

The racialization of class struggle in *Black Reconstruction*

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Abstract: This article examines the debates surrounding class and race in Du Bois's seminal work, *Black Reconstruction*, specifically addressing the contemporary tension between Du Boisian sociologists and Marxist critics regarding the primacy of each category in the analysis of the modern world. We argue that Du Bois aimed to avoid both class and race reductionism. Instead, the Pan-African leader offered crucial alternatives: understanding capitalism as a racialized system and producing a historical analysis that views class struggle as a racialized one.

Key Words: Black Marxism; Du Boisian Sociology; *Black Reconstruction*.

NINETY YEARS after its initial publication, *Black Reconstruction* has finally been translated into Portuguese.¹ The book represents Du Bois's serious engagement with Marxist theory,

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offering an analysis of the post-Civil War period in the United States as a revolutionary moment that could have led to the dismantling of capitalism and its racial hierarchies. Rather than focusing on the European proletariat, Du Bois focused on the perspective of Black workers who struggled against colonialism and slavery. Thus, this book is also a landmark for the emergence of a particular strand of Marxist theory and politics grounded on the understanding of colonialism, slavery, and racism as centrally constitutive of capitalism.²

This translation arrives at a timely moment. The conversations about capitalism and racial violence sparked by the book are currently being revisited in Sociology, and this renewed attention can help deepen our understanding of the racialization of class struggles across different fields. More specifically, anti-racist scholars have successfully integrated Du Bois into the sociological canon to challenge the discipline's historical complicity with colonialism, slavery, and capitalism, and to advance a Du Boisian sociology that treats knowledge production as a tool for social transformation.³ However, a recent Marxist critique has argued that this inclusion has domesticated Du Bois's work by downplaying his commitment to class analysis and reducing all social inequalities to a singular force of racism.⁴ Du Boisian scholars counter that such a critique reduces race and other forms of oppression to mere byproducts of class, insisting that the Pan-African leader neither subordinated race to class nor treated racial violence as an offshoot of capitalism.⁵

This article revisits capitalism and racism in *Black Reconstruction* in light of such debate. We argue that Du Bois suggested analyzing class and race as different components of capitalism as a historical totality. Furthermore, we contend that the relationship between them was not of subordination or separation but of interdependence — one depends on the other to produce and reproduce itself, in a way that one cannot be understood without the other. In addition, we also claim that Du Bois was fighting against both race and class reductionism. He was proposing a third alternative: understanding

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1 DU BOIS, William Edward Burghardt. **Black Reconstruction in America**. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935.

2 See ROBINSON, Cedric. **Black Marxism**: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition. London: UNC Press, 2020.

3 See ITZIGSOHN, José; BROWN, Karida. **The Sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois**: Racialized Modernity and the Global Color Line. New York: New York University Press, 2020.

4 Such as GOODWIN, Jeff. The Dilemma for 'Du Boisian Sociology'. **Catalyst**, v. 7, n. 1, 2023a.

5 ITZIGSOHN, José. In Defense of Du Boisian Sociology. **Catalyst**, v. 7, n. 3, 2023. MORRIS, Aldon. From Social Movements to Du Boisian Sociology: A 40-Year Journey Interrogating Domination and Liberation of the Oppressed. **Annual Review of Sociology**, v. 51, n. 1, p. 1-20, 2025.

capitalism as a racialized system and producing a historical analysis that views class struggle as a racialized one.

Therefore, the paper begins with an exposition of some key disputes concerning Du Bois's work. We recognize the importance of critiques that pursue centering Marxism in Du Bois's work. Still, we point out that the way these critiques are currently elaborated has fallen into the trap of marginalizing the struggle against racial violence. The paper then continues examining *Black Reconstruction* as a study of how class conflict is racialized, aiming to move beyond the binary of class and race towards an analysis of capitalism in its complete existence.

