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White Supremacy, the Colonial Commodification of the Land, and the Corporate Structure

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Abstract

In this keynote address Steve Martinot will briefly examine the specific colonial relations in 17th century Virginia between the corporate structure, the seizure of indigenous land, and the forced labor imposed on indigenous American and African people as essential factors in the development of the modern concept of whiteness, race, and white supremacy, and consider how it then appears and expresses itself in the present. Today we find our socio-economic environment to be one of total commodification (a form of labor control), a general corporatization of our society (expressed as an absence of ethics), embedded in a concept of whiteness and a supremacist sense of white racialized identity as its organizing principle. The confluence of white supremacy and corporate control of socio-political processes signify an ongoing contemporary coloniality, in which all questions of "land" and social belonging are enmeshed. Our liberation from this coloniality will entail a decommodification of the land.

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Introduction

A relation to the land has always been a central aspect of the struggle for liberation, whether from colonialism, or the call for a black-belt nation in the United States, Tijerina's struggle for land-grant autonomy in New Mexico, the Zapatistas and their autonomous municipalities in Chiapas, and the general reclamation of the Americas by the indigenous. The recent housing crisis was about the land. The waves of mortgage defaults and foreclosures, creating millions of new homeless people, had its source in international corporate speculation on land spurred by IMF structural adjustment programs imposed on nations the world over. Today, 33,000 children die every day from starvation and minor diseases (according to the WHO) because local economies have been decimated by these IMF programs. And in the United States, the death rate among the urban homeless remains unspoken; they die unnoticed by the hundreds and thousands each month.

The land question is not just a question of agriculture, but one of housing, of community, and of economic structure. The colonialism to which the Americas were subjected is known as a system based upon the seizure of land by Europeans. But they could do so only by a most fundament transformation of economic structure. Land cannot be stolen like gold or horses. You can't just pick it up and put it in your pocket. It is stolen by changing its juridical (that is, legal) status. A boundary is drawn, a legal paper called a "deed" is written, and ownership is created that takes the land from its residents and makes it marketable. In other words, land is taken by commodifying it. The commodification of the land is not its natural state.

What I wish to discuss today is how two social structures central to our society emerged from this primordial act of commodification. These are the corporate structure and the structure of racialization. I will try to outline how these three structures—commodification, racialization, and the corporate entity—interweave to form our present circumstances.

All three are forms of labor control. They form profound elements of the culture of the United States. They were instrumental in how its political institutions were designed and continue to condition our own thoughts and actions. Ultimately, the racism and white supremacy that is the focus of this conference cannot be replaced by a society based on equality and justice without confronting both the structures of commodification and the corporation. And that will mean thinking differently about our relation to the land.

1. Commodification

Let us begin by looking at how commodification is a form of labor control (as well as being a mode of exchange).

In a capitalist economy, the control of labor is synonymous with the production of private wealth. One works on a job producing something that gets sold. But the person or corporation that hires—that is, the one who "owns" that job—gets the value of the product when it is sold, not the person who does the work. The key to this system is obedience. It is critical that the worker do what the employer tells him/her, and not something else. If a worker has a means of living other than working that job, such as in a cooperative or a communal society in which living conditions are developed democratically and the wealth of the social product shared, then that worker can dispense with employers and their demands

for obedience. But in a totally commodified society, in which every individual has to purchase the means of survival, even of housing, clothes, and food, then every individual has to have a source of income in order to live. This means that the threat of losing a job becomes a life-or-death issue. It threatens the ability to purchase the goods needed to survive. It is the threat of being fired that insures obedience. Because employment becomes a life-or-death issue, job insecurity becomes a way of life. That it how the total commodification of society works, even to prevent people from organizing other means of living.

Before there was total commodification of society, however, labor had to be controlled by other means, by various modes of enslavement. In the early Virginia colony, English laborers were held by contract, 14 years of servitude with a grant of land upon release. Breaking that contract was considered a crime. When Africans were first imported to the colony, they were held under similar circumstances, but eventually enslaved in the 1680s, which I will talk about shortly. For both, military control was necessary because there was plenty of opportunity to live independently. The indigenous did it just fine, farming in a cooperative manner. They were willing to share the land with anyone else who wanted to share with them. But the colonists were interested in wealth, and wealth grew from labor on commodified land, harvesting mass-produced crops. To work the commodified land, the colony needed commodified laborers, that is, laborers who could be bought and sold. That was the context in which the concept of race was invented.

