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The Co-Dependency of White Supremacy Culture and Capitalism

Allegra Bliss Kistler Ellis

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to discuss questions surrounding the intricacies and intertwining narratives of white supremacy culture and capitalism, and other systems of oppression that they fuel. For my research, I intentionally used anecdotes, essays, poems, books, and social media posts by primarily queer, trans, Black and Indigenous women and femmes. In doing so, I delve into the inherent relationship between whiteness, white exploitative institutions, and power. I discuss the history of the two systems of oppression in the United States through analyzing pillars and characteristics of white supremacy culture and capitalism, western colonized science and research, sexism, white feminism, fatphobia, whorephobia, classism, queerphobia, transphobia, environmental racism, the climate crisis, and compost. Through each of these frameworks, we arrive at the same conclusion: we should have been listening to queer and trans Black and Indigenous people of color, who have consistently connected the intertwining and violent nature of white supremacy and capitalism.

“We need to join together in a rebellion of love, persistence, commitment, and profound caring and create constellations of co-resistance, working together toward a radical alternative present based on deep reciprocity and the gorgeous generative refusal of colonial recognition.”
-Leanna Betasamosake Simpson¹

Trigger Warnings

Before beginning, I would like to give trigger warnings for what is discussed in this thesis: racism, anti-Blackness, police brutality, slavery, genocide, medical violence against Black and brown people, land displacement, white supremacy culture, white supremacists, violence from capitalism, exploitation of Black and brown people, fatphobia, whorephobia, and intersections of racism with classism, sexism, queerphobia, and transphobia, as well as the climate crises. Please take the necessary steps to ensure your mental and emotional well-being before, during, and after reading this thesis.

Land Acknowledgement

It is vital to acknowledge and honor the land this thesis was written on. The land of the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi nations of the Three Fires Confederacy.² In any discussion of systems of oppression and oppressed groups, land should not be left out in its inherent relation between the two. Separation of people from land and the disconnection between land and our bodies is a purposeful tool of colonization to further dehumanization. Land acknowledgements

¹ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 9.

² Western Michigan University, 2019.

without discussion of reparations only function to perform activism.³ The continual gentrification and raping of the land serves to continue the genocide against Indigenous peoples in this state, country, and world. Winona LaDuke, part of the Ojibwe Nation and a transformative environmental activist and land rights advocate, discusses this in her TEDxTC talk the “Seeds of Our Ancestors, Seeds of Life.”⁴ The Western capitalistic concept of land ownership directly contributes to how white society views nature and the land we walk on. Therefore, our active participation in the climate crisis is fueled by racial capitalism to further exploit this planet and those living closely and respectfully on it. Environmental justice cannot be separate from social and economic justice.⁵ The amount of connection that exists between people and environment, and therefore the dual exploitation of both, is harmful to go ignored.

Personal Biases and Disclaimers

Prior to diving into my topic, I think it is necessary to discuss my personal biases that had influence on my writing process that I worked to interrogate along the way. First and foremost, I am a white person talking about white supremacy culture and capitalism. Two systems of oppression in which I benefit from greatly, and have benefitted from generationally. While I benefit from these oppressive systems, I am also harmed by them. I have skin in the game of dismantling white supremacy culture and capitalism because — even though I am not targeted or shot down by police, or barred from institutions and social services, or abused and violated by medical professionals — my life and personhood and personality have been curated to be destructive (both to myself and others).⁶ Holding that duality—that I benefit from systems that also hurt me, and understanding my role in unlearning that destruction—has been heavy during this analysis. My processes of writing this thesis have been heavily rooted in my own self-reflection, and the interrogation of how intertwined my personality and whiteness are with these two oppressions

³ Performative activism, also called optical allyship, is defined as “the visual illusion of allyship without the actual work of allyship.” Layla F. Saad, *Me and White Supremacy* (Illinois: Sourcebooks, 2020), 228.

