Transnational Blackness
The Critical Black Studies Series

Center for Contemporary Black History
Columbia University

Edited by Manning Marable

The Critical Black Studies Series features readers and anthologies examining challenging topics within the contemporary black experience—in the United States, the Caribbean, Africa, and across the African Diaspora. All readers include scholarly articles originally published in the acclaimed quarterly interdisciplinary journal Souls, published by the Center for Contemporary Black History, the research and publications center of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia University. Under the general editorial supervision of Manning Marable, the readers in the series are designed both for college and university course adoption, as well as for general readers and researchers. The Critical Black Studies Series seeks to provoke intellectual debate and exchange over the most critical issues confronting the political, socio-economic, and cultural reality of black life in the United States and beyond.

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TRANSNATIONAL BLACKNESS

NAVIGATING THE GLOBAL COLOR LINE

Edited by Manning Marable and Vanessa Agard-Jones
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Jean Allman

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The advance guard of the Negro people . . . must soon come to realize that if they are to take their just place in the van of Pan-Negroism, then their destiny is not absorption by the white Americans. That if in America it is to be proven for the first time in the modern world that not only Negroes are capable of evolving individual men like Toussaint, the Saviour, but are a nation stored with wonderful possibilities of culture, then their destiny is not a servile imitation of Anglo-Saxon culture, but a stalwart originality which shall unswervingly follow Negro ideals.

—W. E. B. Du Bois, 1897

On March 5, 1897, the newly formed American Negro Academy met for its inaugural sessions in Washington, D.C., W. E. B. Du Bois, then a twenty-nine-year-old social scientist and recent PhD graduate of Harvard University, delivered the second paper to this gathering of black American intellectuals, “The Conservation of Races,” that would foreshadow much of his future life’s work. The paper centered in part on the question of what constituted “blackness,” or the construction of black identity within the challenging contexts of white-dominated societies. Inside the United States, Du Bois argued, each African American must struggle to determine “what, after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both?” Du Bois then sought to delineate the boundaries between Africanity, race, and citizenship that constantly confronted black Americans:
We are Americans, not only by birth and by citizenship, but by our political ideals, our language, our religion. Farther than that, our Americanism does not go. At that point, we are Negroes, members of a vast historic race that from the very dawn of creation has slept, but half awakening the dark forests of its African fatherland. . . . We are that people whose subtle sense of song has given America its only American music, its only American fairy tales, its only touch of pathos and humor amid its mad money-getting plutocracy. As such, it is our duty to conserve our physical powers, our intellectual endowments, our spiritual ideals; as a race we must strive by race organization, by race solidarity.  

For Du Bois at this time, the boundaries of blackness were defined largely by aesthetics, culture, and the highly charged construction of “race.” But as the twentieth century unfolded, Du Bois expanded his understanding about the common grounds that people of African descent shared throughout the colonial and segregated world. This led him to embrace the politics of Pan-Africanism, and efforts by black activists in the Caribbean, the United States, and Africa itself to overthrow white minority regimes. Intellectually, it gave Du Bois a truly global concept of what today would be termed “Black Studies.” Part of the mission of Black Studies as an intellectual project has been the remapping of collective identity and memory, in part by using Du Bois’s criteria. But it should also combine theory with collective action, in the effort not simply to interpret but to transform the world, empowering black people in the process.

During the 1960s, when Black Studies departments were first being launched within predominantly white academic institutions, an ideological debate subsequently developed over the appropriate geopolitical and cultural boundaries for what the study of “blackness” should comprise. Many prominent African American cultural nationalists, such as Kwanzaa-founder Maulana Karenga, vigorously argued that Black Studies must trace its intellectual lineage back to classical Egyptian civilization. The black experience in the United States, in this Afrocentric interpretation, was a small subsidiary of a much grander African civilizational saga. Other black studies scholars noted the destructive effects of the transatlantic slave trade, and focused on the cultural and political resistance of African Diasporic populations scattered across North and South America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Asia as the decisive elements in the making of the modern world. Scholars largely trained in the United States often had a more parochial vision of Black Studies, emphasizing the local struggles waged by African Americans to achieve political rights and equality against the American nation-state. As a measurement of the lack of theoretical and conceptual consensus among these scholars, departments and programs dedicated to Black Studies still call themselves by various names: “Afro-American Studies,” “African American Studies,” “Africana Studies,” “African and African American Studies,” “African Diasporal Studies,” and “Comparative Race and Ethnicity Studies.”

At Columbia University, when I founded the “Institute for Research in African-American Studies” (IRAAS) in July 1993, the precise name of the program was the result not of a theoretically grounded academic discussion but rather
a pragmatic political compromise. The “Institute of African Studies” had been established in Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs approximately one-quarter century earlier, and its director and small faculty were deeply concerned that IRAAS would colonize and incorporate their curricula into our own program. The decision was made to keep African American and Caribbean Studies distinctly separate from African Studies. Over subsequent years, as the fortunes of Columbia’s African Studies Program rose and fell, I came to regret that decision administratively, as well as intellectually.