But what this means is that capitalism is really founded on enslavement, in its dependence on labor control, and not on wage labor. Wage labor, as we know it, is a luxury capitalism could afford for itself only after it had totally commodified society. Wage labor works as a form of labor control only if no opportunities exist for living autonomously. It developed differently in Europe (and in the Spanish colonies), where commodification was not the primary means of holding land. European capitalism essentially developed from the profit extracted from the slave trade—that easy and criminal commodification of laborers—to the Americas.

2. Racialization in the colony and as the foundation of the United States as a culture and identity

To understand how the structure of racialization developed in the United States, we have to know its history. When the English first arrived in Virginia in 1606, they did not see themselves as white, but as English. They only started to refer to themselves as white in the 1690s, almost a century later. The story of how they got there is again a story of labor control.

The first cash crop developed in Virginia was tobacco, a drug for which there was a ready European market. Though they initially attempted to enslave the indigenous Algonquin people, they failed. The Algonquin were too rooted in the land to put up with that. English indentured bond-laborers were used. Many were kidnapped in England and others transported from English jails. After 1619, a few Africans were imported to work alongside the English. The decision to shift to African labor primarily was not made until the 1650s. Until the 1680s, the English and African laborers made common cause in resisting the hardships of their labor or in attempting to escape.

The elite tried to divide them against each other by various means. The first division was an accident of English law. English laborers were eligible for contracts providing release dates, while the Africans were not because they were not English. Because laborers were counted as capital goods (transferable for payment of debt, loan collateral, etc.), labor markets existed. While English laborers were sold by selling the contract, Africans had to be brought bodily to the market, for which auctions developed. The auction markets established an ongoing valuation for African laborers that could be accounted for as wealth by landowners. English laborers lost estate value as their release date approached. To maintain the value of the African laborers, landowners demanded the ability to hold them in perpetual servitude, eliminating release dates. The colonial governance gradually acceded to that demand. I mention this detail because it is an important element in the evolution of the concept of race. At no time has the existence of race not involved the actions of the state. In this case, it was a juridical detail that drove the colony toward a system of slavery, from which the modern concept of race has emerged.

The actual process of invention occurred after Bacon's rebellion (which marked a high point in English-African solidarity). After the rebellion was quelled, a massive campaign to demonize the Africans as a social threat (of further rebellion) was undertaken. On the basis of this, slavery was codified as a so-called protective measure. The sense of threat was required because the codification of slavery violated English tradition. It was the confluence of the social paranoia toward the Africans and the colony's transformation of their status from legal to alien that brought the English together in a sense of solidarity against them. It was in that sense of solidarity that they began to see their whiteness as a social identity.

The fear engendered against the Africans is properly called a social paranoia because it was self-generated. The colony could have lifted the hardship of labor and given the Africans equality and standing. Instead, it increased importation and made the hardship of labor conditions worse. The Africans were beaten down into a subhuman condition in order to convince the English laborers that the Africans were indeed subhuman.

The final step in the development of whiteness and a white racialized identity was the organization of the slave patrols. These patrols were conscripted from poor, marginalized English farmers and laborers under elite control to stop runaways and to squelch any sign of autonomy or organization among the slaves. The patrollers found that the violence they might use against slave meetings or gatherings was generally welcomed with gratitude by the elite, as long as it appeared to be suppressing incipient uprising. Thus, the patrollers found that their violence elevated them above their marginalized status as poor and gave them social standing. It marked a sociocultural unification of the colony. This unification of whites as a society transformed whiteness from a social to a profoundly cultural identity, from a social distinction to a characteristic of a people. It took decades to complete, from the 1680s to the 1720s. But it consolidated a primordial distinction between white and black that was later, in the eighteenth century, theorized as a concept of race by European naturalists and adopted as a means of rationalizing the colonialist seizure of the land and the laborers. It is important to understand that whiteness came first, before the concept of race, as a supremacy based upon a socially generated paranoia.