⁴ Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHNlel72eQc>

⁵ By environmental justice, I don’t only mean how Black and Indigenous people of color are disproportionately harmed by the climate crisis. I am also talking about settler colonialism, forcibly removing people from land, all of our collective disconnection from our bodies and the land, food justice/accessibility/sovereignty, harmful and unsustainable agricultural practices, the unjust lack of autonomy and honor of the land by institutions, and the connection between the land and all beings.

⁶ I intentionally use the word destructive to describe how my relationship with myself and how I can relate to others is impeded by white supremacy culture and the pillars of white supremacy culture, which will be discussed in a further section.

that I am fighting against. I am also a white femme-presenting person talking about two violent systems of oppression that society tends to separate me from in terms of how we as white women have consistently uplifted this violence for our own gain.⁷ To my white readers, if you find it easier to listen to me discuss racism and capitalism versus a person of color, or a Black woman, or queer and trans Black folk, please interrogate that. If it is easier for you to believe and comprehend what I am saying and how I am saying it, ask yourself why that may be and what the function of that reaction or comfortability is. Throughout this whole process, I have not once been gaslit, labelled as angry or too emotional, or had my credibility questioned. That is not the case for Black and Indigenous people of color when these conversations and topics are brought up, and especially when their research and work is published.

I have almost exclusively used research and literature – including lived experiences and social media content – from Black women and femmes, and Black and Indigenous queer and trans people of color.⁸ It was extremely important to me that I acknowledge those whose work I have read and became informed by to write this paper, and that my information comes from the people who have been saying all of this from the very beginning. In higher education and the larger public activist sphere, it may seem that relating white supremacy culture to capitalism is new, but it is in fact not.

“Racism cannot be separated from capitalism” – Angela Davis, n.d.

“The evils of capitalism are as real as the evils of militarism and evils of racism. The problems of racial injustice and economic injustice cannot be solved without a radical redistribution of political and economic power.” – MLKJ, 1967

“It’s impossible for a white person to believe in capitalism and not believe in racism. You can’t have capitalism without racism.” – Malcom X, 1964

“Capitalism is essentially racist; racism is essentially capitalist” Ibram X. Kendi, 2019

⁷ Stephanie Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (Yale University Press, 2019).

⁸ I use femme here to include the entity of femininity, as not being inherently related to women but to anyone who identifies with femininity. Not all women are femme and not all femme presenting people identify as women, however violence is enacted on both. Femme allows for critique of gender binary and can also operate within the binary. I use this word to avoid explicitly gendered language and capture an essence of being. Femme is not one way, it is fluid.

I also would like to be very clear that I have purposefully used personal narratives and posts on social media by Black and brown activists to inform my writing. Social media is readily discredited as being viable sources of information, especially when coming from Black and brown people. The inaccessibility of publishing and higher education makes the validity and credibility of social media even more important, particularly with content discussing lived experiences. If you only read books or watch content written by white people, widen your scope.⁹ I wanted to be intentional about critiquing higher education and research institutions by using anecdotes and social media posts directly from Black and brown people, not necessarily articles that are published by whitewashed and generally accepted journals. The information I have read, synthesized, and based my writing on would not normally be found in “accredited institutions of higher learning” due to the inaccessibility, gate-keeping, and tone-policing of academia.

White supremacy is not a sufficient term to describe the extent of the violence Black and Indigenous people of color face daily.¹⁰ I am intentionally using the phrase white supremacy culture because I think it is important to normalize that term to all of whiteness and white violence, instead of only thinking of it when white supremacist or extremist groups are mentioned. The supposedly radical notion of using this phrase instead of racism to describe the interconnected aspects of society – that systematically disenfranchise people of color and enacts constant violence on them – serves to separate the white individual from the white system(s). This, therefore, separates the hoarding of power, violent exploitation, and violent expansion from “normal” white behavior. It is very easy for us as white people to try to distance ourselves from violence attributed to “overt” or “extreme” anti-Black white violence, and we do it frequently. But if we don’t understand that white supremacy is OUR problem as white people to fix, if we don’t see how our liberation is also wrapped up in the destruction of these systems, and therefore see how we reflect those values and function to uphold said systems, we will continue to place the burden on Black women and femmes, who will bear the brunt of this work.¹¹

⁹ If you give credit and praise to Angela Davis or Layla F Saad – both published authors – but not Ericka Hart (racial and social justice activist on Instagram) or Megan Thee Stallion (rapper and singer) or the mothers of the Black boys and men who were murdered by the police, you might need to think about where your anti-Blackness starts and ends, and how that contributes to credibility politics and elitism in academics.

