

Cita Cook (ccook@westga.edu)
Project South

**University Sin Fronteras: Liberation summer
Class #4 Jerome Scott and Rita Valenti August 1, 2012**

KEY POINTS FROM THE MEETING OF UNIVERSIDAD SIN FRONTERAS ON AUGUST 1, 2012

PRESENTATION BY RUBEN SOLIS GARCIA

As we have shared the knowledge each of us has, the members of this class have developed a deeper analysis of colonialism.

In 1848, when the United States colonized the part of Mexico that was north of the Rio Grande, they divided my family into two groups: those who would still be citizens of Mexico and those who would be living officially in the United States.

Members of my family were migrant farmworkers for many decades, working for agricultural companies that eventually became multinational corporations.

PRESENTATION BY JEROME SCOTT

Quote to consider: **The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.**

It was a number of years before I realized how colonialism was affecting my life. When I was young, I wondered why white people acted as if they were superior to me and as if I and my brothers were superior to my sisters. Eventually, I understood that our lives were being affected by common assumptions about **class, race, and gender**.

Class divisions recognize the difference between the people who work for others and those who gain wealth by making others work for them. There are variations within classes, as seen in the distinctions between owners of a small store and the heads of large corporations. Under recent capitalism, more members of the middle class have been forced into the working class, while the ruling class has gained more wealth and power. Even professionals such as teachers and nurses are becoming laborers with little control over their working conditions.

People in the United States, unlike those elsewhere in the world, tend to avoid thinking and talking about class and class divisions. **WHY IS CLASS A TABOO TOPIC?**

A basic contradiction about the concept of **race** is that although it is a fictional ideology with no scientific validity, beliefs about it have significant material impact on people's lives. Because I was African American, for example, I had limited access to the best education and occupations.

For much of my life, I believed that there were racial differences determined by the continent on which one's ancestors had lived. In fact, however, people classified as being from different "races" have more commonalities than differences. Genetics show that the original ancestors of all humans lived in Africa. We are all Africans.

Until the mid-1600s in English American colonies, indentured servants (poor people treated like slaves for a set period of time and then freed) were from England as well as from Africa. As English American and African American servants socialized together, had children together, married, ran away together, and rebelled against the government together, English American officials passed laws to divide them, denying their right to marry each other, making African Americans servants for life (slaves), and enslaving the children of female slaves.

As capitalism became stronger, the power of some European Americans to control the work of African Americans and some Native Americans and to steal the land of Native Americans brought them more and more wealth. White supremacy has been an effective tool to divide and conquer poor and working people and to help a minority of white people make a lot of money. No matter how poor a white person was, they could feel superior to any person of color.

In the 1840s, the term Manifest (obvious) Destiny was coined to support the belief that God intended the United States to rule over all of North America and beyond after pushing or killing the people already living there. The U.S. military waged a series of genocidal wars against indigenous peoples, as well as against Mexico.

Imperialist (colonialist) nations have received enough wealth from their super-exploitation of colonized peoples to be able to buy the allegiance of white workers by paying them a little more than they have ever paid colonized peoples.

The demeaning, racist depictions colonizers have used to make colonized people

seem inferior to them have been quite similar, whether the colonizers were the English oppressing the Irish, Europeans enslaving Africans, the Japanese controlling the Koreans, or any other examples. The primary motive was always economic: to gain access to more wealth.

White skin privilege is one aspect of white supremacy, as when white people never have to worry about police or store clerks considering them suspicious because of their physical appearance.

When we say that “they” have done these things, we mean the people of the ruling class who took various actions to dominate everyone else so they might become wealthy and powerful.

PRESENTATION BY RITA VALENTI (See handout with some information about what was covered.)

From Mother Right to Patriarchal Colonization

About 200,000 B.C.E. (Before the Common Era, previously known as B.C.), some ancestors of human beings with certain physiological advantages began to live on land instead of mainly in trees. Opposing thumbs made it easier for them to grasp tools. They became successful hunters (usually males) of animals and gatherers (usually females) of plants.

Hunter-gatherer societies, which had to move often to find enough food, could survive only if they practiced communal cooperation. Everyone participated in production and consumption, so there were no class divisions. The contributions and authority of women and men were different but balanced, making these societies matriarchies guided by Mother Right. Unlike what dichotomous thinking would suggest, the egalitarian aspects of matriarchies and the removal of leaders who did not support the common good meant that they were not opposites of patriarchies.

Since these societies were not monogamous, it was difficult to know who was the biological father of a child. Gender was fluid and two-spirited people gained special respect.

After societies developed agriculture and other new technologies, they had a surplus of storable consumption goods. Communities became larger, settled in one place, and divided into classes with different degrees of power. Men claimed the right to rule over women.

The conquests of colonializing nations and the rise of capitalism crushed communal practices. When one group made advances, it always happened at the expense of another group. Patriarchy became an important tool of colonization.

The idea of Mother Right lasted longer in some societies than in others. Today, for example, some African peoples call the Mother the tap-root of society.

Changes after the American Civil War and the Emancipation of the Slaves

The kind of slavery that had been common in the U. S. South for over two centuries ended in 1865 as the U. S. government defeated the Confederate States of America in the Civil War. For much of the period of Reconstruction, from 1865 to 1877, freedpeople (ex-slaves) managed to have some say over their work conditions, to marry whom they pleased, to establish their own schools and churches, to vote (if male) and elect their own (male) officials, and sometimes to own their own land and small businesses.

White ex-Confederates used multiple forms of brutal violence, including rapes, beatings, and lynchings (terrorist killings, often perpetrated by mobs of various sizes), as they sought to end the new freedoms and powers of the freedpeople. In the mid-1870s, the U. S. government stopped trying to prevent this terrorism.

