

3/17/2020

## GETTING PAST THE “N” WORD: MARX AND RACISM

“The Jewish Nigger Lassalle, who fortunately departs at the end of this week, has luckily again lost 5,000 taler in a fraudulent speculation. The fellow would rather throw his money into the muck than lend it to a ‘friend,’ even if the interest and capital were guaranteed.”  
Marx to Engels, 30 July 1862.<sup>1</sup>

“Without slavery North America, the most progressive of countries, would be transformed into a patriarchal country. Wipe North America off the map of the world, and you will have anarchy – the complete decay of modern commerce and civilization. Cause slavery to disappear and you will have wiped America off the map of nations.” – Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*.

Some years ago a friend commented on the problem of talking with a Christian fundamentalist. She noted that no matter what the initial subject of the conversation was, say the weather or traffic, sooner or later as the conversation evolved it was almost certain that the name “Jesus” was going to be mentioned with testimony about what how he was really a great guy.

A similar fate all too often awaits readers of books written by devout Marxists. No matter what the ostensible subject under discussion with regard to Marx’s view of this or that, time and time again the reader will discover just how great Karl Marx really was. In fact it is virtually impossible to read any tome produced in (for example) either the former East Germany or the Soviet Union that came to any other conclusion. Needless to say, neither the Russians nor the East Germans failed to see any irony in the fact that any author who tried to argue otherwise would never see a word of his argument in print even as both states assured the readers that they embodied Marx’s democratic heritage unlike their capitalist scoundrel rivals in the West.

Yet tragedy really turns to farce when reading semi-scholarly homages to Marx produced not by Dietz Verlag or Progress Publishers but by Western Marx groupies issued under the auspices of leading academic presses. Replicating the at-times tortured logic of Marx and Engels, they write more like defense lawyers arguing a brief for their clients before some imaginary court of history. Unlike the cynical ideologues in both Eastern Europe and the USSR who interpreted Marx’s ideas in an instrumentalist way, they utterly devout in their soteriology.

Take, for instance, August Nimtz, Jr.’s, *Marx and Engels: Their Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough* published by the State University of New York Press in 2000 under the auspices of the “SUNY Series in Political Theory, Contemporary Issues.” On the first page of Nimtz’s preface, he announces “my most sweeping claim” that “Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were the leading protagonists in the democratic movement in the nineteenth

century, the decisive breakthrough period in humanity's age-old struggle for democracy.”<sup>2</sup>

Nimtz, a political science professor at the University of Minnesota and an African-American and African Studies expert, received his Ph.D. in 1973. He wrote one scholarly study, *Islam and Politics in East Africa: The Sufi Order in Tanzania*, which was based on his PhD thesis and published by the University of Minnesota Press in 1980. In *Marx and Engels*, Nimtz cites in “Primary Sources” exactly one book largely in German, MEGA<sup>2</sup>. In his secondary sources, he does not cite a single book in German or French or any other language than English.

At the end of his preface, Nimtz argues that anyone who disagrees with him does so simply because they are not in the correct camp of history:

One final comment. In the spirit of Marx and Engels, I harbor no illusions that what is presented here will convince opponents or skeptics of the correctness of their practice. My purpose is to challenge the claims, or more specifically, the many misrepresentations and myths about their project. As they fully understand, one's class position and perspective are in the final analysis determinant as for being attracted or repulsed by what they had to offer.<sup>3</sup>

Nimtz then takes the reader through a detailed reading of the MECW, a project as he says that was “in some ways inspired” by Hal Draper's “insufficiently heralded work,” by which he means KMTR. Not surprisingly on page after page we learn just how right Marx was about almost everything until we reach the Conclusion some 285 pages later which begins:

The timeworn ad nauseam treatment of Marx – as well Engels, though less so --- as only a thinker or even worse, a quixotic thinker, flies in the face of everything they both were about, what they did, *and* what they accomplished. The evidence is unambiguous that they were indeed first and foremost political beings and to treat them otherwise is not only inadequate but disingenuous. From their youth until their deaths, politics – revolutionary politics – was the axis around which their lives revolved. And it was exactly the combination of their communist politics

and activism that allowed them to make the most decisive contribution to the nineteenth century's democratic movement – the central argument of this book.<sup>4</sup>

Yet Nimitz never critically engages other scholarly studies that have critically looked at Marx's role in the revolutionary politics of 1848, one of the main areas of Nimitz's book. Take Jonathan Sperber's major book, *Rhineland Radicals: The Democratic Movement and the Revolution of 1848-1849*, for example. Sperber's book underscores just how marginal Marx's contribution to the democratic movement in the Rhineland and in the 1849 Revolution in Germany really was.<sup>5</sup> Although Nimitz does cite Sperber in his bibliography, he devotes exactly a small part of one brief endnote to him in his book. The endnote itself is devoted to an important issue in the history of the Communist League but one somewhat marginal to the larger context of the 1848 Revolution – namely Marx's conflict with the radical doctor and Communist League member Andreas Gottschalk. Sperber is written off as just restating an argument first advanced by the well-known historian P. H. Noyes in his 1966 book *Organization and Revolution: Working-Class Association in the German Revolution of 1848-1849*, a classic study also published by Princeton University Press.<sup>6</sup>

The real sin of both Noyes and Sperber seems to be that they don't see the universe through Nimitz's own Marxist prism. Even worse, the fact is that both Noyes and Sperber based their own work on extensive use both of original archives as well as the leading literature of numerous German scholars particularly in the postwar era who have also exhaustively looked at both the origins of the German workers movement as well as the history of the 1848 Revolution. If Nimitz were to seriously engage both Noyes and Sperber, he would also have to enter into a deeper examination of decades of critical scholarship produced in post-war Germany as well. Yet as a proud *engagé* intellectual, Nimitz somehow feels he doesn't have to engage with other academic research that fails to mimic his own views. As he makes clear in his preface, he dismisses any criticism of his work as ultimately the result or reflection of his critic's "class position." All this in a work published by an American academic press in 2000.

Yet even someone as devout as Nimitz has to balk a bit at Marx's frequent use of the word "nigger" in his private letters. For years the East Bloc tried to cover up Marx's use of such language in translations. For example in writing about a slave revolt in the *Grundrisse*, Marx attacks the attempt to reintroduce slavery into the West Indies but then writes about the "Quashees (the free niggers of Jamaica)" which in the MECW comes out in English translation as the "free blacks of Jamaica."<sup>7</sup>

In fact, the MECW is filled with numerous slurs and derogatory remarks, particularly in the letters between Marx and Engels on blacks, Jews, Russians, South Slavs, etc. In fact the letters are filled with similar vitriol against their political opponents. Obviously both Marx and Engels found such comments hilarious. However the infamous 30 July 1862 letter by Marx to Engels concerning Lassalle is so jaw-dropping that even Nimitz has to offer up some criticism of his hero. After all it is in this same letter – written one might recall near the height of the American Civil War – that Marx writes:

It is now completely clear to me that he [Lassalle], as is proved by his cranial formation and [curly] hair – descends from the Negroes who had joined Moses' exodus from Egypt (assuming his mother or grandmother on his paternal side had not interbred with a *nigger* [in English]). Now this union of Judaism and Germanism with a basic Negro substance must produce a peculiar product. The obtrusiveness of this fellow is also *Nigger-like* [in English]. . . . One of the great discoveries of our *Nigger* [in English] – which he only confides to his "most trusted friends" – is that the Pelasgians are descendants of the Semites.<sup>8</sup>

In *Marx and Engels*, Nimitz comments about Marx's infamous letter this way:

It might be appropriate here to address Marx's usage of quite derogatory language (certainly by today's standards) in another letter to Engels about Lassalle – particularly his 'nigger' origins. Marx employed the term in other letters but never in his published writings. According to the editors of the MECW, it did not have the "more

profane and unacceptable status” of later history. Whether the editors’ note is an apologia is neither here nor there.<sup>9</sup>

Yet the attempt by loyal Marx fans to avoid confronting Marx’s obvious racist statements would take an even more absurd turn in Kevin Anderson’s 2010 opus *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* published by yet another university press, this time from the University of Chicago. Like Nimitz, Anderson is not a historian but rather a professor of both political science and sociology at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Anderson is also a decades-long follower of the late Raya Dunayevskaya’s Detroit-headquartered “Marxist humanist” sect known as *News and Letters*. In some ways, *Marx at the Margins* is Anderson’s attempt to validate Dunayevskaya’s theories about the “late Marx” using texts – particularly Marx’s late notebooks – to suggest that Marx had somehow abandoned his earlier “Eurocentric” blinders to embrace an ill-defined brand of Third World Revolution. (Unlike Nimitz, however, Anderson is also occasionally willing to throw Engels under the bus when it suits his argument.)