¹⁰ Ericka Hart, 2020

¹¹ With the increased normalization and use of this phrase white supremacy culture, I would like to encourage us to critique potential white superiority that stems from it. White supremacy does not mean we as white people are supreme or superior. This violent mentality has been ingrained in our behaviors, thought processes, and actions, and we need to actively critique our socializations to unlearn this lie.

“White people of all genders being violent is not new in this country, so the usage of “white supremacist” makes it seem like it’s something else rather than white people – white people-ing. They are behaving consistent with the power their whiteness confers.” – (Ericka Hart, 2020)

If you as the reader could have one significant takeaway from this piece of writing, I would love it to be curiosity. It has always been hard for me to separate my emotions from anything I do, so I might sound angry, saddened, pessimistic, or cynical throughout this piece. I am very passionate about what I discuss in the following paragraphs and sections, and I hope that that is tangible. I want you as the reader to feel a whole spectrum of emotions while reading, and I would love for you to lean in to those emotions, thought processes, and body reactions. I don’t believe that we can do sustainable or transformative activist work without realizing how we hold emotion and feeling in our body, whatever that may look like for you, and however that is accessible to you. I have had to take steps back from my writing and editing process and lean in to my emotions to work on practicing gentleness and curiosity with them. The gritty work of unpacking our own internal positionalities, socialization(s), racial identity/identities, and other embodied trauma is needed to make this work sustainable and impactful. To aid in that personal reflection, I have included intentional questions at the end of each section. I encourage you to read this piece slowly, don’t rush through it. I don’t want this to be a passive experience for you as the reader. I want this to spark thoughts and questions, and as the writer, I am requesting your active participation.

A Brief and Non-Exhaustive History on the Intertwinement of Racism and Capitalism in the Americas and Particularly the United States

Very rarely in history classes or books in K-12 education, and higher education, do we see capitalism and racism being attributed as forming together in the United States. The fact that one has to actively search for textbooks and research – again, mainly conducted by Black and Indigenous people and people of color – on this topic goes to show how intensely and purposefully hidden this work is. Audrey Smedley and Brian Smedley, in their literature *Race in North America*, discuss how capitalism started in England in the sixteenth century with the fall of the feudal system, and was ingrained into whiteness. It was then transferred to and coupled with colorism and racism in the Americas through violent and consistent colonization and African

slavery.¹² The transfer of labor and land into commodities later globalized into a widening world market, and the transformation of communal lands and forests into private property owned by landowners, marked the start of early capitalism at the fall of a feudal society.

The insidiousness of “merchant capitalism fostered other values: individualism, absolute private property, and the unrestrained accumulation of wealth” and have become behavioral traits of this oppressive system.¹³ Where we saw a separation of people from land, we also saw a separation of people from kin. Power and wealth – and the protection from the powerful and wealthy – became more important than the support of family and friends. Capitalist ideology and capitalist mentality brought forth “possessive individualism” and the commodification of people and land even before Europeans fully turned to African slavery.¹⁴ This ideology set the stage for easy dehumanization of people in the name of exponential growth and power.

To effectively create an environment and systems that systemically exploits an entire race of people, those in power have to establish a baseline of race; a normalization to compare everything else to. Whiteness is just that. Race and whiteness specifically were created to justify the exploitation of and violence on Black and brown people. The nineteenth century brought forth the global development of the white racial superiority where “theories of racial history were transformed into theories of world history. Facts that did not fit the racial worldview of white superiority and black degradation were ignored, deleted, distorted, or obfuscated.”¹⁵ This is where we see the culmination of capitalism and racism into racial capitalism in binary form.

