

# Social Justice Watch 0703

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# 图集精选

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a boomer will never own a zoomer on social media. science won't allow it.

[source](#)

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## Wisconsin

An 18 y/o black woman was SET ON FIRE yesterday by 4 WHITE MEN who approached her car at a stoplight screaming racial slurs at her before throwing lighter fluid and a match in her face.

She suffers from THIRD DEGREE BURNS to her body.

SAY HER NAME: ALTHEA BERNSTEIN [source](#)

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# 消息精选

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Here's one feminist life rule of mine: I never judge a man based on how he treats women when they are coddling or praising him. Look closely at how a man reacts when a woman displeases him, stands up to him, or draws a boundary with him, and you will find out who he really is. [source](#)

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when girls mention sexual assaults men's first response is "happens to men too" yet when men talk about the high rates of male suicide which is a very valid problem in our society you will NEVER find a girl say "happens to girls too" because we understand basic empathy [source](#)

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[telegra.ph/What-a-machine-learning-tool-that-turns-Obama-white-can-and-can-tell-us-about-AI-bias-06-27-2](https://telegra.ph/What-a-machine-learning-tool-that-turns-Obama-white-can-and-can-tell-us-about-AI-bias-06-27-2)

Telegraph

What a machine learning tool that turns Obama white can (and can't) tell us about AI bias

It's a startling image that illustrates the deep-rooted biases of AI research. Input a low-resolution picture of Barack Obama, the first black president of the United States, into an algorithm designed to generate depixelated faces, and the output is a white...

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That woman in red. THATS how you use your privilege. [link](#) [source](#)

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Tik Tok suspended the account of this 17 year old Muslim girl for raising

awareness about the Concentration Camps detaining 2 million Muslims in China

They want silence. We want JUSTICE!

PLEASE KEEP TALKING ABOUT THIS. [source](#)

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If you need to explain social distancing to kids, or anyone, use this [source](#)

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[telegra.ph/This-time-they-can-see-our-pain-06-30-3](#) | [source](#)

Telegraph

This time they can see our pain

Salt Lake City's recent protests and perspectives from a young black student. You can call the protest violent. By the end, it was. But understand that when you do so, when all you are willing to see is the parts of activism that make you most uncomfortable...

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[apnews.com/269b3de1af34e17c1941a514f78d764c](#)

AP NEWS

China cuts Uighur births with IUDs, abortion, sterilization

The Chinese government is taking draconian measures to slash birth rates among Uighurs and other minorities as part of a sweeping campaign to curb its Muslim population, even as it encourages some...

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Op-ed: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLPJpiw1WYdTpmOmC2i3hR4\\_aR7omqhaCj](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLPJpiw1WYdTpmOmC2i3hR4_aR7omqhaCj)

YouTube

David Harvey's Anti-Capitalist Chronicles

David Harvey's Anti-Capitalist Chronicles is a bimonthly podcast that looks at capitalism through a Marxist lens. Support the podcast on Patreon:

<https://www...>

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[telegra.ph/Patrice-Lumumba-on-the-Congos-Independence-Our-Wounds-Are-Too-Fresh-and-Too-Painful-06-30](http://telegra.ph/Patrice-Lumumba-on-the-Congos-Independence-Our-Wounds-Are-Too-Fresh-and-Too-Painful-06-30)

Telegraph

Patrice Lumumba on the Congo's Independence: "Our Wounds Are Too Fresh and Too Painful"

Our spring issue, "Pandemic Politics," is out now. It features over 120 pages of beautiful illustrations and quality writing and analysis. Get a discounted subscription today! Mike Davis Liza Featherstone Peter Frase Seth Ackerman Sixty years ago today, the...

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[telegra.ph/Want-to-Fight-Poverty-Give-Poor-People-Money-06-30](http://telegra.ph/Want-to-Fight-Poverty-Give-Poor-People-Money-06-30)

Telegraph

Want to Fight Poverty? Give Poor People Money.

It may be inadequate and it may only be temporary, but the sudden federal injection of cash that accompanied the coronavirus made a significant difference to millions of lives. That's according to new research on the impact of government aid by teams based...

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[telegra.ph/The-Supreme-Court-Will-Not-Deliver-Justice-on-Abortion-Rights-07-01](http://telegra.ph/The-Supreme-Court-Will-Not-Deliver-Justice-on-Abortion-Rights-07-01)

Telegraph

The Supreme Court Will Not Deliver Justice on Abortion Rights

Defying expectations, the Supreme Court narrowly struck down a hyper-restrictive Louisiana abortion law on Monday. The court ruled 5 to 4 in June Medical Services v. Russo that Louisiana can't require abortion doctors to have admitting privileges at nearby...

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The brutal purpose of Beijing's so-called "national security" law is to frighten, intimidate & suppress the speech of Hong Kongers. All freedom-loving people

must come together to condemn this law, which signals the death of the “one country, two systems” principle. [source](#)

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[telegra.ph/The-Forgotten-Socialists-of-Tiananmen-Square-07-01](#)

Telegraph

The Forgotten Socialists of Tiananmen Square

Public discourse on the 1989 Tiananmen Democracy Movement has been dominated by two narratives. The most prevalent interprets the movement in the framework of “democracy vs. authoritarianism.” The “democracy” in this narrative almost always refers to liberal...

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If you’re an Asian upset about COVID racism, but silent about the police murdering a black man or a white woman weaponizing the police against a black man, you’re selfish and selective about your anti-racism. And you need to think about your complicity in anti-black racism. [source](#)

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[telegra.ph/Jacobins-Racial-Justice-Reading-List-07-01](#)

Telegraph

Racial Justice Reading List

A reading list is no substitute for political action. But it can inform the steps we take to win a more just world. As the late Detroit activist General Baker put it, “We have to turn thinkers into fighters and fighters into thinkers.” With that in mind...

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[telegra.ph/Dismantling-Anti-Blackness-Together--NACLA-07-01-3](#)

Telegraph

Dismantling Anti-Blackness Together | NACLA

On June 3, a group of protestors, most of them Dominicans, marched on Dyckman Street in New York to demonstrate against looting that destroyed several small immigrant-owned businesses in the Bronx and upper Manhattan.

The night before, a group of mostly Dominican...

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# Dismantling Anti-Blackness Together

## | NACLA

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On June 3, a group of protestors, most of them Dominicans, marched on Dyckman Street in New York to demonstrate against looting that destroyed several small immigrant-owned businesses in the Bronx and upper Manhattan. The night before, a group of mostly Dominican men were caught on video chasing away another group of presumed looters from their neighborhood. The footage, which received more than hundreds of thousands of views, underscored racial tensions among Black Americans and Dominicans in this section of Manhattan. The video and the anti-looting protests that followed made #Dominicans a popular hashtag for anti-Blackness on social media. Memes declaring that Dominicans “don’t know they are Black” flooded Twitter, while

more serious calls were made to “cancel Dominicans” and to call out Latinx anti-Blackness. Similar scenes like the one on Dyckman have played out across the United States, leading to confrontations between Latinxs and African Americans and exposing Latinx anti-Blackness. Some critics have expressed surprise that there could be anti-Blackness within the Latinx community.

Anti- Blackness is a pandemic. It affects every nation. To be surprised that there is anti- Blackness among Latinx communities—be it Dominican, Puerto Rican, or Mexican—is to misunderstand where racism comes from. It is to believe that individual actions, such as a racist cop killing a Black man, can exist in isolation and can therefore be remedied by a single solution: condemning the racist cop. If that were the case, ending racism would be easier. What sustains racism is precisely that it does not reside on individual choice, but rather in a system that undergirds every single one of our institutions. Racism shapes not only individual actions but, more dangerously, collective, civic, governmental, and official responses to everyday life, from traffic violations to college admission to which mothers are cared for during childbirth and which are left to die, to which children are disproportionately disciplined in schools, to which type of hairdo is considered appropriate, to who is perceived as too loud or too angry, to who can run, nap, read, and watch birds in peace. Racism and its father, white supremacy, are rooted and ingrained in the fabric of every aspect of our everyday world. Eradicating it means we need to confront, directly, the structures that sustain each individual and collective racist act.

The anti-looting actions and protests on Dyckman—from the ousting of the African American presumed looters by a group of Black and Brown Dominicans seen in the video to the protest by mostly Black and Brown Dominicans that followed—were grounded on a generalized misunderstanding of the fact that Blackness is a global category of oppression. That the media identifies Dominicans as “ousting Black people” misrecognizes and erases the fact that the “ousters,” in addition to being Dominican, are also Black.

## A Colonial History

In the Dominican Republic, as in the United States, racism is foundational to the nation. A primarily Black and mulatto country, the Dominican Republic is the birthplace of both slavery and the first enslaved people’s uprising in the Americas. Besieged by Spanish, French, and U.S. colonialism, the Dominican Republic has a complicated history of racial identity formation that was shaped

by the fact that it shares the island with Haiti—the first Black republic—as well as its need to negotiate with the U.S. empire.

In the context of 19th century global anti-Blackness, which was often articulated through disdain and fear of Haiti as a symbolic birthplace of Black freedom, the white elite leaders of the young Dominican Republic knew that in order to be admitted as a nation they had to assert a difference from Haiti, which meant portraying themselves as mixed race rather than Black. At the hands of the white elites, this foundational racial myth shaped the nation's institutions, literature, history, and culture, producing the erasure of Black Dominican lives, of Black Dominican history, and of the long legacy of Dominican anti-colonial Black resistance. This dates all the way back to the 1540s, when the first enslaved people's rebellion was launched against the Spanish under the leadership of the African-born rebel leader Sebastián Lemba.

Since the emergence of the Dominican nation in 1844, though, the world, and in particular the United States empire, has demanded that the Dominican Republic proves itself to be less Black and more white than Haiti. In 1845, the U.S. government sent a commission lead by John Hogan to the D.R. to assess the country's ability to self-govern, declaring that unlike Haiti, "it had enough white citizens" to do so. In 1871, shortly after U.S. emancipation and the passing of the 14th Amendment, U.S. president Ulysses Grant launched an expansion campaign that sought to acquire the Dominican Republic in order to ship Black Americans off the mainland, so they could lead a "life of fulfillment" separate from white Americans. The United States perceived the Dominican "mixed race population" as an asset for development and expansion in comparison to Haiti's Blackness.

Parallel to the project of a separate but (kinda) equal citizenship was the colonial project of territorial expansion to the "lesser republics" of the Caribbean, a project that would take away the sovereignty of Black and Brown people. From that early moment, participating in American citizenship implicitly required complicity with the colonial project of expansion: with agreeing to a form of U.S. superiority and its "Manifest Destiny" to rule and guide over others.

## **The Colonial Legacy**

Colonized peoples who suffered the effects of these ideologies in their own land and their own skin often disassociate from U.S. struggles, even as they migrate

to the United States. The very concept of a “Latin” America emerged in contradistinction to the U.S. empire. Yet, the most pernicious, vicious, destructive, and lasting effect of U.S. colonialism in Latin American has been the production of the struggles of colonized peoples—Black, Brown, Indigenous, Asian—as separate and, at times, contradictory to Black freedom rather than as the entangled, intrinsically linked struggles for liberation and democracy that they are.

It is precisely that vicious effect of colonialism that led to Dominicans organizing anti-looting protests in New York despite experiencing the violence of anti-Blackness in their own neighborhood and on their own skin.

In the diaspora, the logic of colonial racial capitalism divides Black people based on national and ethnic identities. It erases the fact that Black and Brown Latinx immigrant and U.S. Black struggles are connected; It obliterates the fact that Blackness and anti-Blackness transcend national identity; it hides the legacy of colonialism in upholding white supremacy; and it silences a Black Latinx historical struggle for liberation. It divides and it reproduces oppression.

The results of centuries of colonial and racial capitalist oppression on the island led to a massive migration of working and poor Dominicans—who are, for the most part Black—to the United States. In the diaspora, they experience yet again erasure from both Americanness and Latinidad: Too Black to be Latinxs and too foreign to be admitted to either Black or white Americanness. The double exclusion of Dominicans is common to the experience of Afro-Latinidad in the United States, regardless of one’s ethnicity. The erasure from the more acceptable (light-skin) forms of Latinidad and the inability to be fully included in American Blackness—whether because of language, cultural, social difference or legal status—makes Black Latinxs one of the most vulnerable and underrepresented groups in the United States. The common practice of referring to Latino/a/xs as a race—rather than as an arbitrary conglomerate of ethic and racially diverse peoples who trace their origins to Latin America—further erases Black Latinxs from literally every space, institution, and possibility of representation. We are an invisibilized minority within a minority. But that invisibility does not prevent Black Latinxs from being targeted by both racist police and immigration authorities. Black Latinxs exemplify exactly how anti-immigration and anti-Blackness intersect in our present world.