The physical, economic, and judicial methods used to stop the freedpeople from being truly free after the Civil War were also used to deny equal rights to the Mexican and Native American people who had been living in Mexico until 1848. The Texas Rangers became a government-supported terrorist organization.

In the 1880s and 1890s, when some white and black southerners began to work together politically in the Populist Movement, the white southern elite told poor white men that if they did not return to the white supremacist Democratic Party, black rapists would destroy the purity of their innocent daughters. This was also when the U. S. South began to industrialize, first by hiring white women to work in textile factories.

Before the Civil War, some black and white abolitionist (anti-slavery) women in the North had condemned white slave masters for raping enslaved women and girls. After

emancipation and especially from 1880 to about 1930, white southerners (including many men who raped black women and girls) claimed that they were lynching black southern men because they had raped or tried to rape white women and girls. As Ida B. Wells, a black journalist from Memphis, pointed out, they actually targeted black men and women who had been economically successful or showed in some other way their refusal to defer to white people, including defending their children or other family members from white violence. Among the thousands of lynching victims were some pregnant women and at least thirty white women who had stood up for themselves and others in an “unfeminine” way.

From 1865 to 1965 and beyond, southern white men repeatedly used violence, economic pressures, imprisonment, and disfranchisement (taking away the right of black men to vote) to try to control the labor and limit the political and social independence of black southerners.

White southerners rationalized these actions by emphasizing the ideology of chivalry, which portrayed white southern men (especially the elite) as honorable white knights with a duty to protect white southern ladies from supposedly dangerous black men. Although most white people were quite poor during those years, most ended up accepting the lie that nature made them superior to all people of color, including those with more wealth and education than they had. The continuing popularity of *Gone with the Wind* shows that the myth of southern chivalry is still quite influential.

Many white southern women supported the myth of white southern chivalry. The privileges (different from rights) granted to white Anglo-Saxon/ Northern European women meant that white supremacy repeatedly prevented gender unity. A number of white suffragists in both the South and the North used racist arguments to justify their asking for the right to vote.

For the past two decades, the World Courts of Women have held dozens of public hearings in many countries at which women on the margins of their societies testified about the stark realities of their lives. Hearings were held at the U. S. Social Forums in Atlanta in 2007 and in Detroit in 2010. The latest in the United States was in Oakland, California last May.

DISCUSSION

Thoughts in reaction to the new information

Women were the first victims of the rise of class divisions. Patriarchy hurt women by portraying them as weaker than men and also by controlling their sexuality through enforced monogamy.

Patriarchy sometimes exists within families, strengthened by internalized colonization and the lack of connections between women of color and white women.

Sometimes colonizers have outnumbered the colonized (especially after using genocide) and sometimes the colonized have been the majority of people. Pushing Palestinians out of their homes has become a way for the government of Israel to try to make them less of a majority.

White privilege has affected what is taught in schools, as when scholars and teachers have praised Joseph Conrad’s racist novel, *Heart of Darkness*.

White supremacists perceive people of color as subhuman, different from and beneath them.

White men freed themselves of guilt for their colonizing acts by claiming that black men were villains.

Racism has developed in many parts of the world, as seen in the caste system in India.

After the rise of class societies, one way men attacked the remnants of Mother Right was by labeling women with healing knowledge “witches” and killing them.

Privileged people often detach themselves from reality to justify holding on to their privileges.

The fanatical investment some white scientists have placed in their assumptions about white (and male) supremacy have led them to use faulty methodology (silly science) that they claim proves their assumptions are correct even when they should or might know that this is not true.

Cognitive dissonance (accepting two opposing beliefs at the same time) leads many people to accept the racist and sexist ideologies which have been used to divide us.

People have turned to bargaining and bribery in order to survive.

People of color who move into the middle class are tempted to believe in the American Dream.

Questions and new thoughts about how we might overturn colonialism

A large majority of the people are poor and oppressed. How might we change that?

How can we resolve all these problems to bring about liberation while capitalism still exists?

How can women of color and white women work together more often and more effectively?

What has been the role of religion in colonization?

Whether organizing in black, white, or diverse communities, we need to stress how powerful false ideas about race still are.

To become empowered, we must change the stories of our lives, uncovering the lies and distortions. People need to tell their own stories.

Critical race theory can help debunk the myths about people of color.

The history of the militancy of dominated peoples shows that we should consider ourselves as an unarmed militia ready to do what is necessary to free ourselves and others from colonialism.

We need to recognize that if we do not plan to overturn colonialism in a relatively short time, we won't succeed anytime soon. What can we do now?

We cannot succeed if we each focus on only one struggle rather than recognizing the dialectical relationships between the different struggles. We need to use our emancipatory imaginations to unite in a corporate movement that brings all our struggles together.

TO DO FOR THE CLASS

Send an email with a three-page discussion of your work in a front of the struggle against colonialism and for decolonization. What is your struggle and how do you fight colonialism?

Read the papers distributed by Rose before the August 8 class.

On August 15, Jenice will direct the first half of the class. In the second half of the class we will create a life road map.

Think about when you can meet with the rest of us to hold a People's Movement Assembly (PMA).

Join in the presentation of a report on our course at the Southern Movement Assembly in Lowndes County Alabama on September 20-22

(http://projectsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/5AsTheSouthGoesSpring2012_SMAOverview.pdf)

This summation of the main points made at a class for the Liberation Summer of the Universidad Sin Fronteras is selective, to some extent organized by topic rather than in the order in which they were stated, and often paraphrased. I encourage anyone in the class to suggest additions or corrections.