

Marx, Capitalism, and Race

Tom Jeannot

In *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), Eric Williams argued that “slavery was not born of racism: rather racism was the consequence of slavery.”¹ In the nineteenth century, Marx anticipated a similar argument linking the categories of anti-black racism and African slavery. However, Williams’s formulation of their coincidence in the peculiar institution carried a causal implication (assigning a “basic” economic cause to a “superstructural,” cultural effect) that has also contributed to the discrediting of Marxism. It is no mean feat to state what “Marxism” is in the first place, but something like a received, semi-canonical formulation of it—“standard Marxism”—fails the test of conceptual adequacy for the theory of anti-black racism on at least three counts: on account of its economic determinism and reductionism (called “economism” here); on account of the privilege it assigns to the category of class, to the exclusion of other forms of oppression; and on account of its Eurocentrism (which has been taken as evidence of its own implicit racism).

Vigorous counter-arguments within Marxism exist, but Cedric Robinson’s 1983 *Black Marxism* is a landmark that orients the state of the question today.² As Travis Tatum recently pointed out, “Robinson’s title may seem deceptive. His work is not a celebration of Marxism, but rather a critique of it and the Eurocentric tradition from which it evolved.”³ It may be that “Marxist theorists and historians” are “locked in the same historical and analytical presumptions as the bourgeoisie they oppose.”⁴ On similar grounds, in his “Foreword” to the 1999 reissue of *Black Marxism*, Robin D. G. Kelley writes that Robinson’s book constitutes “a withering critique of Western Marxism and its inability to comprehend either

the racial character of capitalism and the civilization in which it was born or mass movements outside Europe.”⁵ In the same year, Robinson wrote that the “Black Radical Tradition emerged in the belly of the beast” at least partly “as a response to the denial of historical agency within Marx.”⁶

As long as Marx’s thought stands in the shadow of these received views concerning causality, class, Eurocentrism, and historical agency, an objective appraisal of its contribution to the struggles against racism and to the renewal of radical theory will be hobbled. The irreducibly racist character of African slavery, and therefore also the congruence of origins of modern, anti-black racism and capitalism itself in the triangular trade was as evident to Marx in the nineteenth century as to non-Marxist theorists from Williams to Robinson in the twentieth.⁷ Yet Marx, who closely followed and wrote copiously about the dramatic developments leading from slave revolts and abolitionism to the American Civil War and its aftermath, took a position more or less the reverse of the standard view assigned to him: far from subsuming the struggle against racism under the dynamics of class struggle or otherwise relegating it to a secondary and subordinate status as a reflex or epiphenomenon of something putatively more basic, he argued that the struggle against racism itself served as a catalyst and propellant of the class struggle.⁸ Ironically, in the received formulations of Marxism, his actual argument is rendered unintelligible. By arguing forcefully against “the loudly proclaimed principle that only certain races are capable of freedom,” Marx at once defies the charge of Eurocentrism, makes anti-racist struggle a category in its own right of his humanist philosophy of freedom, assigns a pivotal role to the world-historical agency of the black liberation movement in the architecture of his theory as a whole, and fatally undermines the economic reading of his text.⁹

I. Marx and the American Civil War

Marx’s account of the American Civil War can serve contemporary readers as a test case of the adequacy of a Marxian theoretical approach to anti-racist struggles and Marx’s own distinctive contribution to anti-racist discourse. Although he studied the military campaigns and political intrigues of the war, he focused on and emphasized the social factors that assured the Union’s victory.¹⁰ He held that the cause of the war was the movement to abolish slavery; that the agents of the North were not isolated individuals but the popular movements of the masses of people; that given its cause, the war would be transformed from a “constitutional” to a “revolutionary” war; and that the Emancipation Proclamation was “an earnest of the epoch to come” in the working-class struggle. We can briefly consider each of these four key moments in turn.

First, against “the leading weekly and daily papers of the London press,” which routinely presented the Civil War as “a tariff war” and “a war for the forcible maintenance of the Union” that “has absolutely nothing to do with [the abolition of slavery],” Marx argues that “[the] whole movement . . . is based . . . on the *slave question*,” that “the Union had in fact become the slave of the three hundred thousand slaveholders who held sway over the South,” and that the decisive question is “whether the twenty million free men of the North should submit any longer to [this] oligarchy,” with its objectives of turning “the vast Territories of the republic” into “nurseries . . . for slavery” and the “armed spreading of slavery in Mexico, Central and South America.”¹¹ “If, therefore, it was indeed only in defense of the Union that the North drew the sword, had not the South already declared that the continuance of slavery was no longer compatible with the continuance of the Union?”¹² In short, for Marx, the “principle of the war” is “the root of the evil” leading to it: “*slavery itself*.”¹³ Observing that “[none] of the so-called border states . . . were ever *actual slave states*,” Marx writes that “the actual field of battle between South and North” is a battlefield “between slavery and freedom.”¹⁴

Second, with his eye steadily trained on the self-activity of the masses of people and their vanguard (although not the “vanguard party”), Marx assigns historical agency to “[the] Kansas War [of 1854–1856], the formation of the Republican party, and the large vote, cast for Mr. Frémont during the Presidential election of 1856,” which were “so many palpable proofs that the North had accumulated sufficient energies to rectify the aberrations which United States history, under the slave-owners’ pressure, had undergone, for half a century.”¹⁵ For the purpose of this essay, it is crucial to recognize that Marx makes his case concerning agency and subjectivity against the truly economic position of *The Economist*: “In 1859, on the occasion of John Brown’s Harper’s Ferry expedition, the very same *Economist* published a series of elaborate articles with a view to prove that, by dint of an *economical law*, American slavery was doomed to gradual extinction from the moment it should be deprived of its expansion.”¹⁶ By contrast, Marx did not take the view that slavery would wither away of its own accord “by dint of an economical law.” In fact, he points out that in 1859, “more Negroes have been imported from Africa than ever before in any single year, even at the time when the slave trade was still legal. The number of slaves imported in the last year totaled fifteen thousand.”¹⁷

