social constructionist critiques amounted to the claim that race was unreal. Rather, the racial liberation movement confronted the reality of race. It was the real contradiction of race as a reflection and determinant of socioeconomic precarity with the narrative of market-granted freedom that had sharpened the black working class's disaffection with the U.S. racial monopoly in the first place. As such, the racial liberation movement organized around the contradictory and socially constructed identity of race with relative socioeconomic status.

This immanent constraint also meant that the racial liberation movement's critical mobilization of race was both drawing on and critiquing race as a capitalist tool. However, the worker's own activity is appropriated by the capitalist class as they control the means of production. Without worker control of the productive means production is directed by the owner such that the character of the product is useful to the capitalist, typically as private property. In this case, race is one such means of production that is managed by the capitalist class. Because the working class does not control this means, its reproduction is directed by capitalists to ensure that it continues to serve historical, divisive, stratifying, and mystifying functions in service of capital. Furthermore, worker control alone is insufficient to guarantee that production will be oriented towards the benefit of the social totality. Indeed, false consciousness among the working class engenders willful production against one's own class interests. Because racialization embodies one such foreclosure of critical

¹⁸⁶ Reed, "The 'Black Revolution,'" 55-70.

consciousness, working class reproduction of racial commodities is likely to embrace the capitalist class's monopoly influence.

Additionally, production should not be narrowly conceived to only include the creation of *physical* commodities. Workers themselves also produced racial ideology through their laboring under and reproduction of the ruling class's racial monopoly. In the case of resistant racial politics, the racial tool of production was not under the exclusive control of the working class. Resistant racial meanings were therefore produced with resources and under conditions that the working class did not control, just as workers transform the physical means of production into commodities under conditions they did not choose. Consequently, even resistant racial politics were subject to capital's appropriation.

This fact of capital's racial monopoly did not mean that the racial politics of the 1950s and 60s racial liberation movement were homogeneously determined. Rather, the movement consisted in a wide array of racial politics, ranging from more reform centered Civil Rights activism to the racial nationalism of many Black Panther Party chapters. As such, the critiques of the social construction of racial significance around which the movement cohered were also politically variable. For instance, the Civil Rights movement and Fred Hampton's Rainbow Coalition embodied different social constructionist critiques of the racial monopoly's contradictions.

Like the racial liberation movement more generally, Civil Rights activism recognized the U.S. state's active role in the constitution and defense of racialized division and precarity as a contradiction of its self-justification that racial segregation was natural and inevitable. However, criticism of this contradiction took shape as the accusation that state sanctioned segregation, such as that explicitly embedded in New Deal policies and enforced by police violence, implied the relative inequality of racial groups, and were therefore prejudicial.¹⁸⁷ In other words, the state had preemptively misrecognized black people as subordinate, and having enshrined this prejudice in law, produced black subordination by identifying black life with real conditions of destitution. Therefore, racial significance hung upon the state's perceptual apparatus, and black degradation was contingently created through the state's social ideation. In this conception of racial social construction, the state's determination of racial significance did not accurately map the reality of race because the meaning of race appears singularly as the prejudicial content of state policy distinct from the reality of racialized life. As such, one aspect of the black working class's resistance of U.S.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 64.

capital's racial monopoly was their transformation of racial meanings to align more closely with their empirical reality than their mythical meanings. However, the mystifying form of race thus disappeared into its abstract state determined meaning. In this way, this social constructionist approach criticized state mystification as an abstract falsehood, rather than a productive mechanism operating to create the real significance of race itself. Therefore, this criticism did not demystify racial monopoly, but rejected it. As such, the resistant racial politics of recognizing the identification of race with market hierarchy as a social construction underestimated the adaptability of racial mystification. As a result, the appeals of Civil Rights activism to state's mediation of private and public antagonism facilitated its appropriation by capital's racial monopoly.¹⁸⁸

In contrast, Hampton's late 1960s Rainbow Coalition exemplified another variation of the racial liberation movement's social constructionist critique, one whose politics were oriented towards the demystification of racial monopoly. The Rainbow Coalition brought together the Black Panthers (a black group), the Young Lords (a Puerto-Rican group), and the Young Patriots (a white group), while acknowledging the salient distinctions between them.¹⁸⁹ This meant recognizing the unique cultural values, motivations, and interests of the respective groups, while organizing their collaboration around their common racial subjection to capital. Their resistance thus took shape in response to state racial management, often New Deal policies and police violence, in contradiction with narratives of inherent racial hierarchy, typically in the form of real racial segregation and racist propaganda. However, the Rainbow Coalition did not interpret racial monopoly's racial myths as lies about racial groups or negations of a racial group's potential, but as productive contradictions realized as race and racial division. Rather, they approached race as a historically contingent distortion of human species-being that organized labor conditions to the benefit of capital, orchestrated uneven resource distribution to stimulate market demands, and ensured that working class consciousness would be internally antagonistic. For this reason, the Coalition worked to reconnect racial politics to the real conditions of racialized life by providing food, education, and

¹⁸⁸ Adolph Reed argues that corporate interests were not causal of the Civil Rights movement; critical social actors agentially resisted the capitalist racial monopoly of the mid-twentieth century. Simultaneously, Reed suggests that "civil rights ideology fit very well with the goals of monopoly capitalism." Indeed, my aim is to instead assess "what elements within the civil rights movement were sufficiently compatible with the social agenda of corporate elites to prompt the latter to acquiesce to and encourage them." Ibid, 60, 64.

¹⁸⁹ Gordon K. Mantler, "Making the 1970s" in *Power to the Poor: Black-Brown Coalition & the Fight for Economic Justice 1960-1974* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 231.; Amy Sonny and James Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* (Brooklyn: Melville House Publishing, 2011), 66-67.

medical care for their communities.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, this meant crossing racial boundaries to forge allyships between racial groups without denying the immanent reality of salient racial divisions. When they organized across such racial boundaries without denying their contingent significance, the Rainbow Coalition demystified and contested capital's racial monopoly. They had begun to build the conditions under which the American working class might refuse to reproduce their alienation as race and private property.