So where do we go from here? We must recognize that the same colonial logic,

which convinced the world that it was somehow acceptable to profit from the capturing and enslaving of Africans and Indigenous peoples, continues to sustain the “immigrant” as a racialized sub-human category of unbelonging, and racialized immigrant subjects as disposable, consumable bodies without history, aliens to the nation-state and at the service of the global capital machinery. Or, as Angela Davis put it, “The discourse of ‘immigrants’ draws from and feeds on the racisms of the past, the racisms that have affected people of African descent, of Native American people.” We must thus appreciate that the two struggles—Black liberation and immigrant rights—are intertwined and must thus be confronted together.

That means acknowledging that there is racism in the project of Latinidad and among Latinx people. That also means recognizing the failure of the label “Latino/a/x” to name our Blackness. That means as Latinx, we must uphold Black lives everyday, in every fight. Our best weapon against inequality and white supremacy is to insist on our intersections: to unite, to engage with each other, and to uplift each struggle as our own because each violence and each exclusion sustains the other. Dismantling one injustice requires that we confront all injustice. The oppression of Black people—Black women, Black LGBTQ, Black migrants—must therefore be confronted together. Black Lives Matter. Black Women Matter. Black LGBTQ Matter. Black Immigrants Matter. Black Refugees Matter. Black Latinxs Matter.

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*Dr. Lorgia García-Peña is a public scholar and writer. Her work focuses on Black Latinidad, migration and diaspora. She is the co-founder of Freedom University Georgia and of Mind the Gap: Archives of Justice. Currently, she teaches Latinx Studies at Harvard University. Dr. García Peña is the author of multiple award-winning book The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nations and Archives of Contradictions (Duke, Fall 2016) and the forthcoming Translating Blackness: The Vaivén and Detours of Latinx Colonialities in Global Perspective.*

*Note: The question of blackness, anti-blackness, mulataje, mixed-race Dominicanidad and legacies of anti-Haitianism and colonialism in Dominican blackness have been at the center of Dominican studies for the last forty years. For more on the topic read: Candelario, Ginetta. Black behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops*

. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. Chetty, Raj, and Amaury Rodríguez. "Introduction: The Challenge and Promise of Dominican Black Studies

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Fumagalli, Maria Cristina. On the Edge: Writing the Border Between Haiti and the Dominican Republic

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. University Press of Florida, 2014. Paulino, E. (2016). Dividing Hispaniola: The Dominican Republic's Border Campaign Against Haiti, 1930-1961

(Pitt Latin American series). Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.  
Ramírez, Dixa. Colonial Phantoms: Belonging and Refusal in the Dominican Americas, from the 19th Century to the Present

. NYU Press, 2018. Ricourt, Milagros. The Dominican Racial Imaginary: Surveying the Landscape of Race and Nation in Hispaniola

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." Latin American Perspectives 25, no. 3 (1998): 126-146. Victoriano-Martínez, Ramón Antonio. "Rayano": una nueva metáfora para explicar la dominicanidad

. Canadá: University of Toronto, 2010.

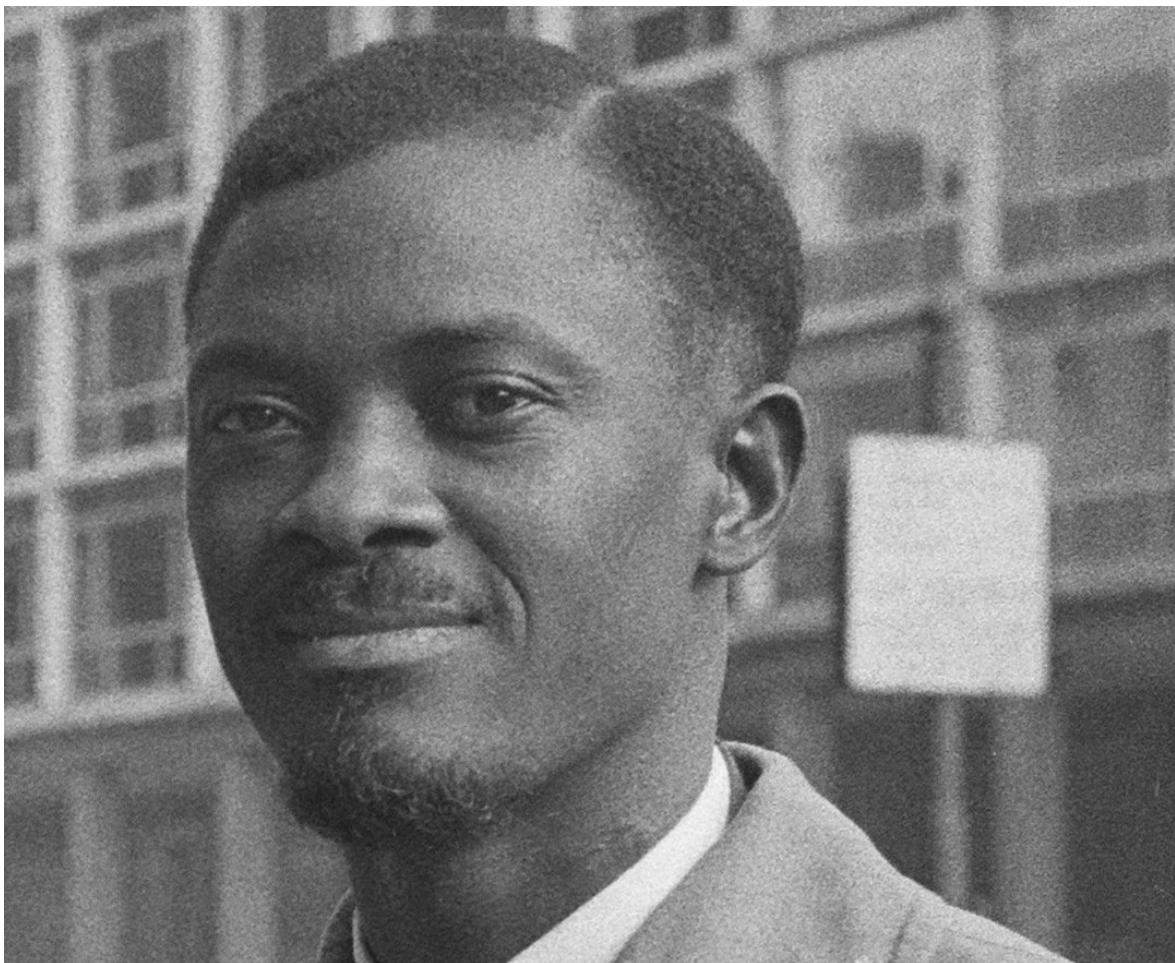
*Keep an eye out also for the forthcoming work by Yomaira Figueroa (Michigan State), Omaris Zamora (Rutgers University) and Sharina Maiollo-Pozo (University of Georgia).*

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# **Patrice Lumumba on the Congo's Independence: “Our Wounds Are Too Fresh and Too Painful”**

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Patrice Lumumba was a leader of the Congolese independence movement and the first prime minister of the independent Republic of the Congo. (The National Archives of the Netherlands)

Our spring issue, “Pandemic Politics,” is out now. It features over 120 pages of beautiful illustrations and quality writing and analysis. Get a discounted subscription today!

Mike Davis Liza Featherstone Peter Frase Seth Ackerman

Sixty years ago today, the Congo won its independence from Belgian rule. The country's first prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, was planning to speak at a formal ceremony in Léopoldville (now Kinshasa). First, however, he had to listen to a speech by the Belgian king, Baudouin. Baudouin insisted on paying tribute to King Léopold II, who had carved out the Congo Free State as his personal fiefdom in the late nineteenth century.

As the Congolese people knew all too well, Léopold II was one of the greatest mass murderers of his time, responsible for millions of deaths in his hunger for colonial loot. Baudouin insulted the audience by sanitizing his predecessor's image: "He appeared before you not as a conqueror but as a civilizer." The Belgian monarch claimed that Congolese independence "marks the outcome of the work conceived by the genius of King Léopold II, which he undertook with tenacious courage and which Belgium has continued with perseverance."

When Patrice Lumumba later took the stage, he delivered a blistering indictment of Belgian colonial rule, much to the indignation of Baudouin and the Belgian officials in attendance. The Congolese audience repeatedly interrupted Lumumba's speech with rapturous applause; many others listened to it eagerly on the radio. But it cemented perceptions of Lumumba in Brussels, Washington, and other Western capitals as a dangerously independent figure at the helm of a major African state. A *Guardian* correspondent described the speech as "unpleasant" and "offensive."

To undermine Lumumba's fledgling administration, the United States and its allies sponsored a breakaway movement in mineral-rich Katanga and a military coup led by Mobutu Sese Seko, who went on to rule the country as a kleptocratic tyrant for three decades. Having been ousted as prime minister, Lumumba was murdered in January 1961 at the age of thirty-five. He remains an iconic figure of the anti-colonial struggle.

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Men and women of the Congo, victorious independence fighters, I salute you in the name of the Congolese government.

I ask all of you, my friends, who fought tirelessly by our side, to make this June 30, 1960 into an illustrious day that will always be engraved in your hearts — a

date whose meaning you will proudly explain to your children, so that they in turn might pass on to their grandchildren and great-grandchildren the glorious history of our struggle for freedom.

Although this independence for the Congo is being proclaimed today by agreement with Belgium, a friendly country with which we treat as equals, no Congolese will ever forget that it has been won in struggle — a passionate, idealistic struggle waged every day; a struggle in which we have not spared our strength, our sacrifice, our suffering, or our blood.

It was a struggle full of tears, fire, and blood. We are proud of it to the bottom of our hearts, because it was a just and noble struggle — an indispensable struggle to put an end to the humiliating bondage that had been forced upon us.

That was our fate for the eighty years of the colonial regime: our wounds are too fresh and too painful for us to banish them from our memory.

We have known the backbreaking work demanded of us in return for wages that were not enough to satisfy our hunger, to clothe ourselves or house ourselves decently, or to raise our children as loved ones should be. We have known the jeers and taunts and blows that we had to suffer, morning, noon, and night, because we were “Negroes.” Who can forget that a black man was addressed as “tu” — and certainly not because he was a friend, but because the honor of “vous” was reserved exclusively for whites?

We have seen our lands confiscated, supposedly in the name of the law, which only ever recognized the right of the strongest. We knew that the law was never the same for whites and for blacks — for one set of people it was indulgent, for the other, it was cruel and inhuman. We have known the atrocious sufferings of those banished for their political convictions or religious beliefs: exiles in their own country, their lot was truly worse than death itself.

We knew that in the cities, there were splendid mansions for the whites and rickety huts for the blacks; that a black was not allowed into cinemas, restaurants, or “European” shops; that a black had to travel on the hull of a barge, while the white was in his luxury cabin.

And finally, who can forget the bullets that despatched so many of our brothers, or the dungeons into which those who would not submit to a regime of oppression and exploitation were mercilessly thrown?

We have suffered deeply from all of this, my brothers. But we, chosen by your elected representatives to lead our beloved country, we who have suffered in body and soul from colonial oppression — we tell you, from now on, all that is finished.

The Republic of the Congo has been proclaimed and our beloved land is now in the hands of its own children. Together, my brothers and sisters, we are going to begin a new struggle, a sublime struggle that will lead our country to peace, prosperity, and greatness.

Together, we are going to establish social justice and ensure that every person receives a just reward for their labor. We are going to show the world what the black man can do when he works in liberty, and we are going to make the Congo an example for all of Africa. We are going to ensure that the lands of our native country are used for the benefit of its children.

We are going to revise all the old laws and make new ones that will be just and noble. We are going to put an end to the persecution of free thought, and see to it that all citizens enjoy in full the basic liberties provided for by the [Universal] Declaration of Human Rights.

We are going to eliminate all forms of discrimination, whatever they may be, and ensure for everyone a station in life worthy of their human dignity, their labor, and their loyalty to the country. We are going to establish a peace, based not on rifles and bayonets, but on good hearts and good will.

And in all of this, my beloved compatriots, we can rely not only on our own great strengths and immense riches, but also on the assistance of many foreign countries, whose co-operation we shall accept as long as it is loyal and does not seek to impose any kind of policy on us.

In this field Belgium — which, finally heeding the lessons of history, has not tried to obstruct our independence — is prepared to give us its aid and friendship; to that end, an agreement has just been signed between our two equal and independent countries. I am sure that this cooperation will be profitable for both nations.

For our part, while remaining vigilant, we will respect commitments that have been entered into freely. And so, at home and abroad, the new Congo that my government is going to create will be a rich, free, and prosperous country.