Rather, in his investigation, it took the movement from below of the masses of people—the demographic “growth of the North-West,” popular resistance to “the attempt to transform Kansas into a *slave Territory* by force of arms,” slave revolts, and the raid on Harper’s Ferry itself—to achieve the “antagonistic agencies”

required to “turn the balance of power.”¹⁸ In a letter to Engels on July 1, 1861, Marx writes that “the present war should actually be dated” from “the Kansas affair.”¹⁹ Anticipating the “irrepressible conflict” (with William Seward), the trail Marx blazes leads from “the Kansas war” (1854–1856) to the raid on Harper’s Ferry, Virginia (October, 1859), and from Harper’s Ferry to Black revolt in Bolivar, Missouri (December, 1859).²⁰ Following the Black-led revolt in Bolivar, just after Harper’s Ferry, Marx writes to Engels, “the biggest things that are happening in the world today are on the one hand the movement of the slaves in America, started by the death of John Brown, and on the other the movement of the slaves in Russia” (January 11, 1860).²¹ Against the standing temptation to trivialize or ignore the self-activity of Black slaves themselves, or else cast them as passive bystanders to the process of their own emancipation, Marx foresaw, in an obscure, little-noticed event in Missouri before the war began, the key to the future course of world events. Once the war was underway, he wrote to Engels, “A single Negro regiment would have a remarkable effect on Southern nerves” (August 7, 1862).²² In other words, demographic, statistical, and structural factors were not alone decisive in his mind or even his point of departure; equally and decisively important was the human subject’s own inner aspiration to be free, in evidence in the revolt in a small Missouri town.

Third, in the same letter to Engels just quoted, Marx returns to a related point that governs his thinking about the progress and outcome of the Civil War as a whole: “The long and the short of the story seems to me to be that a war of this kind must be conducted on revolutionary lines, while the Yankees have so far been trying to conduct it on constitutional lines.”²³ In an article for *Die Presse* two days later (“A Criticism of American Affairs,” August 9, 1862), he argues that “things are taking a revolutionary turn,” owing not to economic factors but to the revolutionary wing of the abolitionist movement. Marx explains:

New England and the North-west, which have provided the main body of the army, are determined to enforce on the government a revolutionary waging of war and inscribe the battle-slogan of ‘Abolition of Slavery!’ on the star-spangled banner. . . . So far we have only witnessed the first act of the Civil War—the *constitutional* waging of war. The second act, the *revolutionary* waging of war, is at hand.²⁴

Writing still later that month for *Die Presse* (“Abolitionist Demonstrations in America,” August 30, 1862), Marx excerpts a lengthy quotation from Wendell Phillips’s speech in Abington, Massachusetts “on the occasion of the anniversary of the slaves’ emancipation in the British West Indies,” a speech the *Times* of

London denounced as “an ‘abuse’ of freedom of speech,” but which Marx writes “is of greater importance than a battle bulletin.”²⁵ At Abington, Phillips declared, “We shall never have peace until slavery is uprooted. . . . Had Jefferson Davis the power, he would not capture Washington,” for then “The entire North would thunder with one voice, ‘Down with slavery, down with everything that stands in the way of saving the republic!’” Short of this revolutionary demand, Phillips argues that the war itself can only be “a useless squandering of blood and gold,” and yet its inexorability, as Marx grasped from the outset, is only partly explained by the development of the productive forces and cannot be explained at all apart from the subjectivity and agency of a conscious meaning and purpose.²⁶

Finally, as the Civil War changes in character from being a self-limiting conflict over the U.S. Constitution and states’ rights of secession to becoming a revolutionary freedom struggle with the aim of abolishing “the root of the evil” in “slavery itself,” so too does Marx detect a transformation in Lincoln. His assessment of Lincoln is a masterpiece of historical-materialist analysis. In 1861, he had written,

During the last two decades the singular practice developed in the United States of not electing to the presidency any man who occupied an authoritative position in his own party. . . . In this manner Polk, Pierce, Buchanan, etc. became Presidents. Likewise Abraham Lincoln. General Andrew Jackson was in fact the last President of the United States who owed his office to his personal importance, whilst all his successors owed it, on the contrary, to their personal unimportance.²⁷

Still, after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862, Marx appraised his act as follows, which I will quote at length:

Lincoln’s proclamation is even more important than the Maryland campaign. Lincoln is a *sui generis* figure in the annals of history. He has no initiative, no idealistic impetus, no cothurnus, no historical trappings. He gives his most important actions always the most commonplace form. Other people declaim about the “struggle for an idea,” when it is for them a matter of square feet of land. Lincoln even when he is motivated by an idea talks about “square feet.” He sings the bravura aria of his part hesitatively, reluctantly, and indignantly, as though apologizing for being compelled by circumstances to “act the lion.” The most redoubtable decrees—which will always remain remarkable historical documents—flung by him at the enemy all look like, and

are intended to look like, routine summonses sent by a lawyer to the lawyer of the opposing party, subtle legal arguments, involved, hidebound juridical acts. His latest proclamation, which is drafted in the same style, is the manifesto abolishing slavery, it is the most important document in American history since the establishment of the Union, and it denotes the tearing up of the old American Constitution.

Nothing is simpler than to show that Lincoln's principal political actions contain much that is aesthetically repulsive, logically inadequate, farcical in form and politically contradictory, and this is done by the English Pindars of slavery, *The Times*, *The Saturday Review*, and the rest. But Lincoln's place in the history of the United States and of mankind will nevertheless be next to that of Washington. Nowadays when the insignificant struts about melodramatically on this side of the Atlantic, is it of no significance that the significant is clothed in every-day dress in the new world?

Lincoln is not the product of a popular revolution. This plebeian, who worked his way up from stone-breaker to Senator in Illinois, without intellectual brilliance, without a particularly outstanding character, without exceptional importance—an average person of good will, was placed at the top by the normal interplay of the forces of universal suffrage unaware of the great issue at stake. The new world has never achieved a greater triumph than by this demonstration that, given its political and social organization, ordinary people of good will can accomplish feats which only heroes could accomplish in the old world!²⁸

In standard Marxism, this remarkable passage could be read as a denial of subjectivity and historical agency to the person of Lincoln, which would at least have the virtue of kicking a dead dog, the nineteenth century's "great man" approach to history. But this is not Marx's point. Rather, as Marx writes his maternal uncle Lion Philips in 1864, "if one bears in mind the fact that during Lincoln's election 3 ½ years ago, it was merely a question of making *no more concessions* to the slave-owners, whereas now *abolition of slavery* is the avowed—and in part even realized—aim, one must admit that so gigantic a transformation has *never* proceeded at such a rapid pace. It will have a most salutary influence on the whole world."²⁹ This gigantic transformation in so short a time, in turn, reveals a characteristic Marx takes to distinguish the "new world," namely, that here, "the significant is clothed in every-day dress," itself expressing a new form of "political and social

organization” that characteristically authorizes the agency of ordinary people in a historically unprecedented and even a revolutionary way. Moreover, Marx finds his key to a revolutionary explanation of the American Civil War in “the movement of slaves,” signified, even before Lincoln’s election and the outbreak of war, by an obscure uprising of Black freedom fighters in Bolivar, Missouri, responding in turn to John Brown’s seemingly futile raid on Harper’s Ferry.