When I first read this book a few years ago, one of the biggest takeaways I had was that race and racism in the Americas started off as an economic ploy. Racial capitalism started on the plantation. Matthew Desmond, in his article in the New York Times under the *1619 Project*, affirms that “slavery was undeniably a font of phenomenal wealth.”¹⁶ The specificity of the horror and trauma that separates African slavery in the Americas from other eras of slavery in past countries histories is the undeniable willingness of white plantation owners to violently exploit, through all aspects of life, Black people in the drive for cash crop and cotton economic expansion;

¹² Audrey Smedley and Brian D. Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2012).

¹³ Smedley and Smedley, *Race in North America*, 46.

¹⁴ Smedley and Smedley, *Race in North America*, 48.

¹⁵ Smedley and Smedley, *Race in North America*, 244.

¹⁶ Matthew Desmond, “In order to understand the brutality of American capitalism, you have to start on the plantation,” *The New York Times Magazine* The 1619 Project, August 2019.

through the forcing of violent will on “seemingly endless supplies of land and labor” that was consistently and unflinchingly stolen.¹⁷

This mentality of possessive individualism, the inherent right to land, and violent exploitation of Black and brown people and communities continues to go on. Canada is violently forcing the Wet’suwet’en people off of their land, breaking treaties, destroying people and their environment, for the expansion of a pipeline.¹⁸ Indigenous communities in the United States are historically left without clean drinking water or access to federal social services. The number of parallels between historical and contemporary racial capitalistic violence is endless, and proves that systems of oppression have not ended, they’ve simply changed shape. Desmond further connects our current form of capitalism – late capitalism – to early capitalism on the plantation by relating the methodical hierarchy of business plantation owners created as paving the path to corporate business management; capitalism rooted in dehumanization and the willingness to save and protect corporations over the lives of people and the planet.^{19,20} Slavery was sheer brutality, but it wasn’t rash. It is easier to see 250 years of slavery as a blip in history, as careless and dumb racism, when in reality it was thought-out and well-planned to build white fortunes on the backs of Black people through the denial of their freedoms. This form of anti-Black racist corporate violence still exists because the very nature of capitalism is still the same: to have someone at the bottom to exploit.²¹ Just look at who owns the largest companies in the United States, what their income is versus their employees, and who predominantly serves as the labor force. “Corporate America” was built on the values of racial capitalism with the purpose of expansion through the exploitation of Black and brown people and communities. Everything that is created from this system is infected, and the violence that is ingrained in these systems and will not change unless we destroy and rebuild said systems.

Questions to consider and ask yourself:

1. Why does world history as it’s taught in the United States only seem to comprise of the study of Western European countries?

¹⁷ Desmond, “In order to understand the brutality of American capitalism, you have to start on the plantation,” 32.

¹⁸ Allen (@lilnativeboy), “Link to the Wet’suwet’en Strong: SUPPORTER TOOLKIT,” Instagram, February 13, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B8lumXiAGAF/>

¹⁹ Desmond, “In order to understand the brutality of American capitalism, you have to start on the plantation.”

²⁰ The United States’ response to the COVID-19 pandemic is an apt and current example of this.

²¹ Ericka Hart and Ebony Donnley, “Racial and Social Justice 202,” Webinar: May 12, 2020

2. If I am having a disbelieving or adverse reaction to the concept of white supremacy culture and capitalism being integral to each other, what function does that reaction serve to uphold oppressive systems?
3. Where do I see the intertwinement of racial capitalism in my own life? In my job?