¹⁹⁰ These organizational commitments were not just consequences of the Rainbow Coalition's demystifying approach but were also manifestations of their demystification. Access to these resources challenged capital's racialized precaritization and contested false race consciousness.

IV: THE APPROPRIATION OF CRITICAL RACIAL POLITICS

*The purpose of this new counterintelligence endeavor is to expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities of black nationalist, hate-type organizations and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership, and supporters.*¹⁹¹

—J. Edgar Hoover, *Letter to Special Agents in Charge at FBI Field Offices*

Confronted with the racial liberation movement's contestations of racial monopoly, private and state spheres again reacted. This time, however, their reactions did not only aim to repress racial liberation by overtly retrenching historical antagonisms through a racial division of labor, racialized stimulation of consumption, and the naturalization of racial hierarchy. Rather, through increasingly developed policing institutions like the FBI, state defenses of private interests assumed the appearance of neutrality by appropriating the racialized working class's resistant racial politics.¹⁹² Nonetheless, some racial politics, like the multiracial coalitional politics of Fred Hampton's Rainbow Coalition, were incommensurable with the racial monopoly because their social constructionist critique had begun to demystify racial monopoly and enabled the Coalition to realize multiracial class unity against the interests of capital. As such, the FBI could not avoid outright class conflict with the Rainbow Coalition. It was through this conflict between the racial liberation movement in general, the Rainbow Coalition in particular, and institutions like the FBI, that the post-Civil Rights stage of anti-racist struggle was negotiated as capital's ongoing appropriation of liberatory racial politics.

When present anti-racist projects struggle against this mystifying appropriation, contradictory meanings of race are attached to them, transforming them into allies of the capitalist racial monopoly. While the anti-racist left laments these muddied waters within which liberatory struggle must now be conducted, it has not yet reckoned with a key component of its own theoretical underpinning that has rendered anti-racist politics subject to appropriation.¹⁹³ A closer look at the abstract social constructionism undergirding a wide range of contemporary racial activism reveals its neutral political character: a stance endorsed by the FBI in its mission to “expose,

¹⁹¹ While Hoover only explicitly names “black nationalist hate-type organizations” as the targets of FBI repression, FBI would nonetheless continue its long-standing interference in liberatory racial politics more broadly. See J. Edgar Hoover to All FBI Field Offices, August 25, 1967, in *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars Against Domestic Dissent*, ed. Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 92.

¹⁹² Reed, “The ‘Black Revolution,’” 57.

¹⁹³ This vulnerability is neither an accidental co-incidence of liberal and conservative politics, nor outright theft and corruption of an otherwise resolute politics by the right. Contemporary anti-racism itself also shares in a common abstract approach to processes of social construction. Further, the problem I identify is not a feature of anti-racism *as such*, but an aspect of its dominant manifestation today. There are many approaches to anti-racist work, multiple of which I discuss in this project.

disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize” the racial liberation politics of the 1960s.¹⁹⁴ Exposing this historically sedimented weakness of contemporary racist political economy opens space for the resuscitation of a coalitional political approach to social constructionism that more effectively challenges the mystifying stage of anti-racist struggle today.

The FBI’s Neutral Contradiction

The FBI’s counterintelligence activities in the 1950s and 60s were significantly motivated by the uptake of racial coalitional politics on the American political stage in fear of their potential to unsettle “traditional” American capitalist values.¹⁹⁵ The FBI targeted left-wing racial liberation groups like Fred Hampton’s Rainbow Coalition not only for the violent potential of their methods, but because of their political aims to cross racial boundaries and organize around a common objective interest in subverting the capitalist racial monopoly.¹⁹⁶

In the 1950s, early counterintelligence programs (COINTELPROs), primarily targeted communist groups like the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) for disruption because of their opposition to the American capitalist status quo, the Bureau’s sworn protectee.¹⁹⁷ By the 1960s the FBI had stoked enough conflict in the CPUSA to facilitate the party’s fracture.¹⁹⁸ Yet, in communications between FBI field offices and the Washington headquarters, agents repeatedly describe left-leaning groups as potential threats, particularly black liberation groups ranging in political orientation from reform-centered civil rights activists to black nationalist Black Panther Party (BPP) chapters.¹⁹⁹ Importantly, these documents lack analysis of black liberation groups’ racial politics. The distinct absence of direct concern with black liberation itself in FBI communications indicates that racial liberation groups like the BPP were not alone the targets of Bureau repression, at least early in FBI COINTELPROs. Rather, the FBI intervened in the racial liberation movement because of their perceived *vulnerability* to leftist infiltration.²⁰⁰ For example, the FBI targeted Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with this justification, due to his association with ex-communist party contributor Stanley Levison.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁴ Hoover to All FBI Field Offices, August 25, 1967, 92.

¹⁹⁵ Cunningham, *There’s Something Happening Here*, 95.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 98, 118, 136.; The Bureau did also target racial groups before then, though not as systematically as against CPUSA. As early as 1918, the FBI was intervening in Marcus Garvey’s activism. See Churchill and Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers*, 11-13, 91.

¹⁹⁷ Cunningham, *There’s Something Happening Here*, 27-31; Noam Chomsky, “Introduction,” in *COINTELPRO: The FBI’s Secret War on Political Freedom*, by Nelson Blackstock (New York: Random House, 1975), 6.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 73.

¹⁹⁹ Churchill and Wall, “COINTELPRO – Black Liberation Movement,” 91-164.

²⁰⁰ Cunningham, *There’s Something Happening Here*, 31-33.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 30.