This assessment of the significance of Lincoln’s “aesthetically repulsive, logically inadequate, farcical in form and politically contradictory” Emancipation Proclamation contextualizes the letter Marx wrote to him on behalf of the International Workingmen’s Association on the occasion of his reelection. He begins by congratulating, not Lincoln, but “the American people.” “If resistance to the Slave Power was the reserved watchword of your first election, the triumphant war-cry of your reelection is Death to Slavery.” He continues,

From the commencement of the Titanic American strife the working men of Europe felt instinctively that the star-spangled banner carried the destiny of their class. . . . [The] working classes of Europe understood at once . . . that the slaveholders’ rebellion was to sound the tocsin for a general holy crusade of property against labor, and that for the men of labor, with their hopes for the future, even their past conquests were at stake in the tremendous conflict on the other side of the Atlantic. Everywhere they bore therefore patiently the hardships imposed upon them by the cotton crisis, opposed enthusiastically the pro-slavery intervention . . . and, from most parts of Europe, contributed their quota of blood to the good cause.

While the working men, the true political powers of the North, allowed slavery to defile their own republic, while before the Negro, mastered and sold without his concurrence, they boasted it the highest prerogative of the white-skinned laborer to sell himself and choose his own master, they were unable to attain the true freedom of labor, or to support their European brethren in their struggle for emancipation; but this barrier to progress has been swept off by the red sea of civil war.

The working men of Europe . . . consider it an earnest of the epoch to come that it fell to the lot of Abraham Lincoln, the single-minded son of the working class, to lead his country through the matchless struggle for the rescue of an enchained race and the reconstruction of a social world.³⁰

As we have just considered, Marx does not have his tongue in his cheek when he calls Lincoln a “single-minded son of the working class.” Between Lincoln’s first and second terms, the Civil War is transformed from a constitutional to a revolutionary struggle, as Marx predicted it had to for the Union to defeat the slavocracy. But this transformation in the terms of the titanic struggle likewise corresponds to a transformation in the nature of the working-class struggle itself. As Marx puts it to Lincoln in so many words, the anti-black racism of white-skinned Northern workers, by virtue of which they felt themselves to be superior to African slaves, was a barrier that had to be swept away before they could be in a position to struggle for their “true freedom” and to “support their European brethren in their struggle for emancipation” as well.

In this account, Marx makes it known unequivocally that the anti-racist struggle against slavery categorically requires the defeat of “the loudly proclaimed principle that only certain races are capable of freedom,” and that the defeat of this principle is a necessary condition of progress for the international class struggle against capital itself. Marx’s own view, then, is not only that capital is racialized, linking his nineteenth-century outlook to Williams’s twentieth-century one and creating the problematic of race and class to which Robinson’s critique of standard Marxism responds, but it also discloses an integral connection between race and class as socially constructed realities, which it takes an explicitly anti-racist form of freedom struggle, now as then, to cancel and transcend.

II. Marx’s View on Racism Misinterpreted

It is part of the tragic history of Marxism after Marx that it has too often equivocated when Marx himself did not. It is true that in private correspondence, Marx was capable of using racist expressions.³¹ Furthermore, the textual evidence cited for his alleged Eurocentrism includes his 1850s writings on India for the *New York Daily Tribune*, in which the line can be found that “Indian society has no history at all,” (reminiscent of some of Hegel’s more obnoxious claims in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*), although his purpose in writing about England’s “double mission in India” was to bring out “[the] devastating effects of English industry” on the subcontinent, and “[the] profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization” that “lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked.”³² Texts like these count as evidence for charges like Robinson’s that Marx denies “historical agency” to non-European or non-Western people. Whether Marx moved from a unilinear view of development in the 1850s, according to which the stages of history and the future of humanity were uniquely repositied in the European

class struggle, to the multilinearism evident in the writings of his last decade, (for example, the “Preface to the Russian Edition of *The Communist Manifesto*,” the “Letter to Mikhailovsky,” the “Letter to Vera Zasulich,” and *The Ethnological Notebooks*), or whether indeed the former view is rightly ascribed to Marx in the first place, are not topics that can detain us here.³³ However, in the light of our discussion of Marx’s writings on the American Civil War, it is difficult to see how the notions can be sustained that Marx himself was a racist, that his outlook was Eurocentric, that his analyses were economistic, that he privileged class to the exclusion of race, or that he denied historical agency to freedom struggles other than the class struggle itself.

For the subsequent history of Marxism, to be sure, the case is not as clear, although Black radicalism has intervened in that history and shaped it in ways that continue to be significant. It is beyond the scope of this essay even to begin to sort out the tangle of positions and counter-positions that have invoked Marx’s name and warrant for the bewildering array of conflicting tendencies proliferating like mushrooms across the landscape of theory and practice. A single figure will have to suffice. The Harlem Renaissance poet and novelist Claude McKay, speaking as a U.S. delegate to the Fourth Congress of the Communist International in 1922, emblemizes both the essential connection between black radicalism and Marxism and also the essential tension between them. On the one hand, McKay states,

When in 1920 the American government started to investigate and to suppress radical propaganda among Negroes, the small radical Negro groups in America retaliated by publishing the fact that the Socialists stood for the emancipation of the Negroes, and that reformist America could do nothing for them. Then, I think, for the first time in American history, the American Negroes found that Karl Marx had been interested in their emancipation, and had fought valiantly for it.³⁴

On the other hand, however, he tells the Congress that “American Socialists and Communists . . . are not willing to face the Negro Question,” leaving it to “[the] reformist bourgeoisie [to carry] on the battle against discrimination and racial prejudice in America.”³⁵ He continues,

In associating with the comrades of America, I have found demonstrations of prejudice on the various occasions when the white and black comrades had to get together, and this is the greatest obstacle that the Communists of America have got to overcome—the fact that they first have got to emancipate themselves from

the ideas they entertained towards Negroes before they can be able to reach the Negroes with any kind of radical propaganda.³⁶

More than eighty years later, one way the Marxist tradition can renew the lost opportunity (to which McKay testifies) to restore Marx's own integral, organic connection to the Black radical tradition is to return to the sources in his writings for the dialectics of Black freedom struggles.