But in order to achieve our goal without delay, I ask all of you, Congolese legislators and citizens, to assist me with all your strength. I ask you to forget about all of the tribal quarrels that exhaust us and threaten to make us despised abroad. I ask the minority in parliament to assist my government with a constructive opposition, and to remain strictly on legal and democratic paths. I ask you all not to shrink from any sacrifice to ensure the success of our grand enterprise.

Finally, I ask you to respect unconditionally the life and property of your fellow citizens and of the foreigners who have settled in our country. If the conduct of these foreigners is unsatisfactory, our justice will promptly expel them from the territory of the Republic; if, on the contrary, their conduct is good, they must be left in peace, because they, too, are working for the prosperity of our country.

The independence of the Congo is a decisive step towards the liberation of the entire African continent.

Sire, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, my dear compatriots, my brothers of the same race, my brothers of struggle, this is what I wanted to say to you in the government's name, on this magnificent day of our independence, complete and sovereign.

Our government — strong, national, popular — will be the salvation of this country. I ask all Congolese citizens, men, women, and children, to set themselves resolutely to the task of creating a prosperous national economy that will ensure our economic independence.

Glory to the fighters for national liberation!

Long live independence and African unity!

Long live the independent and sovereign Congo!

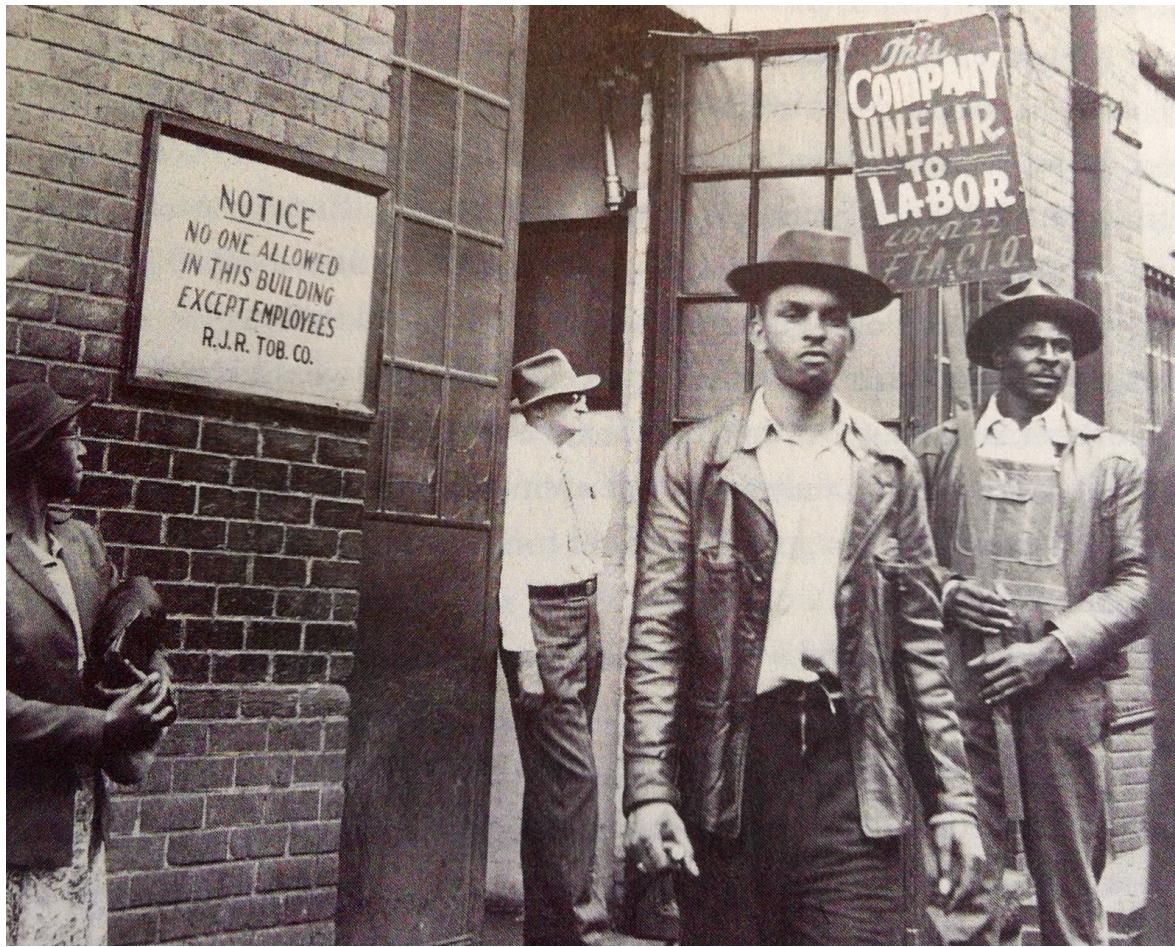
Patrice Lumumba was a leader of the Congolese independence movement and the first prime minister of the independent Republic of the Congo from June until September 1960.

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# Racial Justice Reading List

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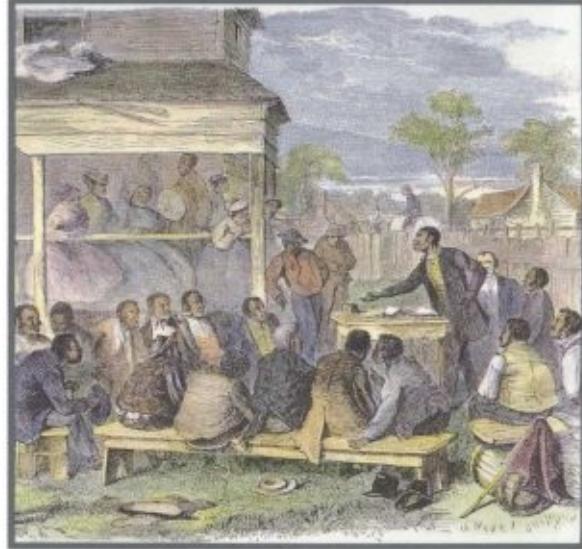
An R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company supervisor watches workers during a 1947 strike by Local 22.

A reading list is no substitute for political action. But it can inform the steps we take to win a more just world. As the late Detroit activist General Baker put it, “We have to turn thinkers into fighters and fighters into thinkers.”

With that in mind, here’s a list with an eye toward better understanding the history of the black freedom struggle — and carrying that struggle forward today.

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W. E. B. DU BOIS



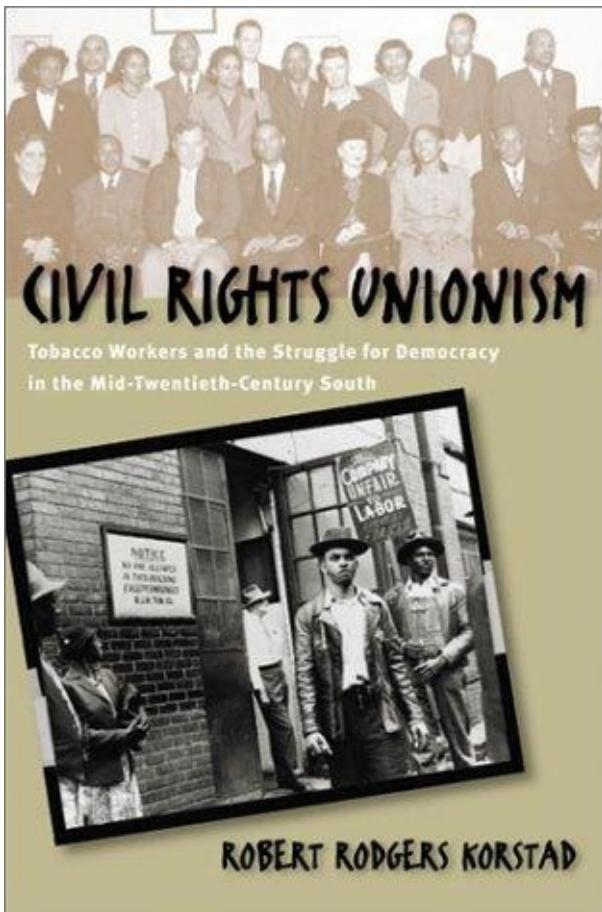
B L A C K  
RECONSTRUCTION  
IN AMERICA 1860-1880

INTRODUCTION BY DAVID LEVERING LEWIS

W. E. B. Du Bois

A long — very long — book, but more than worth it if you want to understand the centrality of the black freedom struggle to American democracy. First published in 1935, *Black Reconstruction* chronicles, with great rhetorical flourish, the story of the post–Civil War Reconstruction era, when free black men won the right to vote, African Americans attained positions in elected office, and legislatures set about constructing schools and hospitals for all. Du Bois overturned decades of racist scholarship that had insisted Reconstruction

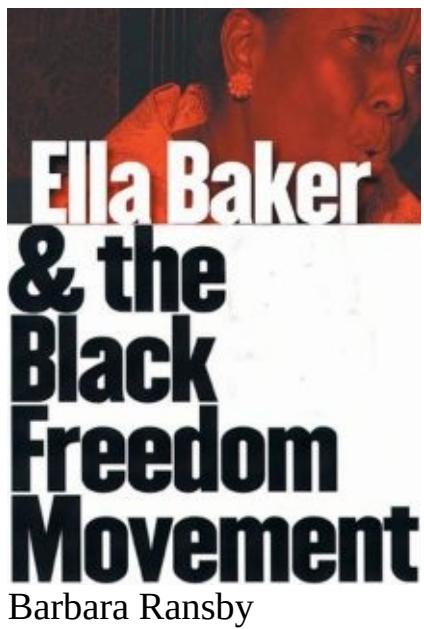
legislatures were irredeemably corrupt and that black Americans were unable to govern themselves. And Du Bois showed, as Robert Greene II notes in his write-up of the book for *Jacobin*, that “forging a radical democracy requires combating both racism and the degradations of capitalism.”



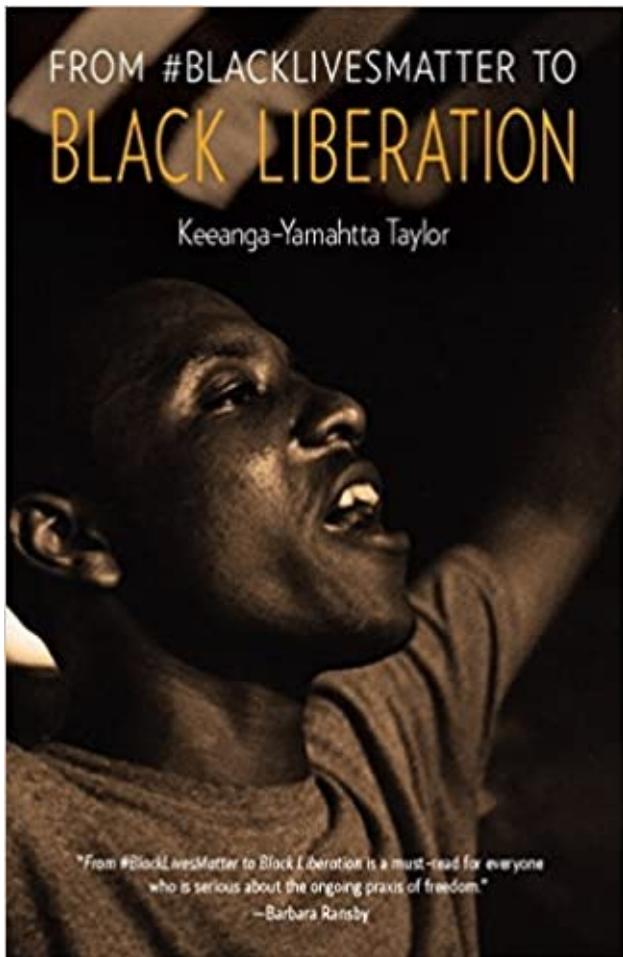
Robert R. Korstad

A remarkable book about the power of racial justice struggles rooted in the labor movement. Korstad’s subject is a Communist-led union of mostly black tobacco workers in Jim Crow North Carolina. Excluded from the political sphere and dominated at work, these workers fought back by leading a successful unionization drive in the 1940s at R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, Winston-Salem’s most powerful employer. The unionized workers toppled racial hierarchies on the shop floor, won political power in the electoral arena, and shook the foundations of white supremacy in the city. “While the Communist-led union ultimately collapsed under the weight of red-baiting,” *Jacobin*’s Shawn Gude writes, “the history of Local 22 reminds us of the essential role socialists played in the black freedom struggle — and provides us with a

compelling portrait of anti-racist organizing and democratic struggle.”