Given his overall project, the MECW and MEGA<sup>2</sup>’s non-stop revelations of Marx’s use of degraded terms for Jews, blacks, Slavs, etc., poses real difficulties for Anderson. Unable to deny Marx’s use of racist terms, Anderson tries to “spin” Marx’s usage. In one endnote, Anderson even claims that Marx occasionally used “the ‘n’ word for dramatic effect,” surely a rather preposterous claim.<sup>10</sup> Throughout his book, Anderson feels compelled to apologize almost every time Marx uses the word “nigger.” For example after quoting a Marx sentence “a single nigger-regiment would have a remarkable effect on Southern nerves,” Anderson then has to add:

In the block quote above, the term “nigger regiment” is written in English in the middle of a German sentence. This is an instance of Marx using what today would be considered a very racist phrase to make an equally anti-racist point.<sup>11</sup>

But the phrase comes from a private letter Marx wrote to Engels on 7 August 1862. It is one of many letters where Marx employs ethnic or religious slurs in

his correspondence with his closest friend. Did he feel Engels needed his anti-racist consciousness raised? Was Marx trying to strengthen Engels anti-racism and encourage warm feelings to Jews when he described Lassalle to him as well? Anderson's response: "That Marx was capable of making such racist remarks in private should not obscure the fact that a major part of what made him so angry with Lassalle was the latter's indifference to the Civil War and the issue of slavery and racism in America."<sup>12</sup>

Yet Anderson reaches really astonishing heights of confusion when he tries to foist off Marx's economic rationalization for chattel slavery by claiming that Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, of all people, wanted to "save slavery." In his 1847 critique of Proudhon, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx includes an extremely significant comment on American slavery in a section entitled "Fourth Observation."<sup>13</sup> Marx's comments on America are well worth citing in their entirety. The "Fourth Observation" begins:

Let us see now to what modifications M. Proudhon subjects Hegel's dialectic when he applies it to political economy.

For him, M. Proudhon, every economic category has two sides – one good, the other bad. He looks upon these categories as the petty bourgeois looks upon the great men of history: Napoleon was a great man; he did a lot of good; he also did a lot of harm.

The good side and the bad side, the advantages and the drawbacks, taken together form for M. Proudhon the contradiction in every economic category.

The problem to be solved: to keep the good side, while eliminating the bad side.

The gist of Marx's comments is clearly that Proudhon had a naïve reformist view of history, particularly economic history. Marx then introduces the economic category of slavery as a necessary part of economic development against Proudhon.

In his 1840 *Qu'est-ce-que la propriété? (What Is Property?)* and his 1846 *Système des contradictions économiques, ou Philosophie de la misère*, Proudhon

does comment on slavery in the ancient world to some degree, but he says next to nothing about current chattel slavery in North America.

In the famous opening to *What is Property?*, Proudhon makes his views about slavery of all kinds perfectly clear when he writes in the opening lines of chapter one of *What is Property?* these famous lines:

If I were asked to answer the following question: *What is slavery?* and I should answer in one word, *It is murder*, my meaning would be understood at once. No extended argument would be required to show that the power to take from a man his thought, his will, his personality, is a power of life and death; and that to enslave a man is to kill him. Why, then, to this other question: *What is property!* may I not likewise answer, *It is robbery*, without the certainty of being misunderstood; the second proposition being no other than a transformation of the first?

This opening paragraph then is the origin of the most famous quote ever associated with Proudhon which in its popular version in English is “Property is theft.” However for our purposes, this one sentence of Proudhon’s makes it perfectly clear what he really thinks about slavery of any kind: “It is murder.”

Although it is hard to know for sure why Marx decided to explain to Proudhon his naïve way of thinking using the example of black slavery in America for his example, it may be that he had this famous paragraph in mind. Whatever his motives, the most important point to keep in mind is that Marx isn’t refuting any statement by Proudhon on contemporary slavery in the United States in any of his major works of the 1840s because Proudhon barely mentions the issue. Hence when Marx gives his analysis of chattel slavery in America, in my view his motive is to give a “concrete” or “historical materialist” analysis of a concept – “slavery” – that Proudhon only discussed in abstract terms.

Picking up on Marx’s statements in “Fourth Observation,” he continues:

Slavery is an economic category like any other. Thus it also has its two sides. Let us leave alone the bad side and talk about the good side of

**slavery. Needless to say we are dealing only with direct slavery, with Negro slavery in Surinam, in Brazil, in the Southern States of the United States.**

**Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry; It is slavery that gave the colonies their value; it is the colonies that created world trade, and it is world trade that is the precondition of large-scale industry. Thus slavery is an economic category of the greatest importance.**

**Recall that for Proudhon slavery was “murder.” The views that Marx advances here about slavery are his own and not a paraphrase of Proudhon which he will later refute. Marx then continues:**

**Without slavery North America, the most progressive of countries, would be transformed into a patriarchal country. Wipe North America off the map of the world, and you will have anarchy – the complete decay of modern commerce and civilization. Cause slavery to disappear and you will have wiped America off the map of nations.**

**Exactly why Marx thinks the elimination of slavery would transform “the most progressive of all countries” into a “patriarchal country” – whatever that means – remains a puzzle. However what I believe Marx is getting at in a somewhat confused way is the attempt to stress that “chattel slavery” operates one way in the ancient world as in the “antique” or “slave mode of production” he found in both Greece and Rome and in an entirely different way in the modern bourgeois world, where slavery is integrated into a world market and capitalist economic system.**

**Back to the “Fourth Observation”:**

**Thus slavery, because it is an economic category, has always existed among the institutions of peoples. Modern nations have been able only to disguise slavery in their own countries, but they have imposed it without disguise upon the New World.**

**What would M. Proudhon do to save slavery? He would formulate the problem thus: preserve the good side of this economic category, eliminate the bad.**

**At this point it is worth noting that the above argument by Marx was almost word for word in part first formulated in a 28 December 1846 letter he wrote from Brussels to Pavel Annenkov, a Russian living in Paris shortly after Marx had received *Philosophie de la misère*, which Marx says he skimmed through in a few days. In the part of the letter dealing with slavery, Marx told Annenkov: “After these reflections on slavery, what will the good Mr. Proudhon do? He will seek the synthesis of liberty and slavery, the true golden mean, in other words the balance between slavery and liberty.” Because Proudhon sees the “prime cause” in “abstractions and categories” he believes that such categories “and not men” make history. In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx expands this claim right after he concludes his discussion of slavery this way:**

**Hegel has no problem to formulate. He has only dialectics. M. Proudhon has nothing of Hegel’s dialectics but the language. For him the dialectic movement is the dogmatic distinction between good and bad.**