Pillars of White Supremacy Culture (and therefore of capitalism)

The cultivation and rootedness of capitalism and white supremacy culture in the United States is sustained through its infection in every part of our society and individual selves. Through 250 years of slavery, 90 years of Jim Crow laws, 60 years of separate but equal, 35 years of racist housing policy, and rampant gentrification, the internalization of these two oppressive systems is strong.²² Tema Okun and Kenneth Jones cover characteristics and pillars of white supremacy culture in their workbook *Dismantling Racism: A workbook for Social Change Groups*, and these characteristics can and should be applied to large institutions as well as our individual personalities and behavior.²³

- Perfectionism
- Sense of Urgency
- Defensiveness
- Quantity over Quality
- Worship of the Written Word
- Only one Right Way
- Paternalism
- Either/or Thinking
- Power Hoarding
- Fear of Open Conflict
- Individualism
- I'm the Only One
- Progress is bigger, more
- Objectivity
- Right to Comfort
- Politeness

In our jobs or professions, the need to have perfect work (perfectionism), have to work quickly and “efficiently” (sense of urgency + quantity over quality), have to abide by a strict set of laws or rules (worship of the written word), binary decision making (either/or thinking), don’t want to upset the workspace (fear of open conflict), and have to separate emotions from thinking (objectivity), all functioning to conform each of us into what normalized whiteness is: docile, listening to the higher ups, not breaking rules, prioritizing work over health, and competing for

²² Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic* (June 2014), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

²³ Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups* (Online: ChangeWork & dRworks, 2001), <https://www.dismantlingracism.org/>, http://www.cwsworkshop.org/PARC_site_B/dr-culture.html.

power. The ways in which these pillars serve to uphold white supremacy culture and capitalism are not only related to where we work or the institutions that exist in our society, but how we view ourselves and especially how we view and police others. We've all seen or experienced how easy it is to become defensive when discussing oppressive systems, especially if we benefit from that system. We've experienced the tightening in our bodies when conflict arises, or when we break a rule. These two institutionalized oppressive systems are so ingrained in us that they show up in our bodies when we come face-to-face with how we participate within them or try to dismantle them. Understanding how severely white supremacy culture and capitalism are intertwined means understanding how our behaviors and thought processes are intertwined in them.

Given the previously painted history of capitalism in the United States by Smedley & Smedley and Desmond, drawing connections between pillars of white supremacy and capitalism is arguably evident. It also brings to the conversation the fact that capitalism IS white supremacy culture and vice versa. Quantity over quality, either/or thinking, power hoarding, individualism, and progress is always bigger are the more obvious pillars that can be easily attributed to capitalism.²⁴ We see these five pillars consistently with corporate scandals, multi-billionaires like Jeff Bezos, corporations being given the rights of a human being, but not granting those same rights to land or bodies of water.²⁵ The stated pillars also give context behind the racist and classist saying "pick yourself up by your bootstrap." That kind of assumed individualism and ability to have power ignores the history of inherited wealth at the expense and murders of Black and Indigenous people. Nell Irvin Painter, an American historian and the author of *The History of White People*, says poignantly that "[white] people fabricated the idea of race as a means to justify subordination."²⁷ If racism and capitalism aren't connected or relatable, then why is it that we consistently see neo-liberal exploitation forced upon Indigenous people and land, and Black and brown communities? Why is it that the land that is destroyed for trans-national corporate profit is of Black Indigenous people in the Global South (Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela)?²⁸ Why are

²⁴ Jones and Okun, *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups*

²⁵ Winona LaDuke, "Seeds of Our Ancestors, Seeds of Life," filmed March 2012 at TEDxTC, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHNle172eQc>

²⁶ Those rights are also not given to people previously incarcerated, those seeking refuge or citizenship, people who don't have access to transportation or the internet, people who can't read, non-English speakers, and so many others.

²⁷ Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2010).

²⁸ Not only in the Global South, but through Indigenous lands here in the so called United States. National corporate profit thrives off the destruction and exploitation of land and those who live closely upon it. There is a reason why oil pipelines don't go through predominantly white neighborhoods and communities, and almost always force their way

factories and mills and landfills and polluted water all in and surrounding communities of color (the East side of Kalamazoo, MI, Flint, MI, Native American reservations)? Why does the military occupy neighborhoods, nations, and countries of predominantly Black and brown people (Palestine, the National Guard during Black Lives Matter protests, police)? White supremacy and capitalism need each other and are essential to each other's survival through views on Black and brown bodies and the value of exploitation for profit. This begs the question, what is whiteness if not the compilation, complacency, and internalization of white supremacy culture and capitalism as personality?