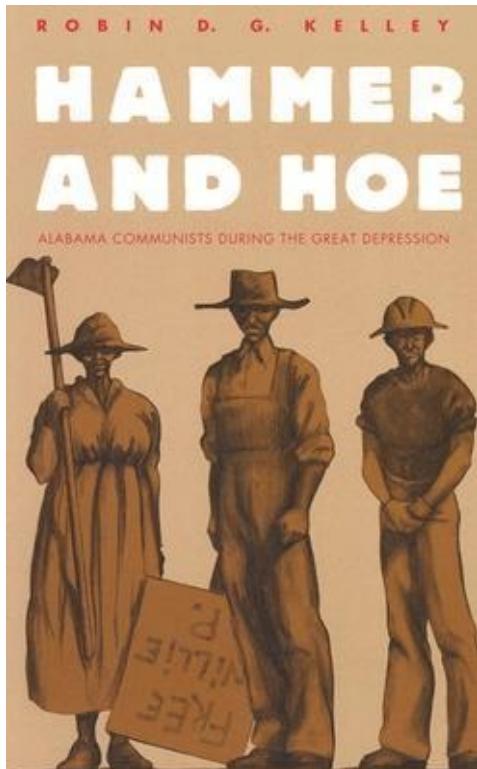


Often overlooked in favor of her male counterparts, Ella Baker was one of the most important civil rights organizers in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. She served as a field secretary for the NAACP, helped found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and mentored the young activists of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). But more important than any of her particular positions was Baker’s commitment to building up leaders and organizers, believing in the ability of oppressed people to emancipate themselves. For a vivid portrait of what that looked like in practice, you can also read I’ve Got the Light of Freedom, Charles Payne’s exceptional book about civil rights organizing in the Mississippi Delta.



Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

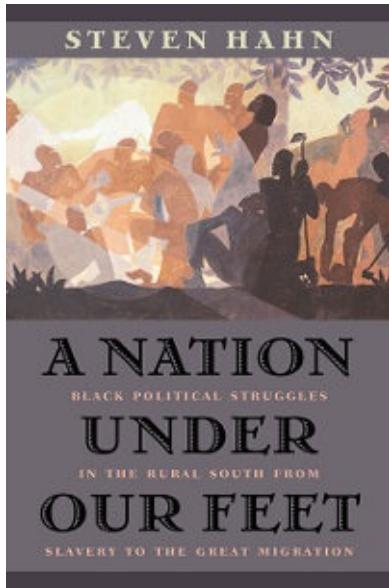
Published in 2016, this is still the best book on Black Lives Matter. Taylor locates the explosion of the movement in young black people's disillusionment with Barack Obama, and sharply criticizes mainstream anti-racist politics, which puts "black faces in high places" without improving the material conditions of poor and working-class African Americans. Capitalists, Taylor argues, use racism to divide workers while enriching themselves. We need a mass working-class movement to root out white supremacy and attack the economic system that delivers so little to so many. "Black liberation," Taylor writes, "is bound up with the project of human liberation and social transformation."



Robin D. G. Kelley

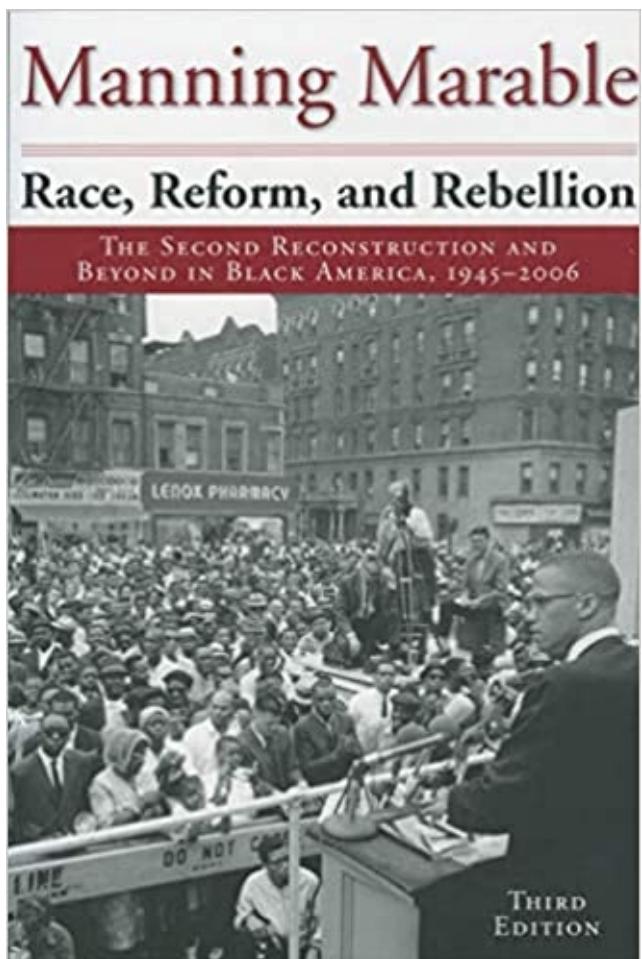
Black sharecroppers in 1930s Alabama existed in conditions a step or two removed from chattel slavery. Crushed with debt, bereft of their own land to till, tenant farmers lived under the crushing boot of the landlord. Kelley's book details the harrowing efforts of sharecroppers to organize, aided by the Communist Party. Sharecroppers and their families were beaten and terrorized; organizers received the same treatment. But these "Black Belt Communists," Kelley writes, were successful in bringing a mode of organizing that, while "resonat[ing] with the cultures and traditions of black working people . . . offered something fundamentally different: a new kind of politics that required the self-activity of people usually dismissed as inarticulate."

(Covering some of this history, Kelley is doing a live lecture for *Jacobin's* YouTube channel tonight at 6 p.m. ET.)



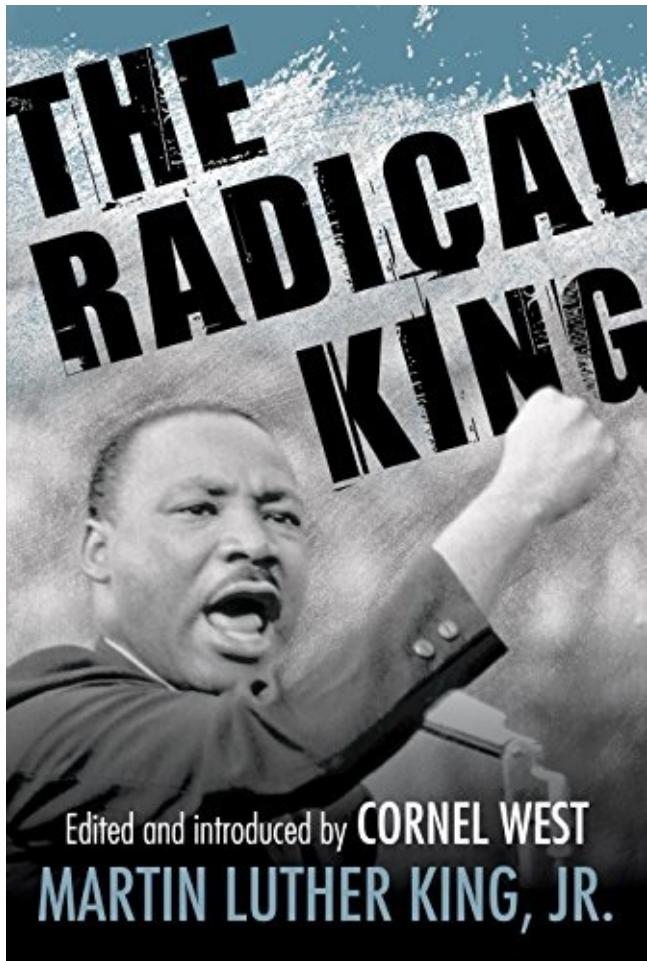
Steven Hahn

Black history is often reduced to the history of black leaders. Steven Hahn's *A Nation Under Our Feet* is one of the most brilliant rebuttals of this tendency. The book traces black politics at the grassroots level from slavery to the beginning of Jim Crow and shows that even in the most oppressive circumstances, black freedom was advanced through the collective political action of ordinary people.



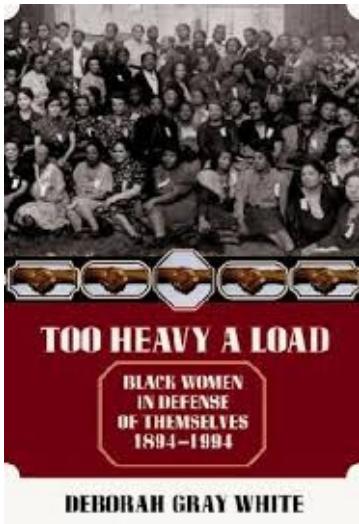
Manning Marable

Three and a half decades after it first appeared, Manning Marable's *Race, Reform, and Rebellion* remains the best single-volume treatment of the civil rights movement. Marable was a leading Marxist, and his book is distinguished from most histories of the movement by its scrupulous focus on the politics of the movement at different moments. At each point, Marable reconstructs the debates within the movement, from how to respond to McCarthyism to the rise of Black Power. It's a tremendously useful book for activists today, demonstrating that political debate was the lifeblood of the movement, and that the questions activists raised in the 1960s about where to go next are similar to the questions we confront today.



Martin Luther King Jr, ed. Cornel West

In these pages, you'll find Martin Luther King Jr defending W. E. B. Du Bois's radical politics ("It is time to cease muting the fact that Dr Du Bois was a genius and chose to be a communist"), calling on the marginalized to revolt ("The dispossessed of this nation . . . live in a cruelly unjust society. They must organize a revolution against that injustice"), and denouncing US imperialism ("Our government felt . . . that the Vietnamese people were not ready for independence, and we again fell victim to the deadly Western arrogance that has poisoned the international atmosphere for so long"). A one-stop shop for debunking the myths of the moderate King.



Deborah Gray White

Deborah Gray White's book is a thoughtful and searching history of black women's activism from the late nineteenth century to the 1990s. Examining groups from the self-consciously middle-class and respectable National Association of Colored Women, to the insurgent National Welfare Rights Organization, White considers the way that class and gender have fractured movements for black equality. Though the book is written for a popular audience, and is refreshingly nonacademic, it mounts a sustained argument against simplistic ideals of racial unity by detailing the struggles of black women's organizations.

*Touré F. Reed*



# TOWARD FREEDOM

THE CASE *against*  
RACE REDUCTIONISM

Touré Reed

We'd be remiss if we didn't include at least one book from the Jacobin series. In *Toward Freedom*, Touré Reed argues that the road to a more just society for black Americans and everyone else is obstructed, in part, by a mainstream discourse that divorces racism from class, equates entrepreneurialism with freedom and independence, and insists that the sway of a metaphysical conception of racism is responsible for persisting racial inequality in US society.

In his blurb for the book, Cornel West writes: "Touré Reed is the most brilliant

historian of the black freedom movement of his generation. This book is the best grasp of our recent past and guide for a progressive future we have!"

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# The Forgotten Socialists of Tiananmen Square

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A Beijing demonstrator blocks the path of a tank convoy along the Avenue of Eternal Peace near Tiananmen Square, June 5, 1989.

Bettmann / Getty

Public discourse on the 1989 Tiananmen Democracy Movement has been dominated by two narratives. The most prevalent interprets the movement in the framework of “democracy vs. authoritarianism.” The “democracy” in this narrative almost always refers to liberal democracy. In this telling, intellectuals and college students deeply influenced by Western liberalism hoped to push the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to accelerate political liberalization, which had been rolled out only intermittently during the 1980s. The goal of the movement was to keep democratization advancing apace with marketization.

The second narrative, much less influential than the first but nonetheless widely circulated among segments of the Chinese and international left, interprets the movement in the framework of “socialism vs. capitalism.” In this narrative,

China's marketization reforms in the 1980s produced severe inflation and rising inequality, which hurt the livelihoods of urban populations and gravely intensified discontent. Therefore, the 1989 Tiananmen Democracy Movement was in fact an anti-market, anticapitalist movement triggered by material grievances.

Both of these narratives are flawed. In the “democracy vs. authoritarianism” narrative, the protagonists were always intellectuals and students. Almost completely ignored were workers and ordinary residents of Beijing, who played a significant role in the movement. In fact, measured by both the estimated death tolls during the final massacre on the evening of June 3 and early morning of June 4 and the intensity of repression thereafter, workers paid a much higher price than students and intellectuals, in a way similar to the 1980 Gwangju Uprising in South Korea. Yet in the liberal narrative, workers are largely absent.

The “socialism vs. capitalism” narrative acknowledges workers’ role in the movement but obscures the fact that democratic aspirations were indeed the dominant theme. These aspirations cannot be captured by the economic dimension of “anticapitalism.” Moreover, even though discontent with marketization proved crucial in forging workers’ participation, workers in the movement did not express any wish to return to the era before marketization. Almost absent as well was any nostalgia about the Maoist era or Mao himself.