Implicit in this framing, the FBI assumed that left and racial liberation politics are fundamentally different. Indeed, to be “targeted” is to be passive in relation to external activity. As “targets,” black people and the racial liberation movement must have limited agency to self-determine affiliations and common interests with political groups such as those on the left.²⁰² The FBI as a whole and its 1924-1972 director, J. Edgar Hoover, famously harbored such racist sentiments.²⁰³ However, the tangential focus on racial liberation activism as an extension of the FBI’s fight against leftist subversion reveals that the Bureau’s racialized targeting is irreducible to a consequence of its members’ racist attitudes. Rather, the FBI privileged class struggle by organizing its defense of American capitalism in the terms of class-based opposition. In this sense, rising racial struggles were distinct from the class-oriented aims of the FBI. Thus, the Bureau treated leftists as external to, and therefore able to infiltrate, race-centered organizations.

Nonetheless, the FBI identified the racial liberation movement as an important site of organized political power. Racial liberation groups posed a significant threat to the American status quo when allied with the left in a comprehensive anti-racist anti-capitalist project that identified racist private and state oppression as mechanisms of capitalism. This rising critical race consciousness represented the capitalist class’s weakening racial monopoly; that is, capital’s grip on race as a real social mechanism that renders capitalist hierarchies natural, normal, and unalterable.²⁰⁴ The FBI could not allow racialization to be revealed as a contradiction of racialized peoples’ own interests because it is an important method of placating all racial groups in the face of the unequal, dehumanizing, and exploitative living conditions characteristic of capitalism.²⁰⁵ Thus, the FBI strove to ensure the reproduction of racial mystification as against critical race consciousness. The FBI understood racial struggle as an open battleground wherein racial liberation organizations could be mobilized in favor of either its own interests or those of the working-class left. As such, the reality of racism under capitalism was simply coincidental rather than a tool of capitalist stratification. This claim relies on the premise that race is not constructed within the socio-politically partial system of

²⁰² This narrative is simply false. Examples of self-chosen BIPOC leftists are bountiful, including such well-known figures as W.E.B. du Bois.

²⁰³ Cunningham, *There’s Something Happening Here*, 113-117; Nelson Blackstock, *COINTELPRO: The FBI’s Secret War on Political Freedom* (New York: Random House, 1975), 84-109.

²⁰⁴ This is not a misrepresentation of capitalist hierarchies but the operational manifestation of race as a product and tool of capitalism. See Jennifer Ponce de León and Gabriel Rockhill, “Toward a Compositional Model of Ideology: Materialism, Aesthetics, and Cultural Revolution,” *Philosophy Today* 64, no.1 (April 2020): 97-98.

²⁰⁵ Bhattacharya, “How Not to Skip Class,” 68-93.; Fraser, “Expropriation and Exploitation,” 167-175.

capitalism such that race is a normal, natural, and distinct phenomenon outside the realm of human control, and is therefore politically neutral.

Despite their representation of race as politically neutral, the FBI's behavior indicates that it was a common interest between left and racial liberation struggle that brought the Bureau to be concerned with the racial liberation movement in the first place. In other words, the FBI understood race as a neutral phenomenon, while treating racial difference as grounded in the politically non-neutral reality of capitalism.²⁰⁶ This contradiction of neutral and conservative conceptions of the function of race characterizes the FBI's treatment of racial liberation relative to left politics. Consequently, capitalist economics could be preserved and adapted to integrate a politics of racial equality, and racial liberation politics molded to incorporate capitalist economics.²⁰⁷

In this sense, the FBI designed their counterintelligence interventions not to eliminate the racial liberation movement but to select from its multiple formations those theories and praxes that would not comprehensively challenge capitalism or its racial monopoly. Such approaches to racial liberation are therefore content to attempt the resolution of racial struggles within the confines of capitalism's aim of accumulation over and against the material, social, and existential needs of human beings.²⁰⁸ Further, FBI COINTELPROs strove to ensure that those approaches to racial struggle became dominant in activist spheres and popular consciousness and thereby reconstitute racial liberation as a neutral political stance. In Hoover's words, the FBI aimed to "expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise *neutralize*" the racial liberation politics of the 1960s.²⁰⁹ Due in part to its proliferation by FBI COINTELPROs, this neutral/conservative contradiction has become a cornerstone of many contemporary racist and anti-racist politics.²¹⁰ COINTELPRO interventions in Fred Hampton's Rainbow Coalition illustrate the Bureau's neutralizing impact on the racial politics of the left.

From Mystification and Assassination to Neutral Abstraction

In March of 1968 FBI director J. Edgar Hoover sent a memo to the special agents in charge of monitoring "black nationalist-hate groups" in 41 cities across the U.S., including Chicago, where

²⁰⁶ As Theodor Adorno suggests, neutrality, or relativism, is itself a consequence of a bourgeois productive mode that can neither overcome its non-neutral determination nor admit to this limitation. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 35-37.

²⁰⁷ Reed, "The 'Black Revolution,'" 56-69.

²⁰⁸ Bhattacharya, "How Not to Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class," 68-93; Foster, Clark, and York, *The Ecological Rift*, 13-49.

²⁰⁹ Hoover to All FBI Field Offices, August 25, 1967, 92. Emphasis my own.

²¹⁰ For example, see Mills "European Specters," 147-172.