It is impossible to relate the full narrative of the experiences of people of African descent in the United States, and throughout the Caribbean and the Americas, without close integration and reference to the remarkable history of the African continent, its many peoples, languages, and diverse cultures. The South Atlantic and especially the Caribbean were “highways” for constant cultural, intellectual, and political exchange between people of African descent, especially during the past three centuries. Pan-Africanist-inspired social protest movements like Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA) started in Jamaica but accelerated into hundreds of chapters across the United States as a mass movement, and then grew hundreds of new chapters throughout Central America and Africa. Documenting the UNIA’s complex story by focusing solely on the events of one nation, such as the United States, distorts the narrative and cripples our understanding of fundamental events. Similarly, South Africa’s “Black Consciousness Movement” of the 1970s and the brilliant protest writings of Steven Biko cannot be interpreted properly without detailed references to the “Black Power Movement” in the United States during the 1960s, and to the influential speeches and political writings of Malcolm X of the United States and Frantz Fanon of Martinique.

“Blackness” acquires its full revolutionary potential as a social site for resistance only within transnational and Pan-African contexts. This insight motivated W. E. B. Du Bois to initiate the Pan-African Congress Movement at the end of World War I. George Padmore, Kwame Nkrumah, Du Bois, and others sponsored the Fifth Pan-African Congress, in Manchester, England, in October 1945, out of the recognition that the destruction of European colonial rule in Africa and the Caribbean, and the demise of the Jim Crow regime of racial segregation in the United States, were politically linked. Any advance toward democracy and civil rights in any part of the black world objectively assisted the goals and political aspirations of people of African descent elsewhere. An internationalist perspective, from a historian’s point of view, also helped to explain the dynamics of the brutal transnational processes of capitalist political economy—the forced movement of involuntary labor across vast boundaries; the physical and human exploitation of slaves; the subsequent imposition of debt peonage, convict leasing, and sharecropping in postemancipation societies; and the construction of hypersegregated, racialized urban ghettos, from Soweto to Rio de Janeiro’s slums to Harlem. As this edited volume illustrates, the twentieth century was full of examples of “blackness beyond boundaries as praxis”—intellectual-activists of African descent
who sparked movements of innovative scholarship, as well as social protest movements, throughout Africa and the African Diaspora.

In 1900, Du Bois had predicted that the central “problem of the twentieth century” would be the “problem of the color line,” the unequal relationship between the lighter versus darker races of humankind. Du Bois’s color line included not just the racially segregated Jim Crow South and the racial oppression of South Africa but also the British, French, Belgian, and Portuguese colonial domination in Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and the Caribbean among indigenous populations. Building on Du Bois’s insights, we can therefore say that the problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of global apartheid: the racialized division and stratification of resources, wealth, and power that separates Europe, North America, and Japan from the billions of mostly black, brown, indigenous, undocumented immigrant, and poor people across the planet. The term “apartheid” comes from the former white minority regime of South Africa; an Afrikaans word, it means “apartness” or “separation.” Apartheid was based on the concept of herrenvolk, a “master race” that was predestined to rule all non-Europeans. Under global apartheid today, the racist logic of herrenvolk is embedded ideologically in the patterns of unequal economic and global accumulation that penalizes African, South Asian, Caribbean, Latin American, and other impoverished nations by predatory policies.

Since 1979–80, with the elections of Ronald Reagan as U.S. president and Margaret Thatcher as prime minister of the United Kingdom, America and Great Britain embarked on domestic economic development strategies that are now widely known by the term “neoliberalism.” Neoliberal politics called for the dismantling of the welfare state; the end of redistributive social programs designed to address the effects of poverty; the elimination of governmental regulations and regulatory agencies over capitalist markets; and “privatization,” the transfer of public institutions and governmental agencies to corporations. Journalist Thomas B. Edsall has astutely characterized this reactionary process of neoliberal politics within the United States in these terms: “For a quarter-century, the Republican temper—its reckless drive to jettison the social safety net; its support of violence in law enforcement and national defense; its advocacy of regressive taxation, environmental hazard and probusiness deregulation; its ‘remoralizing’ of the pursuit of wealth—has been judged by many voters as essential to America’s position in the world, producing more benefit than cost.”

One of the consequences of this reactionary political and economic agenda, according to Edsall, was “the Reagan administration’s arms race” during the 1980s, which “arguably drove the Soviet Union into bankruptcy.” A second consequence, Edsall argues, was America’s disastrous military invasion of Iraq. “While inflicting destruction on the Iraqis,” Edsall observes, “[George H. W.] Bush multiplied America’s enemies and endangered this nation’s military, economic health and international stature. Courting risk without managing it, Bush repeatedly and remorselessly failed to accurately evaluate the consequences of his actions.”
Edsall’s insightful analysis significantly did not attempt to explain away the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq under President George W. Bush and subsequent military occupation as a political “mistake” or an “error of judgment.” Rather, he located the rationale for the so-called “war on terrorism” within the context of U.S. domestic, neoliberal politics. “The embroilment in Iraq is not an aberration,” Edsall observes. “It stems from core [Republican] party principles, equally evident on the domestic front.” The larger question of political economy, left unexplored by Edsall and most U.S. mainstream analysts, is the connection between U.S. militarism abroad, neoliberalism, and macro-trends in the global economy. As economists, such as Paul Sweezy and Harry Magdoff, noted decades ago, the general economic tendency of mature, global capitalism is toward stagnation. For decades, in the United States and western Europe, there has been a steady decline in investment in the productive economy, leading to a decline in industrial capacity and lower future growth rates. Profit margins inside the U. S. have fallen over time, and corporations have been forced to invest capital abroad to generate higher rates of profitability. There is a direct economic link between the deindustrialized urban landscapes of Detroit, Youngstown, and Chicago with the expansion of industries in China, Vietnam, Brazil, and other developing nations.