Du Bois in Dispute

IN THE WELL-KNOWN introduction to *Remaking Modernity*, Adams, Clemens, and Orloff critique the “classical” project of historical sociology.⁶ While recognizing that this project represents a significant contribution to social science, they argue that it became overly rigid, state-centered, and Eurocentric. Nevertheless, their reconstruction of the field does not incorporate references to Du Bois's work or Du Bois-inspired sociology.⁷ Although Du Bois is briefly mentioned — once as part of a lineage of theorists analyzing modernity and again in relation to Enlightenment individualism and racial subordination — the subsequent seventy pages focus on Marx, Weber, and Durkheim.⁸

This omission reflects the racial foundations of scientific knowledge production.⁹ Against such foundations, scholars such as Reiland Rabaka, Aldon Morris, and Earl Wright II have denounced the epistemic apartheid that excluded Du Bois from sociology's founding canon and have called for his recognition.¹⁰ Their work led to a movement to include Du Bois in sociology's canon — not as a token addition, but as a critique of the discipline's complicity with colonialism, slavery, and capitalism, and as a creation of a sociology from below. Itzigsohn and Brown have recently contributed to this movement by calling for a Du Boisian Sociology.¹¹ They argue that Du Bois developed a sociology of racialized modernity — one

6 ADAMS, Julia; CLEMENS, Elisabeth; ORLOFF, Ann. Introduction: Social Theory, Modernity and the Three Waves of Historical Sociology. In ADAMS Julia; CLEMENS, Elisabeth; ORLOFF, Ann (org.) **Remaking Modernity: Politics, History and Sociology**. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005. p.1-74.

7 Such as the ones investigated by MEGHJI, Ali. Du Boisian Sociology After Du Bois: Frazier, St Clair Drake, and the Global and Comparative Study of Race and Empire. **Sociological Forum**, v. 39, n. 4, p. 361-72, 2024.

8 Although not mentioned in the introduction, Zine Magubane's chapter about historical sociology's global imagination includes a discussion of Du Bois's contribution to sociology. See MAGUBANE, Zine. Overlapping Territories and Intertwined Histories: Historical Sociology's Global Imagination. In: ADAMS Julia; CLEMENS, Elisabeth; ORLOFF, Ann (org.). **Remaking Modernity: Politics, History and Sociology**. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005. p. 92-108.

9 ARAÚJO, Marta; MAESO, Silvia (org.). **Eurocentrism, Racism and Knowledge: Debates on History and Power in Europe and the Americas**. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

10 RABAKA, Reiland. **Against Epistemic Apartheid**: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Disciplinary Decadence of Sociology. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010. MORRIS, Aldon. **The Scholar Denied**: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017. WRIGHT II Earl. **The First American School of Sociology**: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. London: Routledge, 2017.

11 ITZIGSOHN; BROWN, op. cit.

that reveals how core processes of modernity, such as industrialization, urbanization, division of labor, secularization, and technological development, are shaped by racial hierarchies and rooted in colonialism and imperialism. Accordingly, they advocate for a sociology that critiques racialized modernity through contextualized, historicized, and relational methods, while centering subaltern experiences.

The efforts to integrate Du Bois into the sociological canon and create a Du Boisian sociology had relevant results. Du Bois is now broadly recognized across the field.¹² However, the form in which such recognition occurred has been criticized by a few Marxist sociologists. In particular, Goodwin has argued that Itzigsohn and Brown domesticated the Pan-Africanist scholar, placing him within the sociological canon while ignoring the centrality of his Marxism.¹³ In more detail, the author argues that Du Bois's Marxist turn led him to define capitalism as the central social structure of the modern world and racism as its product. On that line, they claim that Du Boisian sociologists ignore capitalism's social structure by placing white supremacy as a social-historical force independent of capitalism. These critiques target not only those who consider themselves Du Boisian scholars but also those who seek to argue that colonialism and racism fundamentally structure identity, lived experience, and politics in ways not reducible to economics.

The critique against the invisibilization of Du Bois's Marxist turn in sociology is not new. More than a decade ago, Stanfield II argued that U.S. sociology marginalized Black scholars and Marxist thinkers, disproportionately affecting Black Marxists like Du Bois.¹⁴ Nonetheless, there is something different about the recent debate. After the addition of Marx to the sociological canon since the wave of anti-system movements of the 1960s, the discipline became "perhaps one of the most hospitable homes to Marxists in the social sciences, [but] Marxists are now a marginalized subfield within the discipline."¹⁵ Many factors contribute to this marginalization, but a fundamental one is the anti-Marxist propaganda that sought to domesticate social movements by moving them away from the struggle for an anti-capitalist society and toward demands for inclusion in the capitalist economy. In the field of anti-racist politics, for example, Melamed argues that such propaganda led to the growth of racial liberalism — the ideology and political praxis that seeks to dismantle racial hierarchies by promoting the advancement of Black people mainly through legislative changes focusing on equality without addressing capitalism.¹⁶ In more detail, her work demonstrates that

12 MEGHJI, Ali et al. Why Now? Thoughts on the Du Boisian Revolution. *Sociology Compass*, v. 18, n. 8, p. e13264, 2024.

13 GOODWIN, Jeff. **The Dilemma for 'Du Boisian Sociology'**. GOODWIN, Jeff. In Defense of Black Marxism. *Catalyst*, v. 7, n. 3, 2023b.

