

Capitalism, Discrimination and Race

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A global movement has erupted in the wake of an ever-growing chain of black American deaths. The death of George Floyd on the 25th May in Minneapolis at the hands of the police, sparked international rage, giving new life, strength and momentum to the Black Lives Matter movement as protests of solidarity have taken place in 50 states, over 700 U.S. cities and across multiple cities in 18 countries. A movement that started in 2013 after the murderer of 17 year old Trayvon Martin was acquitted, Black Lives Matter started as a response and fight against state and vigilante violence against black communities, and has now become one of the biggest civil rights movements in history. The power and force behind today's movement is in its worldwide solidarity, as the last month has seen people of all colour, race and background stand together as one in order to tackle the horrors of racism and discrimination in our societies. To fight for personal justice is powerful, but to recognise that someone else's struggle is also your own struggle, is a force beyond the empathetic capabilities of capitalism and the elite. Many people (in particular non-black people) are facing up to their own lack of action, empathy and historical knowledge and are re-educating themselves about the way that racism has evolved to exist within the fabric of our societies. These realisations come hand in hand with a clear criticism of capitalism itself, as we discover that the demands we make to eradicate racism cannot be fully met without a complete re-evaluation of the structures and foundations that capitalism exists on.

America and Racism

If we look back at the history of racism in America, dating back to slavery, black people were seen and used as property and as a force of labour, they were commodities that functioned as a productive means within the economy, rather than as individuals. The abolishment of slavery was therefore a huge threat to the economy, as a huge population which had previously acted as an economic engine were suddenly released into American civilization as human beings who required welfare and support. In order to fully integrate the black population into society, America would have to fund a huge rehabilitation scheme, providing trauma therapy, education, social housing, financial support, employment support etc. Instead, a loophole in the law, known as the 13th amendment which was approved by Abraham Lincoln upon the abolishment of slavery, saw that black people were returned to slavery through the penal system. The 13th amendment stated that: 'neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as a punishment for crime* whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States.' Therefore after the abolishment of slavery, America found a way of maintaining economic success by reintegrating black people into the labour of capital through mass incarceration. In southern states, laws known as Black Codes were passed which gave black Americans the legal right to marry, sue in court and own property, but most significantly, the Black Codes made it illegal for African Americans to testify against whites or to serve on juries, which created a wave unjustified arrests. They continued to dehumanize the black population in harmful narratives which bled into the homes of America and allowed slavery to continue under the guise of law, order and justice, as black arrests rose to alarming numbers, and prison labour became a justified course for the American society and economy to flourish once more. In today's America there are six million people under correctional supervision and over two million people are incarcerated. There are more black and brown people caught in the current criminal justice system than there were slaves in the 1800s. Despite the abolishment of slavery, the

state continued to actively pursue racial inequality by putting the wants of the economy before the welfare of people for the purpose of profit. The chain that commands the progress of our economy and structures of our civilization operate on a basis of supply, demand, price and profit. When personal profit, self-interest and competition are the leading force of a society; social unity, equality and welfare become mere token gestures, and will forever fail to be connected with adequate funding, planning and result. This reliance on black inferiority has been maintained up until today and in order to question racism, we need to understand and question the system that thrives on discrimination and hate. How can social welfare and equality ever be placed at the forefront of a society that relies on racial and class divides? A society that thrives on crime is fundamentally incapable of meeting the social needs of its citizens, because ultimately funding discipline and policing is more beneficial (profitable) to capitalism than funding welfare.

Crime is Desired

Amidst current protests people are calling for police reformation and even abolishment. This debate comes with a realisation that crime is hugely linked to inadequate social support. Gang related crimes and drug arrests which make up a huge percentage of US incarcerations are predominantly a symptom of poor economic backgrounds which are more prevalent in black communities which have been underfunded and neglected throughout US history. Police departments also often have ticketing and arrest quotas to fill, which encourages petty and false arrests in black and ethnic neighbourhoods. And, if we look into mental health statistics, it is estimated that 8.3 million adults in the US have a mental health illness, with as many as 3.9 million going untreated at any given time. Denial of mental health treatment leads to the criminalisation of their symptoms and ultimately to avoidable arrests and imprisonments. In 2016 alone it was estimated by The Treatment Advocacy Center that 383,000 people with severe mental health illnesses were incarcerated. Whilst these statistics do not specifically refer to racial discrimination, it reveals an evident neglect and disregard for public wellbeing and reformation and shows that it is not just the black population that suffers under the current system. Capitalism is undeniably dependant on discriminatory divides and demands the constant exploitation of minorities and lower classes for cheap labour, which is implemented by a booming police force.