We need to simultaneously break away from both of these narratives, rejecting the exclusive focus on students and intellectuals, taking workers seriously, and at the same time acknowledging that “democracy” was the core demand of workers as well. Most importantly, “democracy” as understood by workers was different from the liberal notion embraced by students and intellectuals; it was a distinctly *socialist* vision of democracy premised on the agency of the working class. This dimension of the 1989 Tiananmen Democracy Movement, as a workers’ movement fighting for socialist democracy, is important both for the writing of history and politically, but has been mostly forgotten.

A paper published in 1993 by Andrew Walder and Gong Xiaoxia traced the trajectory of workers’ participation in the movement through the rise and fall of the Beijing Workers’ Autonomous Federation (WAF). After Hu Yaobang, a much-revered pro-reform CCP leader, passed away on April 15, 1989, students in Beijing’s universities started setting up memorials on their campuses. At the same time, pockets of workers started gathering in the Tiananmen Square to

exchange views about current affairs. Over the next few days, the number of workers gathering in the square increased, reaching more than a hundred at times. On April 20, after a student sit-in in front of Zhongnanhai, the CCP leaders' residential compound, was suppressed by the police, a few angry workers decided to form an organization, which turned out to be the WAF in embryo. The workers' organization was established even earlier than the Beijing Students' Autonomous Federation.

However, the WAF at that time was just an informal, loose network of dozens. It didn't operate publicly or have established organizational structures. Members barely knew each other. In April, students remained front and center in the movement. From the first big march on April 17, to the Zhongnanhai sit-in, to the April 22 rally outside Hu Yaobang's official memorial ceremony, to the April 27 march against a harsh editorial published in the official CCP mouthpiece, the *People's Daily*, in which tens of thousands participated, and finally an even bigger march on May 4 — the participants were almost exclusively university students.

But after May 4, the students' movement stagnated and declined. Students didn't know what to do next, and were hesitant to escalate further. Most of them returned to the classroom. Facing such a deadlock, a group of radical students started planning a hunger strike to reenergize the movement. In this sense, the hunger strikers accomplished their goal. On May 13, its first day, a record-breaking 300,000 protested in and occupied Tiananmen Square.

The beginning of the hunger strike marked a turning point for the movement. Despite a temporary revival of students' enthusiasm, the movement unavoidably declined again; after May 13, the number of students participating in the Tiananmen Square occupation dwindled, with more and more students returning to campuses. However, the students' hunger strike marked the beginning of workers' participation *en masse*. Workers' enthusiasm was seen not only in numbers, but in the fact that they started to organize their own rallies and marches and display their own banners and slogans. Workers became a major force in the movement from that point on.

Many workers decided to participate both due to sympathy with the hunger-striking students, and from a sense moral outrage against the CCP's indifference. A worker I interviewed told me he decided to get involved "simply because the state was treating students too badly." As the number of workers participating in

the movement exploded, the WAF started to go public and recruit members on a large scale.

What boosted workers' participation even further was the declaration of martial law on May 20. As military regiments marched toward Beijing from all sides, a huge number of workers and working-class residents spontaneously went to the streets in Beijing's outskirts, trying to obstruct the military. Workers erected barricades and assembled human walls. They brought water and food to soldiers to fraternize with them and convince them to abandon their arms and stop their march. In other words, it was workers, not students, who directly confronted the most powerful, repressive apparatus of the state. And workers won temporarily: the military was prevented from entering Beijing's inner core for two weeks.

As Rosa Luxemburg famously argued, workers' radical consciousness grows out of the process of struggle itself. Nineteen eighty-nine proved this. During the struggle to obstruct the military, workers started to realize the power of their spontaneous organization and action. This was self-liberation on an unprecedented level. A huge wave of self-organizing ensued. The WAF's membership grew exponentially and other workers' organizations, both within and across workplaces, mushroomed.

The development of organization led to a radicalization of action. Workers started organizing self-armed quasi-militias, such as "picket corps" and "dare-to-die brigades," to monitor and broadcast the military's whereabouts. These quasi-militias were also responsible for maintaining public order, so as not to provide any pretext for military intervention. In a sense, Beijing became a city self-managed by workers. It was reminiscent of Petrograd's self-armed workers organized in the soviets in the months between Russia's February and October revolutions. At the same time, Beijing workers built many more barricades and fortifications on the street. In many factories they organized strikes and slowdowns. A possible general strike was put on the table as well. Many workers started to build connections between factories, to prepare for a general strike.

Self-arming, self-organizing, and striking had an altogether different meaning than marching, rallying, and occupying. The latter were self-expressive acts, whereas the former were self-empowering, a way to concretely build power over the production process and the management of society as a whole. The radicalism was not in the words workers proclaimed, but in the acts themselves.

This was where the movement stood towards the end of May and early June: the students' movement was struggling with declining enthusiasm, dwindling participation, and constant infighting, but the workers' movement, through self-organization and self-mobilization, was growing stronger and more radical by the hour.

There is no way to ascertain why the CCP leaders finally decided to order the military to enter Beijing “no matter what” and crush the movement. But a plausible speculation is that what terrified the party leaders was not the declining students' movement, but the rapidly growing and radicalizing workers' movement. This is consistent with the fact that workers faced much more severe repression than students both during and after the massacre.

Throughout the movement, public discourse and international media attention was largely monopolized by university students and intellectuals, partly because they were media-savvy and spoke English. Workers remained relatively silent. As noted above, the workers' vision of democracy was reflected first and foremost in what they *did*, not what they proclaimed. Through a host of different kinds of actions to concretely build power to control production and manage society, workers put into practice the motto that “workers are the masters of society” — something the CCP had long promised but never realized. The prevalence of self-arming, self-organizing, and striking spoke volumes about workers' radical democratic imaginary.

At the same time, although workers made fewer speeches and published fewer writings than students, their discourses, when examined closely, showed an understanding of democracy very different from that of the students.

According to Walder and Gong's analysis of pamphlets published by the WAF, workers were first and foremost concerned with economic issues directly affecting their livelihoods, such as inflation and inequality. These problems, which emerged during the marketization reforms, produced strongly negative sentiments toward the reforms. However, workers didn't focus solely on the economic dimension, but provided an explicitly political understanding of these economic problems and articulated a vision of democracy accordingly. Workers understood that inflation and inequality had a common, underlying political source: “Stalinist dictatorial bureaucracy.”

The WAF's analysis of inflation attributed rising prices to the bureaucrats who

controlled pricing of domestic and imported goods and deliberately set the prices high to make room for their own hoarding and profiteering. Therefore, the only way to eradicate inflation and inequality was to overthrow the bureaucracy as a whole and restore to workers the power to control the production and circulation of goods. This democratic vision based on anti-bureaucratism is reminiscent of the workers' rebellions of 1966 and 1967, the early years of the Cultural Revolution.

Workers' direct experience with the oppressiveness of bureaucracy didn't arise from the absence of freedom of speech or voting rights in the formal political sphere, but from the lack of power in the workplace. For workers, the bluntest manifestation of "dictatorial bureaucracy" was one-man rule in the factories. A worker interviewed by Walder and Gong said:

(I)n the workshop, does what the workers say count, or what the leader says? We later talked about it. In the factory the director is a dictator; what one man says goes. If you view the state through the factory, it's about the same: one-man rule... Our objective was not very high; we just wanted workers to have their own independent organization.

In other words, while the workers who participated in the movement were undoubtedly fighting for democracy, "democracy" in workers' eyes meant first and foremost democracy in the workplace. The WAF's articulation of the democratic ideal was intertwined with sharp criticisms of China's official trade union system, which didn't really represent workers, and with a vision of workers having the right to organize independent unions, supervise managers, and bargain collectively.

This ideal far exceeded opposition to marketization per se, directly attacking the political foundation of the marketization reforms: bureaucratic dictatorship. Democracy as defined by workers meant the replacement of bureaucracy by workers' self-management, and the first step towards this goal was to establish democracy and independent organization in the workplace.

This vision of democracy clearly had a class character. It was premised on the agency of the working class. In sharp contrast, the democratic ideal articulated by intellectuals and students was composed of a set of supposedly universalist liberal values. Even though students were also deeply discontented with corruption and official hoarding, their discontent pointed towards an abstract

notion of democratic rights and liberty, unlike workers' belief that democracy should first be established in the workplace, over the production process. In other words, the democratic ideal embraced by students was devoid of class content — although students' demands still ended up revealing their class interests: among the seven demands formulated by students during their April 17 rally, one was to increase state spending on education and elevate the material well-being of intellectuals.

For workers, democracy and marketization were diametrically opposed. Marketization emboldened the same bureaucrats who already monopolized political power. Since bureaucracy and marketization were mutually constitutive, they had to be overthrown together. But for students, it was democracy and marketization that were mutually constitutive. Corruption and official hoarding during the marketization reforms reflected, not the flaws, but the incompleteness of marketization, as well as the fact that democratization was lagging behind economic reform. Therefore, students argued that democratization and marketization should go hand in hand. In fact, "further expansion of economic liberalization" had already been a core demand articulated by students during their 1986–1987 protest wave, widely seen as the forerunner of the 1989 movement.

To sum up, the core differences between workers' democracy and students' democracy were as follows: the former was based on a class discourse, the latter was supposedly class-neutral; the former targeted the workplace first, the latter was based on an abstract notion of individual liberty; the former solidly rejected marketization, the latter embraced it. It is in this sense that workers had a socialist democratic vision whereas students held a liberal democratic one.

Workers and students displayed different trajectories of participation, and held different conceptions of democracy. So, it's not surprising that a notable disconnect existed between students and workers throughout the movement. Students constantly tried to exclude workers, seeing the movement as "their own," and sought to maintain its "purity." Walder and Gong pointed out that until the end of May, students had been adamant that workers' organizations not be allowed to enter Tiananmen Square proper. Students had little interest in communicating or coordinating with workers' organizations, especially the organization formed by construction workers who were mostly villagers from Beijing's rural outskirts. Historian Maurice Meisner argued that "in the early weeks of the movement, student demonstrators often marched with arms linked

to exclude workers and other citizens.” A student who participated in the movement also recounted that students took great care to ensure that the logistical supplies donated by supporters in Hong Kong went to themselves, not to workers.

Here lies the irony of the movement. Student leaders repeatedly said that they intended to use their actions to “awaken” the masses. But in fact, a significant part of the masses was already “awake” and actively participating in the movement, yet the students showed little interest in talking to them. Students’ inflated sense of superiority and self-importance was in part nourished by the elitism of China’s top universities, and also partly reminiscent of China’s traditional gentry-intelligentsia, which saw itself as the moral mainstay of society, the conscience of the people, responsible for articulating what is right and wrong on behalf of the masses. Indeed, sociologist Zhao Dingxin has pointed out that students in the movement used a combination of Western liberal vocabularies and China’s traditional moralist language.

Excluded by students, many workers started to lose faith in them. For workers, students felt too good about themselves, didn’t respect workers, and were much better at talking than doing things practically. What alarmed workers most was that traces of bureaucratic elitism, which they deeply resented, started to appear within the students’ organizations. As Walder and Gong noted, student leaders “had titles like ‘General Commander,’ ‘Chairman,’ and so forth,” and their internal jockeying for power, position and privilege left workers disgusted. In contrast, the WAF and other workers’ organizations were much more horizontal in structure, with individual leadership playing a much smaller role.

What workers found even more intolerable was the material perks enjoyed by student leaders. According to Walder and Gong,

It was widely rumored among workers on the square that the two top leaders among the student protesters (they were married) not only had the largest tent of anyone but also slept on a Simmons mattress; that the size and quality of tents and sleeping mats were allocated among student leaders according to their relative rank; that many of the student leaders had electric fans in their tents.

Though these rumors cannot be verified, they clearly show that workers were extremely sensitive to any traces of hierarchy and bureaucracy.

At the same time, workers and students also disagreed about strategy. From the very beginning, students assumed a posture of petitioning the party, seeking to convince the party leaders to make concessions. To win the party's trust, students even held banners with slogans like, "We Support the CCP" during marches. In contrast, workers were much more hostile to the party and argued for an insurrectionary strategy. The WAF's leaflets always called on people to rise up and overthrow oppressors.

When disagreements about how to deal with the movement emerged among the CCP's top leadership in May, some students were inclined to cooperate with the "moderate" leadership faction headed by Zhao Ziyang, then the CCP's general secretary, against the "hardliner" faction headed by Deng Xiaoping, the de facto supreme leader, and Li Peng, the premier. For students, factional fights among the CCP leadership provided leverage for the movement. This is why students were firmly opposed to workers' call for a general strike, seeing such initiatives as "instigating chaos."