In this history, the inner structure of white racialized identity is revealed. It is a conjunction of paranoia, white solidarity and consensus, and violence against a racialized other. In defining the Africans as other, through the blackness used to mark them as slaves, the English were defining themselves as what was not that. That act of self-definition was then self-reinforcing. The violence against the Africans led to greater paranoia, which in turn led to a greater need for white solidarity, which called in turn for greater violence to assuage the resulting insecurity. Whiteness carries this mark of its colonial aggression in always seeing itself as on the defensive. This cycle of exclusion, paranoia, white exclusiveness, defensive solidarity, and violence has appeared throughout U.S. history: the early nineteenth-century forms of segregation, post–Civil War Jim Crow, and the present-day police-prison complex that Professor Michelle Alexander[1] Indeed, this defensiveness is responsible for a revenge ethic that inhabits and corrupts U.S. jurisprudence. We see this most clearly in the maintenance of the death penalty, as well as the inordinate use of imprisonment (and its long sentences).

The implication of this history is that "race" cannot be considered something inherent in people. It was produced by profound political and social processes. Today, we call this a social construct. But that remains insufficient. We have to examine the structure of what is constructed. Our history shows it to be an active structure, something that one group of people (whites) does to others whom they define as "nonwhite" for the purpose of

defining themselves as white. In other words, "race" is a verb; the verb is "to racialize," and it marks a cultural activity by which white society objectifies others and stratifies society according to whom it has racialized. To be white-identified means to have accepted this structure for oneself, whether one is aware that is how one came to be white or not. It means to occupy, to accept being socially placed, in the subject position of that verb, establishing a hegemonic relation to those one accepts as socially given to occupy the object position ("we racialize you"). The white hegemonic mind is the mind that accepts that subject position, regardless of how active one might be in the cultural process of racializing others. It is the mind that thinks it knows who others are *a priori*, who can tell others who they are with impunity and speak for them with alacrity, because one occupies the role of definer. It is that subject position, and the hegemonic mind that accompanies it, that constitutes the substance of one's identity as white. It is what we fight as racism; but we can see that to consider it that is altogether too superficial.

The "caste" conflict (to adopt Professor Michelle Alexander's use of the term *caste*) in this racialized society, then, is between those who impose a racialization and those who resist it. The task for antiracist white people is to figure out how to resist what white society does, which means figuring out what white society does to them as well as to others.

As a side note, we might position this concept of white racialized identity in the American Revolution. In the first sentence of the Declaration of Independence we read, "when in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands that have connected them with another." This literally signifies that, as white, the settlers had

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[1] As described in Dr. Michele Alexander's book "The New Jim Crow." I am referring to Dr. Alexander's keynote address at the 12th Annual White Privilege Conference on Thursday, April 13, 2012 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

begun to see themselves as a different people from the English. That is, the purpose of independence was to transfer control of the land and its enslaved laborers from one people to another. It was not an anticolonialist revolution, since it was not a revolt of the colonized African Americans and the indigenous against the colonizers.

Some examples

Let me give some examples of the operation of this structure of paranoia, white solidarity, and violence:

Black disenfranchisement during the 1830s.

During the first few decades of the United States' existence, free black people in the north had the vote. As a party structure evolved, white people feared that, in a close contest on any issue, the black vote would be the deciding vote. That would mean that black people would be deciding white politics. It didn't matter that black people had no parties of their own and functioned politically within the parties that whites had organized. It didn't matter that black people worked for abolition, or against racial discrimination, through the major white parties as their only real access to political expression. White voters saw black voters, saw them as a "black vote," and thus as a threat, against which they acted by excluding black people from the political process. Had they seen the reality of black participation, they would have realized that no "black vote" existed. But black disenfranchisement was enacted in New York in 1821, and in Pennsylvania in 1836. During the 1830s, there were race riots in major Pennsylvania cities against black people attempting to vote. Black communities were invaded and many killed. Thus were political activity and democracy proclaimed to be a white domain. Here we see clearly the operation of a paranoia, a

violence to make it appear real, and political consolidation of white consensus.

The founding of Jim Crow.