Since capitalist economies are “based on the profit motive and accumulation of capital without end,” observed Marxist author Fred Magdoff, “problems arise whenever they do not expand at reasonably high growth rates.” Since the 1970s, U.S. corporations and financial institutions have relied primarily on debt to expand domestic economic growth. By 1985, total U.S. debt—which is comprised of the debt owed by all households, governments (federal, state, and local), and all financial and nonfinancial businesses—reached twice the size of the annual U.S. gross domestic product (GDP). By 2005, the total U.S. debt amounted to nearly “three and a half times the nation’s GDP, and not far from the $44 trillion GDP for the entire world,” according to Fred Magdoff.

As a result, mature U.S. corporations are forced to export products and investment abroad, to take advantage of lower wages, weak or nonexistent environmental and safety standards, and so forth to obtain higher profit margins. Today about 18 percent of total U.S. corporate profits come from direct overseas investments. Partially to protect these growing investments, the United States has pursued an aggressive, interventionist foreign policy across the globe. As of 2006, the United States maintained military bases in fifty-nine nations. The potential for deploying military forces in any part of the world is essential for both political and economic hegemony. Thus the current Iraq War was not essentially a military blunder caused by a search for “weapons of mass destruction” but rather an imperialist effort to secure control of the world’s second largest proven oil reserves; it was also the first military step of the Bush administration’s neoconservatives to “remake the Middle East” by destroying the governments of Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

Although the majority of nations in the international community either openly opposed, or at least seriously questioned, the U.S. military occupation of Iraq, the neoliberal economic model of the United States has been now widely
adopted by both developed and developing countries. Governments across the ideological spectrum—with the important exception of some Latin American countries in recent years—have eliminated social welfare, health, and education programs; reduced governmental regulations on business activity; and encouraged the growth income inequality and entrepreneurship. Even noncapitalist countries like Cuba have revived the sex-trade-oriented tourism business, which has contributed to new forms of gender and racial prejudice in that country. As a result, economic inequality in wealth has rapidly accelerated, reinforcing traditional patterns of racial and ethnic domination.

A 2006 study by the World Institute for Development Economic Research of the United Nations University established that, as of 2000, the upper 1 percent of the globe’s adult population, approximately 37 million people, averaged about $515,000 in net worth per person, and collectively controlled roughly 40 percent of the world’s entire wealth. By contrast, the bottom one-half of the planet’s adult population, 1.85 billion people, most of whom are black and brown, owned only 1.1 percent of the world’s total wealth. There is tremendous inequality of wealth between nations, the UN report noted. The United States, for example, comprised only 4.7 percent of the world’s people, but it had nearly one-third, or 32.6 percent, of global wealth. By stark contrast, China, which had one-fifth of the world’s population, owned only 2.6 percent of the globe’s wealth. India, which has 16.8 percent of the global population, controlled only 0.9 percent of the world’s total wealth. Within most of the world’s countries, wealth was disproportionately concentrated in the top 10 percent of each nation’s population. It comes as no surprise that in the United States, for example, that as of 2000 the upper 10 percent of the adult population owned 69.8 percent of the nation’s total wealth. However, Canada, a nation with much more liberal social welfare traditions than the United States, nevertheless still exhibited significant inequality. More than one-half (53 percent) of Canadian assets, were owned by only 10 percent of the population. European countries such as Norway, at 50.5 percent, and Spain, at 41.9 percent, had similar or slightly lower levels of wealth inequality.10

The most revealing finding of the World Institute for Development Economics Research was that similar patterns of wealth inequality have come to be prevalent throughout the developing world. In Indonesia, for example, 65.4 percent of the nation’s total wealth belonged to the wealthiest 10 percent in 2000. In India, the upper 10 percent owned 52 percent of all Indian wealth. Even in China, where the ruling Communist Party still maintains vestiges of what might be described as “authoritarian state socialism,” the wealthiest 10 percent owned 41.4 percent of the national wealth.11

But even these macroeconomic statistics, as useful as they are, obscure a crucial dimension of wealth concentration under global apartheid’s neoliberal economics. In the past quarter century in the United States, where deregulation and privatization have been carried to obscene extremes, we are presently witnessing a phenomenon that the media has described as “the very rich” who are leaving
“the merely rich behind.” One study by New York University economist Edward N. Wolff found that 1 out of every 825 households in the United States in 2004 earned at least $2 million annually, representing nearly a 100 percent increase in the wealth percentage recorded in 1989, adjusted for inflation. As of 2004, 1 out of every 325 U.S. households possessed a net wealth of $10 million or more. When adjusted by inflation, this is more than four times as many wealthy households as in 1989. The exponential growth of America’s “super-rich” is a direct product of the near elimination of capital gains taxes and the sharp decline in federal government income tax rates.

