

# University Sin Fronteras Liberation Summer Semester

## Class Report #4 August 1, 2012 Gender, Race, Class and the Creation of White



Liberation Summer 4<sup>th</sup> Class

The fourth Liberation Summer class took place on August 1, 2012 taught by Rita Valenti and Jerome Scott. Jerome S. is one of the founders of Project South and since has transitioned out of the organization to make room for younger leadership, Emery Wright and Stephanie Guilloud.

The class division according to Jerome “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”.

The class divided society is usually poor and rich, the haves and the have not and this is established by the system not by fellow human beings. The class division will be followed by class struggle as the classes fight for more economic gains and more power socially and politically.



### WHY IS CLASS A TABOO TOPIC?

Jerome shared that “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”.

Jerome shared that “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 Destiny was implemented 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 people in 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.



Rita Valenti presented 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. It was then that men claimed the right to rule over women.

The conquests and colonialist 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.

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, freed people (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 freed people. In the mid-1870s, the U. S. government stopped trying to prevent this terrorism and reconstruction stopped.

The physical, economic, and judicial methods used to stop the freed people 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.

#### Thoughts in discussion...

- 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.