This history is well known. After the violent overthrow of the Reconstruction governments, black debt servitude through the crop lien system was instituted to keep black farmers tied to the land. When agrarian populism failed to rise above its racism and establish real financial independence (a longer story), a campaign for complete segregation was launched on the basis of a paranoia toward black sexuality. Many black men were murdered by mobs because of wild accusations of assaults on white women.[2] I myself remember reading, during the 1950s, of a black man convicted of rape in Florida for having spoken to a white woman on the telephone. The result was the construction of a massive system of segregation giving white society totalitarian control over black people. Again: paranoia, white consensus, and violence.

We see this structure of white racialized identity in the invasion of Iraq. First, there was the paranoid campaign about weapons of mass destruction, fabricated stories about Iraqi nuclear programs, and Iraq's involvement in organized terrorism, etc. And the mainstream bought all that, despite international refutations, because it spoke to an inherent paranoia. Though there were massive protests against the proposed invasion, once it began, white solidarity kicked in ("support the troops") and the resistance eroded. Though no Iraqi weapons program was found, the violence of the invasion cemented support for the war even in its fallaciousness and criminality.

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[2] Wells, Ida. *On Lynching: Southern Horrors.* New York: Arno Press, 1969.

The manifestations of this white identity structure are endless. The cold war, the war on drugs, the anti-affirmative action movement ("reverse discrimination"), the anti-immigrant movement, and the mass incarceration resulting from the *a priori* criminalization of people of color are all examples of its operation. Even though the civil rights movements established the principle of equality before the law, through its recognition and building of community autonomy as a response to and defense against racism, that community autonomy was denigrated and turned into a source of criminality, and the principle of equality before the law turned upside down, as a way of colorlessly attacking and imposing police occupation and mass incarceration. Both have found general acceptance in white society.

The thing to understand about a cultural structure is that it both renders large political and social events familiar and recognizable, and it guides individual actions in ways that not only harmonize with the larger events, but make alternative procedures hard to conceive. An alternative to prison for dealing with crime is anathema. If the majority of prisoners are there for pot possession, that in itself makes marijuana decriminalization unthinkable. In other words, the cultural is what goes without saying. Cultural norms are not regulations or directives. They map out domains and limits of comportment in which there is space for different attitudes and activities, but beyond which comportment ceases to be recognizable or familiar.

Racism, each time it appears in events, has a certain familiarity as the signifier for white solidarity and consensus. Housing and education remain segregated. Labor unions discriminate internally in terms of leadership positions, or fighting for promotions on the job. For city

governments, urban renewal programs became ways of breaking up communities of color. Before we ask how to combat it, we have to ask the question why, after 200 years of progressive people fighting against it, each resurgence of racism works so well. And that is the purpose of examining white racialized identity as a cultural structure. It is not a psychological phenomenon. Racism, representing white solidarity and consensus, constitutes a ticket to belonging and membership for white people, the means by which white people obtain their identity as white. Those familiar with the unfolding events in Jena, Louisiana,[3] or Tulia, Texas,[4] know what happened in the white parts of town there.

3. The corporation and what it does to social structures and relations

Although the corporate structure is generally seen as an economic form, an organization of production, it also provides a template for social organization. And, in fact, as a structure, it perfuses this society. The Virginia colony was a corporation. Trade unions, political parties, cities and

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[3] The incidents in Jena, Louisiana involved some white high school students acting in a white supremacist manner to claim certain areas of the school yard as "whites only" areas, an act that led to several clashes between white and black students. In the wake of one such clash in which some black students were defending themselves against some white students, six blacks students were indicted by the District Attorney for attempted murder.

[4] In Tulia, Texas an over-zealous police agent infiltrated the drug trafficking going on in the town, and gave the names of 43 people to the police and DEA, all black persons. Many were pressured into confessions through plea-bargaining and threats. The testimony of the undercover agent was shown to be perjured, but those coerced into confessing remained in jail.

counties, as well as government agencies all adopt it as an organizational structure. Unfortunately, it also provides a source for a social ethics. That is what I want to address here.

The corporate structure exhibits a number of important characteristics. Most prominently, it stratifies people hierarchically, not by what could be called class, but as a structure of organizational responsibility. At the top, there are the directors, and at the bottom, the productive workers or the members. In between, there are various gradations of management who work for those above and direct those below. The management structure of manufacturing firms is familiar. In the case of unions, there is generally an executive committee, under which lower levels of officers (middle management) consisting of lawyers, business agents, and shop stewards, act to produce membership compliance with the contract.