Fred Hampton was Chairman of the city's Black Panther Party chapter.²¹¹ The memo details several long-term goals of the COINTELPROs. Hoover explicitly states as the first goal the prevention of coalitions of racial liberation groups, in particular, militant black nationalist groups.²¹² Hoover then expresses concern with the unifying power of such coalitions, suggesting that they could initiate “a true black revolution.”²¹³ Hoover's memo proceeds to identify several counterintelligence strategies to maximize the COINTELPRO's effectiveness. He directs field offices to discredit coalitional racial liberation organizations and leaders as perceived by three groups: “the responsible Negro community,” the white community in general consisting in both “responsible” white people and sympathetic liberals, and the groups’ “followers,” particularly, “negro radicals.”²¹⁴ FBI field offices across the U.S. then escalated their defamation campaigns against racial liberation groups, collaborating with news sources, documentary teams, and local police to publicly represent racial liberation organizations as self-interested, weak-willed, inarticulate, and unpredictably violent.²¹⁵

For example, when the FBI learned of Fred Hampton's plan to form an allegiance with the Chicago gang, the Blackstone Rangers, in early 1969, the Bureau produced and sent a letter to the leader of the Blackstone Rangers, Jeff Fort.²¹⁶ In the name of an anonymous Black Panther Party associate, the letter warned that Hampton had ordered Fort's murder in retaliation over a territorial dispute.²¹⁷ Through this falsified letter, the FBI hoped to intensify animosity between the two groups, thereby preemptively disrupting their possible coalition.²¹⁸ The FBI's letter amplified Fort's hesitance to meet with Hampton, thus inhibiting Hampton's capacity to organize a coalition. Similar letter impersonations were distributed to another black gang, the Maus Maus, the Young Lords, the Young Patriots, and Students for a Democratic Society in attempts to fracture their emerging coalitions with the Chicago BPP.²¹⁹ However, this particular tactic did not ultimately succeed in dissolving a relationship between the Chicago BPP and the Blackstone Rangers nor in dissolving

²¹¹ J. Edgar Hoover to All FBI Field Offices, March 4, 1968, in Churchill and Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers*, 108-111.

²¹² Hoover to All FBI Field Offices, March 4, 1968, 108-111.

²¹³ *Ibid*, 108-111.

²¹⁴ *Ibid*, 108-111; While this memo directly addresses black liberation groups, it is representative of the strategies used against the American Indian Movement, the Communist Party USA, the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, and the New Left, which were also often oriented towards generating racialized disunity.

²¹⁵ J. Edgar Hoover to All FBI Field Offices, August 5, 1968, in Churchill and Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers*, 118-119; FBI St. Louis Field Office to J. Edgar Hoover, May 26, 1969, in Churchill and Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers*, 116; Churchill and Wall, “COINTELPRO – Black Liberation Movement,” 117; Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here*, 15-41.

²¹⁶ Churchill and Wall, “COINTELPRO – Black Liberation Movement,” 135-139.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, 135-139.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, 135-139.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, 139.

Hampton's growing Rainbow Coalition in general. It nonetheless limited the efficacy of Hampton's coalitional political aims and was successfully employed against other possible racial liberation coalitions nationwide.²²⁰

Another of the FBI's mystifying defamation tactics aimed to distort the Rainbow Coalition's appearance to other antagonistic groups and the public by distributing Bureau-produced cartoons in the name of the BPP and other groups like the United Slaves.²²¹ These cartoons represented each group's threats and perceived fears to the other, stimulating their further animosity and provoking violence.²²² Simultaneously, prolific Bureau-authored news articles, again presented as the news agencies' own journalism, misrepresented the group's tensions as gang rivalry, deceitfully neglecting assessment of their real political aims and ideological differences.²²³ Alongside such "neutral" reporting, the cartoons and the groups' resultant hostility then appeared to the public as empty and erratic violence originating from the groups themselves. Using similar public-facing methods, the FBI further pointed to the BPP's condemnation of Zionist expansion to cultivate the specifically racialized misconception that the BPP was antisemitic.²²⁴ Together, these tactics guided public perception toward misinterpretation of the Rainbow Coalition as racially self-interested gang.

The FBI also used their provocations as justification for more direct police and legal intervention. With the critical perception of the revolutionary wing of the racial liberation movement popularly legitimated and violence realized, the Bureau easily arrested Coalition leaders and pressured courts to prosecute them under dubious or even false charges.²²⁵ For instance, in summer 1969, Fred Hampton was falsely convicted of an ice-cream truck robbery and sentenced to two to five years in prison based not on evidence of the crime, but on his revolutionary political stance.²²⁶ Indeed, Hoover's FBI communications plainly demand the falsification of evidence against political prisoners like Hampton. Hoover writes, "[the] purpose of counterintelligence action is to disrupt [the] BPP and it is immaterial whether facts exist to substantiate the charge."²²⁷ This tactic of police

²²⁰ Ibid, 135-139.

²²¹ Ibid, 130-131.

²²² Ibid, 130-133.

²²³ Hoover to All FBI Field Offices, August 5, 1968, 118-119; FBI St. Louis Field Office to Hoover, May 26, 1969, 116; Churchill and Wall, "COINTELPRO – Black Liberation Movement," 117, 130.

²²⁴ Ibid, 135. This strategy inaccurately identified Jewish people in general with an imperial project, displacing the FBI's own racist presumptions onto the BPP.

²²⁵ Ibid, 112, 123, 129, 133, 140, 142, 146-148, 157.

²²⁶ After two months Hampton was released on an appeal bond arranged by BPP lawyers. See Jeffrey Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and the Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2019), 47-53.

²²⁷ J. Edgar Hoover to All FBI Field Offices, September 16, 1970, in Churchill and Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers*, 150.

harassment and wrongful imprisonment both directly inhibited Hampton's coalitional organizing and demonstrated the alleged criminality of Coalition leadership to the public, thereby further entrenching popular distortions of coalitional politics.

Misrepresentation of the Rainbow Coalition both to the public and sympathetic groups had the effect of mythologizing their coalitional aims. While Hampton continued to openly pursue coalitional racial liberation, the FBI's proliferation of antagonistic counter-messages rendered the Rainbow Coalitions' politics suspect. When the public was confronted with the Coalition's anti-racist anti-capitalist message, its meaning had been preemptively warped by the FBI to signify the BPP's deception to achieve their own dominance against the interests of other racial and political groups.²²⁸ Even while the Coalition's resistant message was circulated, this new meaning had been attached to it by the FBI. At best, the public's distinction of coalitional politics from a hierarchical power grab was made difficult. At worst, coalitional resistant meanings were rendered antagonistic to racial liberation. Given that the FBI primarily targeted the left-wing of the racial liberation movement, this strategy resulted in the FBI's displacement of its own patronizing assumption that black racial liberation leaders were primarily self-interested onto the left.²²⁹ Racial liberation politics and left politics were thereby disconnected from their common basis in their rejection of the real racial dehumanization and exploitation characteristic of capitalist racial monopoly.

