

Perhaps the most important difficulty in the advancement of progressive politics in the United States is the necessity to navigate the relationships among the justice demands of class on one hand and of race, gender, and ethnic justice on the other. I take it as our shared goal across generations to build a country that treats its workers well and with respect, opposes war, conserves a healthy natural environment, and defeats the many forms of white supremacy and patriarchy that cause suffering among so many scores of millions of people. But as important as action is in moving towards these goals, that action must be guided by understanding based on analysis of the conditions in which our movements operate. Here we will focus on the interactions of class and race.

Race and Its Consequences

Race is not just a census taker's check-box, or some pollster's focus of interest. Race is an instrument of social control, directed at white working people as well as Blacks. As political scientist Adolph Reed Jr. has put it, "Class—as an expression of location within the political economy—is the framework in which race attains meaning."¹

Race is not an inherent part of some supposed biological hierarchy. In the United States, race has developed in ways that are deeply enmeshed with society's class dynamics. Race and class are separate and different of course, but neither exists in the US without the other entwined in it. The tensions in this contradiction within US society help drive its path of change.

From the beginning of colonial settlement up to the present time, the mutual determination of race and class has been operating in our country. In our settler state, as in all such societies, Native peoples were the first to be excluded from what Bill Fletcher Jr. has dubbed "the relevant population."

subjective reward white workers got from the feelings of superiority they found in their higher status compared with Black people, and their apparent common bond with the white elites who ran society. In 1836, John C. Calhoun, the South's principal proponent of states' rights and slavery, explained this forthrightly: "With us, the two great divisions of society are not rich and poor, but white and black; and all the former, the poor as well as the rich, belong to the upper class and are respected and treated as equals, if honest and industrious, and hence have a position and pride of character of which neither poverty nor misfortune can deprive them."³

With the growth of the US industrial economy in the last half of the nineteenth century, however, the situation regarding white workers grew more complex. The opportunities for economic advancement that opened up in the process accrued almost exclusively to workers of European heritage. These workers experienced real material gains denied to their Black working class counterparts—now freed from their former enslavement—whether in the form of access to credit to start a business, or access to industrial jobs that offered more than they could hope for as a sharecropper or tenant farmer. In factories and mills across the country, whites got the best jobs. Brutal as these working conditions often were, Black workers were channeled into the dirtiest, most dangerous, most unhealthy jobs, or excluded altogether.

In the twentieth century, the reforms of the Depression-era New Deal, although expressed in universal terms, nevertheless benefited white workers far more than Blacks. The Social Security program, for example, was drafted with compromises that excluded household and agricultural workers from its benefits. Senators and congressmen from southern states had demanded these exclusions because over 90% of African American workers held those jobs. The Son Am. T(k)9.4 (e)-9.5 (r).3 (i)9.9 (t)-29.8 (y p)-2.7 (r)-3.2 (o)8 (g)-29.3 (r)-15.3 (A)1(e Soci)-21ted als .2 (u (r)-3.b(h)-2. T)-211.4 (r)-4..6 (l)9.33 (a)-0.9 (t)-11. Td[(t)-15t7(d c)-6.6 (o)-s from its benrem, for exaTw 0 -1.2 d

patterns were institutionalized and made to seem normal, it was easy to lose track of their origins.

Structural Racism

Racism is more than the personal opinion of an individual racist whose mind needs to be changed or enlightened. Racism is structural, rooted and reinforced in the operations of social structures that guide us through life. We need to understand how racism and white supremacy are deeply rooted instruments carried forward within institutions that shape people's opinions and life outcomes. We need to challenge those structural channels and their institutional reinforcements.

We see this process in the educational system that still provides significantly fewer and inferior resources to schools with mostly

Challenging White Supremacy

The battle against racism must start by acknowledging that white supremacy is first and foremost a problem that white people must address. White supremacy will loosen its grip only when white people loosen it. Black, Hispanic, Native, and Asian social movements will continue to challenge white supremacy, but they cannot end it until white people give it up. How can that happen?

We can get some insight into what might be involved by looking at different motivations that have led a number of white people historically to dedicate their lives to racial equality.¹¹ Some have been motivated by religious conviction: “We’re all equal as children of God.” Some have been motivated by patriotism: our founding national document proclaims that “all men [people] are created equal,” and the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution guarantees equality for all under the law. Others have been motivated politically by an awakened class consciousness that underscores the common interests of all workers.

As powerful as each of these arenas of concern may be in getting white people to move away from white supremacy, each arena also lends itself to opposite interpretations that can reinforce it. Historically, there have been white church leaders who used their interpretations of the Bible to legitimize white supremacy and

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candidate Jon Ossoff, and Joe Biden against Donald Trump:
“What we really try to do is organize around mutual interests,
talking to our folks about what white people have to gain from