

Cita Cook ([ccook@westga.edu](mailto:ccook@westga.edu))  
Project South

## LIBERATION SUMMER SEMESTER 2012

CLASS #5  
ROSE BREWER

### KEY POINTS FROM THE MEETING OF UNIVERSIDAD SIN FRONTERAS ON AUGUST 8, 2012

#### PRESENTATION BY ROSE BREWER ON THE... **SLAVE TRADE AND CAPITALISM**

. Anyone who studies how the slave trade interacted with the ongoing growth of capitalism is indebted to W.E.B. DuBois (Black Reconstruction) and Walter Rodney (How Europe Underdeveloped Africa), both of whom based their work in dialectical materialism. More recent scholars inspired by them have added women, gender roles, and other topics to the history.

. DuBois and Rodney were punished for their commitment to integrating scholarly work and political activism. Late in his life, DuBois had to leave the United States, but he was welcomed by Nkrumah and the people of Ghana. Rodney, a Guyanese, was assassinated in 1980.

. Capitalism and colonization were rooted in the enslavement of Africans and their descendants. A desire for great profits led to the traffic in and exploitation of those slaves.

. The slave trade removed and killed so many young, strong Africans that it became the cause of an African holocaust or "Maafa," ironically solidified in part by cravings for sugar. Slave traders packed as much "human cargo" as they could without causing "too many" deaths. They chained the people so that they were lying close to each other. Sailors repeatedly raped the women.

. Once there were enough enslaved Africans involved in the brutal process of growing and producing sugar in the Caribbean, a triangular trade developed. European merchants exchanged human beings seized in Africa for West Indies sugar (often made into rum), which they then exchanged for products in England, which were, in turn, traded for more captive Africans. The profits from all of these sales allowed English and other European capitalists to accumulate massive wealth, which they then invested in more colonies and industrialization in England. For many decades, the Royal African Company had a monopoly over the English slave trade.

. Along with monetary capital to invest in textile mills, industrial entrepreneurs depended on resources such as cotton, dyes, gum, and many others, all gained by exploiting the labor of enslaved Africans.

. The capitalists who gained from slavery included those who made money not only selling raw materials such as sugar but also from related businesses such as banking, insurance, and shipping and stimulated others such as fishing in France and the importation of ivory from Africa.

. The first Africans in Virginia in 1619 were legally indentured servants who became free after a set period of time. As African and Anglo servants began resisting together, however, Virginia and other colonies passed laws limiting the rights of African servants and their children. In 1670 South Carolina became the first colony to impose legally sanctioned slavery. By the early 1700s, the colonies had restrictive slave codes (sets of laws).

. The economic success of the thirteen colonies that became the United

States was based in the buying and selling of slaves by New England merchants and the selling of goods produced by those slaves in the southern colonies, including tobacco, rice, indigo, and cotton. At one point the colony of Georgia had more people with African roots than with European roots. Most of the so-called Founding Fathers were involved with shipping and/or owning slaves to some extent. Thanks to the labor of the slaves of George Washington, his wealth, when adjusted for inflation, was equal to that of Bill Gates today.

. The fact that the thirteen colonies that became the United States were settler colonies, with many people moving to them from England and other European nations, affected the particular nature of brutality in their treatment of slaves, such as when they forced enslaved women to have children who would become new enslaved workers.

. In *The Racial Contract*, Charles W. Mills covers the ways in which white supremacy affected European colonization and the history of the United States.

. While most enslaved people were unable to liberate themselves, they found many ways to resist, including through revolt. The successful social revolution led by slaves in Haiti inspired slaves and frightened their masters all over the Americas.

. Emancipation of the slaves in the United States was a liberatory process during which they increased their resistance and left as soon as they knew the U. S. military was relatively close, turning the Civil War into a war of liberation. W. E. B. DuBois wrote about their waging a general strike by "voting with their feet." Thousands joined the U. S. Army.

. The freed people's primary demand was to own their own land. General William Sherman's Field Order #15 granted land to many along the South Carolina and Georgia coast in January 1864, but when Lincoln was assassinated in April, President Andrew Johnson restored the land to its previous white owners.

## DISCUSSION

. The slave trade stole from Africa many skilled workers, including miners and experts on growing rice and tobacco.

. By taking so many people and resources from Africa, the European and American enslavers limited the ability of Africans to generate capital, weakening and fragmenting the continent.

. Although the acquisition of wealth requires much labor by some people, turning Africans into slaves reduced the recognition of the value of a person and of human labor. The language of the enslavers seemed to turn a person into a thing, but the many forms of resistance, rebellion, and self-liberation by slaves showed how wrong they were.