**Let us for a moment consider M. Proudhon himself as a category. Let us examine his good and bad side, his advantages and his drawbacks.**

**If he has the advantage over Hegel of setting problems which he reserves the right of solving for the greater good of humanity, he has the drawback of being stricken with sterility when it is a question of engendering a new category by dialectical birth-throes. What constitutes dialectical movement is the coexistence of two contradictory sides, their conflict and their fusion into a new category. The very setting of the problem of eliminating the bad side cuts short the dialectical movement. It is not the category which is posed and opposed to itself, by its contradictory nature, it is M. Proudhon who gets excited, perplexed and frets and fumes between the two sides of the category.**

**Clearly when Marx writes “What would Mr. Proudhon do to save slavery?” he does not mean at all that Proudhon is plotting to “save slavery.” I believe**

Marx is trying to argue is that Proudhon is hopelessly naïve in thinking in simple-minded abstract categories (like “freedom” and “slavery”). Thinking in such a manner, he can only “reconcile” contradictions in a kind of parody of Hegelian thinking. Proudhon, as such, refuses to think historically and to realize that slavery in its modern condition is an intrinsic part of advanced modern capitalism.

Indeed if Marx actually believed Proudhon *was* in reality out to “save slavery,” it would make Marx himself rather a peculiar socialist since some months before he read *Philosophie de la misère*, Marx had tried to get Proudhon to become an active member of Marx’s Brussels’-headquartered Communist Correspondence Committee (CCC). Marx’s 5 May 1846 letter to Proudhon was also signed by the Belgian-based Philippe Gigot as well as Engels. Indeed, Engels wrote in the note: “For my part, I can only hope, Mr. Proudhon that you will approve of the scheme we have just put to you and that you will be kind enough not to deny us your cooperation. Assuring you of the deep respect your writings have inspired in me . . .”<sup>14</sup> Surely a curious way to address someone Marx, Gigot and Engels would believe to be “pro-slavery.” However in a letter to Marx dated 17 May 1846 which is not included in the MECW and may well be lost, Proudhon – according to an endnote in the MECW – “refused to collaborate and declared he was opposed to revolutionary methods of struggle and to communism.”<sup>15</sup> It was soon after Proudhon’s decision not only not to collaborate with the CCC but to criticize Marx’s views that Marx now decided Proudhon was a hopeless idiot.

How does Anderson describe all this? Citing from the Marx-Annenkov letter, Anderson writes in an endnote:

This [the Marx-Annenkov letter] is a part of a critique of Proudhon, whom Marx accused of misusing Hegel’s concept of contradiction by speaking of “the good side” as well as “the bad side of slavery,” attempting thereby to find “the synthesis of freedom and slavery, the true golden mean, in other words the balance between slavery and freedom” (MECW 38, 101-2). Soon afterwards, in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), he reworked and sharpened this attack, accusing Proudhon of wanting to “save slavery” (MECW 6, 168).

Yet what is most remarkable of all about Anderson's assertions is that he overlooked an astonishing note by Engels which also appears in the MECW's "Fourth Observation." After Marx wrote the totally absurd statement: "Cause slavery to disappear and you will have wiped America off the map of nations" Engels added his own comment for the 1885 German addition of *Philosophy of Poverty*. In its entirety, the note – showing off Engels at his economic determinist best -- reads:

This was perfectly correct for the year 1847. At that time the world trade of the United States was limited mainly to import of immigrants and industrial products, and exports of cotton and tobacco, i.e., of the products of southern slave labour. The Northern States produced mainly corn and meat for the slave States. It was only when the North produced corn and meat for export and also became an independent country, and when the American cotton monopoly had to face powerful competition, in India, Egypt, Brazil, etc., that the abolition of slavery became possible. And even then this led to the ruin of the South, which did not succeed in replacing the open Negro slavery by the disguised slavery of Indian and Chinese coolies.<sup>16</sup>

Engels' peculiar note underlines just how much Marx himself reduced the question of Negro slavery simply to a question of economics, indeed to a kind of necessary sacrifice on the altar of industrial progress.

Throughout their career Marx and Engels often went out of their way to minimize the moral issues involved in the specific horror of African slavery, more or less dismissing African slavery as one of a number of unavoidable tragedies of the industrial age. If anything, they wanted to minimize the horrors of chattel slavery in order to highlight their claims about "wage slavery."

## SLAVERY AND THE WAR WITH MEXICO

Nimtz's apologetics and Anderson's verbal gymnastics highlight the fact that for some time now it has become more and more difficult to defend Marx and Engels from claims from black nationalists, postmodernists, and even some on the far right that Marx and Engels were classic "Eurocentric" ideologues.

Along with Marx's vast claims about an alleged "Asiatic Mode of Production" – a mode of production that in Marx's schema is far more reactionary and backward than the mode of production based on slavery – Marx's comments and views on race have been commented on by Marx's critics although frequently in a simple and haphazard way. Even the most intelligent of Marx's critics who accuse him of the crime of Eurocentrism seem utterly unaware that when it suited him Marx was only too willing to support "non-Western peoples" against his own enemies. Thus it is almost never mentioned that Marx was an ardent Turkophile from the 1850s onward or that he embraced Shamil's Taliban-style war in Dagestan against expansion from Tsarist Russia, a power that was unquestionably more "modern" than Shamil's religious warriors.

One of Marx's sharpest critics when it comes to race, Carlos Moore, begins his critique of Marx by stating: "The history of Europe, the socioeconomic evolution of its peoples, and the cultural and political institutions they have created, serve as the foundation for every 'universalist' philosophy manufactured in the West. Marxism-Leninism is no exception."<sup>17</sup> What Moore doesn't fully address, however, in his general overview of European thought is that at times Marx was well to the "right" of many other Europeans particularly on the issue of black slavery.

In July 1844, for example, the Marx-dominated *Vorwärts* ran a series of articles by Georg Weber (1816-1891) entitled "Negersklaven oder freie Sklaven" ("Black Slavery or Free Slavery").<sup>18</sup> Weber was a radical doctor originally from Kiel who played an important role in the German radical movement in Paris and later in Kiel and Brussels. After the failure of the 1848 Revolution, he immigrated to America in 1854 but he returned to Kiel in 1861. His articles in *Vorwärts* are considered historically very significant by specialists as they are exceptionally theoretical and seem to be in part drawn from Marx's ideas on labor and economics that he was developing at the time in the famed *1844 Manuscripts*. Weber also drew on Engels' writings such as his *Outline of a Critique of Political Economy*. As a result, Weber's series of articles can be read as an early popularization of Marx's developing views on economics and class struggle. As a result, Weber's arguments – obviously also

influenced by Marx -- as the view the labor movement should take to black slavery has been downplayed.

The discussion of the views the labor movement should take to black slavery had been triggered by a petition of French workers for the liberation and improvement of the lives of black slaves.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, in the sources I have looked at there is no discussion of just what French workers were advancing a petition to improve the lot of black slaves. What is clear is that Weber used the petition to argue that it was wrong for French workers to advocate the abolishment of slavery and the introduction of wage labor for blacks. Instead they should demand a complete revolution overthrowing their own form of slavery so that they themselves don't starve to death.<sup>20</sup> While this article has an ultra-radical feel to it, as I shall show later on, it was not at all uncommon for union leaders in England in particular to denigrate or play down the plight of black slaves in America in order to highlight the claim that "wage slaves" in Europe were treated by their employers in a far worse manner than blacks in the Americas.