Inside the United States, the processes of global apartheid are best represented by the “New Racial Domain” (NRD). The NRD is different from other earlier systemic forms of racial domination inside the United States—such as slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and ghettoization or strict residential segregation—in several critical aspects. These earlier racial formations, or exploitative racial domains, were grounded or based primarily, if not exclusively, in the political economy of U.S. capitalism. Antiracist or oppositional movements that blacks, other ethnic minorities, and white antiracists built were largely predicated upon the confines or realities of domestic markets and the policies of the U.S. nation-state. Meaningful social reforms such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were debated almost entirely within the context of America’s expanding, domestic economy, and influenced by Keynesian, welfare-state public policies. The political economy of America’s NRD, by contrast, is driven and largely determined by the forces of transnational capitalism, and the public policies of state neoliberalism. From the vantage point of the most oppressed U.S. populations, the NRD rests on an unholy trinity, or deadly triad, of structural barriers to a decent life. These oppressive structures are mass unemployment, mass incarceration, and mass disfranchisement. Each factor directly feeds and accelerates the others, creating an ever-widening circle of social disadvantage, poverty, and civil death, touching the lives of tens of millions of people in the United States.

Transnational Blackness presents examples of individuals and organizations of African descent, primarily originating in the United States, that challenged the legitimacy and power of the global color line and its oppressive political economies of inequality. Such examples varied widely in the tactics and strategies for social change they employed. What they held in common was a long memory of resistance to human exploitation, and the knowledge of African-descendant cultural heritages and rituals that connected the diverse peoples of the African Diaspora. For Du Bois over a century ago, there were certain “Negro ideals” worth fighting to preserve, which challenged the hegemonic materialism of Europe and America. Similarly, as the twenty-first century unfolds, and as the global color line’s struggles for social justice intensify, the role of black activist-intellectuals and social protest movements will assume even greater significance transnationally.
Notes

2. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
PART I

Theorizing Race in a Global Context
Chapter 1

Race and Globalization

Racialization from Below

Leith Mullings

In 1903 the great African American scholar and Pan-Africanist W. E. B. Du Bois noted, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line . . . the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.”

In the twenty-first century we are still confronted with an international color line, the racialized consequences of massive impoverishment, and displacement integral to globalized capitalism. The challenges of structural racism create simultaneous spaces for oppression and resistance. The modern color line is not only imposed from above but also becomes a site for contestation from below. This book testifies to the complexities of the paradox of race in the contemporary world. As these papers demonstrate, globalization has resulted in new forms of racialization but has also created new, transnational forms of resistance to racism. Race making—the construction of race as a way to rationalize global inequalities—also creates a basis for global collective action. These innovative new movements take race as a space for organizing global social movements against the inequities of globalization and have the potential to transcend both the scope and the reach of earlier Pan-Africanist movements. Four centuries of the transatlantic slave trade and racialized subordination of people of African descent produced a construction of race throughout much of the world. As a result, many regions of the world were dominated by what one could call a racial mode of production—involving not only exploitation of labor but also the skills of Africans and their descendants—to build the modern world system. In many areas of the world, race became a worldview that rationalized domination and privilege, on one hand, and dispossession of land, labor, wealth, and rights, on the other. “Scientific racism,” which emerged in the eighteenth century, provided a pseudoscientific patina for a set of beliefs that categorized people into different races, each endowed with
unequal capacities, and alleged not merely that biological and social differences were fixed, inheritable, and unchangeable, but also that races could be ranked hierarchically, with the white race as the pinnacle of civilization.

Yet the imposition of race also created the structural context for producing sites of resistance and creative spaces for the articulation of subaltern opposition. The twentieth century saw magnificent mass struggles whose objective was to overturn powerful structures of racial hierarchies: the diverse and sometimes contradictory anticolonial struggles throughout Africa and the Third World, the civil rights movement in the United States, and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. These struggles brought about powerful worldwide transformations in politics and culture. The people of Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, who lived under European colonization, have now acquired nominal sovereignty in nation-states, defeated the apartheid state in South Africa, and dismantled legal segregation in the United States. Today, most anthropologists reject the notion of biological race.2

Powerful new forces now configure how race is lived. With the fall of socialism, globalized capitalism became the dominant world system. Old and new forms of “accumulation by dispossession”3 have increasingly impoverished much of the world’s population, creating new forms of racialized and gendered stratification and new sites of racialization, such as the prison-industrial complex. U.S. phenomena including rising unemployment, the dismantling of the welfare state, the privatization of previously public services (such as education), and the growth of incarceration as a way of controlling dissent4 all have their counterparts in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. In the areas of the greatest oppression, the legacies of colonialism, international debt, structural adjustment policies, and the enormous circulation of arms have resulted in major setbacks for the progressive thrusts of the post–World War II liberation movements. Black women frequently become the first victims of violence during structural adjustment, warfare, ethnic strife, and domestic conflict.

In these new conditions, the meaning of race is constantly reconfigured as new forms of exclusion built upon the continuing consequences of enslavement, colonialism, and imperialism. As capitalism incorporates elements of racialized populations into its neoliberal global project, the familiar rigid stereotypes and polarizing discourses built during earlier epochs become less useful to capital’s needs, and new ways of managing race and inequality are manufactured and fostered. In the United States and South Africa, for example, the implementation of policies of “color blindness” may serve to repackage white supremacy by denying the continuing significance of racism.5 Racial stratification now works not only through frameworks alleging biological differences between populations but also through an emphasis on individual meritocracy or group culture. In Europe, right-wing anti-immigration ideologues no longer openly claim incontrovertible biological differences between races in opposing immigration from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East but rather assert that there are unbridgeable cultural differences between immigrant groups and Europeans—a neoracism, a
“racism without race.” In the United States, “culture of poverty” or “underclass” frameworks function pseudobiologically as mutually enforcing paradigms that provide explanations for—and ultimately deflect attention from—the structural forces that have produced savage inequalities of race, class, and gender.