Need for control and the constant policing we do on ourselves to remain “productive” cycle directly into anti-Black racism and the dismissal of racist poverty. If it has been ingrained in you by a capitalist society that you yourself need to amass power and wealth through “hard work” at the sacrifice of your mental and physical health, it's easy to judge those who don't have access to that privilege. Anti-Black racist poverty is fueled by the dehumanization of Black people and people of color

Questions to consider and ask yourself:

1. If whiteness is the internalization of white supremacy culture and capitalism as personality, how does my personality fit into that? What do I look like and who am I without those power structures?
2. Can I point out specific behaviors of mine that are reflective of pillars of white supremacy? If I can't, what internal work do I need to do with myself to be able to?
3. What practices can I use to interrogate how I reaffirm white supremacy culture within myself (and therefore society)?

Western Science and Colonization

Westernized science and research has been used as a tool for white supremacy culture and capitalism since its inception in the Americas. It has been used to discredit the lived experiences of people of color, exploit Black women and femmes through violence and abuse, and justify white superiority by making up racist and biased information about people of color.²⁹ The severity of how deep this violence extends to goes from the creation of the study of gynecology through raping and violating Black women, the continual ignorance of Black women and femmes pain in

through sacred Indigenous lands. Racial capitalism functions to expand and protect whiteness and white institutions, always.

²⁹ Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to Present* (Doubleday, 2007).

medicine, and the ignorance of accurate histories of Black and Indigenous people of color, to appropriating and profiting off surface level cultural aspects like yoga.³⁰ Shreena Gandhi and Lillie Wolff, in their article *Yoga and the Roots of Cultural Appropriation*, say that “white supremacy equals exchanging cultural grounding for the unearned power and privilege of whiteness” that eventually leads to the elitism and capitalization of knowledge, making any knowledge or information only valid if proven by western science and empirical research.³¹ Colonized western science is painted to be wholly and inherently rational while any other culture that is not rooted in Westernized empirical data is assumed irrational and child’s play.

Colonization is not a single or direct systemic action. Genocide and colonized knowledge in education institutions are of the same coin, enacting violence for the same reason, just at different paces. Many white women stereotypically capitalize on yoga as only a form of exercise, separate from its connection to spirituality and grounding intentions. This superficial engagement is a purposeful and sustainable form of long-term colonization of yoga-practicing cultures. The continual colonization of the land is significant to the colonization and exploitation of Indigenous people and communities because of our society’s disregard for non-white/western science and modes of measuring cultural meanings. What is decidedly factual or true “is guided by a body of concepts, formal procedures, specific rules, methodologies, and perspectives that carry the presumption of objectivity and neutrality,” that remain rooted in the creation, violence, and normalization of whiteness as the standard.³² The imperialistic colonization of knowledge also gives way to the generational stealing of information from Black, brown, and Indigenous individuals and communities for the profit of higher education and corporate institutions; at the same time dismissing those communities and ignoring their voices. White institutions continually profit off of emotional and intellectual labor of Black and Indigenous women and femmes, specifically.

Questions to consider and ask yourself:

1. What are the statistics of maternal and infant mortality in my city? Have those statistics been interrogated for demographic-specific numbers? When hearing about Black maternal and infant death rates, do I shy away from remembering that these are actual people, and not just numbers?

³⁰ Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to Present*.

³¹ Shreena Gandhi and Lillie Wolff, “Yoga and the Roots of Cultural Appropriation,” *Praxis Center*, December 19, 2017, <https://www.kzoo.edu/praxis/yoga/>.

³² Smedley and Smedley, *Race in North America*, 214

2. Do I know and understand the difference between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation?
3. When and where do I find myself doubting the lived experiences of Black and Indigenous people of color?
4. How do I participate in making institutions and education — including movement work — less accessible? How can I shift that inaccessibility to accessibility? What would that look like in my spaces?