Perhaps the most striking difference between Marx and Engels on the one hand and other radicals can best be seen over the war with Mexico which followed the "free republic" of Texas where chattel slavery became legal once it declared independence from Mexico. On 4 July 1846, the Fraternal Democrats which consisted -- of among others -- the most radical wing of the Chartist movement as well as the London-based leaders of the League of the Just issued a declaration condemning the American war against Mexico.<sup>21</sup> From the "Address of the Fraternal Democrats Assembling in London to the Working Classes of Great Britain and the United States":

**Working men of the United States -- It is with pain that we accompany these congratulations with a notice of the war now raging between you and the people of Mexico. We will not too closely scrutinize the merits of the question at issue between the two Republics, but we may at least be permitted to doubt the necessity for this contest, when we find it condemned by bodies of your own countrymen. The National Reformers of New York have, in a series of resolutions, denounced the war as unjust to Mexico, and disgraceful to the United States. The people of**

**Massachusetts, or at least that portion of them who are devoted to the Anti-Slavery Cause –forming, we believe, the majority of the people of that State – have gone further, and denounced this war as a “war for the extension of slavery” – pledged themselves not to support the war – and, finally, have summoned the people of that state to take the initiative in establishing a new compact, “which shall be a union of freemen, and freemen only.”<sup>22</sup> With these facts before us we must at least question the justice of your cause in this unhappy war. As to its policy, there can be no doubt that it is a policy exceedingly short-sighted and anti-republican.**

**The address goes on to state:**

**Much as we abhor slavery and strongly as we question the justice of your course towards Mexico, still we should regard the division of your republic as suggested by the Massachusetts “abolitionists” to be one of the greatest calamities that could befall the human race. Besides, the Massachusetts “abolitionists” only see half the evil. In their own state, and throughout the “free” states, a system of slavery exists, practically destructive to the theoretical equality guaranteed by your institutions; the slavery we allude to is the “slavery of wages,” a system which has already reduced the “free-born” men of your order almost to a level with the degraded state of the industrious orders of Europe. The land, which should be the property of the state, is becoming rapidly monopolized by private landlords, speculators, and traffickers, while the working class, hived up in huge cities, are competing with each other for a bare subsistence, the prey of the profitocracy who, with their brother plunderers of the landlord class, are fast acquiring all the substantialities of aristocracy, and even now rival in luxury, arrogance, and tyranny the Molochs of rank and money in the old world.**

**For this reason, the Fraternal Democrats’ statement continues:**

**To give mere personal liberty to the slave of the South, without at the same time guaranteeing him the means of subsistence by endowing him with a portion of the soil, would be conferring upon him only a nominal**

emancipation. On the other hand, experience has proved that the “equality” which gives men votes but leaves them the social slaves of wealth, and subjected to the demoralizing influences of great cities is but an illusory equality.

The Chairman of the Fraternal Democrats who signed the statement was Joseph Moll, a leading member of the League of the Just who later died fighting in Germany during the 1848 Revolution. Among the six secretaries who also signed the statement were Carl Schapper, the leader of the London-based wing of the League of the Just, who signed for Germany and G. Julian Harney, the radical Chartist who represented England. Schapper, Moll and Harney were three leading radicals whom Engels first met when he first visited England in December 1842.

That the Fraternal Democrats were well informed on the issue of American slavery in part can be traced to the extensive speaking tour Frederick Douglass went on in both Ireland and England from August 1845 to April 1847. After publishing his famous autobiography *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* in May 1845, Douglass and his supporters worried that because Douglass was still legally a slave he could be seized and sent South to his former master in Maryland.<sup>23</sup> For his safety, they arranged for him to tour both Ireland and England. England’s anti-slavery organizations also maintained close ties to William Lloyd Garrison’s American Anti-Slavery Society, which sponsored Douglass’ voyage. In Ireland, Douglass became particularly close to Daniel O’Connell, the leader of Irish home rights who also had been a long-time passionate supporter of American abolitionism.<sup>24</sup> During his two years speaking in both Ireland and England, Douglass denounced the American government’s annexation of slave-owning Texas, which also led to the war with Mexico.

Although Marx and Engels seem oblivious to Douglass, when Douglass toured England he worked closely with the Chartists. Douglass’s closest Chartist allies, however, were with the “moral force” Chartists and not the more explicitly radical “physical force” Chartists represented by Harney.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, the Chartists and other European radicals who made up the Fraternal Democrats were well aware of the struggle against slavery with or

without Douglass. The radical democratic European Left also opposed the American war with Mexico over slave Texas.

Yet, astonishing, Marx and Engels actually supported the war for the expansion of slavery. Shortly after completing the *Communist Manifesto*, Engels published an article entitled “The Movements of 1847” which appeared in the *Deutsche-Brüsseler-Zeitung* on 23 January 1848. In it, he wrote about a war which the U.S. took half of Mexico including all of Texas Upper California and New Mexico and which many leading U.S. politicians condemned as a war of conquest this way:

In America we have witnessed the conquest of Mexico and have rejoiced in it. It is also an advance when a country which has hitherto been exclusively wrapped up in its own affairs, perpetually rent with civil wars, and completely hindered in its development, a country whose best prospect has been to become industrially subject to Britain – when such a country is forcibly drawn into the historical process. It is to the interest of its own development that Mexico will in future be placed under the tutelage of the United States. The evolution of the whole of America will profit by the fact that the United States, by the possession of California, obtains command of the Pacific. But again we ask: “Who is going to profit immediately by the war?” The bourgeoisie alone. The North Americans acquire new regions in California and New Mexico for the creation of fresh capital, that is, for calling new bourgeois into being, and enriching those already in existence; for all capital created today flows into the hands of the bourgeoisie. And what about the proposed cut through the Tehuantepec isthmus? Who is likely to gain by that? Who else but the American shipping owners? Rule over the Pacific, who will gain by that but these same shipping owners? The new customers for the products of industry, customers who will come into being in the newly acquired territories – who will supply their needs? None other than the American manufacturers.

Thus also in America the bourgeoisie has made great advances, and if its representatives now oppose the war, that only proves that they fear that these advances have in some ways been bought too dear.<sup>26</sup>

Engels followed up his argument in a famous article entitled “Democratic Pan-Slavism” that first appeared in the 15-16 February 1849 issue of the *NRZ*. Attacking Bakunin, Engels writes:

Just a word about the ‘universal fraternal union of peoples’ and the drawing up of ‘boundaries established by the sovereign will of the peoples themselves on the basis of their national characteristics.’ The United States and Mexico are two republics, in both of which the people is sovereign.

How did it happen that over Texas a war broke out between these two republics, which, according to the *moral theory*, ought to have been ‘fraternally united’ and ‘federated,’ and that, owing to ‘geographical, commercial and strategic necessities,’ the ‘sovereign will’ of the American people, supported by the bravery of the American volunteers, shifted the boundaries drawn by nature some hundreds of miles further south? And will Bakunin accuse the Americans of a ‘war of conquest,’ which, although it deals a severe blow to his theory based on ‘justice and humanity,’ was nevertheless waged wholly and solely in the interests of civilization? Or is it perhaps unfortunate that splendid California has been taken away from the lazy Mexicans, who could not do anything with it? That the energetic Yankees by rapid exploitation of the California gold mines will increase the means of circulation, in a few years will concentrate a dense population and extensive trade at the most suitable places on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, create large cities, open up communications by steamship, construct a railway from New York to San Francisco, for the first time really open the Pacific Ocean to civilization, and for the third time in history give world trade a new direction? The ‘independence’ of a few Spanish Californians and Texans may suffer because of it, in some places ‘justice’ and other moral principles may be violated; but what does that matter compared to such facts of world-historic significance?