It is also true that the forces of globalization previously described also create spaces for new mobilizations and counterhegemonic movements that can be transnational in theory and practice; Brecher, Costello, and Smith describe this as “globalization from below.” Similarly, we can see the emergence and acceleration of counterhegemonic social movements framed in the language of race and racism in order to signal dispossession, make claims on resources, form transnational alliances, and challenge racialization from above—a process we might call “racialization from below.” This development is particularly striking in areas such as Latin America where ideologies glorifying race mixture and the lack of legal segregation have inhibited the growth of such organizations. The expansion of these movements is assisted by the use of new information technology, hemispheric and global conferences, such as the UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Other Forms of Intolerance (WCAR) and their associated documents.

For example, in Latin American countries with sizeable populations of African descent, racially based social movements have emerged and gained strength in the 1980s and 1990s. This is particularly significant because in many of these countries, though the dominant ideology projects a national ideal of racial mixture, pervasive discrimination coexists with an official denial of the existence of racism. In the last two decades, many Latin Americans of African descent have increasingly rejected the options of mixed race categories and the “mulatto escape hatch” in order to assert, on their own terms, an oppositional racial—or more precisely, racialized—identity. In some cases, these movements have won land titles, a commitment to implement antidiscriminatory policies (such as affirmative action), and official government recognition of their historical distinctiveness.

Brazil, the country with the largest black population in the hemisphere, is an interesting case in point. Observers frequently note the paradoxical coexistence in Brazil of persistent racial inequality with the failure to generate mass antiracist movements. The generally accepted national ideology that Brazil is a “racial democracy”—a concept that vigorously denies racial inequality yet aggressively subordinates the status and identity of blackness—has historically limited organizing on the basis of racial discrimination despite the existence of a longstanding, if fragmentary, black consciousness movement. Recently, the articulation and mobilization of a militant black identity has emerged as a potentially powerful political concept unifying those who self-identify as being of African descent and has begun to comprise a major component in the national debate about the future of the Brazilian state. As Sheila Walker observes, although “Africanity” has always been a significant feature of Brazilian culture, Afro-Brazilians are only now unambiguously claiming their blackness. As a result of the growing capacities of that movement in the late 1990s, the Brazilian centrist government
under former President Fernando Henrique Cardosa officially acknowledged the pervasive existence of racial discrimination in Brazil and appointed a national commission to explore it. Militant Afro-Brazilians were prominent in the official delegation to the WCAR and were able to negotiate a major shift in Brazil’s dialogue on race. In May 2001, then President Cardosa signed a decree initiating the National Program for Affirmative Action. Currently, there is a growing (and strongly contested) movement led by Afro-Brazilian members of the ruling Workers’ Party to push for a much more comprehensive racial equality statute that would aggressively enforce affirmative action and similar policy reforms in order to redress Brazil’s racial disparities. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of the Workers’ Party has responded positively to these demands by proposing measures addressing discrimination in government. Recently, he appointed the first black Supreme Court justice and four Afro-Brazilian ministers to his cabinet, including a newly created cabinet-level Special Secretariat for Promotion of Racial Equality. In the face of implacable resistance to the enforcement of affirmative action measures in the form of legal actions, the current government has not only supported affirmative action but also instituted innovative school attendance grants that allow poor families to keep their children in school rather than pulling them out to work. In theory, the policy is designed to address class inequality, but in practice, within the racialized social hierarchy of the country, such reforms also address the profoundly racialized effects of marginalization.

Colombia is another important state in which “racialization from below” is developing as a strategy of resistance. Colombia contains the third highest African-descended population in the Americas, after Brazil and the United States. Afro-Colombians have historically inhabited lands on the Pacific Coast that are rich in timber, gold, farming potential, and biodiversity. Beginning in the 1980s, national and multinational corporations have been attracted to this potential market and have invested heavily in this region. As anticorporate protests grew all over the country, a nascent Afro-Colombian social movement crystallized in the course of organizing to promote legislative reforms. Afro-Colombians were able to win some recognition of territorial rights and cultural distinctiveness in the new 1991 National Constitution and, through subsequent legislation in 1993, gained the right to apply for land titles. However, after winning these rights, Afro-Colombians have been subject to massive displacement from their ancestral lands. Afro-Colombians have increasingly been victims of assassinations of activists and massacres of villagers, primarily by right-wing paramilitary forces, and several observers suggest that levels of violence directed against them have been significantly escalated by the billions of U.S. dollars pouring into the area through the “War on Drugs.” In this context, Asale Angel-Ajani describes the Afro-Colombian strategy of organizing into “peace communities,” which adopt a general policy of neutrality regarding the armed conflict, as an attempt to separate themselves from the escalating violence and the inevitable ravages of constant warfare. To assert their approach of neutral disengagement from violence, Afro-Colombians have increased their organizing efforts in the national and international arenas. The first Afro-Colombian national conference was held in 2002,
and Afro-Colombians have also mounted efforts to mobilize international solidarity by traveling to Europe and the United States to raise awareness about their situation and create alliances.