III. Marx as Philosopher of Liberation

However, before such a return to the sources and radical renewal can be achieved, and the integral place of an irreducible anti-racist discourse in the architecture of Marx's theory can be restored, it is first of all necessary to contextualize it within an approach to Marx's work as a whole, which can be stated only briefly here. The fulcrum is the recognition that Marx must be thought of first and foremost as a philosopher of liberation, who takes his stand with the self-activity and self-development of every freedom struggle. The anthropological vision of *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* grounded every subsequent development in his theory and practice, from the *Communist Manifesto* to *Capital*, and from *Capital* to his final return to the philosophical ground wire of 1844 in the *Ethnological Notebooks* of his last decade.³⁷

The surrealist poet Franklin Rosemont examines the thesis of Marx's return to 1844 in the *Ethnological Notebooks* in his essay "Karl Marx and the Iroquois."³⁸ Rosemont writes, "That Marx, toward the end of his life, was returning to projects that had been dear to his heart in the days of his original and bold grappling with 'naturalist anthropology' as a theory of communist revolution, the days in which he was most deeply preoccupied with the philosophical and practical legacy of Hegel . . . is resonant with meanings for today."³⁹ In the *Notebooks*, Marx copied out lengthy excerpts from the nineteenth-century American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society*, and especially its detailed account of the Iroquois, [which] for the first time gave Marx insights into the concrete possibilities of a free society as it had actually existed in history."⁴⁰ Rosemont also stresses that,

The neglect of the [*Notebooks*] for nearly a century is [not] surprising when one realizes the degree to which they challenge what has passed for Marxism all these years. In the lamentable excuse for a 'socialist' press in the English-speaking world, this last great work from Marx's pen has been largely ignored. The suggestion that the *Ethnological Notebooks* signify Marx's return to the 'projects of his Paris youth' might turn out to entail more far-reaching implications than anyone has yet realized.⁴¹

If the Marxian tradition has its own resources in Marx's text to respond to and benefit from Robinson's critique of the standard presentation, a way forward to its "far-reaching implications" lies in a renewal of the philosophy of liberation that informed Marx's project from first to last.⁴²

From this perspective, even Marx's emphasis on class struggle must be reckoned against the horizon of human freedom—what Hegel called "the self-bringing-forth of liberty"—along the multiform paths of creative advance.⁴³ In what may be his most succinct formulation of the humanist backbone of his theory and practice, Marx posits "the categorical imperative to overthrow all circumstances in which man is humiliated, enslaved, abandoned, and despised, circumstances best described by the exclamation of a Frenchman on hearing of an intended tax on dogs: Poor dogs! They want to treat you like men!"⁴⁴ In the spirit of this "categorical imperative," the Marxist-Humanist philosopher Raya Dunayevskaya singled out *four* "forces of revolution"—both "force and reason," as she called them—thinking of Marx's announcement of "new forces and new passions" in the first volume of *Capital*, without imagining that she was departing from Marx: in addition to the working class, she included what she called the "Black dimension" along with women and youth.⁴⁵ In her 1963 pamphlet *American Civilization on Trial*, she traced the course of Black struggle from the time of Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, and the slave revolts to the Freedom Riders of the time she wrote, in which she characterized the "Black masses as vanguard."⁴⁶

Dunayevskaya thought that her singling-out of "Black masses as vanguard" was organically rooted in Marx's own thought. She imagined that in *American Civilization on Trial*, she was continuing an approach to racism, anti-racism, and revolution that was textually founded by Marx, from Marx's time to her own and from abolitionism to the Black labor struggles of the early nineteen-sixties. For the twentieth-anniversary edition (1983), she added "A 1980s View of the Two-Way Road Between the U.S. and Africa," in which she wrote:

Marx's reference in the *Ethnological Notebooks* to the Australian aborigine as "the intelligent black" brought to a conclusion the dialectic he had unchained when he first broke from bourgeois society in the 1840s and objected to the use of the word, "Negro," as if it were synonymous with the word "slave." By the 1850s, in the *Grundrisse*, he extended that sensitivity to the whole pre-capitalist world. By the 1860s, the Black Dimension became, at one and the same time, not only pivotal to the abolition of slavery and victory of the North in the Civil War, but also the restructuring of *Capital* itself. In a word, the often-quoted sentence: "Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black

skin it is branded,” far from being rhetoric, was the actual reality *and* the perspective for overcoming that reality. Marx reached, at every historic turning point, for a concluding point, *not* as an end but as a new jumping-off point, a new beginning, a new vision.⁴⁷

This way of thinking about Marx’s own self-development, perhaps surprisingly, places anti-black racism, his critique of it, and the freedom struggle against it, among his overarching concerns. The idea of “Black masses as vanguard” is not an accretion in Marxism but has an organic place in it. Having considered Marx’s Civil War journalism and correspondence to this effect, it remains to consider the sense in which this notion is not only consonant with Marx’s theory of capital (i.e. the critique of political economy), but also an integral moment within it.

IV. Race as an Economic Category

To begin with, Marx’s text addresses slavery as an “economic category.” Our subsequent thinking about Marx on racism will therefore hinge upon on the question of what an “economic category” is in Marx’s thought. The approach taken here is the opposite of standard Marxism. Once more, the characteristic feature of standard Marxism is its subordination of every form of struggle to the class struggle, maintaining that the only category relevant to Marxian explanation is class itself. For example, the editors of the volume from Progress Publishers on *Marx and Engels on the United States* write the following in their “Preface”:

Marx and Engels considered that the war against Negro slavery in the USA would inaugurate the era of the rise of the working class in the same way that the American War of Independence at the end of the eighteenth century had opened the era of the rise of the bourgeoisie. It was in this above all that they saw the world-wide significance of the American Civil War, considering that if the reactionary forces of the American slave-holding planters, who were also supported by the counter-revolutionary ruling circles of the European capitalist states, were destroyed, this would be very much in the interest of the European and American working class. In the opinion of Marx and Engels, such a war was bound to become popular and revolutionary in character.⁴⁸

In one way, this account accurately reflects Marx’s plain view. For example, in the “Preface to the First Edition” of *Capital* (Volume One), Marx writes, “Just as in the eighteenth century the American War of Independence sounded the tocsin for the European middle class, so in the nineteenth century the American