Thus, the FBI's mystifying defamation tactic had three main consequences that were important in shaping the contemporary terrain of anti-racist struggle. First, as described above, it drove a wedge between left and anti-racist politics.²³⁰ Because the objective interest of the racialized working class is only intelligible in the context of the whole of society and because this view is the politically partial position of the left, the FBI's division of left and anti-racist politics at once reconstituted race as radically particular phenomenon transcending the social totality and therefore also separate from the objective basis that is necessary for truly anti-racist praxis.²³¹ Thus, race and anti-racism were simultaneously *neutralized* and *abstracted*. Then, without a common basis of struggle,

²²⁸ Here, I invoke Roland Barthes' articulation of the structure of myth to express the parasitic warping of liberatory politics through their mythologization. See Barthes, "Myth Today," 223-231.

²²⁹ Churchill and Wall, "COINTELPRO – Black Liberation Movement," 91-164.

²³⁰ Blackstock, *COINTELPRO*, 110-118.

²³¹ "By relating consciousness to the whole of society it becomes possible to infer the thoughts and feelings which [humans] would have in a particular situation if they were *able* to assess both it and the interests arising from it in their impact on immediate action and on the whole structure of society. That is to say, it would be possible to infer the thoughts and feelings appropriate to their objective situation." Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 51. For further analysis of the politically partial character of revolutionary consciousness of the objective social totality, see Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 55-68; Barthes, "Myth Today," 254-264.

groups hesitant of the anti-racist anti-capitalist meaning of racial coalitional politics could then only interpret the intentions of resistant groups through the lens of racial difference. Thus constrained to the bourgeois right-wing view of abstract racial particularity, the necessary basis of multiracial coalition in real common interest was mystified and coalition inhibited. Second, through the cleansing of racial politics of economic critiques, the racial political form was made useful to any group regardless of the real content of their claims.²³² The lack of an objective basis for racial politics meant that any racial group could organize their politics around race, and mobilize it towards any chosen end, while maintaining the language of racial liberation. Thereafter, racial liberation groups participating in racial politics without a comprehensive economic critique would be rendered neutral and therefore miss the opportunity to form coalitional power. However, as described above, this neutrality is self-contradictory: abstract racial politics cannot be mobilized to *any* end. The only political goals foreclosed by this conception of race are those that challenge capitalism and its racial monopoly, that is, coalitional racial liberation politics like that of the Rainbow Coalition. Third, in distancing racial groups' interests from their objective basis, the FBI's mystifying muddy-waters tactic divided racial groups from one another and from the left. Alongside the unavoidable antagonism between the FBI's conservative neutral politics and the Rainbow Coalition's coalitional left racial liberation politics, the postulation of an essential distinction between racial liberation and the left meant that revolutionary groups like the Rainbow Coalition must have already been infiltrated by leftists. Consequently, the Rainbow Coalition was reframed as a direct target for direct FBI repression. Thus, the racial liberation movement's factions and leaders who most firmly opposed capitalism were slated for elimination.

The second goal Hoover outlined in his 1968 memo famously aims to “prevent the rise of a ‘messiah’ who could unify” the racial liberation movement.²³³ Fred Hampton's and the Rainbow Coalition's marked resilience in the face of mystifying counterintelligence identified Hampton as potentially one such “messiah.” On December 4th, 1969, the FBI assassinated Fred Hampton in his sleep.²³⁴ In this way, the FBI systematically eliminated the leading proponents of a view of racial monopoly, leaving the more capitalist-sympathetic approaches to form the base of contemporary anti-racist struggle.²³⁵ Nonetheless, the surviving ideas sustained an indispensable drive to articulate

²³² Reed, *Class Notes*, 167.

²³³ Hoover to All FBI Field Offices, March 4, 1968, 108-111.

²³⁴ Churchill and Wall, “COINTELPRO – Black Liberation Movement,” 139-140; Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton*, 72.

²³⁵ Importantly, not all radical figures were eliminated, nor were all of those who weathered the repression enemies of coalitional left racial liberation politics.

and overcome racism by drawing on any resource with potential to progress towards an anti-racist end.²³⁶ Among the most significant contributions to a larger anti-racist project is a theory of social construction.

The Liberatory Limit of Abstract Social Constructionism

Rising in prominence throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, scholarship of race has organized itself around the fundamental premise that phenomena such as race, gender, and sexuality are not essential features of human bodies. Instead, their genesis can be found in complex social processes like childhood psychological development, linguistic practices, institutional reform, and economic developments. Unlike social constructionism, biological and racial market essentialism both constitutes and identifies certain social groups as particularly vulnerable to exploitation and expropriation, forming a self-legitimizing counterargument to these groups' grievances.²³⁷ For example, biological essentialists use racial features like purported lower intelligence, diminished social capacity, hypersexuality, and bodily strength to characterize black people's bodies such that the natural state of black people appears to the biological essentialist as best suited for enslavement, exploitation, and degradation. Additionally, racial market narratives suggesting that the free market is fundamentally racially segregated identify the historical fact of black subordination as an unalterable limitation of reality as such. Thus, critical attention is directed away from the socioeconomic processes of monopoly capitalism that reproduce racialized subordination through mobilization of working class precarity, state policies, and the creation of justificatory commodified racial identities.²³⁸ For this reason, a social constructionist critique is important for identifying the contingency of subordination and possibilities for liberation.

However, it is possible for a social constructionist stance to similarly naturalize racial essences by locating them not in biology, but in abstract social categories like identities. This is the embodiment of a paradigmatic commitment to an approach that is only attentive to sociopolitical dynamics removed from economic realities. In this way, the function of abstract social constructionism is a truncation of analysis of the material determinants of racialized life.²³⁹ In such a

²³⁶ As Lukács insists, bourgeois class consciousness, like that embodied and propounded by the FBI, unconsciously also produces its own opposition in the form of proletarian resistance. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 61-64.

