

Exploitation, Oppression, and Transformation

Political Economy & Social Movements - Winter 2007

Tony Zaragoza, 2/13/07

Outline

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- Popular Education: Race and Class in Immortal Technique and Dead Prez 10 min
 - Questions & Discussion
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 - Getting Past the Race vs. Class Debate
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 - Selection from *Always Running*
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White supremacy emerged in the throes of capitalism's planetary birth to justify the expropriation of people off their lands and the exploitation of people for their labor. Of course the discussion of the birth of racism begs the question of its demise: What is a useful anti-racist ideological framework?... Polyculturalism, unlike multiculturalism, assumes that people live coherent lives that are made up of a host of lineages--the task of the historian is not to carve out the lineages but to make sense of how people live culturally dynamic lives. (Prashad, xi-xii)

My idea of the multipolarity that is necessary today entails a radical revision of “North-South relations,” in all their dimensions. This revision must create a framework that makes it possible to reduce the power of forces with the system (the capitalist system to call it by its name) that operate in such a way as to exacerbate the polarization of wealth and power. By calling into question the “imperialist” tradition, or whatever one likes to call it, which governs core-periphery relations in the actually existing capitalist system (something quite different from the general market system dreamed up by mainstream economists), such a revision would automatically pose a challenge to the most fundamental aspects of capitalism. (Amin, *Beyond US Hegemony*, 2)

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"Philosophy of Poverty," Immortal Technique, *Revolutionary Vol. I*

... But you see, here in America the attitude that is fed to us is that outside of America there live lesser people. "Fuck them, let them fend for themselves." No, Fuck you, they are you. No matter how much you want to dye your hair blonde and put fake eyes in, or follow an anorexic standard of beauty, or no matter how many diamonds you buy from people who exploit your own brutally to get them, no matter what kind of car you drive or what kind of fancy clothes you put on, you will never be them. They're always gonna look at you as nothing but a little monkey. I'd rather be proud of what I am, rather than desperately trying to be something I'm really not, just to fit in. And whether we want to accept it or not, that's what this culture or lack of culture is feeding us.

I want a better life for my family and for my children, but it doesn't have to be at the expense of millions of lives in my homeland. We're given the idea that if we didn't have these people to exploit then America wouldn't be rich enough to let us have these little petty material things in our lives and basic standards of living. No, that's wrong. It's the business giants and the government officials who make all the real money. We have whatever they kick down to us. My enemy is not the average white man, it's not the kid down the block or the kids I see on the street; my enemy is the white man I don't see: the people in the white house, the corporate monopoly owners, fake liberal politicians those are my enemies. The generals of the armies that are mostly conservatives those are the real Mother-Fuckers that I need to bring it to, not the poor, broke country-ass soldier that's too stupid to know shit about the way things are set up.

In fact, I have more in common with most working and middle-class white people than I do with most rich black and Latino people. As much as racism bleeds America, we need to

understand that classism is the real issue. Many of us are in the same boat and it's sinking, while these bougie Mother-Fuckers ride on a luxury liner, and as long as we keep fighting over kicking people out of the little boat we're all in, we're gonna miss an opportunity to gain a better standard of living as a whole.

In other words, I don't want to escape the plantation I want to come back, free all my people, hang the Mother-Fucker that kept me there and burn the house to the god damn ground. I want to take over the encomienda and give it back to the people who work the land.

You cannot change the past but you can make the future, and anyone who tells you different is a Fucking lethargic devil. I don't look at a few token Latinos and black people in the public eye as some type of achievement for my people as a whole. Most of those successful individuals are sell-outs and house Negros.

But, I don't consider brothers a sell-out if they move out of the ghetto. Poverty has nothing to do with our people. It's not in our culture to be poor. That's only been the last 500 years of our history; look at the last 2000 years of our existence and what we brought to the world in terms of science, mathematics, agriculture and forms of government. You know the idea of a confederation of provinces where one federal government controls the states? The Europeans who came to this country stole that idea from the Iroquois lead. The idea of impeaching a ruler comes from an Aztec tradition. That's why Montezuma was stoned to death by his own people 'cause he represented the agenda of white Spaniards once he was captured, not the Aztec people who would become Mexicans.

So in conclusion, I'm not gonna vote for anybody just 'cause they black or Latino they have to truly represent the community and represent what's good for all of us proletariat. ...

'We Want Freedom' Dead Prez, *Let's Get Free*

...Yo, this world is oh so cold, I think about my ancestors
Being sold, and it make me wanna break the mold
Fuck the gold and the party, train yourself, clean your shottie
Tell me what you gon do to get free, we need more than MC's
We need Hueys, and revolutionaries
The niggas on the streets today, it's kinda scary
The smell around my way ain't roses or strawberries
In fact it's kinda poisonous, bringin out the boy in us
But I'ma stand up on my own, like a man do
Dominate the land and make wealth, like Fu-Manchu
Yes the peoples army stick togethther like glue
We represent the I-Ching, and to this we stand true
Military formation, anyone participation is welcome
Each one teach one, son help son
Just one gun is all it take to get it started
Livin in the wilderness of the west we cold hearted

If you don't think it could happen think again my son
Be prepared for the worst that's yet to come

We want freedom, prophecies and ancient wisdom
Cataclysm, niggas be like fuck the system

I don't wanna be no movie star
I don't wanna drive no fancy car
I just wanna be free, to live my life, to live my own life

Yeah, I'm for peace
But I'll kill ya if ya fuck with my moms or my niece
See we all want peace, but the problem is
Crackers want a bigger piece
Got it where the niggas can't get a piece
That's why police get stabbed and shot
Cuz a nigga can't eat if the ave is hot
Locked up you get three hot meals and one cot
Then you sit and rot, never even got a fair shot
That's where a whole lotta niggas end up
My man moms even got sent up, tryin to keep the rent up
When I'm bent up I think alot about the reason I'm here
I think about the things I fear in the comin years...