14 STANFIELD II, John. Du Bois on Citizenship: Revising the 'Du Bois as Sociologist' Canon. *Journal of Classical Sociology*, v. 10, n. 3, p. 171-88, 2010.

15 PLYS, Kristin. Theories of Capitalism and Coloniality in World Systems Analysis, the Dar Es Salaam School of History and the New Indian Labour History. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, v. 56, n. 4, p. 1322, 2024.

16 MELAMED, Jodi. The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism. *Social Text*, v. 24, n. 4, p.1-24, 2006.

such ideology was consolidated after World War II alongside anti-communist propaganda and used by capitalist elites to ensure U.S. global power and propel economic neoliberal agendas that dispossess particularly Black communities (rather than promote liberation).¹⁷ In this context, creating more space for Marxist debates and coming back to class analysis is essential to re-radicalize our resistances and horizons.

Du Boisian sociologists have not overlooked capitalism. For example, Itzigsohn examines capitalism as a racialized institution, emphasizing that Du Bois's concept of modernity reveals how race shapes core capitalist processes.¹⁸ At the same time, the author contends that Du Bois viewed white supremacy as a structure that originates within capitalism but eventually takes on a degree of autonomy — becoming partially detached from the system of production. This conceptual separation between capitalism and white supremacy risks neglecting a key strength of Marxist analysis: the use of historical materialism to understand the intertwined dynamics of race and class.

In a recent contribution to this topic, Vanessa Wills explains that Marxism views human existence as shaped by our interactions with both natural and social environments in the pursuit of basic needs, using historical materialism to define being as a constantly evolving process that has labor — the metabolic relationship between humans and their world — at its center.¹⁹ Accordingly, Wills asserts that historical materialism holds material conditions as the primary determinants of both the material and ideal dimensions of existence. However, she clarifies that this does not mean ideas are mere byproducts of economic forces. Rather, historical materialism conceives “structure” and “superstructure” as mutually conditioning elements of a unified whole. These components do not operate through a linear causal chain (X causes Z) but instead reflect dialectical relationships in which elements are interwoven (X relates to Z). Applied to race, this framework highlights that while modern racist ideas draw on pre-capitalist notions of human difference, their consolidation into a central structural feature of society occurred alongside the rise of capitalism. In other words, Wills emphasizes that although capitalism did not invent racism, the specific and enduring character of modern racism is mediated by the concrete relations and structures of production. Therefore, treating white supremacy as separate from capitalism risks weakening our analysis of racism rather than enhancing our understanding of it.

However, the current Marxist critique of Du Boisian sociology does not seem to focus on the relationship between race and class, but rather on the subordination of the former to the latter. For example, Goodwin's reading of *Black Reconstruction* frames

17 The deradicalization of social justice struggles has affected other movements as well. Beyond identity-based activism, labor movements have also tended to prioritize wealth redistribution without confronting the exploitative nature of its production.

18 ITZIGSOHN, José. A Du Boisian Sociological Imagination: The Black Radical Tradition, Marxism and Du Boisian Sociology. *The British Journal of Sociology*, v. 76, n. 3, p. 499-510, 2025.

19 WILLS, Vanessa. What Could It Mean to Say, 'Capitalism Causes Sexism and Racism?' *Philosophical Topics*, v. 46, n. 2, p. 229-46, 2018.

racial violence as rooted in capitalist competition for labor, portraying racism as an elite-crafted ideology designed to divide the working class by scapegoating Black workers.²⁰ While we partially agree, Goodwin seems to absolve poor white people of racism and fault Black individuals who left multiracial, class-based movements to form Black organizations for allegedly weakening the proletariat. After all, his analysis criticizes theories and organizing strategies centered on race while remaining silent about the racial violence within multiracial organizations that led many to abandon them in the first place, as documented in studies of the Black question in the Communist International.²¹ This critique, therefore, risks undermining the re-radicalization of social movements by repeating a long-standing tension: the marginalization of struggles against racial violence in the name of class-based movements.