Bureaucratic stratification, however, represents a skewing of the ethic of responsibility. This takes two forms. A corporation is founded to eliminate any personal responsibility of its members for what the corporation does to others in society. It shields its employees from liability, regardless of how damaging the corporation's actions may be. Thus, in its extraction of resources, the corporate despoliation of the planet (deforestation, strip mining, global warming, etc.) is left to others to clean up. Or similarly, the U.S. government's refusal to take responsibility for the well-being of its citizens (through universal free health care, for instance) is familiar to us because it reflects what we already accept as a corporate ethos.

Inside the corporate structure, there is a strong sense of responsibility, but it is wholly one-sided. Each individual is

responsible to those higher up to correctly perform the tasks given, with no responsibility for the well-being, welfare, or dignity of those below who must fulfill their commands. Thus, a chain of command substitutes itself for organizational participation. Each person's responsibility is properly to perform the tasks given to him or her by those above. And this relation of responsibility to non-responsibility becomes a model for a cultural ethic that also perfuses this society. For instance, it takes the form of a contempt for those lower on the social scale combined with honor and deference to those higher up or certified as experts. The contempt that developed for the homeless during the early 1980s when housing got priced out of reach for many people was astounding. Conversely, when local government holds hearings on an issue, we who wish to present our interest in the issue find ourselves waiting in line, hat in hand, hoping to be heard. One or two minutes at a microphone does not constitute democracy.

What substitutes itself for participation in the corporate structure is allegiance to its purposes. It is part of one's responsibility to the command structure as a member or employee. The dishonor to which one often submits in the command hierarchy is replaced by organizational recognition as a member. The contempt one feels for those below gets tempered by the assumption that they feel a similar allegiance. It is testimony to the universality of this ethos that the United States is the only industrial nation that requires its people, and especially its school children, to pledge allegiance every day. In European countries, one is simply a citizen. But that is not assumed in the United States. It has to be taught and inculcated.

It is the familiarity of corporate hierarchy that makes the "undercaste" that Professor Alexander describes, with its

millions of victims, so easily recognizable as culturally normal. It is seen in its familiarity as simply another way the inferior are lowered on the social scale. And this is part and parcel of a white acceptance of stratification and its constraints on comportment.

The corporate structure and racialization historically have had a close relationship in the United States. Corporations were first given personhood in 1844 by the Roger Taney Supreme Court.[5] It came about as an artifact of the duality of federal and state power. A corporation that engaged in interstate commerce (like a railroad) could be sued by a person from a state other than the state of incorporation. Such a suit would have to be filed in federal court, a fact that required the corporation to have standing. For Taney, this implied having federal citizenship, which implied state citizenship and personhood as well. Ironically, Taney used a direct inversion of this same argument to deny citizenship to black people in the *Dred Scott* decision. He ruled that a slave who lived in a free state did not thereby gain freedom because his/her slave condition was a state issue, and did not extend to federal standing. What is truly ironic is that the dual structure of power in the United States was itself a result of the slave system. To prevent federal intervention in slavery, the Constitution was written to place such state issues out of reach of federal power.

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[5]   The original case in which corporations were given citizenship and personhood was *Letson vs. Baltimore and Cincinnati Railroad,* 1844. This was the foundation on which corporations were granted 14th Amendment rights as persons under *Santa Clara vs. Southern Pacific Railroad,* 1886. *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad* held that corporations had rights to "equal protection" under the 14th Amendment as "persons."

The present concept of colorblindness is a continuation of Taney's reasoning. It is a concept that emerges from goals of the civil rights movements, but distorted to white supremacist ends. The existence of the civil rights statutes won at the federal level by those movements is misinterpreted to signify that race is no longer a factor in jurisprudence. This was then extended by the Supreme Court to the necessity to prove racist intent if one wanted to charge racial discrimination by an institution or employer, a requirement that rendered most discrimination suits impossible to win. Because it was established in the federal courts, it was deemed to hold for state courts as well. That is, if black people cannot bring arguments against discrimination in federal courts, then they also lose that ability at the state level.