Engels then continues:

We would point out, incidentally, that the theory of universal fraternal union of peoples, which calls indiscriminately for fraternal union regardless of the historical situation and the stage of social development of the individual peoples, was combated by the editors of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* already long before the revolution, and in fact in opposition to their best friends, the English and French democrats. Proof of this is found in the English, French and Belgian democratic newspapers of that period.<sup>27</sup>

Was Engels comment also in part an attempt to justify his and Marx's full support for a war "waged wholly and solely in the interests of civilization" which stood in direct opposition to the Fraternal Democrats statement on Mexico that their close colleagues Harney, Moll, and Schapper all had signed on 4 July 1846?

It would take the outbreak of the Civil War for Marx and Engels to begin to reverse their views about the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846-48. At first Marx even tried to blame Texas slavery on his arch-nemesis Lord Palmerston. In a 23 November 1861 article for the *NYDT* entitled "The Intervention in Mexico," Marx claims:

By the treaty concluded with England in 1826, Mexico became bound to not allow the establishment of slavery in any of the territories constituting her then empire. By another clause of the same treaty, she tendered England, as security for the loans obtained from British capitalists, the mortgage of 45,000,000 acres of the public lands in Texas. It was Palmerston who, ten or twelve years later, interfered as the mediator for Texas against Mexico. In the treaty then concluded by him with Texas he sacrificed not only the anti-slavery cause, but also the mortgage on public lands, thus robbing the English bondholders of the security. The Mexican government protested at the time, but meanwhile John C. Calhoun could permit himself the jest of informing the Cabinet of St. James that its desire "of seeing slavery abolished in Texas would be" best realized by annexing Texas to the United States. The English bondholders lost, in fact, any claim upon Mexico, by the voluntary

sacrifice on the part of Palmerston of the mortgages secured to them in the treaty of 1826.<sup>28</sup>

The real victims of the crisis between Texas and Mexico, then, seem to have been English bondholders.

In a 25 October 1861 article for the Viennese-based paper *Die Presse*, Marx finally discussed the fate of Texas and the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846-1848 in the same way the Fraternal Democrats had seen it in July 1846, namely as the dangerous extension of Southern power:

In order to maintain its influence in the Senate and, through the Senate, its hegemony over the United States, the South therefore required the formation of new slave states. This, however, was only possible through the conquest of foreign lands, as in the case of Texas, or through the transformation of the Territories belonging to the United States first into slave territories and later into slave states, as in the case of Missouri, Arkansas, etc.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time in 1848 when Engels was declaring his joy at the American annexations of Mexican territory as a great advancement for civilization, he also celebrated the French takeover of Algeria. In a January 1848 article for the English Chartist paper, *The Northern Star*, Engels writes about the French arrest of the Algerian resistance leader Abd-el-Kader this way:

Upon the whole it is, in our opinion, very fortunate that the Arabian chief has been taken. The struggle of the Bedouins was a hopeless one, and through the manner in which brutal soldiers, like Bugeaud, have carried on the war is highly blamable, the conquest of Algeria is an important and fortunate fact for the progress of civilization. The piracies of the Barbarous states, never interfered with by the English government as long as they did not disturb their ships, could not be put down but by the conquest of one of these states. And the conquest of Algeria has already forced the Beys of Tunis and Tripoli, and even the Emperor of Morocco, to enter upon the road of civilization. They were obliged to find other employments for their people than piracy, and other means of filling their exchequer than tributes paid to them by the

smaller states of Europe. And if we may regret that the liberty of the Bedouins of the desert has been destroyed, we must not forget that these same Bedouins were a nation of robbers – whose principal means of living consisted of making excursions either upon each other, or upon the settled villages, taking what they found, slaughtering all those who resisted, and selling the remaining prisoners as slaves. All these nations of free barbarians look very proud, noble and glorious at a distance, but only come near them and you will find that they, as well as the more civilized nations, are ruled by the lust of gain, and only employ ruder and more cruel means. And after all, the modern bourgeois, with civilization, industry, order, an at least relative enlightenment following him, is preferable to the feudal lord or to the marauding robber, with the barbarian state of society to which they belong.<sup>30</sup>

In reading Engels' comments, it is not hard to imagine a similar justification being used for the treatment of Native Americans. And although Marx and Engels later in life would become fascinated with Morgan's work on Iroquois social structures, I am at a loss to recall a single article by either of them on the relentless destruction of native peoples in the United States for, I believe, essentially the same reason they accepted slavery as yet another necessary evil for the advance of industrial progress. Compare their views to those of Adam Smith who in *Wealth of Nations* condemned slavery as economically inefficient and who in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* spoke of "the magnanimity of the Negro in contrast to his 'sordid master,' and of the Africans as 'nations of heroes' and the slave owners as 'the refuse of the jails of Europe.'"<sup>31</sup>

As the 1848 Revolution swept Europe, Engels would have no hesitation in writing articles for the *NRZ* that called for the end to "non-historic" peoples – southern European Slavs in particular – in the name of progress. In the struggle over Denmark, he had no trouble characterizing Scandinavians as barbaric peoples as well. When Marx later wrote about backward societies in Asia benefiting from British conquest in the early 1850s, he was hardly inventing a new category of thinking about "backward" societies. If one were willing to see black chattel slavery as integral to industrial progress, critically supporting the British conquest of India hardly seemed like much of a stretch.

## A “SLAVE MODE OF PRODUCTION” (SMP)?

In the first part of our examination of Marx and Engels’ views concerning the question of black chattel slavery in the Americas in particular, I have suggested that their views were perfectly in keeping with their general interpretation of the agony and ecstasy of “bourgeois progress” as scripted in the *Communist Manifesto*.

American chattel slavery in this context formed a kind of quasi-category in their view. Although it had roots in a “pre-capitalist” or “patriarchal” form of society – or so they claimed – chattel slavery was fundamentally a capitalist institution deeply integrated into the world market. Such a view is much in line with Barrington Moore, Jr.’s argument in *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* that “plantation slavery was not an economic fetter upon industrial capitalism. If anything, the reverse may have been true, it helped promote American industrial growth in the early stages.”<sup>32</sup>

Yet it was not at all clear if the modern “slave mode of production” could be truly “capitalist” since the very essence of modern capitalism, at least according to Marx, was the alienation of the modern laborer who had to subsist on wages. In contrast the essence of chattel slavery is a “form of bondage in which human beings are a form of *property* and in which the owner has all the rights of property over the slave.”<sup>33</sup> Hence chattel slavery presupposes a society heavily invested in a belief in rights of private property.<sup>34</sup>

In their book *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst argue that as chattel, slaves had nothing to do with a form of economy premised on the wage-form, instead, “there is no distinction between constant and variable capital, the slave is no different from any other form of capital investment in machines, animals, etc. . . Hence there is no division apparent within the mode between necessary-labor and surplus-labor.” This is in sharp distinction to capitalism where “wage labor is sold to the capitalist as a distinct cost of production with a distinct magnitude.”<sup>35</sup> Out of the organization of the SMP, there emerges three groups, the ruling slaveholding class, a class of functionaries some of whom might be freemen and some slaves

and, finally, the direct producers, who are slaves. Far from being an outmoded form of production, slavery managed to integrate itself very well into both the ancient and modern worlds, and slave production in the ancient world was highly productive precisely because there could be divisions of labor on the great latifundia. Nor was there any reason why slaves in the New World could not partake in factory labor. (One only has to think of the Nazi-run concentration and slave labor camps like Dora that even helped produce V-2 rockets to grasp this point.)