Black Reconstruction constituted a major intervention in discussions about Black liberation and Marxism, elaborating an original, historically grounded, and theoretically creative strand of theory and politics. While engaging with Marxist theory to analyze the U.S. post-Civil War era from the perspective of Black workers, Du Bois did not limit himself to repeating Marx and Engels or transforming their conclusions into universal formulas that could be applied in every part of the world. Rather, he prolonged Marxism to understand the particular experience of the Black worker, demonstrating how race and class were deeply intertwined. Considering this, we ask: can *Black Reconstruction* help us produce an analysis of capitalism that recognizes the importance of Marxist critique while avoiding undermining racial violence? If so, how?

Black Reconstruction as a Racialized Class Conflict

As a BLACK INTELLECTUAL and activist committed to structural change, Du Bois recognized that Black liberation was inseparable from the redistribution of the means of production. Following his Marxist turn, he sought to help Black communities grasp the significance of class struggle and socialism.²² At the same time, he understood that racism fractured the working class, causing white workers to resist acknowledging the necessity of centering anti-racist struggles. Thus, Du Bois also worked to introduce conversations about race into socialist circles, emphasizing that true liberation for all workers depends on the emancipation of those racialized as non-white.²³ Through his dual critique of racism and capitalism, Du Bois challenges us in *Black Reconstruction* to move beyond frameworks that prioritize

20 GOODWIN, Jeff. Black Reconstruction as a Class War. **Catalyst**, v. 6, n. 1, 2022.

21 See ADI, Hakim. **Pan-Africanism and Communism**: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919-1939. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2013. DE LEON, Cedric. **Freedom Train**: Black Politics and the Story of Interracial Labor Solidarity. Oakland, CA: Univ of California Press, 2025.

22 LEWIS, David. **W.E.B. Du Bois**: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963. New York: H. Holt, 2000.

23 Ibidem.

either race or class. Instead, he urges us to understand the contradiction between labor and capital as inherently racialized. Indeed, from his early writings on the color line to his later reflections, Du Bois consistently illuminated how capitalism constructs and is constructed by the racialized global division of labor.²⁴

Concerning *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois begins the book by identifying the competing social classes of the period analyzed: the moment during and after the United States' Civil War. His first chapters then discuss the Black workers, the white workers, and the planters (plantation owners), highlighting their life conditions and class interests. The Black workers, including both enslaved people and free Blacks, formed the economic foundation of the nation. Although their material reality was sometimes similar to that of white workers (since both could work in similar settings), slavery enforced violence to the extent of a deprivation of the Black workers' humanity. Occupying the place of an object owned by another, rather than a human being who sells their labor, this was the "ultimate exploited" laborer.²⁵ Regarding their interests, the Black workers aimed for physical freedom, civil rights, economic opportunity, education, the right to vote, and, particularly, to acquire land to work and own the results of their labor. They sought to change the basis of property and redistribute income.

Here, Du Bois lays one of his main theoretical innovations. By considering enslaved people under the category of Black workers, he also incorporates slavery as a dimension of capitalism. In more detail, Du Bois argues that capitalism started with the accumulation of wealth by Europeans through the colonization of America and Africa and was based on the enslavement of colonized and captured people, rather than defining slavery as a historical precedent to the formation of capitalism. As he writes, "Black labor became the foundation stone not only of the Southern social structure, but of Northern manufacture and commerce, of the English factory system, of European commerce, of buying and selling on a world-wide scale [...]."²⁶

Regarding the white workers, Du Bois contends that this class comprised native-born Americans and new immigrants who aspired to capital accumulation and social mobility (transitioning from workers to capitalists). He explains that these workers, often disinherited by the slave system and land monopoly, sought to maintain their racial superiority over Black people, which provided them a sense of authority and fed their vanity. Thus, they feared competition from Black labor. Concerning the planters, they were the wealthy landowning class in the South who profited immensely from slave labor, dominating politics and social life with ideals of European privilege and caste. Their primary

24 See DU BOIS, William Edward Burghardt. The Color Line Belts the World. In: LEWIS, David (org.). **W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader**. New York: Henry Holt, 1995. DU BOIS, William Edward Burghardt. **Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace**. New York: Harcourt, 1945. DU BOIS, William Edward Burghardt. **The World and Africa**. New York: International Publishers, 2007.

25 DU BOIS, op. cit., p. 15.

26 Ibidem, p. 5.

interest was to expand slavery and their land monopoly by resisting any form of Black political or economic emancipation.