In this process, culture plays a strategic role in creating and sustaining an Afro-Colombian identity, on the one hand, and constructing a larger transnational movement, on the other. Joseph Jordan describes this reimagining blackness, African consciousness, and Afro-Colombian ethnicity as a process “that provides a means for extra-national citizenship connecting Afro-Colombians to other communities of African descent throughout the Americas.” The adoption and indigenization of popular cultural forms, such as hip-hop, provide transnational cultural matrices for the articulation of new forms of identity. These function as a strategy of resistance, with the potential to reimagine an African descendant identity, thereby connecting Afro-Colombians to other communities of African descent, as well as making group demands on the nation-state. In Europe, there are more than ten million people of African, Asian, and Middle Eastern descent. Clarence Lusane describes how, drawing heavily on UN declarations and resolutions, “black” communities have been centrally involved in Europe-wide campaigns that call for the implementation of antidiscrimination policies. According to Lusane, Europe is now poised to make “the most sweeping changes in anti-discrimination legislation since the modern effort to come together as a region.”

From August to September of 2001, the WCAR convened in Durban, South Africa. The WCAR and its preparatory conferences were an important point at which these nascent and often contradictory movements began to converge. The WCAR and its accompanying Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Forum was attended by thousands of representatives of governments, international agencies, NGOs, academia, policy makers, media, and communities from over 160 countries. In addition to indigenous and African-descendant populations from all over the world, other groups such as the Burakumin of Japan, the Roma from Europe, and the Dalits from the Indian subcontinent were all in attendance and pressed their claims for addressing comparable forms of discrimination. The more than eight thousand attendees participated in formal and informal meetings, exchanged information and forged alliances. Both meetings produced policy documents, declarations, and programs, and the WCAR adopted a Declaration and Program of Action that commits member states to undertake a wide range of measures to combat racism and racial discrimination at the international, regional, and national levels. These have been used by movements all over the world as organizing tools, for popular education and, as models for legislation.

The various movements represented at Durban emerged from extremely diverse conditions and find themselves at various levels of development, but all are intensified by the transnational consequences of globalized capitalism and the imposition of market-based structural adjustment “reforms” on exploited populations. The recognition of common issues transcending boundaries and the interrogation of the role of profits from slave trade, colonialism, and more recent forms of domination play a part in current conditions of poverty; are important steps in building a transnational movement to challenge these conditions; and
at the same time accelerate the ability of these movements to see themselves as positioned both within and beyond the nation-state.

Samir Amin observed that one of the most significant features of the conference was the development of an analysis that situated racism and discrimination as “generated, produced and reproduced by the logic and expansion of capitalism,” which in its contemporary globalized form “can only result in ‘apartheid on a global scale.’” The concept of global apartheid was an important theme of the conference. In a 2001 article in the Nation, Salih Booker and William Minter described global apartheid as “an international system of minority rule whose attributes include: differential access to basic human rights; wealth and power structured by race and place; structural racism, embedded in global economic processes political institutions and cultural assumptions; and the international practice of double standards that assume inferior rights to be appropriate for certain ‘others,’ defined by location, origin, race or gender.”

Amin hailed WCAR as “a people’s victory” in which “the spirit of Bandung has breathed again.” He compared it to the historic Bandung Conference held in Indonesia in 1955, attended by leaders from Africa and Asia. However, WCAR is potentially a more advanced development than the meeting in Bandung, which was comprised essentially of representatives of states or states-in-waiting—that is, government officials and representatives from national liberations organizations who possessed official credentials. The NGO forum of WCAR, on the other hand, encompassed a range of sometimes disorganized and often contradictory popular currents. At the same time, WCAR transcended the more traditional category of Pan-Africanism by incorporating subaltern groups who are not of African descent but find themselves similarly affected by the weight of global apartheid.

These counterhegemonic movements nevertheless face considerable challenges, and their success in confronting global apartheid will depend on the extent to which they are able to build on the dominant approach that emerged from WCAR—one that attempts to transcend an essentialized notion of race and move toward a perspective linking subaltern populations, not by race but by racialization. There are strong pressures, often from neoliberal organizations such as the World Bank, to emphasize issues of cultural difference at the expense of more radical efforts toward fundamental social change. If history is any guide to the extent that this nascent movement succumbs to such pressures and retreats toward a more parochial vision of their political tasks, they risk developing fissures along lines of class, gender, and other differences and even eventually imploding. As these divergent movements progress to the next step, it will be essential for them to continue to build solidarities across identities and boundaries, developing coalitions among the working class, antiracists, and feminist constituencies and alliances with progressive national liberation movements. In so doing, place-based efforts will have to transform themselves from movements of integration, autonomy, or reform into more ambitious movements confronting all forms of inequality. To achieve these goals, it will be necessary to construct a new language of human emancipation that has the capacity to project a new vision of an
alternative global social order in which “difference” does not inevitably convey the reality of structural inequality.

Notes
23. Clarence Lusane, Chapter 15 of this volume.
Human rights—“the reasonable demands for personal security and basic well-being that all individuals can make on the rest of humanity by virtue of their being members of the species Homo sapiens”—are in increased jeopardy in this era of globalization. Small, poor countries increasingly are dominated by imposed economic controls that make a mockery of their rights to self-determination. For about two decades, this neoliberal regime—in which developed nations aid poorer nations on the condition that they restructure their economies and political systems to accommodate maximum wealth accumulation by multinational corporations—has arrived packaged as so-called free trade. This phenomenon is more than an idea or ideology. It is a cultural system, “a paradigm for understanding and organizing the world and for informing our practices within it.” It is “an approach to the world which includes in its purview not only economics but also politics, not only the public but also the private, not only what kinds of institutions we should have but also what kinds of subjects we should be.”