Civil War did the same for the European working class.”⁴⁹ However, Marx, with the Civil War having only recently concluded, also wrote in this Preface (dated 25 July 1867):

[On] the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, Mr. Wade, Vice-President of the United States, has declared in public meetings that, after the abolition of slavery, a radical transformation in the existing relations of capital and landed property is on the agenda. These are signs of the times, not to be hidden by purple mantles or black cassocks. They do not signify that tomorrow a miracle will occur. They do show that, within the ruling classes themselves, the foreboding is emerging that the present society is no solid crystal, but an organism capable of change, and constantly engaged in a process of change.⁵⁰

There is a subtle but crucial difference between Marx’s remarks in this Preface and the Russian editors’ summation of it. The Russian editors discover “the world-wide significance of the American Civil War” only in the class defeat of “the American slave-holding planters,” which is “in the interest of the European and American working class.” What they omit is the emancipatory content of the abolition of slavery itself. On the other hand, Marx does not reduce “the world-wide significance” of the war to the class interests of the contending classes. Rather, he observes a “sign of the times” that “a radical transformation in the existing relations of capital and landed property is on the agenda.” This formulation occupies a higher level of abstraction and complexity than the reductive formulation of class interests. What the “radical transformation” discloses is not class interests alone, but the shock of recognition that society is, in the metaphor Marx takes from biology, “an organism capable of change, and constantly engaged in a process of change.”

In the hands of the Russian editors, “race” as a category is either invisible or it is wholly subordinate to class and the class interest of the working class. But we have already recorded Marx’s view that “the biggest things that are happening in the world today are on the one hand the movement of the slaves in America . . . and on the other the movement of the slaves in Russia,” that “the loudly proclaimed principle that only certain races are capable of freedom” is a damnable lie, that “the root of the evil” is “*slavery itself*,” and that the racism of “the white-skinned laborer” is a “barrier to progress” that had been “swept off by the red sea of civil war” (only to return again with the end of Reconstruction and the coming of Jim Crow). In *Dialectics of Black Freedom Struggles*, John Alan makes the relevant point:

Many Marxists have pointed to the economic effects of restructuring on the Black population as a way to point to the inherent racism of U.S. capitalism. They do so to single out the underlying *root cause* of the revolt. Yet the tendency to focus on the economic roots of oppression, rather than what W.E.B. Du Bois called ‘the spiritual strivings of the Black masses’ for liberation, has a great deal to do with why Marxism has never succeeded in sinking deep roots in the African-American community. Even those who recognize the inherent limitations of the economic reductionism that has marred so much of post-Marx Marxism suffer from the tendency to reduce Marxism to a ‘theory of struggle’ rather than a *philosophy of liberation* rooted in the ongoing struggles of the oppressed.

. . . [As] seen from his relation to the abolitionist movement which arose to oppose slavery, Marx didn’t stop at making slavery an economic category. The active opposition to slavery was central to the unfolding of the whole liberation movement of his day as seen in the creation of the International Workingmen’s Association, which solidarized with Black slaves fighting for freedom. The whole point of a philosophy of liberation is for subjects of liberation to determine themselves beyond the arena of ‘root cause’ and economic determinism.⁵¹

Accordingly, no “economic category,” in Marx’s hands, is merely an economic category and nothing else. As Herbert Marcuse showed in *Reason and Revolution* (1941), all of Marx’s economic categories are philosophical, and all of his philosophical categories are likewise economic.⁵² In other words, Marx never made the mistake of economism, the idea that a phenomenon such as African slavery has a “merely economic” meaning and significance. Concerning the “economic category” of slavery, Marx’s essential argument already appears in 1847 in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. He writes,

Slavery is an economic category like any other. . . . [We] are dealing only with direct slavery, with Negro slavery in Surinam, in Brazil, in the Southern States of North America. Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry. It is slavery that gave the colonies their value; it is the colonies that created world trade, and it is world trade that is the pre-condition of large-scale industry. Thus

slavery is an economic category of the greatest importance. Without slavery North America, the most progressive of countries, would be transformed into a patriarchal country. Wipe North America off the map of the world, and you will have anarchy—the complete decay of modern commerce and civilization. Cause slavery to disappear and you will have wiped America off the map of nations. Thus slavery, because it is an economic category, has always existed among the institutions of the peoples. Modern nations have been able only to disguise slavery in their own countries, but they have imposed it without disguise upon the New World.⁵³

This text gives a straightforward account of the role of slavery in the historical development of capitalism to the point of world trade and large-scale industry. A virtually identical account appears in volume one of *Capital*.

Although Marx discusses slavery in a variety of contexts—for example, as a precapitalist economic formation in antiquity and the basis of a historically determinate mode of production separate and distinct from the capitalist mode of production; or, for example, as a conceptual adjunct to the categorial presentation of “free labor,” counting as its dialectical opposite—the passage from *The Poverty of Philosophy* specifically bears on African slavery, especially “in the Southern States of North America.” Granted, in this passage, Marx is not morally condemning slavery, nor is he explicitly linking it to the phenomenon of anti-black racism. But for the purpose of our argument, it is significant that he is describing African slavery as *historically necessary* to the determination of specifically capitalist development. Without detaining ourselves on the logical status of “historical necessity,” at least it is clear that to Marx’s mind, slavery is a necessary condition for world trade and large-scale industry as they actually developed in history. In this respect, “it is slavery that gave the colonies their value.” If the economic category, African slavery, is also racist, then we can conclude that racism is necessary to capitalism (or that capitalism is necessarily racist).

From the standpoint of a philosophy of liberation, one of the fundamental errors or harms of racism is the dehumanization of the object of its regard. The gesture of dehumanization is also a fundamental characteristic of slavery. Thus, in volume one of *Capital*, in a note where Marx addresses slavery in antiquity, he writes that the ancient world regarded “the slave” as “the speaking implement,” that is, an implement or a thing rather than a subject or a person, only, with the distinction of talking, while animals were “semi-mute implements” and a plough simply “mute.”⁵⁴ When it is an African who is a slave, the dehumanizing gesture has a double force.