Du Bois then demonstrates that capitalism is racialized by explaining that class is racialized — that is, classes are not solely formed by their positions in the capitalist structure but are also constituted by their position in the racial hierarchy. In more detail, race appears in Du Bois's work as a category that divided who deserved to receive wages and who did not, justifying the apex of capitalist exploitation: the exploitation of unfree labor in the capitalist racial slavery system. Finally, Du Bois argued that the color line was a global division. “[...] That dark and vast sea of human labor in China and India, the South Seas and all Africa; in the West Indies and Central America and in the United States [...] — shares a common destiny; it is despised and rejected by race and color; [...] beaten, imprisoned and enslaved [...].”²⁷ Capitalism, therefore, is a global system that justifies extreme exploitation through racialization.²⁸

After laying down the basics of his analysis, Du Bois explains that the U.S. Civil War started with the Northern capitalists (Union) and the Southern planters (Confederacy) disputing economic power. The North aimed to create laws that protected its products against the importation of cheap manufactured goods from Europe, and it also desired land to expand its industries. The South perceived the national protection of industries as raising the price of the products they consumed, and they aimed to protect the plantation economy. Crucially, neither side aimed to abolish slavery.

Du Bois also explains that the Black workers used this conflict to free themselves through what he calls the general strike - the spontaneous and widespread action of millions of enslaved individuals who refused to work for the Confederacy. In more detail, Du Bois states that as soon as the enslaved population realized that they could use the situation to end their captivity, they interrupted Southern production through different actions, such as the refusal to work (often understood as laziness by the enslaver) and mass escapes (often joining the Union army). In his words, “what the Negro did was to wait, look, and listen [...]. As soon [...] as it became clear that the Union armies would not or could not restore fugitive slaves, the slave began a general strike against slavery by the same methods he had used during the period of fugitive slaves.”²⁹ Following a Marxist approach, Du Bois not only centralized slavery for capitalist formation but also recognized Black resistance as essential for social transformation.

Following the war, the Reconstruction era was marked by a fierce political and economic dispute over the future of the South. Different classes formed and broke alliances in an attempt to secure their interests. Although these alliances changed depending on

27 Ibidem, p. 15-16.

28 Eric Williams further discussed the relationship between the formation of capitalism and the racialization of the world. See WILLIAMS, Eric. **Capitalism and Slavery**. New York: Capricorn Books, 1944.

29 DU BOIS, op. cit., p. 57.

the region, they followed a general pattern. Since Black men were allowed to vote during Reconstruction, Du Bois explains how the planters attempted to control the Black vote to maintain economic dominance. However, this movement was complicated by the intervention of Northerners who moved to the South after the Civil War (the so-called “carpetbaggers”), who offered Black workers civil rights and economic freedoms to gain their political support. This created a situation where Black labor had to align with the carpetbaggers and “scalawags” (white Southerners who allied with the Republican Party, which at that time defended abolition), further alienating the planter class and terrifying the poor whites who feared the rise of Black workers. An alliance was also formed between Northern industrialists and abolitionists, which ultimately swayed the West and was a key factor in the displacement of Southern agriculture.

Unfortunately, the most significant alliance that did not happen was the alliance between the Black and white workers. Du Bois explains that the Reconstruction period was a revolution from below, in which formerly enslaved Black people moved forward, “one of the most extraordinary experiments of Marxism that the world, before the Russian revolution.”³⁰ In addition to creating schools and engaging in various activities to establish free communities, they also called for the redistribution of land to workers. Still, the proletariat in America was divided into freed Blacks, Southern poor whites, and Northern skilled and common laborers. According to Du Bois, these groups “never came to see their common interests.”³¹ The elites of the North and South successfully used racism to divide the working class. White workers, particularly in the South, were given a “public and psychological wage” of perceived racial superiority, which they prized over economic solidarity with their Black counterparts.³² Du Bois explains that even labor organizations in the North were often reactionary or silent on the issue of slavery. This failure of a worker’s alliance was fatal in the struggle for true democracy, leaving the capitalists in a position of ultimate control.³³

The failure of this potential revolution gave rise to what Du Bois called the counter-revolution of property. Once Northern capitalists and Southern planters recognized their shared interest in exploiting labor and consolidating power, they aligned to suppress the political and economic gains achieved by Black workers. This era became marked by widespread corruption, as powerful individuals and corporations bought influence in government, bribed officials, and manipulated markets. Corruption transcended party lines and regional boundaries, revealing a nationwide moral and economic decay. Yet the South