Cohabiting with Racism

Capitalism relies on peer oppression as much as state oppression in order to normalise racism and inequality. We are born into pre-existing 'understandings' of white superiority, and unknowingly grow to accept and employ codes of behaviour which allow racist and discriminatory beliefs to be passed down from generation to generation, and which allow passivity and acceptance to be the leading response to racism. From a young age we are taught about the white heroes in history, we skate over their atrocities and crimes to make way for their greatness. We are told of Winston Churchill's heroic leadership during the second World War, but are spared the details of his beliefs in racial hierarchies and eugenics, his involvement in the Bengal famine (1943 whilst India was still of British possession) which resulted in 3 million Indian deaths, and his approval to attack Kurds and Afghans with chemical weapons, referring to them as uncivilized tribes. We are taught of Christopher Columbus's 'discovery' of the Americas, without acknowledging his use of violence, brutality and slavery against the indigenous people that already lived there. Up until June 7th this year a statue of a slave trader with a plaque that read, 'Erected by citizens of Bristol as a memorial of one of the most virtuous and wise sons of their city', lived in Bristol's city centre despite campaigns

and petitions to remove it. Black and brown history is side-lined to make way for an idolised education of white oppressors. This paves the way for an underlying attitude amongst people themselves that white crime can be excused and should be understood, whilst black crime is inherent and therefore punishable to the highest degree. It also instils a sense of acceptance, that the suffering of black and brown communities is *a)* nothing to do with us, and *b)* a normality that is to be expected. We learn little to nothing about black or brown leading figures, about their influences on where we are today in terms of music, art, science, literature, journalism, sports, technology, healthcare etc. We aren't given the opportunity to celebrate and empathise with other attitudes, cultures and races because alongside this lack of education there has been a constant narrative of beastlike and animalistic races of people that desperately rely on white saviours to survive, whilst successful and relatable representations have been minimal. We can see both white-saviourism and offensive and degrading stereotypes appear in casual and harmful commentaries of other races, both in film and media. Right-wing voices are given a constant spotlight in voicing racist opinions, from journalists like Katie Hopkins' unashamed tweets and columns, to leading authorities like Boris Johnson with his infamous quote calling black people 'piccaninnies' with 'watermelon smiles', to Trump himself campaigning for death sentences for innocent black lives (e.g. central park joggers case), whilst voices on the left are mocked, silenced and side-lined by mainstream media which is primarily funded by a wealthy elite who profit from encouraging racial divides. By numbing the population to the realities of racism, and subtly weaving it into our core understanding of the world, capitalist leaders and the elite have ensured that violence, exploitation and discrimination of other races silently coexists alongside our 'democratic' societies, allowing modern day slavery to flourish and fuel the world's largest corporations and to remain an integral part of western economies. Essentially, inequality is the cog in the wheel of capitalism. In America, yes, but most importantly, globally.

Understanding World-Wide Racism

When we talk about achieving racial equality we need to also incorporate discussions about black and brown inferiority, oppression and exploitation outside of America and the West, and begin to understand the relationship of discrimination, inequality and race to the supply, demand, price and profit ethic of capitalism globally. Currently 60% of global trade is achieved by businesses which use business models centred on exploitative labour which violate basic human rights within supply chains. White businesses profit from the undercurrent of racist and discriminatory ideals that they support, enable and fund, and therefore rely on the public to not only react with passivity and acceptance, but to also partake in the process by consuming their products without questioning the ethics of how it came to be. Essentially, it is cheaper to have slave labour than to pay for responsibly sourced materials, and corporations stand to make larger profits by denying basic pay and human rights to their labourers. This applies to America's reliance on prison labour as much as it applies to the West's dependence on cheap labour from Africa, Asia and the Middle-East. The privilege in the West is essentially dependant on poverty in the East, which is maintained and tolerated through intrinsic racial stereotyping and a reluctance to therefore acknowledge that our consumerism is handcuffed to an acceptance of cheap and exploitative labour of other races. It is important to understand that racism is not just defined by a direct hate towards other races, but also of a subtle acceptance of discriminatory differences and divides which cause people to separate themselves from others in a way that affects social unity. Whilst it allows the West to exploit and trade goods, making use of Iran's oil, African minerals and metals, Asian silks, porcelain, cotton, vehicle parts,