²³⁷ Michael Dawson, "Hidden in Plain Sight: A Note on Legitimation Crises and the Racial Order," *Critical Historical Studies* (Spring 2016): 149, 155.; Fraser, "Expropriation and Exploitation" 163-178.; Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields. *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London: Verso Books, 2012), 1-74.

²³⁸ Reed, *Class Notes*, 135.

²³⁹ This is not an internal inconsistency. The dissonance of abstract social constructionism's function and immanent meaning constitute part of its mythical form. See Barthes, "Myth Today," 233.

framework, race is not assessed as a real, operative tool of socioeconomic organization. Acknowledgement of its reality has already been foreclosed by an over-corrective reaction against biological or market determinism. This reaction neglects differentiation between contingent, human-created, self-contradictory realities, and a reality that preexists human conscious activity and which continually constrains and enables that conscious activity.²⁴⁰ This limitation is both the purpose and premise upon which abstract social constructionism relies.²⁴¹

Abstract social constructionism is correctly concerned with the failure of essentializing biological and market narratives to differentiate between ideologically constituted reality and the actual conditions of possibility for ideological realization of race. Indeed, biological and market narratives of race treat this contradictory whole of their immanence as natural, inevitable, and incontestable truth.²⁴² However, abstract social constructionism makes the same fundamental error, though it responds to that error differently. Rather than naturalizing racist contradictions, abstract social constructionism chooses to assess both realized ideological contradictions and objective material conditions as unnatural, contingent, and contestable.²⁴³ This social constructionist stance neglects assessment of the objective operation of race as a realized phenomenon (re)born from, maintained by, and constituting its own racialized capitalist context. In other words, this abstraction necessitates a neutral stance towards the grounding of political claims.²⁴⁴ This hasty maneuver results in the treatment of race as nothing more than an unreal abstraction relative to which groups of people identify themselves as a way of naming their place in the world.²⁴⁵ Such a description is incomplete: it only accounts for the reality propounded by a system of racial formation which assesses socioeconomic problems on the basis of race rather than disrupting race's condition of

²⁴⁰ Here, I draw on Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist politics of human being at the intersection of immanence and transcendence, as well as Karl Marx's material grounding of consciousness. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 229, 267.; Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998), 29-102. Also see Reed, "The 'Black Revolution,'" 70.

²⁴¹ "[D]ebates that juxtapose identity politics or cultural politics to class politics are miscast. Cultural politics and identity politics are class politics." Reed, *Class Notes*, xxii. See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 36-37.

²⁴² Just like Adorno's relativist, the biological essentialist retreats to a vulgar materialism in avoidance of their socioeconomic grounding. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 36.

²⁴³ Social constructionist critique reveals the vulgar materialism of biological determinism to be reliant upon social processes. Biological essentialism is in this sense already abstract, so the abstraction of social constructionism is not its novel aspect. What is new is the adaptation of bourgeois abstraction to absorb, limit, and nullify social constructionist critique. In denying their own partiality by flattening the relationship between nature and human production, both biological essentialism and abstract social constructionism share in the ironic confirmation of their partiality as simultaneous products and tools of the same bourgeois mode of production. Their difference is whether they proclaim a material or social grounding, but they are nonetheless both. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 35-37. Lukács notes, "Idealism succumbs here to the delusion of confusing the intellectual reproduction of reality with the actual structure of reality itself." See Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 9. Also see Reed, *Class Notes*, xxi.

²⁴⁴ Raymond Geuss, "Ideology" in *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 4-12.

²⁴⁵ Descriptively, this articulation of racial identity yields many useful insights about racialized being.

possibility: the capitalist racial monopoly.²⁴⁶ In this sense, the abstract social constructionist view loses its critical distance through its reaction to biological and market essentialism.²⁴⁷ Now, all forms of reality, from those contradictions constituted by human activity to existence itself, are represented as wholly contingent and malleable to human will. Thus, the meaning of racial identity can be reclaimed from its degrading history as a signifier of inherent subhuman inferiority to a venerable facet of human existence.²⁴⁸ In this way, abstract social constructionism eschews criticism of racialized reality in favor of the realized mystical immanence of race. By participating in the construction of politics independent from the economic reality by which capitalism and its racial monopoly are maintained, this social constructionist view legitimates the meaning of race as innocuous, normal, and natural.²⁴⁹

Such politics abstracted from economics assume human transcendence of materiality, leaving open the probability that a plurality of meanings will be attached to the real socioeconomic operation of race with no grounding that can legitimate one ascription of meaning over another.²⁵⁰ Thus, even far-right former or would-be advocates of biological or market essentialism can attach their own meaning to race within an abstract constructionist paradigm. Indeed, right-wing reactionaries attribute the cause of increasing white working-class precarity to subordinated racial groups and identify such groups' racial nature as the cause of right-wing subordinating reaction.²⁵¹ Further, the economic power of capital takes command of racial identity productions of both the right and left, scapegoating each to the other as the cause of their respective struggles. Yet, anti-racist abstract social constructionism requires a grounding to make its liberatory claim against racism. Confronted with the pluralistic racial productions of capital, distorted racial meanings of the right, and its own detachment of race from reality, abstract social constructionism finds its grounding in the only remaining discernible difference between these visions of race: the racial identities of those it intends to defend.²⁵² Indeed, this prioritization of race as the cause of political differences is a consequence of the FBI's mystifying detachment of left and liberatory race politics.

²⁴⁶ The mystification does not hide the truth of race, rather the fact of racial mystification hides in its immanent manifestation as descriptively complete. See Barthes, "Myth Today," 227, 231.

²⁴⁷ The "alien" is foreclosed. Only immanence remains. See Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 60.