However, for workers, the students' strategy didn't make any sense. They saw Zhao Ziyang as a perfect example of a dictatorial bureaucrat who used his power to make millions for his family during the marketization reforms. They saw no difference between the moderate and hardliner factions. The WAF argued that if the movement sought cooperation with party bureaucrats, only one thing would result: the movement would end up being appropriated by party bureaucrats to advance their own interests, in a way similar to how Deng Xiaoping used the 1976 "April 5" Movement to strengthen his power. The WAF believed that the only way for the movement to attain success was to build power through self-organizing and self-arming until the party bureaucracy could be overthrown. This is why the WAF's leaflets called on the masses to "storm the twentieth-century Bastille," referencing the 1789 French Revolution.

In this sense, one could argue that what transpired in 1989 was not one movement, but two movements. The students' movement and the workers' movement, though overlapping in time and place and somewhat related to each other (as mentioned above, workers were initially motivated to participate *en masse* in mid-May in order to support and protect students), didn't become one. Between students and workers there was little trust, insufficient communication, almost no strategic coordination, and only a very weak sense of mutual solidarity.

The 1989 Tiananmen Democracy Movement formed a sharp contrast with the 1919 May Fourth Movement seventy years earlier. During the May Fourth Movement, after an initial wave of student protests in May, many students shifted to a focus on propaganda, organization, and agitation among workers and ordinary residents, eventually leading to a general strike in Shanghai in June, which was critical in forcing the Peking government to concede to students' demands. In the CCP's official narrative, the significance of the May Fourth Movement lies in the fact that students learned from the general strike how much power workers could potentially have. These students subsequently devoted themselves to organizing workers and mobilizing labor actions. These student-worker connections later provided infrastructure for the nascent CCP.

Unfortunately, what made 1919 significant in the CCP's official history was exactly what 1989 lacked.

In fact, if we want to trace examples of student-worker solidarity in China before 1989, we don't have to go as far back as 1919. As Joel Andreas shows in a forthcoming book, in 1966 and 1967, the early years of the Cultural Revolution, the links forged between students and workers were critical for the development of the rebel movement. Workers visited universities to learn how students conducted debates and organized themselves, and students went into factories and helped workers form their own rebel organizations and articulate demands.

Over the twenty-three years between 1966 and 1989, this sense of student-worker solidarity disappeared. To understand why, we have to examine the history of these two decades.

Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966 because he thought that many bureaucrats within the party (the so-called "capitalist roaders") were so infected by bureaucratism that they were *de facto* trying to institute a form of bureaucratic capitalism. By mobilizing mass movements from below, Mao hoped to eradicate the "capitalist roaders" and at the same time concentrate power. As Andreas argues, Mao believed the point of the mass movements was to "reform the party, not overthrow the party." What was problematic for Mao was not the party apparatus itself, but certain cadre within the party. Therefore the party would return to normal functioning once the "capitalist roaders," like a tumor, were removed. This is why Mao repeatedly claimed that the majority of party cadre were good and the "capitalist roaders" were a minority.

But what Mao didn't anticipate was that once he called upon the masses to "educate themselves" and "liberate themselves," the mass rebel movements would grow and radicalize out of his control, transcending the limits imposed by his agenda. Mao had intended to open only a tiny crack for the masses, but this crack unexpectedly widened, unleashing massive radical momentum among workers and students, which, for a period of time, appeared to be on course to bring down the entire facade.

As Wu Yiching shows, just after Mao called upon workers to self-organize in late 1966, contract and informal workers — who were "second-class citizens" in urban factories — started to form their own organizations. These organizations didn't target the "capitalist roaders" as Mao intended, but attacked China's unjust and discriminatory two-tier labor system. These movements were attacked as "economistic" and demobilized by Mao and other Cultural Revolution leaders.

After the Shanghai People's Commune (SPC) was established in January 1967, which Mao hailed as an inspiring example of the masses seizing power from the party cadre, some radical organizations of rebel workers developed a quite distinct understanding of the SPC. For these radical workers, the "Revolutionary Committees" established in the name of "seizing mass power" were actually controlled by the military and served as an instrument for Mao and the party to repress the rebel movement and restore status quo. These radical organizations hoped to establish a genuine system of workers' self-management akin to the Paris Commune, and engaged in armed struggle with the "Revolutionary Committees" for months.

At the same time, many workers and students extended and deepened Mao's critique of bureaucratism and "capitalist roaders," arriving at political conclusions much more radical and profound than Mao's. For these workers and students, Mao's observations of bureaucratism were astute but his diagnosis was wrong. Bureaucratism was not a result of individual bureaucrats, but of the one-party dictatorial regime, which was inherently capitalist. For these workers, the only way to abolish bureaucratism was to abolish one-party rule and establish workers' self-control in its stead. These arguments were made most elaborately by a radical workers' organization called the Alliance of Proletarian Revolutionaries in Hunan Province. These ideals conveyed a conception of socialist democracy akin to Marx's own understanding.

Mao and other Cultural Revolution leaders were deeply unsettled by these movements, which transcended Mao's own agenda, clearly challenging the authority of the leaders and calling for systematic change and institutionalized socialist democracy. Starting from 1968, Mao called on the military to intervene *en masse*, launching a dramatic wave of repression against rebel workers. According to Walder's calculation, the overwhelming majority of causalities during the Cultural Revolution were committed by the CCP and the military repressing rebel workers after 1968. This remains to this day the bloodiest and most massive state repression in the history of the People's Republic of China. In some cities, rebel workers' organizations fought civil wars with the military and were brutally repressed. In the meantime, Mao and the party leadership launched attacks on the workers' articulation of their socialist democratic vision, accusing it of being anarchist and Trotskyist.

In sum, the mass movement initiated by Mao himself evolved independently into a socialist democratic movement, which threatened Mao and was subsequently repressed by him. In Wu Yiching's words, the Cultural Revolution devoured its own children. The repression between 1968 and 1971 had a profound impact. On the one hand, the segments of rebel workers who were most militant, radical, and organized were physically decimated. On the other hand, Mao's complete about-face left many workers and students disillusioned; they felt betrayed by Mao and believed that other Cultural Revolution leaders such as Jiang Qing (Mao's wife) and Chen Boda had been opportunistically using and manipulating the mass movement in their rise to power.

In 1974, the "Criticize Lin Biao, Criticize Confucius" campaign unexpectedly provided a platform for disgruntled rebels to voice their frustration with the 1968–1971 repression wave. This awkward top-down campaign, which targeted two completely unrelated individuals, was launched by the Cultural Revolution leaders to assist their factional fight within the party. But rebel workers had an altogether different source of resentment towards Lin Biao, Mao's heir apparent before he died after a failed coup attempt in 1971. In 1968–1971, as a leader of the military, Lin played a major role in repressing the rebels. Therefore, many rebels participated in the "Criticize Lin Biao, Criticize Confucius" campaign, using Lin as a target to criticize the period of repression and call for a return of the mass rebel movement of 1966–1967. The most well-argued and influential criticisms along these lines were made in a series of big-character posters issued under the name "Li-Yi-Zhe," which referred to three co-authors who actively participated in the 1966–1967 rebel movement and were later punished harshly.

To the rebels' disappointment, Li-Yi-Zhe's call was not received well by Mao, with other Cultural Revolution leaders calling for a ban on these posters. The rebels' discontent with Mao and Cultural Revolution leaders led to the April 5 Movement in 1976. During this movement, tens of thousands gathered in the Tiananmen Square, apparently mourning the recent death of premier Zhou Enlai but actually expressing discontent with the Cultural Revolution leaders. Slogans and banners like "Down with Emperor Dowager Ci Xi" and "Down with Indira Gandhi" appeared everywhere in the Square, all referring to Jiang Qing. Moreover, slogans like "Down with the First Emperor of Qin Dynasty" also appeared, referring to Mao himself.

The April 5 Movement in 1976 further energized broad discontent with Mao and the Cultural Revolution leaders. This popular sentiment provided support for part of the party leadership to strip the Cultural Revolution leaders of power in a palace coup after Mao's death in the same year. In turn, the downfall of the Cultural Revolution leaders ignited hope and optimism among repressed rebels. They hoped the party could right the wrongs inflicted on them during the 1968–1971 repression and open up space for bottom-up mass movements again. At the same time, between 1976 and 1978, the rebels' hopes were inflated by Deng Xiaoping, who was engaged in fierce factional struggles with other party leaders and expressed some pro-democracy views in order to consolidate his popular support.

The rebels' optimism culminated in the 1979 Democracy Wall Movement. As Meisner points out, most of the participants in this movement were not intellectuals, but rebels who were active in 1966–1967 and later repressed. They formed political organizations, organized public debates, distributed their own publications, and posted big-character posters. The influence of the movement quickly spread from Beijing to other major cities. The movement discourse revived the socialist democratic vision first articulated in 1966–1967, and focused criticism on one-party rule, which the rebels saw as the source of bureaucratism. For the participants, the 1979 Democracy Wall Movement picked up where the Cultural Revolution rebel movement left off. It was the second socialist democratic movement, after the first in 1966–1967.

Just as the 1966–1967 movement terrified Mao, the 1979 Democracy Wall Movement terrified Deng. In a manner similar to Mao, Deng accused the participants in the 1979 movement of being "anarchists" and launched harsh repression. This wave of repression heightened political disillusionment among

the masses. Thereafter, socialist democratic discourse almost completely disappeared from the public. This also meant the marginalization of class politics as a whole — after all, socialist democratic discourse was premised on class politics.

This fundamental shift was entirely consistent with Deng's wholesale promotion of policy pragmatism and retreat from the discourse of class struggle. As socialist democratic activists, most of whom were workers, were silenced, public political discussion was increasingly monopolized by liberal-minded intellectuals and university students, and discussion about democracy was increasingly de-classed and cast in a liberal framework. In the late 1980s, both sides in the “democracy or authoritarianism” debate acknowledged the legitimacy of the marketization reforms and didn’t consider its effects on workers. Anita Chan’s research shows that “if one sifts carefully through the writings of Chinese intellectuals of all persuasions [in the late 1980s], one is hard pressed to find any mention of working class grievances.”

Many commentators have romanticized China’s 1980s as a decade of freedom, hope, pluralism, and idealism. However, a balanced assessment of the decade requires one to consider not only what was present during the decade, but also what was absent. Much of what those commentators love about the decade — the burgeoning influence of Western liberalism, the increased freedom of speech and expression, and the vitality of intellectual groups — was accompanied by the retreat of the working class from politics and the vanishing of socialist democratic ideals, which resulted from repression in the wake of the 1979 Democracy Wall Movement. In a sense, the “liberty” of 1980s China was born in the shadow of repression.

Any discussion of “liberty” has to face the question: liberty for whom? The benefits of political liberalization in 1980s China — ranging from the space to air a wider range of political views, to pluralization of intellectual life, to diversification of lifestyles — were reaped almost exclusively by intellectuals and university students. In order to consolidate support and gain legitimacy for marketization, Deng greatly improved the material well-being and social status of intellectuals, and made the higher education system much more elitist. Consequently, the participation of intellectuals and students in political discussion helped reinforce their elitist self-identity. The Chinese documentary *River Elegy*, extremely influential and widely viewed in the late 1980s, exemplified such elitist liberalism.

In the meantime, what kind of “liberty” did the urban working class enjoy? What affected urban workers’ life most during the 1980s was probably not the liberalization of prices, but the substantial expansion of managers’ power over the operation of state-owned factories at workers’ expense. Managers gained almost unopposed power to allocate the means of production as they please, resulting in much strengthened one-man rule in urban workplaces and *de facto* private ownership.

As workers’ congresses were deactivated, workers lost their limited power over decision-making in factories and directly experienced “bureaucratic dictatorship” at the point of production. With workers feeling oppressed, mistreated, stripped of their dignity, and faced with increasing power inequalities, managers had no choice but to resort to material incentives and bonuses to achieve labor discipline. The rise of workers’ living standards in the mid-1980s was thus a result of the systematic weakening of their power in the workplace. And in the late 1980s, as workers’ material gains were eaten away by inflation, their discontent grew.

The entire 1980s, then, witnessed a widening gap between intellectuals and university students, on the one hand, and workers on the other. What produced this gap was the repression of the two socialist democratic movements — the first under Mao Zedong, the second under Deng Xiaoping — and the resulting retreat of class discourse from politics. In 1989, workers’ accumulated grievances finally translated into large-scale actions, as workers rediscovered the socialist democratic discourse that had appeared in 1966 and 1979. But the growing gap between students and workers meant that students neither understood nor cared about workers’ socialist democratic ideals.

In the 1990s, the divergence between intellectuals and the working class widened. The difference in the approaches the party took towards students and workers was evident in the immediate aftermath of 1989: students were let go except for a few leaders, whereas workers were violently prosecuted on a much wider scale. This difference remained pronounced during the 1990s.