The question of democracy

These structures, of racialization, of the corporation, and of commodification, are all structures of control, the control of social relationships, the control of social allegiances, and the control of labor. What chance does democracy have against these structures? Democracy requires an equality of persons. It requires justice and it requires access to information. If equality is destroyed by racialization and hierarchy, if justice is subverted by an abrogation of responsibility to persons and to the sanctity of human personhood, and if information is falsified through its commodification and dissemination by a corporativized[6] media with no responsibility to the truth, then what chance does democracy have?

Three times in the history of the United States powerful movements have emerged that attempted to establish democracy. And each time they were beaten

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[6] to form a cooperatives

back. The first was the abolitionist movement, the second was the Reconstruction governments in the south after the Civil War, and the third was the civil rights era. Each of these historical eras, with their many modes of social involvement, was initiated by a document that called for equality and democracy, to which a movement responded. The first was the Declaration of Independence (1776), the second was the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), and the third was the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

Abolitionism was defeated by white solidarity, the corporate structure, the regional division of the United States, and the evolution of a two-party system. In the northern states, simple emancipation was rejected on the issue of who would compensate slave holders for their loss, without regard or responsibility for the personhood of the slave. The struggle that took place then became the political arena in which the formation of political parties occurred. At the federal level, parties needed to have national presence. To have a national presence, a party had to have ideas that could be argued in all areas. Because of regional differences, principled ideas became detrimental. The issue of slavery could not be argued in all areas. The program had to be reduced to the pragmatic. Thus, the issue of slavery was reduced to one of extension to the territories. In the context of white paranoia concerning a "black vote," black disenfranchisement became a common ground on which different white parties could contest each other. It provided both sides the ability to appear antiblack in order not to lose their white votes to the other side. The antislavery side could oppose extension in the south without opposing slavery as such, and the proslavery side could advocate extension in the north without having to promote slavery.

In other words, the two-party system, in its reduction of politics to the superficial, is the child of black disenfranchisement, a relation we saw clearly as still in effect in the 2000 presidential election in Florida. Though the radical abolitionists continued their struggle, the more moderate white abolitionists succumbed to white solidarity.

The Reconstruction governments, based on universal franchise, were defeated by white paramilitary gangs throughout the south (of which the KKK later became the iconic leader). Their central purpose was to ensure that the land remained in white hands. Black communities had already shown a propensity to cooperativize their use of the land, as in Port Royal and elsewhere. White landed interests then reduced black farmers to debt servitude (as a proxy form of enslavement) through the crop lien system, and chain gangs for those who sought to escape from it. White farmers were also oppressed by the crop lien system, and fought against it through the Granges and the Farmers' Alliance. They formed cooperatives for financing farmers and for marketing crops, but not for farm production because that would have meant pooling the lands of white and black farmers. Without production co-ops to fall back on, the Farmer's Alliance weakened itself, and was defeated by the economic power of the banks and the Democratic Party. After 1890, there was no opposition to the passage of Jim Crow laws. Both black and white farmers were defeated by white solidarity, corporate finance, and the two-party system.

Professor Alexander has described one dimension of the defeat of the civil rights era, the prison industry, born of a combination of white populism and paramilitary violence under the rubric of "colorblindness." White populism rose to jettison affirmative action in the name of a fear of equality labeled "reverse

discrimination." The war on drugs transformed urban police departments into paramilitary operations, disrupting communities of color and producing mass incarceration. The target of this war on drugs was not only community autonomy, as a breach of the white sense of its social hegemony and solidarity, but the ethic of democracy itself produced by the civil rights movements. Under the rubric of colorblindness, racialization was disguised as the criminalization of communities of color.

In this context, I want to look briefly at two things: the relation of white populism to deindustrialization and the relation of the paramilitary to the structure of policing.

Deindustrialization is the euphemism used to refer to the runaway shop process. Born during the 1970s and receiving massive government subsidies during the 1980s, it moved increasing numbers of factories and jobs in the manufacturing sector out of the country. What is astounding about this is that no union, no city council, no county council, no state assembly lifted a finger to stop the process, despite the local impoverishment that government and society faced with reduction in the tax base and social services. Only in Youngstown, Ohio, was a campaign launched to keep two steel mills from closing. The unions and churches in the area sought to purchase the mills. But without governmental assistance, they failed.