To those who would argue that the South was a capitalist economy because of its “its integration into the world market, because of its use of developed banking, financial and commercial institutions, and because the planters invested for profit and calculated with a capitalist rationality,” Hindess and Hirst argue that what they call the SMP was unquestionably subordinated “to the capitalist mode of production within the international division of labor and the world market created by capitalism.”<sup>36</sup> In fact,

The SMP in the South was not merely dependent on world capitalism, but also upon American capitalism – American capital provided both the apparatus and the means of circulation. Slave production in the South depended on the same forms of commerce, credit, banking, etc., as the capitalist mode (the West Indies similarly using the financial and commercial institutions of England and New England). Money capital from various sources within the capitalist mode (profits derived from surplus-value, merchants’ capitalist profits, etc.) can be invested in slave production (either directly or through the advance of credit). The surplus-product of slave production can be converted into capitalist profit in exactly the same way as the surplus-value derived from wage-labor. Capitalist calculation therefore enters into the investment in slaves and profits are expected from the use of slave labor. Slaves are reckoned as a form of fixed capital. This intersection with capitalist relations of circulation provides slave production with an advanced commercial and financial apparatus and ties it into the capitalist system. It should be noted that it also ties sections of commercial and financial capital to slave production. The South might depend on New York and Baltimore, but the dependence was mutual, and it was in such

centers that support for the Southern interest was strongest. . . . There is no antagonism between the capitalist system in general and slavery – slave production appears under specific conditions as a subordinate form to the CMP [Capitalist Mode of Production].<sup>37</sup>

As a result, “In 1850 there were more social forces prepared to support slavery or indifferent to it than there were actively hostile to the institution. The plantation economy of the South was closely allied with important sections of Northern banking, commercial and industrial capital.”<sup>38</sup>

Although Hindess and Hirst from their lofty Althusserian summit are critical of Eugene Genovese because they believed he had adopted a too-Gramsci-like emphasis on the cultural and ideological views of the slave-holding class, Genovese also believed that the South was not a capitalist society in any meaningful way. Eager to confront the “economic reductionist” history of much American Marxism, in his 1968 essay “Marxian Interpretations of the Slave South,” Genovese argued that Marxist thinking on the South was trapped in the need to fit developments into “a unilinear model of world development” obviously endorsed by Stalinism.<sup>39</sup> Against this, Genovese argues: “In Marxian terms the slave South was pre-bourgeois in essential respects but it was far from being feudal. That is, the South rested on a distinct mode of production that was as different from the feudal as from the capitalist. At the same time the slave mode of production arose anachronistically and as a hybrid during the epoch of capitalism’s world conquest.”<sup>40</sup>

In short, the case of America almost cries out for an analysis of the way an ostensibly retrogressive method of production, the SMP, can be so vitally integrated into the most advanced bourgeois republic in the world in a strange kind of Siamese-twin like formation. Yet to do so would be to further throw into doubt the very ideas about the industrial bourgeoisie that Marx wrote about in the *Communist Manifesto*. It would also call attention to black chattel slavery and the way it undergirded “progress” while being totally integrated into the world capitalist system of production. More to the point, it is also necessary to question just how “retrogressive” modern chattel slavery was from an economic point of view. As Barrington Moore, Jr. points out: “From

a strictly economic standpoint, wage labor and plantation slavery contain as much a potential for trading and complementary political relations as for conflict” since capitalists “had no objection to obtaining goods produced by slavery as long as a profit could be made by working them up and reselling them.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, the plantation slave system, Moore argues, “was no anachronistic excrescence on industrial capitalism. It was an integral part of this system and one of its prime motors in the world at large.”<sup>42</sup>

By the time Marx wrote *Capital* – whose first volume appeared shortly after the conclusion of the American Civil War – he seemed much more aware of the particular horrors of chattel slavery as a combination of the worst of pre-capitalist “patriarchal” forms of existence with the demands of mass production. From Volume One of *Capital*:

But as soon as people whose production still moves within the lower forms of slave-labour, the *corvée*, etc. are drawn into a world market dominated by the capitalist mode of production, whereby the sale of their products for export develops into their principal interest, the civilized horrors of over-work are grafted onto the barbaric horrors of slavery, serfdom, etc. Hence the Negro labour in the southern states of the American Union preserved a moderately patriarchal character as long as production was chiefly directed to the satisfaction of immediate local requirements. But in proportion as the export of cotton became of vital interest to those states, the over-working of the Negro, and sometimes the consumption of his life in seven years of labour, became a factor as a calculated and calculating system. It was no longer a question of obtaining from him a certain quantity of useful products, but rather of the production of surplus-value itself. The same is true of the *corvée*, in the Danubian Principalities for instance.<sup>43</sup>

Marx’s rethinking of the nature of modern chattel slave society, however, seems to have largely stemmed from his reading of one book, John Elliott Cairnes 1862 opus *The Slave Power* rather from any original research. Cairnes, a classical economist who was close to John Stuart Mill, stressed the economic inefficiency of the slave system.<sup>44</sup> In the opinion of Eugene Genovese: “Marx and Engels probably had not read much more than

Olmsted's travel accounts [Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States with Remarks on Their Economy*] and J.E. Cairnes' *The Slave Power*, which is hardly unimpeachable even as a secondary source; their writings show little special acquaintanceship with Southern life and history."<sup>45</sup> Marx quotes quite extensively from Cairnes' book in one section of *Capital*. Marx notes that "The slave-owner buys his worker in the same way as he buys his horse. If he loses his slave, he loses a piece of capital, which he must replace by fresh expenditure on the slave market. But take note of this." At this point, Marx cites from Cairnes' *The Slave Power* at some length:

The rice-grounds of Georgia, or the swamps of the Mississippi, may be fatally injurious to the human constitution; but the waste of human life which the cultivation of these districts necessitates, is not so great that it cannot be repaired from the teeming preserves of Virginia and Kentucky. Considerations of economy, moreover, which, under a natural system, afford some security for humane treatment by identifying the master's interest with the slave's preservation, when once trading in slaves is practiced, become reasons for racking to the uttermost the toil of the slave; for, when his place can at once be supplied from foreign preserves, the duration of his life becomes a matter of less moment than its productiveness while it lasts. It is accordingly a maxim of slave management, in slave-importing countries, that the most efficient economy is that which takes out of the human chattel in the shortest space of time the utmost amount of exertion it is capable of putting forth. It is in tropical culture, where annual profits often equal the whole capital of plantations, that Negro life is most recklessly sacrificed. It is the agriculture of the West Indies, which has been for centuries prolific of fabulous wealth, that has engulfed millions of the African race. It is Cuba, at this day, whose revenues are reckoned by millions, and whose planters are princes, that we see in the servile class, the coarsest fare, the most exhausting and unremitting toil, and even the absolute destruction of a portion of its numbers every year."<sup>46</sup>

Whether Cairnes' portrayal of conditions of American black slaves in the American South is totally accurate or not, his book had a major impact on

Marx's thinking. But even before reading Cairnes, by the late 1850s, Marx seemed aware that the "capitalist mode of production" may not have been the only one in the modern world. In his 1859 *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx famously introduced into his thinking a new category known as the "Asiatic mode of production" which extended back thousands of years of history but was still in existence in Marx's time. Yet was the AMP the only kind of "non-capitalist economy" in the contemporary world? Clearly by the late 1870s both Marx and Engels took renewed interest in communal forms of "primitive communist" and clan societies, which in the 1840s they had simply dismissed as the shards of "non-historic peoples."