The reasons for this assault on human rights—political and socioeconomic—are complex. In many parts of the world, however, it can be attributed, at least in part, to the relative immunity with which transnational corporations and agencies dictate social, political and economic issues within nation-states, especially smaller nations. These nations’ ability to protect rights to education, health care, and humane work standards is drastically compromised by internationally mandated policies and programs that give higher priority to corporate rights and the rights of transnational capital than to the basic needs and dignity of ordinary human beings. Although the social contract that more democratic states once had with their citizens is disappearing, the repressive role of state power clearly is
not. In many cases, Western, particularly the United States, foreign aid packages include generous provisions for police and military upgrading. Thanks to this free market in arms, intergroup tensions within smaller nations now are more apt to escalate into militarized conflicts.

For example, the militarized condition of life in Jamaica provides a prime example of how U.S. foreign aid for fighting drugs and crime impacts developing nations. During the 1980s, after the politically orchestrated demise of the democratic socialist administration, the policing and military capacity of the conservative Jamaica Labor Party government was substantially upgraded with a sizable security aid package, the largest ever given by the United States to any country in the Commonwealth Caribbean. The aid enabled the government of Edward Seaga, former prime minister, to act more punitively against the “dangerous elements”—crime, labor discontent, and political unrest—that threatened law and order on the island and threatened the United States’ strategic interests in the region. The well-funded war against crime was led by the Special Operations Squad, popularly dubbed “Seaga’s eradication squad.” In the mid-1980s, Americas Watch issued a human rights report that decried the growing pattern of extrajudicial executions responsible for half of the nation’s total homicides. The militarization of the state and the often indiscriminate deployment of repressive police tactics remain a problem today. Last year, these problems prompted Amnesty International to censure the government in a special report.4

These problems are not confined to the southern hemisphere; comparable trends are also in evidence in the north. In the United States alone, Reaganomics, Contract with America, welfare reform, the dismantling of affirmative action, Proposition 187, policing by racial profiling, and the prison-industrial complex are variations on the same theme. Note that they closely resemble the structural adjustment programs that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) stipulates and the war on drugs and crime underwritten by the United States in debt-ravaged “developing” countries. Common themes emerge upon examination of these tactics to regulate the global economy and police the crises that regulation engenders. This neoliberal method results in processes that might be called capitalism’s second primitive accumulation and a “recolonization” of markets in a world fraught with dilemmas of postcolonialism and the postmodern condition.5

David L. Wilson, an activist with the Nicaragua Solidarity Network, provides another example of this dynamic in his analysis of maquiladoras (assembly plants operating as subsidiaries or subcontracted firms of transnational corporations) as a site for the workings of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, he writes, is a regime of development and a phenomenon of primitive accumulation, which in many ways is comparable to the classic case that Marx described for the transition into capitalism. Primitive accumulation then and now creates “a vast labor pool of people desperate for jobs, even at wages below subsistence levels.” Wilson argues: “[W]hat is new about neoliberalism is a sort of primitive accumulation against capitalist and post-capitalist economic forms—against industrial production for the domestic market, against small-scale capitalist or cooperative agriculture
(often the result of agrarian reform), and against the tenuous but crucial safety net that has developed in many third world countries.” These conditions of change, mediated by the IMF, World Bank, and World Trade Organization (WTO)—all multinational but strongly U.S.-influenced—have been intensified by the geopolitical and politico-economic realignments engendered in today’s post–cold war milieu in which alternatives to capitalism are widely discredited.

Subsequently, capitalism’s conflicts with communism and socialism have—except for the brutal U.S. embargo against Cuba—given way to wars between competing ethnic groups and to a U.S.-funded “war against drugs” that is driven by the contradictory foreign policy of the remaining superpower.

In this context, one of the gravest human rights problems is the intensification of discrimination and violence that target people on the basis of race. Race is a socially constructed distinction, material relation, and dimension of social stratification that intersects with and is mutually constituted by class, gender, ethnicity, nation, and increasingly transnational location and identity. Although culturally variable, it encodes social differences often presumed to be hereditary—that, if not carefully managed and policed, are considered threats to a nation’s social structure.

Although historically, racial differences were considered to be rooted in biological variations, today these differences are increasingly expressed not in racial terms but in cultural terms. These trends in reconfiguring race are evident across a wide array of international settings, from European zones of ethnic cleansing (where, through mass rapes, women became permanently partitioned racial subjects) to African contexts (in which ethnonational conflicts are racial and, in extreme cases, intensify to the point of genocide). The conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda and Burundi is a tragic instance of this. Anthropologist Lisa Malkki has pointed out that members of Burundi’s Hutu community has crafted mytho-historical narratives that define their differences from Tutsis in terms of “moral essences,” which operate as powerfully as the biological distinctions that operated during an earlier era.