aircrafts, South American cocoa, coffee, sugar, tobacco, wheat, corn etc. as well as the labour that creates our clothes, phones, cars and objects of daily comfort, it simultaneously allows the West to deny welfare to not only the workers in those areas, but to immigrants searching for shelter from poverty, warzones and situations affecting their security. Through pushing harmful racial narratives throughout the history of capitalism, capitalist leaders and the elite have ensured that hostile attitudes towards immigrants exist as part of a protective patriotism, which serves to support and verify government schemes which deny equal welfare to immigrants seeking shelter. By emphasising racial differences governments can refuse responsibility for exploiting workers, as well as refusing them rights and essential funding to integrate into society. It benefits the West for these countries to remain underdeveloped, and for the people to not have basic human rights because poverty allows them to reach out to developing countries and use labour under the promise of opportunity. It also benefits the public to remain silent because people are not willing to confront the realities that surround their daily comforts and material possessions, and so racism remains an undamaged component within our economic and social structures. Capitalist leaders in the West take an active role in influencing and interfering with political choices in the East, creating strong relationships with leaders that will support their trade and industry requirements, and who actively oppress their citizens and deny them basic living standards. The US, with the CIA has been directly involved in regime changes and coups in countries such as Iran and much of Latin America (usually with the aim of replacing left-wing governments and movements for right-wing dictatorships), as well as interfering with national elections in many Asian, Middle-Eastern, Latin American and African countries. Political developments and a realisation of human rights are a direct threat to the whole notion of capitalism, and will forever be treated as attacks rather than progress under the current system. This is what we are currently seeing in America, with the forceful pushback of the police against protesters, because a demand for equality (no matter how peacefully it is requested) incites fear which is met with war rather than civilised discussions of resolution.

Currently, Black Lives Matter is addressing state reliance on racism, inequality and cheap labour in relation to America, UK and Europe, but a refusal to look beyond national racism will only allow these companies and the capitalist elite to continue injecting society with harmful narratives about other ethnicities as it continues to be an integral part of its operating force. Whilst profit still relies on racism, racism cannot be dismantled. We can make one nation safer, we can protest for certain rights to be met, but whilst profit is a global leading force under capitalism, any progress that threatens financial and economic security will forever be flattened and concealed with false gestures of temporary improvement, rather than concrete resolutions that lead to permanent equality and human rights. Can we really have a meaningful discussion about ending racism if we only look at solutions that exist and participate in a structure that is built and maintained by the very thing that we are trying to erase?

Black Lives Matter - Today's Fight and Tomorrow's Future

The difference between past black freedom movements and the current Black Lives Matter movement is the progress of debates which centre around radical reformations of our current structures. The demands within the protests of the last month have been very clear: there have been calls to rework and improve education, media, forms of labour and production, work opportunities, policing, health services, social and community services and more. With so much called into question, we have to be unafraid to link these demands to a discussion about capitalism itself. For racism to be dismantled with a real meaningful effort and end, we need to connect this

fight to a programme of steady deconstruction of our current economic and social structures, and a reworking of our societies on a global scale. People are starting to reclaim consciousness by trying to understand the root of their oppression, and that is a huge step in reimagining a society separate from capitalism.

Within this pandemic the fragility of our societal structures have been revealed as we've witnessed how quickly stability and security can disappear (with loss of jobs, local businesses, community programmes, mental health-care and lives), and what is prioritised is not people's welfare, but an economy which only serves to benefit the upper classes. The consequences of the pandemic on our daily routines and lives, has placed us in the midst of a social trauma, which in turn has triggered a readiness to confront the long-awaited realities of racism and discrimination. People are beginning to feel dissatisfied, burdened and betrayed by the laws that are allowing this to be normalised and explained. This is how the Black Lives Matter movement has grown beyond protests of police brutality in America, to represent a worldwide stand against inequality and capitalist oppression. Death and tragedy are easily excusable in a society that puts profit and financial gain before necessity and health, and this has made people question what our current social norms really mean. George Floyd is certainly not the first African American to be killed at the hands of the state, but his death has encouraged a fight that everyone was finally ready to have. In death, George Floyd became a trigger against the entire establishment that led to his death. The fight to end racism has therefore become globally tied to a fight against capitalism, with people from all backgrounds, races and classes waking up to a suffocating reality that they cannot breathe under the demands of our current system. With continuous protest, debate, action and momentum, we can address injustice on broader levels, and open the door for radical policies and revolutionary political advancements to be publicly accepted and understood. Throughout history it is through protest that real humanitarian change has emerged, and it is only through continuous protest and action that capitalism can be pushed back and weakened, in order to make way for radical development. The progress made by Black Lives Matter has already brought real change to America. Among some of the changes, the officers involved in George Floyd's murder have been charged (setting a tone for the future of police brutality cases), Minneapolis bans the use of police chokeholds (other cities are following suit), \$150 million from the LAPD budget is to be redirected to youth jobs, health initiatives and peace centres, many cities are redirecting police funds to different social sectors, many US cities are removing police resource officers from schools, statues linked with racism are being torn down globally, New Jersey announced law enforcement reforms, Minneapolis commits to dismantling police department, no-knock warrants are being discussed and reassessed, Dallas police announce new policies to intervene when force is inappropriately used or is no longer necessary, Democrats propose new police reform bills, millions of dollars have been donated to Black Lives Matter and other related charities and organisations, and world-wide debates have begun to investigate the roots of racism, where it began and why it exists. Acknowledging the link between capitalism, discrimination and race is a significant milestone for black freedom movements, and is also dependant on realising that the fight needs to extend beyond civil rights to human rights and a human society – in order to commit to ending racial injustice, we need to commit to revolutionary change.

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