²⁴⁸ "This society turns everything it touches into a potential source of progress *and* exploitation, of drudgery *and* satisfaction, of freedom *and* of oppression." Race is no exception. See Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 79-81; Reed, "The 'Black Revolution,'" 70.

²⁴⁹ Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 1-26.

²⁵⁰ Barthes, "Myth Today," 242.

²⁵¹ Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, 174-188.

²⁵² For example, see Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," 139-167.

When race is reinscribed in such an abstract identity form as the foundation of liberatory struggle, it is hypostatized as an unchallengeable feature of human existence.²⁵³ While the meanings ascribed to race may be contested and change over time, its real structure remains operative as a politically partial, divisive, naturalizing, and legitimating tool of capitalism and its monopolistic instantiation of racial hierarchy.²⁵⁴ The abstract social constructionist approach has therefore done the work of adapting the political appearance of race to be liberatory by legitimating race as it already exists without altering its fundamental form.²⁵⁵ Thus, the anti-racist social constructionism that has weathered FBI repression by adopting the Bureau's purportedly neutral stance also harbors the same contradiction as the FBI COINTELPROs. Both preemptively foreclose coalitional politics and in so doing reveal a political allegiance with capitalist racial monopoly.

Today, a wide range of purportedly liberatory racial politics from aggrieved white ethnonationalism to "inclusive" multiracial capitalism appropriate liberatory language and hypostasize race, thereby rendering all racial politics equally suspect and legitimate. Having taken shape in the wake of FBI interventions, abstract neutral social constructionist analysis implicitly assumes that it does not need an objective grounding in a strategic rejection of racial monopoly to meet its anti-racist goals. As a result, the abstract neutral social constructionist stance misses the critical distinction between the ideologically mediated reality of contemporary race relations and the real lives of racialized subjects themselves.²⁵⁶ Confronted with the organizational inhibitions resultant of these muddy waters, abstract social constructionism finds itself forced to either throw out the baby with the bathwater or keep them both. Neither answer suits anti-racist ends.

Importantly, anti-racist social constructionists are far from bearing full responsibility for this function. This limiting adaptation of social constructionist critique was made necessary by the political upheaval of the 1950s and 60s when racial liberation movements threatened capitalism and its racial monopoly. To defend its mystifying division of politics and economics and the hierarchies by which it stratifies capital, the U.S. bourgeois state mobilized multiple institutions like the FBI which considerably shaped the ideological terrain of the racial liberation movement. While the

²⁵³ "Truth became a function of the speaker's 'blackness.'" See Reed, "The 'Black Revolution,'" 68. For example, see George Yancy, *Backlash: What Happens When We Talk Honestly About Racism in America* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

²⁵⁴ Fraser, "Expropriation and Exploitation" 163-178.

²⁵⁵ Abstract social constructionist stances may emphasize the malleability of race. This truth is not incompatible with my point here, as the historical contingency of race means that particular racial meanings have and will change over time. However, within an abstract social constructionist framework, this change cannot alter the existence or fundamental socioeconomic function of race. See Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness*.

²⁵⁶ Geuss, "Ideology," 4-12.

abstraction of social constructionist critique is also not a direct consequence of FBI counterintelligence, it nonetheless significantly confined the conceivable range of objections to racism to those which were compatible with the interests of capitalism.²⁵⁷ In this sense, the FBI counterintelligence of the late 1960s has been largely successful in neutralizing racial liberation through the repression of the movement's objective interest in multiracial coalitional left politics.²⁵⁸

Resuscitating Coalitional Politics to Re-Politicize Social Constructionism

We are not left without hope for a robust and successful anti-racist project. This history reveals the viability of a revival of coalitional politics for an anti-racist project. The reactions of both the 1960s era FBI and the "neutral" capitalist political order it helped constitute are motivated by a specter sedimented in their own structures' history: coalitional politics. Formal political racial neutrality detached from economic reality must necessarily reject multiracial coalitional politics, lest it assume a distinctly anti-racist anti-capitalist political stance, rather than merely accommodate anti-racism equally alongside its ethnonationalist inverse. As a result, those political claims that insist upon bridging the political/economic rift by emphasizing real collective interests and those which insist upon abstracted racial politics are mutually incompatible. An anti-racist strategy that does not organize itself around the unity of politics and economics - and therefore also common interests between racial groups - will remain stuck in the muddied waters of anti-racist struggle today.

A coalitional political strategy sutures politics and economics, reattaching race to its functional meaning. As such, coalitional politics offer a useful corrective by revealing contradictory neutrality as a key weakness in the capacity of capitalism to legitimate and reproduce itself.²⁵⁹ Against a new racial coalitional politics, the capitalist racial monopoly would no longer be able to maintain its false neutrality. The conflict in which anti-racism is already embroiled would then be laid bare.

Today, the stage of racial liberation struggle differs from the risks encountered by Hampton's Rainbow Coalition in one key respect: hypostatized abstract racial social constructionism has been popularly adopted, owing to its reproduction by private media, corporate diversity initiatives, reactionary groups, and electoral political stunts. In the 1960s, however, the state's blatant resistance to overturning Jim Crow segregation in contradiction to American values of equality and freedom enabled Civil Rights, Black Power, and New Left organizations to intelligibly confront the starkly unjust status quo.²⁶⁰ In response, instead of bringing people of color under the protection of

²⁵⁷ Churchill and Wall, "COINTELPRO – Black Liberation Movement", 117.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 117.

²⁵⁹ Bhattacharya, "How Not to Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class," 68-93.