In many places around the world, race is being reconfigured in more acceptable ideological codes and rhetoric, which some scholars view as a new form of racism without races. Social critics in France, Germany, and Austria point out that even right-wing xenophobes in their countries formally acknowledge that blatant racism is widely discredited and that “races” do not “really exist.” Although this may sound progressive, this cursory, one-dimensional awareness does not mean that racism has withered away or is not being reproduced in modern and postmodern guises. Despite the nominal no-race stance taken by some western European neofascists, their punitive assaults against Third World immigrants and eastern European refugees (e.g., the Roma in Bosnia) effectively demonize ethnonational outsiders and subject them to conditions so oppressive that a new form of apartheid may be emerging. Encoded in the notions of immigrant and refugee are meanings of ethnic absolutism that invent or renew racial identities on reconfigured landscapes of national inclusion and exclusion. Paradoxically, although
certain categories of immigrants are viewed as troublesome parasites whose cultures threaten the purity of European nations, their economic participation in ethnically and sexually segmented labor keeps their host economies thriving and enriches their employers.

This ambivalence is also present in the United States, where nativist campaigns target immigrants. Californians supported Proposition 187, which barred children of illegal immigrants (mainly Mexican) from educational and health services, even as California’s agribusiness and service sectors became increasingly dependent on the exploitable labor of the children’s parents. Propositions such as 187 are not intended to create an inhospitable atmosphere for immigrants, thereby urging them to return to their native countries; it is really about keeping them in their (exploited and vulnerable) place within the United States by restricting their legal rights. In other words, these measures perpetuate a deskilled and stigmatized labor force that cannot make credible human rights demands like those increasingly made by Americans and legal residents of color—demands that are eroding white privilege and engendering a crisis of white identity.

Alongside, and in some instances interacting with, these culturalist essentialisms, though, is the relentless resurgence of biology-based accounts about the nature and roots of social difference. This is clearly the case in North America where Richard Herrnstein’s and Charles Murray’s 1994 book, The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life, and research funded by neoconservative foundations such as the Pioneer Fund have revitalized discussions on measurements of intelligence, athleticism, fertility patterns, and criminal violence.

These disturbing patterns are reemerging despite the decades-old perspective of such scholars as Ralph Bunche, who noted in his A World View of Race that racial distinctions lack any real biological basis. In his bold analysis of imperialism, global intergroup conflicts, and the threat racism posed to world peace, Bunche—who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1950 for his role as UN mediator in Palestine and Israel’s conflicts with neighboring Arab states—underscored the economic basis of the global racial hierarchy and its fundamental intersection with class exploitation.11

Bunche was influenced by Du Bois, who in 1915 published a seminal essay, “African Roots of the War,” in which he theorized about imperialism and global conflict before Lenin published his Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism in 1917. Historian and biographer David Levering Lewis writes that the essay, which articulated Du Bois’s “mature ideas about capitalism, class, and race” in the workings of colonialism and the causes of World War I, was “one of the analytical triumphs of the early twentieth century.”12 Nearly ninety years after Du Bois’s analysis and seventy-six years after Bunche’s, political scientists and others who study international relations still need to be urged to include race and racism in their analyses of global politics and political economy.

Anyone who reads the newspaper—and knows how to read between the lines—is aware that racism and the interlocking injustices of xenophobia, class
exploitation, and gender oppression are escalating global phenomena. If they read the alternative media, they know that some people think the globalization of free-market ideas and policies, especially those imposed on vulnerable nations (i.e., neoliberalism) have something do with this trend. If they read or heard broadcast news reports in late August and early September 2001, they are well aware that these problems were foci around which the fraternal twin meetings, the World Conference against Racism (WCAR) and its parallel Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Forum, convened in Durban, South Africa. The meetings marked the year 2001 as the International Year of Mobilization against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, one of the highlights of the Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination (1993–2003). South Africa’s symbolic power as a postapartheid society and, previously, as the setting for a protracted struggle for African liberation and multiracial democracy, resonates deeply with the political sensibilities and yearnings of antiracists the world over. As a sort of secular “Mecca,” the Durban meetings attracted “pilgrims” from all over the world. Not surprisingly, quite visible among them were NGO representatives and country delegates from the African continent and Diaspora. In the spirit of optimism, we might say that the pilgrims who gathered in Durban participated in symbolically charged and substantively meaningful rituals of rebellion and solidarity. On this hopeful note, let us also assume that some of them—by virtue of their experience and by virtue of their critique of those experiences—underwent a significant rite of passage that led them to a new phase of critical knowledge, consciousness, and struggle. Their expanded social action and political mobilization toolkits may have enabled them to better respond to today’s volatile atmosphere of restructuring, which is an atmosphere that seems particularly resilient in the face of many of the resistance tactics employed in the past.

As they police the crises that neoliberalism unleashes, the managers of today’s global economy insist that there are no alternatives to the market liberalization, privatization, and cuts in government spending—domestic and foreign—being mandated by the IMF, World Bank, WTO, and U.S. policy. These neocolonial ideologies are informed by transnational interests that force vulnerable nations to redefine their national priorities. Neoliberal ideology and policy directives, which cross national boundaries with impunity, have promoted free market rights at the expense of human rights. It is crucial to note that globalized politics and policies, particularly those of such post–World War II institutions as the IMF and World Bank, are now largely controlled by a single superpower: the United States. Although, as Sherle R. Schwenninger writes, “the perception of U.S. power and influence has in many cases exceeded its reality,” the United States dominates, especially in the area of finance. Owing to the “unusual circumstances of the post-cold war period—Europe’s preoccupation with the European monetary union, Japanese deflation, Russian weakness, low oil prices, geopolitical inertia in East Asia,” the United States controls “world monetary policy in a way not seen since the 1950s.” As a consequence, it has been able to “[push] financial