The unions had a stake in those factories. The labor of their members had paid for them many times over. Yet they exhibited no political or proprietary interest in those factories. In France, on the other hand, workers have consistently prevented factories from moving away out of that very sense of propriety. The difference in worker consciousness involves the racialization of

U.S. politics. The industrial unions built during the 1930s were integrated unions, including as members the masses of black people who had migrated north after the turn of the century to escape the terror, debt servitude, and chain gangs of the south, and to find jobs. But those unions were still white unions, with white leadership. When factories started moving out, the membership knew that the unions would collapse. Many white workers then bet that when new jobs appeared to fill the vacuum, they would get first access to them as white. Thus, they eliminated their condition of working with black workers, and reestablished their white hegemony with respect to whatever economic changes occurred. Black and brown unemployment soared, as did their prison population.

It was at the same time that the structure of policing changed. It involved drug trafficking, a system of victimless crime laws, enhancement of police obedience statutes, and the persistence of racial profiling.

Professor Alexander has demonstrated the sharp focus by which police drug operations targeted communities of color. But, as has been well documented. the police have also been involved in trafficking itself. [7] There are many benefits the police receive from this involvement. The most banal, of course, is financial. They get payoffs.[8] Second, because they know

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[7] Gary Webb, *Dark Alliance* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998) and Peter Dale Scott and Jonathan Marshall. *Cocaine Politics: Drugs, Armies, and the CIA in Central America.* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1991).

[8] Peter Maas, *Serpico*, 1973; also a movie directed by Sidney Lumet, starring Al Pacino, 1973. Serpico had joined the police force in New York City, and refused to accept payoffs from drugs dealers or commercial enterprises. As a result, other police officers set him

the pushers in each neighborhood, they have a free informer network to use at will. Should something happen that they feel pressed to solve, they round up the pushers of the area to find out what they know, or to invent testimony. In San Francisco alone, five people were released after years on death row because it was discovered that the primary evidence against them was the false testimony of drug traffickers.[9] Thirdly, in the wake of the upsurge of political movements for justice and equality during the 1960s and 1970s, the government was faced with highly politicized communities of color. Drugs, as all colonialists know, "stone out" and depoliticize such communities.

But a fourth benefit is the main one. In the face of community impoverishment through withdrawn employment, closed business opportunities, underfunded schools, and cancelled welfare safety nets, people not only turn to drugs but to petty crime to survive. Few would suggest that the intentional political impoverishment of a community was actually an act of attempted mass murder in a wholly commodified society. Instead, the crime to which people have to turn to survive gets the attention. Faced with increased crime, in which the police are complicit through their involvement in drug trafficking, they go to the state legislature demanding higher appropriations to deal with the problem. Over the last 30 years, urban police departments have grown to be the most powerful political forces in most urban areas.

This form of urban police rule is based on juridical mechanisms. First, there is racial profiling. Racial profiling is the opposite of law enforcement. In law

enforcement, a crime is committed, and the police look for a suspect. In racial profiling, the police commit an act of suspicion, and then look for a crime for the suspect to have committed. What facilitates profiling is a system of victimless crime laws, of which drug possession laws are the most used. Victimless crime laws relieve the police of the necessity for a complainant. They can act with autonomy, approaching whomever they desire to make suspect for search or questioning. That autonomy has been increased through heightened obedience statutes, which permit the police to arbitrarily criminalize whomever they like. An officer has but to give an order that the subject will consider humiliating or disrespectful, and whatever defense the person may express for his or her dignity or self-respect can then be considered disobedience, resistance, and cause for arrest and perhaps violent treatment. In other words, the police operate with impunity, as a law unto themselves. That impunity is then supported by biased prosecutions, in which black nonviolent offenders are eight times as likely to be imprisoned as whites, while the crime rate for both remains roughly the same, and with black people constituting only a sixth of the population. In this manner, the police become a boundary line between those whose humanity and dignity will be respected (the unprofiled) and those whose humanity will not be respected (the profiled).