In *Critique of Political Economy*, Marx also comments: "The means of production may be robbed directly in the form of slaves. But in that case it is necessary that the structure of production in the country to which the slave is abducted admits of slave-labor or (as in South America, etc.) a mode of production appropriate to slave-labor has to be evolved."<sup>47</sup> What can the "etc." mean but to include the economy of the American South? Where else had "a mode of production appropriate to slave-labor" evolved more? Yet just a few pages later, Marx heralds the United States for being the most advanced society in the world for its high level of "abstraction of labor" which he later explains developed as part of the "historical products" of the United States:

This abstraction of labor is, on the other hand, by no means simply the conceptual resultant of a variety of concrete types of labor. The fact that the particular kind of labor employed is immaterial is appropriate to a form of society in which individuals easily pass from one type of labor to another, the particular type of labor being accidental to them and therefore irrelevant. Labor, not only as a category but in reality, has become a means to create wealth in general, and has ceased to be tied as an attribute to a particular individual. This state of affairs is most pronounced in the United States, the most modern form of bourgeois society. This abstract category "labor," "labor as such," labor *sans phrase*, the point of departure of modern economics, thus becomes a practical fact only there.<sup>48</sup>

**Marx in short seems torn between expanding his ideas on “modes of production” to include a new modern form of the “slave mode of production” on the one hand which would further complicate his earlier unilinear notion of history but would radically raise deep questions about the United States as “the most modern form of bourgeois society.”**

## **THE MYSTERY OF HAITI**

**Yet if Marx briefly flirted with the idea of the “slave mode of production” in the *Critique of Political Economy* and made slavery the major factor in the “ancient mode of production” -- which Marx limited to ancient Greece and Rome -- he somehow managed to ignore the greatest contemporary slave revolt in the modern world, namely the uprising in the French colony of Saint-Domingue which in 1805 adopted its former Arawak name “Haiti.”<sup>49</sup>**

[to be continued]

## **MARX AND JAMAICA**

---

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *The Letters of Karl Marx* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 466. This is the edition translated and edited by Saul Padover. The emotionally neutral German word is *Neger* so when Marx wrote “Nigger” he clearly did so deliberately as in “der jüdische Nigger Lassalle.” Rather astonishingly in his introduction to the Marx-Lassalle correspondence, Padover writes: “Deeply envious, and yet admiring, Marx indulged in scathing anti-Semitic remarks about Lassalle (“Nigger-Jew,” etc.) in his private letters, as can be seen in the following pages.” Apparently it didn’t cross Padover’s mind to remark that Marx’s comments were also blatantly racist as well as anti-Semitic.

<sup>2</sup> August Nimtz, Jr., *Marx and Engels: Their Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), vii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals: The Democratic Movement and the Revolution of 1848-1849* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Nimtz writes that Noyes somehow missed the idea that Marx and Engels “did indeed have a strategy for the working class but in alliance with the petit bourgeoisie and small peasantry. They, as opposed to Gottschalk, saw that it was through such an alliance that workers would be in a better position to further their interests, i.e., through the fight for the bourgeois democratic revolution.” Then Nimtz mentions Sperber’s book “for a more recent rendering of Noyes’s argument.” 316-17.

---

<sup>7</sup> Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 160, 271, fn. 5. According to Anderson, the Penguin edition of the *Grundrisse* translated by Martin Nicolaus and published in 1973 also uses the term “free blacks” instead of “free niggers.” However MECW does accurately translate Marx’s racial slurs in his correspondence.

<sup>8</sup> Marx, *The Letters*, 468. The italics are in Padover’s translation.

<sup>9</sup> Nimtz, 334, fn. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Anderson, 266, fn. 24.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 266, fn. 22.

<sup>13</sup> MECW 38: 167-68.

<sup>14</sup> MECW 38: 38-40.

<sup>15</sup> MECW 38: fn. 53, 575.

<sup>16</sup> MECW 6: 167-68.

<sup>17</sup> Carlos Moore, « Were Marx and Engels White Racists? The Prolet-Aryan Outlook of Marxism,” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review*, Vol. xix (1974-75). This is an extremely interesting article by a Cuban-born former supporter of the Cuban Revolution who in part broke with Castro over what Moore believed was the lower status treatment of blacks in revolutionary Cuba. Moore’s essay, according to the editors, “appears with the permission of the Institute of Positive Education, Chicago. We have taken the liberty of deleting small portions.” The Institute of Positive Education was founded in 1969 in Chicago by Haki Madhubuti (Don Lee) who also founded at the same time The Third World Press. The Third World Press was a leading Black Nationalist publishing house.

During the early 1970s there was a fierce debate in the black nationalist movement over Africa and whether or not black nationalist groups should ally with the Soviet and Cuban-backed national liberation forces or whether they should instead ally with the anti-Cuban and anti-Russian groups which frequently had ties to either the CIA, China, South Africa or all three. Hence Moore’s essay can be read as part of a broader attack on Havana’s alliance with Moscow. Moore was also a leading friend and ally of Senegal’s Cheikh Anta Diop, one of the modern founders of “Afro-centrism.”

The fact that Moore’s essay was reprinted in 1974 in the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review* with a harsh rebuttal by the very journal’s Marxist editor Jerome Himmelstein (“Marx and Engels Are Dead: An Editorial Reply to Carlos Moore”) suggests that the clash between the more overt Marxist wing in support of national liberation movements and the rise of independent black nationalist critiques of Marxism as “Prolet-Aryan” at the time. In his reply Himmelstein argues that Marxism has gone through enormous changes in six decades and if anything is centered on the need for Third World revolutions against Western domination; Moore selectively quotes Marx but ignores his strong denunciations of the havoc reeked by the West on indigenous cultures making Marx’s work “a ringing denunciation of imperialism and a devastating debunking of the West’s pretensions to ‘civilization’”; Moore focuses on passages in Marx’s work that are historically irrelevant today; Marx’s misanthropy “exempted no one”; and that “Moore appears to adopt “ the notion that a theory is racist “if it departs from the Manichean vision that the West is the source of all evil and the non-West, the source of only good.” Marx also denounced oppressive features of non-Western societies that existed before colonialism along with the misery inflicted by colonialism.

One book highlighting Marx's racism comes from the rightist Nathaniel Weyl. A former member of the Communist Party from an upper class background, Weyl became a fierce anti-communist as well as a supporter of eugenic theories popular on the far right. His pop biography of Marx, however, attacks Marx for being a racist and an anti-Semite and it contains some facts Marxists very much want to overlook such as Marx's infatuation with Pierre Trémaux. Because Weyl could read German he could highlight some of Marx's most embarrassing statements before the full MECW translation series. See Nathaniel Weyl, *Karl Marx: Racist* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1979). Arlington House was a John-Birch Society friendly right wing publisher and churned out many anti-Communist tracts. *Karl Marx: Racist!* Also has one of the most over-the-top book covers featuring Marx wearing a KKK hood.

The most jaw-dropping article on Marx's views of race that I have seen has to be Edward Kerling, "Marx and Engels: World-Class Racists," *Instauration*, February 1995. *Instauration* was the leading "intellectual" journal for openly racist and pro-Nazi far rightists in the United States. Instead of condemning Marx and Engels for their views, Kerling – possibly a pseudonym as a German saboteur who was executed during World War II for trying to carry out industrial terrorism acts in America – celebrates them. He concludes his article: "The long and the short of it is that Marx and Engels opposed the struggles for independence of those races and peoples they despised. They regarded them as obstacles to the forward sweep of history, treating them as objects rather than subjects. They were people who *ought* to be conquered and exploited by the more advanced Anglo-Saxon nations. Some of these inferior stocks were people who *ought* to be eradicated and removed from the surface of the earth." Although much of this is ridiculous, Kerling is clearly drawing on Engels' writings about the South Slavs in particular. Ironically, I suspect Moore would agree with much of Kerling's conclusion. (There is even some internal evidence in Kerling's essay that he may have read Moore but Kerling's endnotes are too limited to be completely sure.) Kerling is also the author of "Abraham Lincoln and the Problem of Slavery" in the far right journal and in a way toned-down heir to *Instauration*, *American Renaissance*, 2/5 (May 1991) arguing that by today's standards Lincoln was an "uncompromising white supremacist." He also wrote an article detailing the white supremacist views of the American Socialist Party entitled "Racial Views of Early American Socialists" which appeared in the January 1995 issue of *Instauration*.