The dramatic acceleration of marketizing reforms in the 1990s provided ample economic opportunities for college students who graduated from top universities in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Some Chinese observers have noted that through the high tide of marketization, many student participants in the 1989 movement transformed into the new urban middle class that developed a vested

interest in supporting the CCP regime. In a sense, the economic reforms of the 1990s were a way for the CCP to absorb and co-opt the generation of college students who participated in 1989. I have talked to dozens of people who studied at Beijing's top universities in the late 1980s, almost all of whom participated in the movement. Today, as middle-class residents of Beijing, they believe that "political stability trumps everything." They look back on their participation in 1989 as naïve and manipulated.

Whereas the 1990s marketization reforms greatly benefitted intellectuals and students, they almost completely destroyed the urban working class. As the majority of state-owned enterprises were restructured, downsized, and privatized, workers lost jobs or faced much worse working conditions and meager benefits and protections. Scholars have generally attributed this wave of industrial restructuring to economic factors, but if we take 1989 into account, political considerations seemed to play a role as well. Urban workers' power and radicalism, as displayed in 1989, alarmed the party leaders and made them determined to break down the urban working class.

The contrasting fates of the intellectuals who morphed into China's new middle class, and the urban working class, have remained a basic feature of post-1989 Chinese society. It is still there today. This class-based strategy of "divide and rule," one of the most important legacies of 1989, remains crucial to sustaining the CCP regime.

An article published by the author in Chinese at Initium Media advanced the same arguments.

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# The Supreme Court Will Not Deliver Justice on Abortion Rights

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Abortion rights rally outside of the Supreme Court in Washington D.C. as the justices hear oral arguments in the June Medical Services v. Russo case. (Sarah Silbiger / Getty Images)

Defying expectations, the Supreme Court narrowly struck down a hyper-restrictive Louisiana abortion law on Monday. The court ruled 5 to 4 in June Medical Services v. Russo that Louisiana can't require abortion doctors to have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals, cutting off one avenue anti-abortion lawmakers had hoped to use to trample abortion access, while signaling it would view other restrictions more favorably in coming sessions.

Yesterday's ruling provides some relief for women across the South. A lower court had blocked the law, finding that if the rule had gone into effect, Louisiana

would have been left with one clinic and one doctor to meet a demand of around ten thousand abortions a year. (The decision was reversed on appeal.)

Since the Louisiana law is identical to a Texas statute the court halted four years ago, court-watchers wondered what Chief Justice John Roberts would do. In 2016, he approved the restrictions that Texas had imposed in Whole Woman's Health vs. Hellerstedt. But on Monday, Roberts sided with the three women on the court — Elena Kagan, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Sonia Sotomayor — and with Stephen Breyer, who wrote the decision.

Roberts's reasoning, in a separate concurrence, was based on deference to *stare decisis*, "the legal term for fidelity to precedent." Given that a month of unprecedented demonstrations have charged cops and courts with generating injustice and tyranny, the supremes are no doubt shifting uneasily on their bench. Recent decisions favoring the DACA program for young immigrants, anti-discrimination protections for LGBT people, and now this abortion case, may reflect Roberts's desire to maintain some legitimacy for the court.

But the chief justice spends much of his concurrence arguing that legislatures can do whatever they want for whatever reasons they wish, unless it constitutes a "substantial obstacle" to abortion. Quoting the Supreme Court's 1992 *Casey* decision, Roberts writes: "The State's freedom to enact such rules is 'consistent with Roe's central premises, and indeed the inevitable consequence of our holding that the State has an interest in protecting the life of the unborn.'"

Also at issue in *Juno v. Russo* was whether abortion clinics and doctors could go to court on behalf of their patients' constitutional right to abortion. Looked at from a commonsense perspective, these laws attack clinics to deprive women of abortions, so that the interests of the clinics and their patients coincide. But the issue was never fully addressed, as Louisiana's lawyers had agreed earlier in the process that the clinic had standing and, therefore, Breyer argued, couldn't introduce their challenge at the Supreme Court. This leaves the issue open to future challenges.

Admitting privileges are a ruse Texas and Louisiana have used to drive out abortion doctors and prevent them from providing care at more than one clinic. As testimony before the district court made clear, the problem for abortion providers is that their outcomes are too good — they almost never have patients who need to go to the hospital. Most hospitals only give such privileges to

doctors who drum up hospitals' business by admitting at least fifty patients a year. But doctors who perform abortions typically don't have any patients who require hospitalization.

Monday's ruling should not be taken as a sign that attacks on abortion will slow down. Roberts's opinion and Samuel Alito's dissent continue a successful path of eroding abortion rights rather than dramatically overturning *Roe v. Wade*. (Trump appointee Brett Kavanaugh, despite promising to respect precedent during his weepy confirmation hearing, took the anti-abortion side, to no one's surprise.)

We should expect states trying to further restrict abortion to fashion their arguments to meet Roberts's concerns. He's given them a road map. Under the "significant obstacle" test and its predecessors, the court has okayed prohibitions on federal funding, parental consent for minors, waiting periods, forced ultrasounds, a ban on one abortion procedure (D&X), scaremongering scripts, and various laws making it harder for abortion providers to operate. Next among the likely restrictions to be considered are bans after twenty weeks, and bans on a second-trimester abortion procedure known as D&E.

And states continue to pass new laws. In a closed midnight session on June 18, the Tennessee legislature approved a so-called "heartbeat bill" that would ban abortion as early as six weeks. Two feminist leaders who heard about it and tried to attend were arrested and hauled out of the chamber by police. They responded with a two-hundred-car caravan around Governor Bill Lee's house.

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# This time they can see our pain

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## Salt Lake City's recent protests and perspectives from a young black student.

You can call the protest violent. By the end, it was. But understand that when you do so, when all you are willing to see is the parts of activism that make you most uncomfortable, you risk drawing the conversation away from the reasons for the protests and riots, happening now with more vigor and rage than ever before.

Perhaps the worst thing we can do right now is focus on riots and looting yet remain silent about the murders, the racism, white supremacy and the longstanding inability of our society to protect and respect black lives.

Attending Saturday's downtown protest was, for me, an act of listening to and trying to understand our black community and their anger, hurt and resilience. Some white protestors were clearly there to advance their own agendas and express personal rage, but watching hundreds of people—groups of friends, siblings, whole families—march or drive around downtown and up to the state capitol to demonstrate was to observe the important practice of allyship.

<https://guidetoallyship.com/>

Organized by Utah Against Police Brutality, the car caravan rally route began in front of the Public Safety building just east of the Downtown Library. I ended up near the end of the long lanes of participants, stuck in traffic near the intersection of State Street and 500 South. Here, the view was incredible. People spilled out of car windows and poked out of sunroofs. Signs read “Stop killing black people,” “Silence is violence” and “My skin is not a weapon.” Chanters called “Black lives matter!” and “No justice, no peace, no racist police.”



Many people, most wearing masks, had given up their cars and were walking at that point, and we honked and waved at them as they passed. Did everyone know where they were going? We moved together, as one, like a school of fish, strong and able to protect itself from predators.

Even as the tune changed and different factions grew violent as police moved in, it was clear that, for whites, this gathering was about listening and trying to understand.

In my post-protest discussions, one black friend said that for some time now he's felt as if he was watching something like the genocide of his own people, as images and videos of dead black bodies filter across phone and tv screens with grievous regularity. Another said that one of the most helpful things white people can do right now is to talk about racism. Confront it in your social circles. Listen to black people and believe them.

Thus, I realized that in writing about the protest, it is not my perspective you need to hear. Instead, I share with you the voice of one of my former students, a 15-year-old from Rwanda who moved to Utah a few years ago. He attends a predominantly white school.

### **Conversation with a young black student**

When he first heard about George Floyd's death, his reaction centered on a realization that this was the norm—another black person was murdered by police. He explained that racial aggression and even death by police is something black people can't help but fear in daily life.

"It's always the same... what cops do to black people. We can't just be. For example, when I go to the gym, my mom, she tells me to take my hood off. She says people might think I'm a thug or whatever just because of the way that I look."

At school, not only could white friends wear their sweatshirt hoods up without having to confront that lingering association, but sometimes they'd make pointed comments at him that always felt uncomfortable.

"Every time, they're like 'Can I touch your hair?' I mean that's not racist, but it makes you feel different." Some might dismiss a question like this as inconsequential, but repeated invasive comments (known as microaggressions) can lead to a person feeling isolated, especially in largely white institutions where they might be the only ones ever asked such questions. What's more, black hair has a political history in the US.

While "black" hair is often seen as exotic or unprofessional, "white" hair is accepted as the norm: neat and professional. Many school and company dresscodes restrict historically black hairdos such as braids, dreadlocks and bantu knots. My student also discussed his hesitation at wearing his favorite hairstyle, dreads, due to his mother's fear that he might be seen as thuggish and disobedient—an inconvenient association in school and a dangerous association on the streets.

He is the hardest working teen I know, yet his economic and racial status put him at a disadvantage to succeed in many aspects of the school system.

For instance, he is an excellent soccer player and carried his school's junior

varsity team. I was certain he would be the very next pick for varsity.

“When I was sad about not making the varsity soccer team... I don’t think it was because I wasn’t good enough,” he told me. The high school team this student tried out for is nearly entirely composed of white players and is notorious for parent politics involved in the selection process. At the time, it frustrated me greatly that the coaches picked a different student over him.

Making it on varsity is extremely important to him. The more years on the school’s best team, the more likelihood of being scouted by colleges. If he doesn’t make the varsity soccer team next year, he may switch to track and field as a route to the exposure necessary for scholarships despite his enduring love for soccer.

His school certainly lacks teachers and staff of color, but the silence of his white teachers is what bothers him most. “My teachers don’t talk about [race]. They fear to talk about it. When it comes up, they go silent.”

Regarding the late May protest, he said he wanted to go but “for me, that’s taking a big risk.”

He might wish he could go to the protest. He also wishes he could wear dreads without his mother fearing for his life.

But when the police see you differently, he acknowledged, that’s when it becomes the deadliest problem.

“I try to be good to everybody at school. But I can’t always take the time to explain [my experiences with racism] to everyone. Sometimes I can see they don’t believe me,” he confessed.

“But to be honest, I love these protests. A good thing I see right now is that this time, there are white people there. This time they can see our pain.

“At the end of the year, when I go back to school, people are going to understand better. Maybe they will listen.”

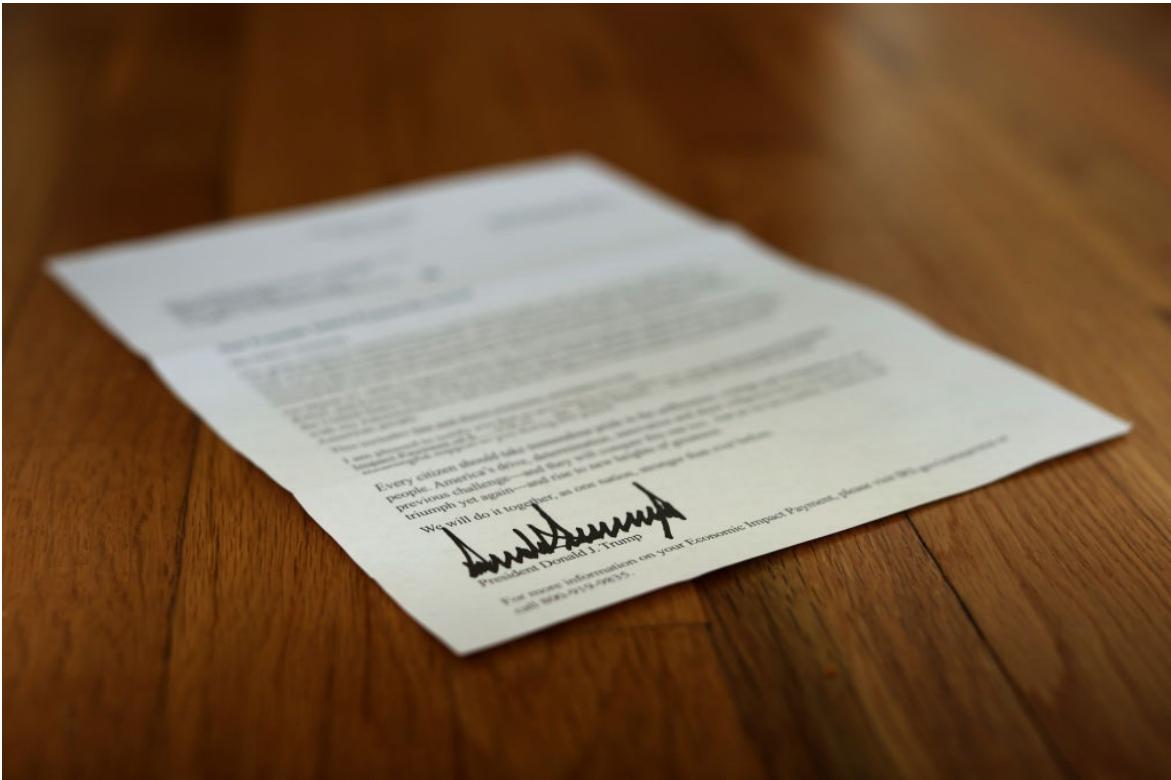
Emily Spacek is a CATALYST staff writer.