30 Ibidem, p. 358.

31 Ibidem, p. 216.

32 Ibidem, p. 700.

33 In this short paper, we could not expand on the discussions of the ‘public and psychological wage’. Still, it’s important to note that the concept has been contentious among sociologists. Some downplay its significance for Du Bois, arguing that he used the term only once in *Black Reconstruction* and reducing it to access to jobs and civil rights. This narrow reading overlooks how the entire book examines how whiteness granted poor white workers recognition as Human. It also neglects the chapter “Transubstantiation of a Poor White,” which details how President Andrew Johnson, once a poor white laborer, allied with capitalists and former slaveholders to build a white, rather than proletarian, government.

placed the blame not on the war, poverty, or systemic corruption, but on Black people themselves. This counter-revolution forced Black workers back into a state of extreme exploitation, denying them the land and political power essential for genuine freedom. Thus, Black folks were pushed “back toward slavery” despite legal freedom.³⁴

Moreover, Du Bois argued that this outcome was not a victory for the white working class. By prioritizing their racial superiority, white workers abandoned their own class interests. The failure to ally with Black workers allowed the capitalist and planter classes to consolidate their power and exploit the entire working class. Du Bois demonstrates that the counter-revolution of property ultimately damaged all laborers, both Black and white, by cementing a system of racialized capitalism that kept wages low and suppressed any political or economic power they might have gained through solidarity. In short, the victory of the capitalist classes was a loss for the entire working class, which was duped into accepting a new form of racial hierarchy that perpetuated their own exploitation. In this analysis, Du Bois shows that capitalism is racialized where race is not a peripheral issue affecting only Black subjects; rather, it is a foundational mechanism of the global economic system. The racialization of the world both created and was created by capitalism — it justified the transformation of people into commodities, and it established a color line that split the working class into those who deserved wages and those who did not. By creating this racial hierarchy, capitalism secured extreme exploitation and suppressed the quality of life for the entire working class. In the same way that Black liberation could only be reached in a socialist society, the fight for a truly free working class was inseparable from the fight against racism, as it meant battling the very foundations of capitalism itself.

Towards a Conclusion

Du Boisian sociology offers a liberation-oriented framework and critiques the discipline's complicity with racialized modernity, serving as a vital correction to the historical epistemic apartheid that long excluded Black scholars. Marxist critique rightly insists that Du Bois's commitment to class analysis must not be downplayed. This is especially important for a critical Du Boisian sociology. Yet, as our analysis of the ongoing debate demonstrated, the recent Marxist critique often falls into the trap of subordinating the struggle against racial domination to a primary focus on class, thereby marginalizing the structural role of racism. Thus, such a particular Marxist critique may endure a repeating a long-standing historical tension between the Black Radical Tradition and the Marxist Tradition, where anti-racist struggles have been undermined in the name of a purportedly universal class-based movement.

After all, a close reading of *Black Reconstruction* reveals that, for Du Bois, class is not a purely economic position — it is racialized. By defining enslaved people as the ultimate

³⁴ DU BOIS, op. cit., p. 670.

exploited laborer and the cornerstone of the modern world's economic structure, Du Bois integrated slavery and race into the very genesis of capitalism. That is, he rejected the notion of slavery as merely a primitive accumulation phase preceding true class conflict. Instead, he showed that race — the hierarchical categorization of peoples and bodies to justify their commodification — was the central mechanism through which capitalism achieved its most extreme forms of exploitation.

Furthermore, Du Bois's analysis of the "splendid failure" of Reconstruction further illustrates how poor white workers, prioritizing racial superiority over economic solidarity, sacrificed their own class interests and enabled the victory of the planter-capitalist alliance.³⁵ This confirms our central argument: race and class are not subordinate to one another but are interdependent components of a totality. Their analysis, and how they politically, socially, and economically combine, must be framed — like Du Bois did — within specific social conditions. In *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois shows how the capitalist class used race to divide labor, enabling super-exploitation and maximizing profit and power. The result was a racialized system that degraded the quality of life for the entire working class, Black and white. Thus, *Black Reconstruction* remains essential as it resolves the class-versus-race dilemma not by merging the two into an abstract intersection, but by revealing their concrete, material articulation within capitalism.

The Portuguese translation of *Black Reconstruction* is thus a timely event, offering contemporary anti-racist and anti-capitalist movements a powerful framework to resist the divisive and reductionist tendencies that persist in academic analysis and political organizing. After all, the task for scholars and activists moving forward might not be to debate which category is primary, but to grasp how their interdependence creates the totality of the modern world. By analyzing capitalism as a racialized system, therefore, we can more effectively dismantle the structures that exploit and oppress the global working class, realizing the ultimate goal: the liberation of the darker races and the liberation of all workers. What project could be more profoundly Marxist?

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35 Ibidem, p. 708.