. The logic of capitalism is the logic of slavery. Without slavery, capitalism may not have developed at the same time and with the same features as it did. We cannot understand the history of capitalism without recognizing its slavery foundation. Slavery's connection to the rise of capitalism was similar to serfdom's connection to the rise of feudalism.

. English has long been the international language of capitalism.

. The connections between white supremacy and access to property have created conflicts for people of color seeking economic advancement. We need a system without white supremacy.

. White supremacy, with its emphasis on a social hierarchy, has pitted

black women and black men against each other. Patriarchy has been closely connected to white supremacy.

- . Certain practices, such as dislocating people from their homeland, made it easier for oppression to be self-sustaining. Since slaves born in the Americas had no home to return to, it was harder for them to escape or challenge the system, even after they had liberated themselves.

- . For centuries colonizers, enslavers, and white supremacists have engaged not only in the mass killing of human beings (genocide) but also in the mass killing of knowledge, epistemicide (defined as a war on knowledge and a destruction of existing knowledge).

- . The hierarchy in Academia limits the kinds of research and knowledge that is considered worthy of scholarly respect. Academics castigated Black Reconstruction, published by W. E. B. DuBois in 1935, until new research in the sixties and seventies revealed that DuBois had been correct.

- . This class in liberation is a form of resistance to epistemicide.

- . The spread of consciousness of all these truths and of the ability to see through propaganda is necessary for liberation to occur.

- . Enslavers and capitalists have successfully obscured the enormity of the profits they have received, including today as the economic gap between black and white Americans increases.

- . Hiding the ways in which slavery benefited white capitalists made it easier for them to claim that they were wealthy because of their entrepreneurial spirit and that poor people were to blame for their poverty.

- . It has taken many factors and institutions, working in harmony, including churches, educational systems, governments, various social forces, and a discursive, written ideological component to allow such brutality to occur at every layer of our lives,. To overturn it, we need to understand more than the basic frame of what has happened. It helps but is not enough to recognize the economic division between the 99% and 1%. What forces created and are perpetuating that split?

- . Multiple actors have also been involved in many ways. Today's neo-colonization brings new people into the system and counters resistance in new ways, often through bribery.

- . Legal acceptance of gay marriage is one example of how those in power can bribe or distract people they are oppressing to prevent them from organizing for more basic changes.

- . Today's system of wage labor is a more subtle system of slavery.

- . Human trafficking today is a variation of the slavery of earlier centuries as it also creates profit for a few from the enforced labor of many.

- . Globalization involves recolonization, making it an uncivilizing process.

- . A revolutionary activist wants ideas to stimulate activism.

- . As troubling as the oppression is, positive changes do occur. Where are we in the process of liberation at this point? What are the similarities and differences between specific examples and patterns of the oppression in varying contexts, including examples of re-colonization, neo-colonization, and neo-imperialism?

- . The continuing reliance on the masters' narratives show how colonized we are. We need to regain the power of knowledge of the truth.

- . How has anti-intellectualism interfered with our ability to move toward liberation?

## Strategies of Liberation after Emancipation

- . Calling for the creation of an African American nation outside the

border of the United States by Georgian Henry McNeal Turner and others

- . Demanding land to allow independence from white employers
- . Demanding self-determination, as when freedwomen refused to work in white homes
- . Becoming involved in armed struggle during the Civil War and sometimes in self-defense against attacks of white supremacists during and after Reconstruction

#### Reports from Small Group Discussions of Strategies of Liberation

- . The problem of African Americans who were not born in Africa being without a home country to go back to has some similarities with the experiences of second generation members of immigrant families, especially those who do not speak their parents' native language.
- . Very few ex-slaves were interested in moving to Liberia or anywhere else in Africa.
- . Ex-slaves with a narrow range of experiences needed to develop new skills and knowledge to move beyond agricultural work.
- . Access to owning land allowed some autonomy, but because of the workings of white supremacist capitalism, it was never easy for black southerners to keep their land.
- . Some freedpeople in the U. S. military during the Civil War used a dialect of English that only they understood (Pidgin English) to organize themselves without alerting the European Americans.
- . True self-determination requires access to power; liberation therefore requires a transfer of power that includes the ability to sustain it economically and politically.
- . Liberation struggles require strong solidarity between people.
- . Self-determination involves, among other things, having an identity beyond that imposed by those who villified the oppressed people.
- . Many factors supported colonization, capitalism, and white supremacy, so it will take many factors to overturn them.

#### **TO DO FOR THE CLASS**

1. One page at the end of the class: How was emancipation from slavery a liberatory act by those who had been enslaved?
2. By Monday, 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?
3. 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. The combination will take three hours.
4. The People's Movement Assembly (PMA) for this class will be on Wednesday, August 29.
5. 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](http://projectsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/5AsTheSouthGoesSpring2012_SMAOverview.pdf))