Moore, Weyl -- and even in a way the truly despicable Kerling -- are examples of fringe authors one step removed from the soap box who have been marginalized by orthodox academic discourse particularly in an academia dominated by quasi-New Left-inspired liberalism with its own deep investment in presenting Marx's ideas in an anodyne or sanitized way. They all have been marginalized not just by their rhetoric but by the fact that they are all challenging well-established interpretive paradigms. However the broader discussion of the early socialist left's strong embrace of "scientific eugenics" and the development of "Socialist Darwinism" has also been a topic that while once marginalized has received more serious academic examination in the past few decades as we will see later.

<sup>18</sup> On these articles see Grandjonc, *Marx et les communistes allemands*, 70-71, and Schmidt (ed.), *Vorwärts*, xxv-xxix.

<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, in the sources I have looked at there is no discussion of just what French workers were advancing a petition to improve the lot of black slaves.

<sup>20</sup> "der französischen Arbeitern daher greaten werden sollte, nicht eine Verwandlung der Negersklaven in freie Lohnarbeiter, sondern eher umgekehrt ihre Verwandlung in Sklaven zu fordern, damit sie nicht vor Elend unkommen." Schmidt, *Vorwärts*, xxvii.

<sup>21</sup> For the full text of the statement, see Gregory Claeys (ed.), *The Chartist Movement in Britain 1838-1850* (Volume Four) (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001), 81-85.

<sup>22</sup> At the time the famous abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison had called for the antislavery states to secede from the Union and draw up a new constitution.

---

<sup>23</sup> Douglass only returned to America after buying his freedom.

<sup>24</sup> On Douglass' visit, see John F. Quinn, "Safe in Old Ireland": Frederick Douglass's Tour, 1845-1846," *The Historian*, 64/3-4 (Spring & Summer 2002).

<sup>25</sup> This may have been one reason why Douglass never seems to have met a leading London-based black Chartist named William Cuffay, the son of a freed slave from St. Kitts who aligned himself with the "physical force" Chartists. See Richard Bradbury, "Frederick Douglass and the Chartists," in Alan J. Rice and Martin Crawford (eds), *Liberating Sojourn: Frederick Douglass & Transatlantic Reform* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 184.

<sup>26</sup> MECW 6: 527. Marx was also enamored by the fighting prowess of the "Yankees" in the 1846-1848 U.S.-Mexico War. Solomon Bloom, *The World of Nations: A Study in the National Implications in the Work of Karl Marx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 172.

<sup>27</sup> MECW 8: 365-66.

<sup>28</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Civil War in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1961), 31.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>30</sup> MECW 6: 471-72. Marx and Engels would radically reverse their views on Algeria and el-Kadar in the late 1850s especially in light of their deep hatred of Napoleon III.

<sup>31</sup> Roger Kennedy, *Orders from France: The Americans and the French in a Revolutionary World, 1780-1820* (New York; Knopf, 1989), 134.

<sup>32</sup> Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 112.

<sup>33</sup> Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 110. This book drew heavily from Althusser and enraged many British Marxists, E.P. Thompson in particular. Yet the chapter on "the slave mode of production" (SMP) is especially interesting for our purposes because they critique both Genovese and Cairnes. For an interesting related attempt to take the "mode of production" analysis seriously, see Martin Kilian and E. Lynn Tatom, "Marx, Hegel and the Marxism of the Master Class: Eugene D. Genovese on Slavery," *The Journal of Negro History*, 66/3 (Autumn 1981).

<sup>34</sup> For this reason the great Whig constitutional theorist John Locke could attack on the legal tyranny of an unchecked monarchy even as he served as a shareholder in the Royal African Company and involved in American colonial police in Carolina along with his patron the Earl of Shaftesbury. Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti," *Critical Inquiry*, 26/4 (Summer 2000), 826.

<sup>35</sup> Hindess and Hirst, 128.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 150,161.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>39</sup> Eugene Genovese, *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History* (New York: Pantheon, 1971), 327.

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 340. Genovese also writes: “First, the obsession of Marxists with the unilinear theory of history has compelled them to view Southern slavery as a form of feudalism . . . . In these terms the problem of ‘two social systems’ reduces itself to one of internal class struggle between anachronistic and modern formations. Unilinear Marxists find incomprehensible the notion that social stags may be reversed or that archaic modes of production may reappear in modern forms with considerable political independence. History, it seems, may not go backwards.” 340-41.

<sup>41</sup> Moore, 114.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 116. Hence Moore concludes that “The South had a capitalist civilization, then, but hardly a bourgeois one.” 121. He believes that the plantation system was not “an obstacle to industrial capitalism as such” but only to “a *particular kind* of capitalism.” 152.

<sup>43</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital* (1) (London: Penguin, 1976), 345.

<sup>44</sup> As a classical economist, Cairnes followed Smith’s thinking in *The Wealth of Nations* that slavery was a highly inefficient economic system. Although Cairnes seems little respected today, Orlando Patterson considered his work highly valuable from a theoretical point of view:

While obviously non-Marxian in the sense of being derived from Marx, it should be noted that Cairnes’s enormously influential work on American slavery, published in 1862, was essentially a materialistic conception of that slave society. Cairnes’s work is little regarded today because ironically, like Marx and Engels, his data has been shown to be wrong. We think, however, that Cairnes’s purely theoretical views on the subject are still extremely valuable, and indeed, it is this aspect of the work that was most influential. The truth of the matter is that Cairnes had the right theory of slave society, if by slave society one means, as classical Marxists do, a pure-type slave system. His error was to assume that the US South was a pure-type slave society, which as we know now, it clearly was not, although it was one in which slavery was predominant. Cairnes’s materialist theory is more applicable to the pure-type slave societies of the Caribbean; indeed, it was developed originally with these societies in mind. The fact that he was misled by the available data on the US South into thinking it was a pure-type slave society is a reflection on his empirical skills, but not necessarily his theoretical insights. The work, at any rate, has clearly influenced not only non-Marxian, but Marxian scholarship.

Orlando Patterson, “Slavery,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 3 (1977), 410-11. Patterson sees Cairnes as representing in theory the argument that the slave system was “inefficient, pre-capitalist, and both socially and culturally destructive,” a view that he says almost no contemporary historians support.” (414). Patterson’s article is a very interesting survey of contemporary works on slavery, both ancient and modern, with an emphasis on the contributions of Marxist scholarship in not just the West but in East Europe, China, and the USSR and remains valuable although obviously dated. His survey includes valuable mention of work in the Far East on the role of slavery particularly in Japan and Korea and the debate over the issue in China. He is also not shy about stating his views including his belief that although Genovese was well versed in Marxist literature, “we can find no trace of what may be termed a Marxian method in his writings.” (426).

For another invaluable survey around the same time of especially Marxist works on slavery both ancient and modern, see Robert Padgug, “Problems in the Theory of Slavery and Slave Society,” *Science and Society*, XI/1 (Spring 1976).

<sup>45</sup> Genovese, 321. For a short but useful survey of Marx’s mention of black chattel slavery in his economic writings, see Ken Lawrence, *Karl Marx on American Slavery* (Freedom Information Service, 1976) available on the web.

<sup>46</sup> Marx, *Capital* (I), 377.

<sup>47</sup> Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 203.

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>49</sup> Buck-Morss, 835.