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# Want to Fight Poverty? Give Poor People Money.

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A letter bearing the signature of President Donald Trump was sent to people who received a coronavirus economic stimulus payment as part of the CARES Act. (Chip Somodevilla / Getty Images)

It may be inadequate and it may only be temporary, but the sudden federal injection of cash that accompanied the coronavirus made a significant difference to millions of lives.

That's according to new research on the impact of government aid by teams based at Columbia University, University of Chicago, and University of Notre Dame, whose findings offer strong evidence that federal aid has successfully protected many low-income families at risk amid surging unemployment and unprecedented economic turmoil.

In the wake of the coronavirus crisis, Congress approved a number of measures designed to blunt the impact of mass layoffs and provide cash relief to those thrown out of work. These included means-tested one-off payments of up to \$1,200 for individuals and \$2,400 to married couples with no dependents and a considerable expansion of eligibility for unemployment insurance. These measures are not without their fair share of problems, coming as they have with a built-in expiry date, delays in reaching the needy, and no provisions for helping undocumented migrants.

Nonetheless, it is abundantly clear from the research that the unprecedented expansion of federal aid has not only averted a catastrophic spike in poverty, but also given many workers a bigger income than they would have had if they'd remained in work. On this point, the authors of the Chicago/Notre Dame study are unequivocal:

Our results show that for low-income individuals and families, the government response to the pandemic more than offset the sharp decline in earnings . . . The entire decline in poverty for April and May can be accounted for by the one-time stimulus checks the federal government sent out during these months and the expansion of unemployment insurance eligibility and benefits.

Drawing on Census Bureau data, the study finds that poverty fell some 2.3 percentage points “from 10.9 percent in the months leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic (January and February) to 8.6 percent in the two most recent months (April and May).” Taken together with a May study which found that some two-thirds of unemployed workers are eligible to collect sums actually exceeding their usual earnings, the research offers ample evidence that the approach generally taken by America’s welfare system has less to do with alleviating poverty than it does with forcing people into degrading and badly paid work.

Which is to say, if you’re actually serious about reducing poverty the most obvious and effective course available is still the redistribution of wealth to the least well-off. America’s hegemonic attitude toward welfare, ridden through as it is with a neo-Dickensian logic of moral desert and personal responsibility, still insists that the best anti-poverty measures are those designed to inculcate a good work ethic and encourage individual self-improvement. Get a job, work hard, go to school, learn to code — or so the logic goes. While poverty may be a moral issue, it is hardly a moral failing, and welfare paternalism will never be a solution to the material deprivation that needlessly robs so many of a decent and

dignified life.

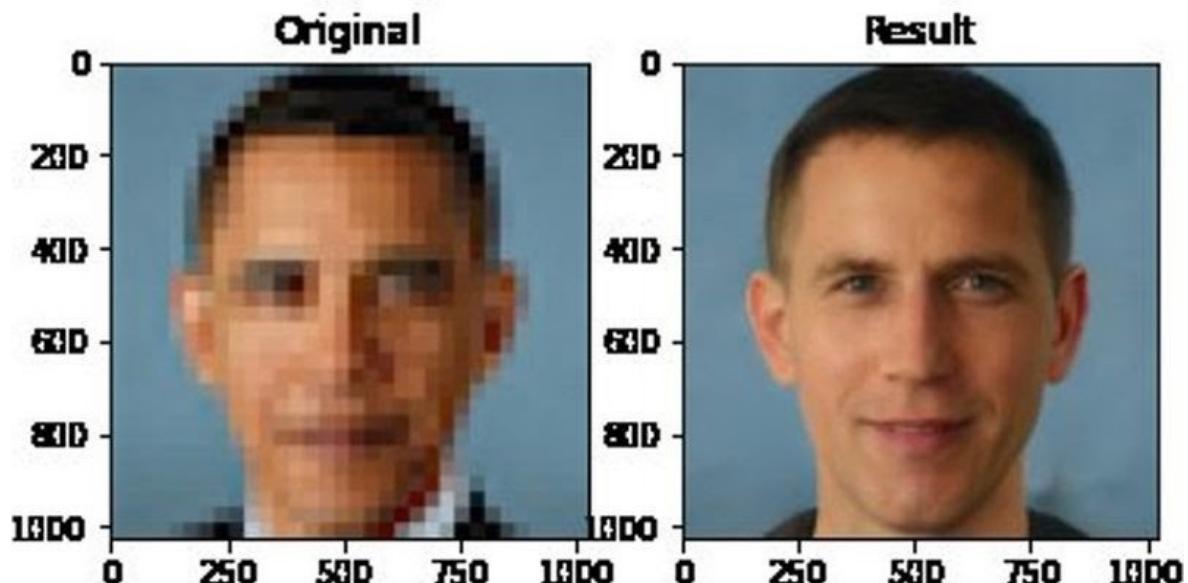
Want to fight poverty? Give poor people more money. It really is as simple as that.

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# What a machine learning tool that turns Obama white can (and can't) tell us about AI bias

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The PULSE algorithm takes pixelated faces and turns them into high-resolution images.

It's a startling image that illustrates the deep-rooted biases of AI research. Input a low-resolution picture of Barack Obama, the first black president of the United States, into an algorithm designed to generate depixelated faces, and the output is a white man.

It's not just Obama, either. Get the same algorithm to generate high-resolution

images of actress Lucy Liu or congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez from low-resolution inputs, and the resulting faces look distinctly white. As one popular tweet quoting the Obama example put it: “This image speaks volumes about the dangers of bias in AI.”

But what’s causing these outputs and what do they really tell us about AI bias?

First, we need to know a little a bit about the technology being used here. The program generating these images is an algorithm called PULSE, which uses a technique known as upscaling to process visual data. Upscaling is like the “zoom and enhance” tropes you see in TV and film, but, unlike in Hollywood, real software can’t just generate new data from nothing. In order to turn a low-resolution image into a high-resolution one, the software has to fill in the blanks using machine learning.

In the case of PULSE, the algorithm doing this work is StyleGAN, which was created by researchers from NVIDIA. Although you might not have heard of StyleGAN before, you’re probably familiar with its work. It’s the algorithm responsible for making those eerily realistic human faces that you can see on websites like ThisPersonDoesNotExist.com; faces so realistic they’re often used to generate fake social media profiles.



*A sample of faces created by StyleGAN, the algorithm that powers PULSE.* What PULSE does is use StyleGAN to “imagine” the high-res version of pixelated inputs. It does this not by “enhancing” the original low-res image, but by generating a completely new high-res face that, when pixelated, looks the same as the one inputted by the user.

This means each depixelated image can be upscaled in a variety of ways, the same way a single set of ingredients makes different dishes. It’s also why you can use PULSE to see what Doom guy, or the hero of Wolfenstein 3D, or even the crying emoji look like at high resolution. It’s not that the algorithm is “finding” new detail in the image as in the “zoom and enhance” trope; it’s instead inventing new faces that revert to the input data.

This sort of work has been theoretically possible for a few years now, but, as is often the case in the AI world, it reached a larger audience when an easy-to-run version of the code was shared online this weekend. That’s when the racial disparities started to leap out.

PULSE’s creators say the trend is clear: when using the algorithm to scale up pixelated images, the algorithm more often generates faces with Caucasian

features.

## “THIS BIAS IS LIKELY INHERITED FROM THE DATASET”

“It does appear that PULSE is producing white faces much more frequently than faces of people of color,” wrote the algorithm’s creators on Github. “This bias is likely inherited from the dataset StyleGAN was trained on [...] though there could be other factors that we are unaware of.”

In other words, because of the data StyleGAN was trained on, when it’s trying to come up with a face that looks like the pixelated input image, it defaults to white features.

This problem is extremely common in machine learning, and it’s one of the reasons facial recognition algorithms perform worse on non-white and female faces. Data used to train AI is often skewed toward a single demographic, white men, and when a program sees data *not* in that demographic it performs poorly. Not coincidentally, it’s white men who dominate AI research.

But exactly what the Obama example reveals about bias and how the problems it represents might be fixed are complicated questions. Indeed, they’re so complicated that this single image has sparked heated disagreement among AI academics, engineers, and researchers.

On a technical level, some experts aren’t sure this is even an example of dataset bias. The AI artist Mario Klingemann suggests that the PULSE selection algorithm itself, rather than the data, is to blame. Klingemann notes that he was able to use StyleGAN to generate more non-white outputs from the same pixelated Obama image, as shown below:

These faces were generated using “the same concept and the same StyleGAN model” but different search methods to Pulse, says Klingemann, who says we can’t really judge an algorithm from just a few samples. “There are probably millions of possible faces that will all reduce to the same pixel pattern and all of them are equally ‘correct,’” he told *The Verge*.

(Incidentally, this is also the reason why tools like this are unlikely to be of use for surveillance purposes. The faces created by these processes are imaginary and, as the above examples show, have little relation to the ground truth of the input. However, it’s not like huge technical flaws have stopped police from

adopting technology in the past.)

But regardless of the cause, the outputs of the algorithm seem biased — something that the researchers didn't notice before the tool became widely accessible. This speaks to a different and more pervasive sort of bias: one that operates on a social level.

**"PEOPLE OF COLOR ARE NOT OUTLIERS. WE'RE NOT 'EDGE CASES' AUTHORS CAN JUST FORGET."**

Deborah Raji, a researcher in AI accountability, tells *The Verge* that this sort of bias is all too typical in the AI world. "Given the basic existence of people of color, the negligence of not testing for this situation is astounding, and likely reflects the lack of diversity we continue to see with respect to who gets to build such systems," says Raji. "People of color are not outliers. We're not 'edge cases' authors can just forget."

The fact that some researchers seem keen to only address the data side of the bias problem is what sparked larger arguments about the Obama image. Facebook's chief AI scientist Yann LeCun became a flashpoint for these conversations after tweeting a response to the image saying that "ML systems are biased when data is biased," and adding that this sort of bias is a far more serious problem "in a deployed product than in an academic paper." The implication being: let's not worry too much about this particular example.

Many researchers, Raji among them, took issue with LeCun's framing, pointing out that bias in AI is affected by wider social injustices and prejudices, and that simply using "correct" data does not deal with the larger injustices.

## EVEN "UNBIASED" DATA CAN PRODUCE BIASED RESULTS

Others noted that even from the point of view of a purely technical fix, "fair" datasets can often be anything but. For example, a dataset of faces that accurately reflected the demographics of the UK would be predominantly white because the UK is predominantly white. An algorithm trained on this data would perform better on white faces than non-white faces. In other words, "fair" datasets can still create biased systems. (In a later thread on Twitter, LeCun acknowledged there were multiple causes for AI bias.)

Raji tells *The Verge* she was also surprised by LeCun's suggestion that

researchers should worry about bias less than engineers producing commercial systems, and that this reflected a lack of awareness at the very highest levels of the industry.

“Yann LeCun leads an industry lab known for working on many applied research problems that they regularly seek to productize,” says Raji. “I literally cannot understand how someone in that position doesn’t acknowledge the role that research has in setting up norms for engineering deployments.”

When contacted by *The Verge* about these comments, LeCun noted that he’d helped set up a number of groups, inside and outside of Facebook, that focus on AI fairness and safety, including the Partnership on AI. “I absolutely never, ever said or even hinted at the fact that research does not play a role in setting up norms,” he told *The Verge*.

Many commercial AI systems, though, are built directly from research data and algorithms without any adjustment for racial or gender disparities. Failing to address the problem of bias at the research stage just perpetuates existing problems.

In this sense, then, the value of the Obama image isn’t that it exposes a single flaw in a single algorithm; it’s that it communicates, at an intuitive level, the pervasive nature of AI bias. What it *hides*, however, is that the problem of bias goes far deeper than any dataset or algorithm. It’s a pervasive issue that requires much more than technical fixes.

As one researcher, Vidushi Marda, responded on Twitter to the white faces produced by the algorithm: “In case it needed to be said explicitly - This isn’t a call for ‘diversity’ in datasets or ‘improved accuracy’ in performance - it’s a call for a fundamental reconsideration of the institutions and individuals that design, develop, deploy this tech in the first place.”

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