In other words, the police then become the embodiment of a new color line. On one side are the criminalized, and on the other, those ostensibly defended from criminality by this mechanism, and who live in gratitude and solidarity with it. We recognize the structure of white racialized identity in its deployment of a paranoia (profiling), a violence against those designated as a threat (police abuse and

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up for assassination, which he fortunately survived and wrote about.
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mass incarceration), and a white solidarity created by this new color line.

The structure of policing thus continues the historical relation between racialization, the corporate state, and the structure of commodification. It functions to oppress, imprison, and kill those on one side of the color line while trapping those on the other (white) side behind this structure of policing. In such cultural circumstances, alternatives to imprisonment, to the political ethos of being hard on crime (white solidarity), and to government subsidies to corporations in crisis become very difficult to conceive or to organize. Democracy becomes a very distant vision.

For an unracialized future

If we are to win the battle for equality, justice, and democracy, we are going to have to figure out how to dismantle and replace these cultural structures in our social environment.

On an economic level, given the despoliation of the planet by the corporations, if we do not eliminate the corporate structure, the planet is doomed, because corporations have no sense of responsibility to the planet or to the human world. They operate only to maintain the value of their stock on the stock market. And ethically, they condition society and model a political structure in which a human sense of responsibility to other humans becomes an act of resistance or rebellion. To arrive at a society in which equality and justice were possible, both a structural change and an ethical transformation would be necessary. A substitution of restorative justice for the revenge ethic that now characterizes the judicial system and its reracialization of society, for instance, would entail an overthrow of the entire mythos of criminality.

To dismantle the structures of racialization, we will need to build social justice movements that can form within themselves modes of democracy and local community control, as alternate political structures to the corporate forms of politics we face. For a movement to build its autonomy and sovereignty, it will need to develop a literature—poetry, stories, critiques of political and social structures, rants, and music—and a sense of its own history by which to construct an alternative subjectivity for itself. At the same time it needs to be able to launch a resistance against the structures of control, and provide a cultural alternative to commodification, corporate stratification, and racialization.

A social environment has to be created in which white people can participate without having to act white, freed from the necessity to act hegemonic, and to learn how to think in a nonhegemonic manner. To end racialization, it is important that those in the subject position of the verb *to racialize* abandon that position and cease to be complicit in the operation of the machine that drives the structure of racialization. This would mean to lose their allegiance and their membership in the criminal enterprises of segregation (today's prisons), the racial stratification represented by community impoverishment, and the fascism of racialized violence (yes, I use that word). Social movements that can overcome the insecurities of a commodified society and a corporate structure will be necessary to allow white people to learn how not to be paranoid.

To give up acting white will be a difficult process. It will mean acting in a way that others no longer see one as racializing. Most white people already think of themselves as merely human, and not white, in order to escape the psychic costs of recognizing the human misery that white

supremacy has wrought, as well as the impossibility of democracy in a racialized society. But this ignores the profound meaning of the subject-object difference across the verb *to racialize*. Others must be able to see a white person as having escaped the culture of whiteness by feeling that they have ceased to be an object of whites acting white.

In practice, for such white people, this will mean thinking in terms of replacing the institutions of police rule, of the prisons, and the ethic of incarceration. The structure of racialization will not be at all contested today without such thinking finding ways to put itself into practice.

Finally, the commodification of society, as a form of labor control, as a form of separation between humans and the land, between humans and the planet, between humans and each other, must be eroded and supplanted. Cooperatives on both the economic and political level suggest themselves—the pooling of resources, the local formation of neighborhood assemblies that can democratically decide on budgets, education and health programs, etc.

Democracy can be defined simply as the ability of those people who will be affected by a policy to participate not only in deciding that policy, but in defining the issues it addresses, defining various resolutions of those issues, and formulating the policy that they then decide on. In a factory, that would mean workers discussing and voting on the policies of employment, what the factory produced, and how it related to the rest of the economy.

To get there, a social ethic and a sense of responsibility, formed through social justice movements and local democratic assemblies, and a general attention to the formation of alternative political structures by which people take back their power from corporate government and commodified governance, an ethic in which paranoia becomes anathema and the hegemonic mind can see itself and end its own operations, will be necessary.

We are speaking about how to bring about the possibility of democracy for the first time in the United States, nothing less. As a fourth attempt at that noble project.