Lance Selfa, in his Marxist reconstruction of the historical tissues connecting African slavery to racism and racism to capitalism, writes:

Historians can actually observe colonial Americans [in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, after Bacon's Rebellion in 1676] in the act of preparing the ground for race without foreknowledge of what would later arise on the foundation they were laying. . . . After establishing that African slaves would cultivate major cash crops of the North American colonies, the planters then moved to establish the institutions and ideas that would uphold white supremacy. Most unfree labor became Black labor. Laws and ideas intended to underscore the subhuman status of Black people—in a word, the ideology of racism and white supremacy—emerged full-blown over the next generation.⁵⁵

An African slave is dehumanized, assigned a subhuman status, both by virtue of being a slave (a “speaking implement”), a characteristic of human beings as chattel property in *any* historical epoch or form of society where slavery occurs, but also specifically by virtue of being black, in the specifically capitalist context of the triangular trade, the persistence of which across the subsequent centuries required “the ideology of racism and white supremacy,” or once more, in Marx's words, “the loudly proclaimed principle that only certain races are capable of freedom.”

In *Capital*, Marx distinguishes between a patriarchal form of Black slavery and a capitalist form, where the capitalist form intensifies the misery already evident under patriarchy. He writes,

But as soon as peoples whose production still moves within the lower forms of slave-labor . . . are drawn into a world market dominated by the capitalist mode of production, whereby the sale of their products for export develops into their principal interest, the civilized horrors of over-work are grafted onto the barbaric horrors of slavery, serfdom etc. Hence the Negro labor in the southern states of the American Union preserved a moderately patriarchal character as long as production was chiefly directed to the satisfaction of immediate local requirements. But in proportion as the export of cotton became of vital interest to those states, the over-working of the Negro, and sometimes the consumption of his life in seven years of labor, became a factor in a calculated and calculating system. It was no longer a question of obtaining from him a certain quantity of useful products, but rather of the production of surplus-value itself.⁵⁶

The “patriarchal character” of a certain type of slavery is a residue of precapitalist social relations apart from racial coding (in western antiquity, for example, classification *by race* does not exist). But in the passage just quoted, Marx draws not only a historical but also a structural and conceptual link from African slavery to the production of surplus-value, imbuing it with its specifically capitalist character. As we saw in the passage quoted earlier from *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx traces the *historical* path from “direct slavery” in America to industrial capitalism and the “disguised slavery” of the working class in England and elsewhere, but at the same time he refers to it as an “economic category of the greatest importance” and “the pivot of bourgeois industry.” When we think about the passage just quoted from *Capital* in conjunction with the passage from *The Poverty of Philosophy*, it begins to appear that a historically determinate content operates as a structural determinant shaping a basic category of Marx’s theory of value. If his categories, like Hegel’s, aim to unify form with content, then anti-black racism enters constitutively into the terms and relations of his critique of political economy, the capitalist mode of production, and bourgeois society; and it enters as well into his emancipatory projection of the opposite, a post-capitalist society free at last from the long travail of racism.

But the crucial question here is whether this implicit indictment of the intensification of the exploitation of the labor of slaves under capitalism is also and at the same time an indictment of African slavery as *racist* in nature. The same chapter of *Capital* just quoted (Chapter Ten on “The Working Day”) gives us grounds to answer affirmatively. Some pages later, Marx writes the “often-quoted” passage (to which Dunayevskaya referred):

In the United States of America, every independent workers’ movement was paralyzed as long as slavery disfigured a part of the republic. *Labor in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin.* However, a new life immediately arose from the death of slavery. The first fruit of the American Civil War was the eight hours’ agitation, which ran from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California, with the seven-league boots of the locomotive.⁵⁷

In this passage, the relevant distinction, labor in a white skin and labor in a black skin, is explicitly a racial one, in which Marx links the project of the emancipation of labor explicitly to the overcoming of the branding of black skin.

Furthermore, it should be clear, although perhaps to standard Marxism it has never been sufficiently clear, that Marx’s criticism of anti-black racism, here in connection with African slavery, has an explicitly ethical hue. For example, in *Capital*, he writes,

While the cotton industry introduced child-slavery into England, in the United States it gave the impulse for the transformation of the more or less patriarchal slavery into a system of commercial exploitation. In fact, the veiled slavery of the wage-laborers in Europe needed the unqualified slavery of the New World as its pedestal. . . . [Capital] comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt. . . . The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginning of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black skins. . . . The treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement and murder flowed back to the mother country and were turned into capital there.⁵⁸

Although Marx does not explicitly state an ethical precept or theory, his characteristic language in passages like these, which could be multiplied indefinitely, is saturated in a moral idiom as striking as any classical moralist.⁵⁹

Marx's clear recognition of the explicitly racist character of the institution of African slavery, which, in other words, is no mere "economic category," also comes out in other works where we can discover an explicit anti-racist discourse from his pen. I will give just two more examples. First, in *Wage-Labor and Capital*, he writes: "What is a Negro slave? A man of the black race. The one explanation is as good as the other. A Negro is a Negro. He only becomes a slave in certain relations. A cotton spinning jenny is a machine for spinning cotton. It only becomes capital in certain relations. Torn away from these conditions, it as little capital as gold by itself is money, or as sugar is the price of sugar."⁶⁰ Quite a bit of Marxian theory is condensed in these few lines, but the relevant point for us is the equation of an African with a "slave," not by nature, of course, but only in the context of "certain" capitalist social "relations."

Finally, in a "Confidential Communication on Bakunin" sent to Ludwig Kugelmann in 1870 in his capacity as the corresponding secretary for Germany of the International Workingmen's Association, Marx writes:

Every industrial and commercial center in England now possesses a working class divided into two hostile camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he feels himself a member of the ruling nation and so turns himself into a tool of the aristocrats

and capitalists of his country against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself. He cherishes religious, social and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude toward him is much the same as that of the “poor whites” to the “niggers” in the former slave states of the U.S.A. This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organization.⁶¹

Here Marx is once again explicitly linking racist ideology and practice, anti-Irish racism here compared to anti-black, as a key element in the divide-and-conquer strategy of the capitalist ruling class. Conversely, “the impotence of the English working class” has to do, not with its class position alone but with other social and cultural factors including its racism. Likewise, we have found Marx arguing that the ideology of white supremacy, as long as it persists, constitutes an insuperable barrier to the development of the American working class, for the simple but decisive reason that it fails to reach up to and “attain” the idea of “true freedom.”