²⁶⁰ Nancy Fraser, "Legitimation Crisis?," 167-189.

the state alongside explicit protections of white interests, the state's inclusion of people of color amounted to the privatization of racial politics.²⁶¹ In other words, capitalism maintained its division of politics and economics, while conceding to racial liberation activism, thereby completing the abstraction of racial politics and maintaining its racial monopoly.²⁶²

Now, this abstract racial neutrality is the norm. When Hampton's Rainbow Coalition encountered the FBI, it fought the emergence and negotiation of the very mystification that has taken root today. Anti-racist politics that target the capitalist racial monopoly itself are no longer intelligible to a broad audience in the muddied waters of neutralized racial struggle. Thus, coalitional politics cannot simply be revived in its earlier form without adaptations to account for this change in the stage of racial conflict. For this reason, coalitional politics must foreground two further concurrent aspects of a coalitional political strategy, which together present a stronger approach to social constructionism that is more adequate to contemporary struggle.

First, a coalitional political strategy organizes *around* real racial differences. It must therefore approach race as a real phenomenon that bears material consequences for all racialized peoples. Racialized Others not only do not receive racial benefits from a hierarchical racial system but are actively suppressed in their efforts to realize their full human activity. Even the relatively privileged face a truncation of their full capacity for human connection.²⁶³ Because their relative freedom relies on the subordination of another racial group, this freedom is constrained to the limits of race. Crossing racial lines disrupts the racial division that is the condition of possibility for their relative advantage. Thus, the privileged group's freedom is confined by the limitation of the freedom of a racialized Other. In this way, a further consequence of race that impacts both relatively advantaged and relatively disadvantaged racialized subjects is their mutual antagonism, which forecloses the possibility of their concerted activity to overcome limitations to their collective full humanity. Because this relative difference is that which makes racial groups distinct, any given racialized person or group is constrained to antagonism to the extent that they maintain racial difference as a premise or goal of their struggle.²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 1-26.

²⁶² This is an example of the achievement of "cultural equality while preserving domination" through the popular production of commodified liberatory aesthetics. See Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 67.

²⁶³ Here, I invoke Simone de Beauvoir's articulation of freedom as collective and reciprocal, alongside the Combahee River Collective. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 9, 683-708.; The Combahee River Collective, "The Combahee River Collective Statement" in *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* ed. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 22-23.

²⁶⁴ This is alienation from the human social totality and consequently also from the self, as articulated by Marx. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 62-66. Race, for both the relatively privileged and the oppressed, is

Coalitional politics refuse to evade this reality by retreating to an abstract notion of race wherein racial differences are easily surmounted by the re-valuation of difference. Rather, coalitional politics recognize that racial difference is real, impactful, and meaningful. This means that liberatory politics cannot afford to be racially neutral but must organize around the reality of race. For instance, Hampton's Rainbow Coalition brought together the black, Puerto-Rican, and white groups, while acknowledging the salient distinctions between them.²⁶⁵ In doing so, the Rainbow Coalition recognized the unique cultural values, motivations, and interests of the respective groups, while organizing their collaboration around their common racial subjection to capital. In this way, a coalitional political strategy does not hastily push together groups with real differences as though their collaboration would automatically engender homogenization, nor re-value, leave unaltered, and hypostatize their differences. Race is thus treated as real, which means that it carries a complex web of problems and values that must be accounted for in the organization of liberatory struggle.

Second, a coalitional political strategy organizes *between* racial differences. Recognition of racial difference is not the priority of coalitional politics. Such an emphasis lends itself to fractionalization, rather than unity. These fault lines will be exploited by organizations like the FBI that are antagonistic to multiracial working-class unity. Indeed, FBI COINTELPRO interventions sought to cultivate disunity in liberatory groups by emphasizing and dramatizing existing differences to push liberatory organizations towards fractionalization, disunity, and as a result, weaker collective power.²⁶⁶ Overemphasis of internal differences not only leaves a group vulnerable to antagonistic external intervention, but also participates in its own dissolution.

Coalitional politics instead place greater emphasis on that which is common among distinct groups. All racialized persons experience alienation from their human species-being due to the real function of their racialization, even as relative differences persist between them.²⁶⁷ However, these differences are not natural transhistorical necessities, but the result of real, contingent, socioeconomic processes. In other words, racial differences share in both their reiteration by and within capitalism, and their function to legitimate the differential evaluation of human life upon which capitalism depends to extract and realize surplus value, and prevent racialized workers'

essentially a form of human alienation, though its content differs according to the specific meanings attached to various groups.

²⁶⁵ Mantler, "Making the 1970s," 231; Sonny and Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power*, 66-67.

²⁶⁶ Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here*, 127.

²⁶⁷ For a further explanation of alienation as a distancing from full humanity, see Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 58-79 and Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), xi-xvii, 206. This is an issue that I expand upon elsewhere.

collective withholding of their labor to demand fully human evaluation.²⁶⁸ Any maintenance of mutual antagonism could be mobilized by the external force of racial monopoly to stoke fears of a reorganization of racial hierarchy in reaction against liberatory movement. As such, the collective organization of coalitional politics both defends against its possible mystification and aims to disrupt the reproduction of human degradation.

In organizing both around race as a reality, and between racial groups based on what is common among them, coalitional politics offer a grounded approach to social constructionism. This view emphasizes the critical social constructionist point that racial subordination is historically contingent and created through real human processes. But it does not retreat from the enforcers of racial monopoly into abstraction. A coalitional approach to social constructionism acknowledges that this confrontation is already active. It further differentiates between its own grounding in reality and the realization of capitalist racial mystification. Rather than prioritizing social politics disconnected from economic reality, it assesses them as interrelated. As such, coalitional politics navigate an ambiguous space between the unavoidable fact that race really exists, and the possibility of its dissolution. Coalitional politics refuse to hypostatize race as biological fact, market truth, or abstract identity. Through this approach to social constructionism, coalitional politics have the potential to cut through the muddy waters of racial mystification. This multiracial coalitional confrontation of racial monopoly acknowledges the reality of racial problems while refusing to concede to their seemingly unavoidable reproduction. It therefore offers a strategic approach to transgressing and eventually altogether dissolving racial antagonism, exploitation, and subordination.

²⁶⁸ Bhattacharya, “How Not to Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class,” 68-93; Fraser, “Expropriation and Exploitation” 163-178.

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