**Gerald Horne's *Race War!*
*White Supremacy and the
Japanese Attack on the British
Empire.* NYU Press, 2004.**

Reviewed by Tony Zaragoza in
December 2004, *Political Affairs*

Recent years have seen a revisiting of the "Good War" and the "greatest generation." These drumbeats have echoed from best sellers, Hollywood blockbusters, and campaign speeches including W's D-day remembrance and Reagan's 1984 speech on the windy cliffs of Normandy replayed throughout the weeklong spectacle of his funeral. The chauvinistic motif of "greatness" is harnessed as a PR backdrop for the "war on terror" as forced comparisons accumulate on the current cultural billboard. But like a lot of commercial and even academic history in the US, much gets left out of broadcast narratives of World War II. *Race War!* revives a discipline. Gerald Horne breaks through pervasive amnesia by telling how for a time the Japanese empire was able to use its claim to be the "champion of the colored races" as a "powerful mobilizing tool in a world comprised overwhelmingly of Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans." What's more, through this history Horne contributes to a fuller global and historic understanding of racism.

The central thesis of the book is expanded upon throughout: "an all-encompassing British racism – amply bolstered by other European powers and particularly by the United States – demobilized the colonized, making them highly susceptible to Japanese racial appeals." The Japanese ruling class morphed popular Japanese anti-racism into a virulent nationalism. These elites don't offer an egalitarian framework but an inversion of white supremacy with the Japanese on top. Horne documents and illustrates the racist world of the British

Empire using Hong Kong as a central case study. It is the British assumption of superiority and the vast and violent discrimination, abuse and exploitation of those not of "pure European descent" that becomes the soil upon which the racial appeal thrives. In addition to his central thesis, Horne offers as a "subtext" the brutality of the Japanese, especially in China, which contradicts their racial appeals.

Race War! offers an on-the-ground history from five continents as told through letters, newspapers, diaries and public records combined with the history of decisions made behind closed doors, in court and through legislation. The narrative ranges from Hong Kong street workers abused by drunken British officials, to British prisoners in Japanese occupied Hong Kong, to the trials of Eurasian and Asian American collaborators with the Japanese. We see tension between German and Japanese leaders arise out of the contradiction between Nazi racial theories and Japanese opposition to white supremacy; we see the Japanese ultranationalist Black Dragon Society who successfully organize solidarity with groups in San Francisco and Harlem (among other things, like plotting to assassinate Charlie Chaplin); we see the British criss-cross of colonial troops (Ceylonese fighters sent to Africa and East Africans sent to Ceylon to avoid arming colonial subjects in their home country); and we see US operatives learn the lessons of the British while opportunistically presenting themselves as a foil to British white supremacy in Asia and attempting minor reforms in the US military.

Besides writing an important history, Horne adds to our understanding of the evolution of white supremacy. This book primarily focuses on "race and racism within the British Empire in Asia," but also shows how British white supremacy and Japanese responses impacted colonized peoples in the Empire from West Africa to the Malay Peninsula as well as

people of color in the US. Particularly, the Japanese show-of-force against white supremacy impacted the push for civil rights in the US after World War II. The move – at least legally – to eliminate Jim Crow resulted from internal pressure from the freedom struggle coinciding with the needs of a changing economy, and the external pressure from the appeal/threat of equality offered by Communism. Horne shows that an additional factor was the appeal/threat of race war.

Throughout the book, we also get a sense of the short-term power and long-term danger of nationalism devoid of class-informed approaches to fighting exploitation and colonialism. Racism was (is) used to dominate Asians, Africans and Latinos around the world while encouraging nationalist responses that have been (can be) hostile to historical materialist understandings of the relationship of racism to capitalism and imperialism. Simultaneously, racism was (is) nurtured to demobilize any class-consciousness among European and US workers while also mobilizing them (at least whites) to fight imperial wars. To the benefit of the ruling class, racism, in its various forms became a principal – and flexible – component of the structured process of hegemony and accumulation.

Knowing and understanding the history provided by *Race War!* can also help understand the larger shifts taking place in the configuration of racism in relation to capitalism through the 20th century. Currently, new modifications in this relation accompany and influence the economic shifts that develop as production becomes increasingly based on mechanization and automation. *Race War!* suggests to me that the fight against white supremacy must avoid fundamentalism – nationalist and religious – and that that fight benefits from a historical materialist understanding of imperialism, national liberation and the overall revolutionary process.