V. Conclusion

Marx’s view is that racism and capitalism are cut from the same cloth. Just as his discursive practice is profoundly anti-capitalist, it is also anti-racist. Nor is race subsumed into other, allegedly more fundamental categories, such as class. Marx was aware of the social construction of “race” as a category in the first place, and he demonstrated the systematic role that racist practices and ideology play in the history and development of the capitalist mode of production. Inasmuch as we still live in a deeply racist, as well as capitalist society, the affiliation of one with the other is not an accident, and Marx recognized as much. If these conclusions are not controversial, even for Cedric Robinson, they nevertheless imply the need for a profound reorientation towards Marx’s thought as a whole, if a renewed Marxism has any hope of answering Claude McKay’s concern about what used to be called “the Negro Question.” If Marx’s own thought is too nuanced and complex to be captured in the nets of certain classic oversimplifications—economism, Eurocentrism, the reading-out from history of “antagonistic agencies” other than class and class conflict, along with the more or less patently false unilinearism of a mechanical theory of history—there is a fundamental reason why, which is philosophical in nature. What these theses share in common is their failure to rise to the level of a philosophy of freedom, grounded in the many concrete freedom

struggles of which the Black freedom struggle is a “touchstone.”⁶² The conceptual move from thinking of Marxism as a “theory of struggle” to thinking of it as a “philosophy of liberation” is the key to encountering the positions Marx actually took on capitalism and race.

Notes

I would like to thank Peter Amato, Harry van der Linden, Peter Hudis, and Kevin Anderson for their helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this essay. The usual caveat applies.

1. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p. 7. Originally published in 1944.
2. See Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). For a recent discussion aiming to vindicate Marx on race and racism, see Lance Selfa, “Slavery and the origins of racism,” *International Socialist Review* 26 (2002). Online at http://www.isreview.org/issues/26/roots_of_racism.shtml. Selfa gives a well-documented, straightforward Marxist account of the history. For another recent discussion that directly responds to Robinson’s critique of Marxism, see Gregory Meyerson, “Rethinking Black Marxism: Reflections on Cedric Robinson and Others,” *Cultural Logic: An Electronic Journal of Marxist Theory and Practice* 3 (2000). Online at <http://clogic.eserver.org/3-1&2/meyerson.html>. Meyerson holds that a “noneconomic determinist Marxism” can adequately respond to and even turn the tables on Robinson.
3. Travis Tatum, “Reflections on Black Marxism,” *Race and Class* 47 (2005): pp. 71–76, online at <http://civillibertarian.blogspot.com/2007/04/reflections-on-black-marxism.html>.
4. Ibid.
5. Robin D. G. Kelley, “Foreword” to *Black Marxism*. Quoted from an excerpt from the “Foreword,” online at http://uncpress.unc.edu/chapters/robinson_black.html.
6. Cedric Robinson, “Capitalism, Marxism, and the Black Radical Tradition: An Interview with Cedric Robinson,” *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory* 3 (1999), online at <http://flag.blackened.net/ias/5robinsoninterview.htm>.
7. Robinson writes an appreciation of Williams, vindicating Williams’s scholarship against a generation of critics, including Marxist critics, in Cedric J. Robinson, “Capitalism, Slavery, and Bourgeois Historiography,” *History Workshop Journal* 23 (1987): pp. 122–140; online at <http://gess.wordpress.com/2007/03/24/capitalism-slavery-and-bourgeois-historiography/>.
8. Recording a line of development from Lenin through Trotsky to Raya Dunayevskaya, John Alan puts the point this way: “By developing Trotsky’s view and revisiting Lenin’s thesis on the national question, Dunayevskaya argued not only that the independent Black struggle was in itself revolutionary but that Black self-activity could be the ‘bacilli’ and catalyst of the American labor movements as a whole.” See his *Dialectics of Black Freedom Struggles: Race, Philosophy, and the Needed American Revolution* (Chicago: News and Letters, 2003), p. 77.
9. Marx, “The Civil War in the United States” (1861), in *Marx and Engels on the United States*, ed. Nelly Romyantseva and others (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979), p. 99.
10. On July 30, 1862, as the war was going badly for the North, Engels wrote a gloomy letter to Marx in which he argued that *an individual*, the Secretary of War, Edward Stanton, was “chiefly to blame,” and he complained that the “total absence of any elasticity in the whole mass of the people—this proves to me that it is all up.” See *ibid.*, pp. 188–189. Marx replied on August 7: “I do not entirely share your views on the American Civil War. I do not think that all is up.”

Shifting the focus from political intrigue to the mass social movement, he continued, “all this will take another turn. . . . If Lincoln does not give way (but he will), there will be a revolution.” *Ibid.*, pp. 189–190.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85, 92. From “The North American Civil War” (1861).
12. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 99. From “The Civil War in the United States” (1861).
14. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 80. From “The American Question in England” (1861).
16. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 89, 80.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 102, 80. Seward, whom Marx sardonically calls “the Demosthenes of the Republican Party,” foresees the “irrepressible conflict” in a speech in Rochester, New York in October, 1858. Marx also writes that the Republican Party “owes its origin to the struggle for Kansas” and that “as the struggle for Kansas . . . called the *Republican Party* into being, it at the same time occasioned the first *split within the Democratic Party* itself” (p. 89).
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
26. *Ibid.*, see pp. 151–153 for Marx’s excerpt from Phillips’s Abington speech.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 101. From “The Dismissal of Frémont” (1861).
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 155–156. From “Comments on the North American Events” (1862).
29. *Ibid.*, p. 206.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 168–169.
31. For example, Marx uses a racial epithet in his complaint against Ferdinand Lassalle in a letter to Engels of July 30, 1862. See *Karl Marx Frederick Engels: Collected Works* 41 (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1987), pp. 389, 390. Here Marx is angry with Lassalle for discounting the importance of the American Civil War.
32. See Marx, “The Future Results of British Rule in India,” in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 332–337.
33. See “Preface to the Russian Edition of the *Communist Manifesto*,” in *ibid.*, pp. 583–584; for the “Letter to Mikhailovsky,” see *ibid.*, pp. 572–572; and for the “Letter to Vera Sassoulitch” and drafts, see *ibid.*, pp. 576–580. Also see *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx*, ed. Lawrence Krader (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972). For their significant place within Marx’s thought as a whole, see Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation, and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981), esp. pp. 177–188 and 190–191. Dunayevskaya writes, “Marx’s last writings—the *Ethnological Notebooks*—are a critical determinant in themselves and in the light they cast on Marx’s works as a totality, as he was completing the circle begun in 1844. . . . The concept he held fast was the one he had worked out in his 1844

- Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts*" (p. 190). For another account that also links these *Notebooks* to 1844, see Franklin Rosemont's remarkable essay, "Karl Marx and the Iroquois," available at http://www.geocities.com/cordobakaf/marx_iroquois.html (n.d.). Finally, for Marx's view of multilinear paths of development versus Engels's tendency towards unilinearism and reductionism, see Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*, esp. pp. 175–187.
34. Claude McKay, quoted in Raya Dunayevskaya, *American Civilization on Trial: Black Masses as Vanguard*, 5th ed. (Chicago: News and Letters, 2003; originally 1963), p. 65. This quotation and the subsequent two quotations from McKay's speech are taken from the *Fourth Congress of the Communist International. Abridged Report of Meetings Held at Petrograd and Moscow*, Nov. 7–Dec. 3, 1922 (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, n.d.), pp. 260–261.
 35. *Ibid.*, p. 67. In a note, Dunayevskaya points out that in 1903 Eugene Debs had taken the position that "properly speaking, there is no Negro question outside the labor question" (p. 67, n. 38).
 36. Claude McKay, quoted in Alan, *Dialectics of Black Freedom Struggles*, p. 73.
 37. Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. Dirk J. Struik (New York: International Publishers, 1964). The manuscripts in their totality constitute the philosophical anthropology of humanization or freedom, and consequently Marx's humanism, which he achieved through his critical appropriation and transformation of Hegelian philosophy. In his *Philosophy of Mind* (trans. William Wallace and A. V. Miller [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971]), Hegel writes, "If to be aware of the Idea—to be aware, that is, that men (*sic*) are aware of freedom as their essence, aim, and object—is [a] matter of *speculation*, still the very Idea itself is the actuality of men—not something which they *have*, as men, but which they *are*" (p. 240).
 38. Rosemont, "Karl Marx and the Iroquois," available at http://www.geocities.com/cordobakaf/marx_iroquois.html (n.d.).
 39. *Ibid.*
 40. *Ibid.* (emphases omitted).
 41. *Ibid.*
 42. Gregory Meyerson's way of responding to Robinson with a "noneconomic determinist Marxism" must be evaluated on its merits and cannot be excluded *a priori*, but from the perspective of this essay, it is a mistake to treat Marx's thought as a type of determinism in the first place, whether it is economic or non-economic in character. See Meyerson, "Rethinking Black Marxism: Reflections on Cedric Robinson and Others."
 43. For "the self-bringing-forth of liberty," see Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 314. In *The Power of Negativity: Selected Writings on the Dialectic in Hegel and Marx*, ed. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), Dunayevskaya writes, "That which Hegel judged to be the synthesis of the 'Self-Thinking Idea' and the 'Self-Bringing-Forth of Liberty,' Marxist-Humanism holds, is what Marx had called the new society. The many paths to get there are not easy to work out" (p. 9).
 44. Marx, "Towards a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction," in David McLellan, p. 69. (In retaining Marx's "man" and "men" for "humankind" and "human beings," I presume the reader's forbearance, assured that were Marx writing today, as a feminist, he would correct for the sexism embedded in many languages.)
 45. Dunayevskaya delineates "four forces of revolution," for example, in the concluding chapter of her book *Philosophy and Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003; originally 1973),

entitled “New Passions and New Forces” (chap. 9, pp. 267–292). Concerning the black freedom struggle in particular, she writes: “Black was the color that helped make the 1960s so exciting a decade. We became witness simultaneously to the African Revolutions and the Black Revolution in America. By their self-activity, self-organization, self-development, the black youth struck out against white supremacy in the quiescent South, and with unparalleled courage took everything that was dished out to them—from beatings, bombings, and prisons to cattle prods, shootings, and even death—and still, unarmed, continued fighting back. They initiated a new epoch of youth revolt, white as well as black, throughout the land. There is not a single method of struggle . . . that did not have its origin in the black movement. Moreover, this was so not only as strategy and tactic but also as underlying philosophy and perspectives for the future” (pp. 267–268). For Marx’s own appeal to “new forces and new passions,” see *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* vol.1, translated by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 928. Hereafter *Capital* 1

46. The subtitle of Dunayevskaya’s *American Civilization on Trial* is “Black Masses as Vanguard.”
47. Dunayevskaya, *American Civilization on Trial*, p. 14. In *Dialectics of Black Freedom Struggles*, Alan contextualizes the reference to “the intelligent Black” as follows: “Marx’s interest in national minorities and non-Western peoples did not dissipate after he published Vol. I of *Capital*. It only intensified. In the 1870s he increasingly turned his attention to developments in the technologically underdeveloped world, writing voluminous manuscripts on Russia, China, Sumatra, India, as well as on Native Americans and Australian aborigines. These manuscripts, many of which have not been translated into English to this day, range from his *Notebooks on Kovalesky* (in which he analyzed Indian and North African societies) to his *Ethnological Notebooks*, which take up Native American and Australian societies. In the *Ethnological Notebooks* Marx counterposed the ‘idiocies’ of English colonial rule to ‘the intelligent Black’ Australian aborigines who refused to listen to them” (pp. 69–70).
48. In *Marx and Engels on the United States*, p. 18.
49. Marx, *Capital* 1, p. 91.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
51. Alan, *Dialectics of Black Freedom Struggles*, pp. 14–15.
52. See Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 258.
53. Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), pp. 111–112.
54. Marx, *Capital* 1, p. 303, n.18.
55. Selfa, “Slavery and the origins of racism,” *International Socialist Review* 26 (2002).
56. Marx, *Capital* 1, p. 345.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 414, my emphasis.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 925–926; 915, 918.
59. Here, only for expediency’s sake, I am conceding to the traditional view that Marx does not work out an explicit ethical theory. What is true is that he did not publish a book explicitly about moral philosophy, like the *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals* or the *Philosophy of Right* (unless, of course, *Capital* is such a book). The relevant point in this paper is only that racism is widely held to be a matter of moral concern, and since Marx’s text is saturated in a moral idiom, one is compelled to conclude that Marx is not merely describing, but also indicting “the turning of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black skins,” etc.
60. Marx, *Wage-Labour and Capital & Value, Price and Profit* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), p. 28.

61. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Ireland and the Irish Question* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), pp. 293–294. The full text of the “Confidential Communication” is available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1870/03/28.htm#s4>.
62. See Alan, *Dialectics of Black Freedom Struggles*, pp. 89–90.