Sexism and Feminism Under White Supremacy Culture and Capitalism

History books talk about the first feminist movement as succeeding with all women gaining the right to vote with the 19th amendment in 1920. The second wave of feminism in the late 1900's is applauded for winning reproductive rights in the forms of access to birth control and the right to abortion. However, these histories ignore the fact that Black women were excluded from the women's rights marches led by Susan B. Anthony in the beginning of the 20th century, that Chinese immigrant women didn't get the right to vote until 1943, Native American women until 1948, Japanese-American women until 1952, and African-American women until 1965.³³ Even though Black and Indigenous women, as well as immigrant women, were crucial to the women's suffrage movement, it took citizenship and civil rights acts and laws to establish voting for all women.

The birth control and reproductive health movement in the United States towards the end of the 20th century was laden with anti-Black eugenicist mindsets led by Margaret Sanger — who we are taught in history classes was the pioneer for women's health rights. Birth control and pre-trial progesterone pills were tested on unknowing Puerto Rican women, sterilizing whole generations.³⁴ Forced and unconsensual sterilization of Black and Indigenous women aided in continual genocide, and Margaret Sanger prided her work on ridding the country of people she deemed as lazy and poor.³⁵ This kind of interrogation of the feminist movements has still not been done by white feminists or (white) feminist movements. As Angela Davis writes in her literature *Women Race & Class*, “the abortion rights activists of the early 1970's should have examined the history of their movement. Had they done so, they might have understood why so many of their Black sisters adopted a posture of suspicion towards their cause.”³⁶ She goes on, “over the last decade, the struggle against sterilization abuse has been waged primarily by Puerto Rican, Black, Chicana, and

³³ Wikipedia, “Voting rights in the United States,” (July 2020).

³⁴ Angela Davis, *Women Race & Class* (New York: Random Press, 1981).

³⁵ Davis, *Women Race & Class*.

³⁶ Davis, *Women Race & Class*, 215.

Native American women. Their cause has not yet been embraced by the women's movement as a whole."³⁷ The ignorance of the (white) feminist movement and the lack of interrogation on intersectionality — or ways that white supremacy culture and capitalism play into the movement — inherently makes it ineffective, unsustainable, and functioning to reify patriarchy and white supremacy culture.

With white supremacy culture and capitalism acting as a basis or a catalyst for all other forms of oppression to thrive, the interrogation of how oppression is fought is a necessity. No one oppression is a single issue, just like we are not single-dimensional beings; it is intimately connected to all other oppressions and identities. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a lawyer and professor at UCLA and Columbia School of Law, coined the term *intersectionality* to discuss the specific experiences of those with multiple oppressed identities, namely Black women. She, along with scholars like Angela Davis, bell hooks, and Audre Lorde, interrogate the racist and for-profit history of the feminist movement in its responses to institutionalized sexism. Sexism, like other, more transient oppressions such as classism or heterosexism, has notoriously been weaponized and made fluid by white women. As white women, it is much easier to ignore sexism if racism is not added, same goes to white queer people or white impoverished people. White women have the specific ability to ignore sexism to reap the benefits of racism. Appealing to white men or striving to reach equality with white men has led to, in every wave of feminism, the sacrifice and dismissal of women of color. The call for equality — giving everyone the same amount — in place of equity — proportioning supply based on need as determined by access and power — by white women to reach the privilege of white men systemically discounts Black and brown women. This closeness and relatedness to whiteness allows for ignoring one-dimensional sexism and sexist experiences because of the relation to white men and the upper class.³⁸ White women with class privilege could and can always experience patriarchy and still reap the benefits of whiteness, unlike women and femmes of color. Cis white women and cis Black men have the specific privilege of being able to lean back on the systems they benefit from, racism and sexism, continually at the violent expense of Black women and femmes.^{39 40}

³⁷ Davis, *Women Race & Class*, 221.

³⁸ Davis, *Women Race & Class*.

³⁹ bell hooks.

⁴⁰ Cis, meaning cisgender, means that you identify with the sex you were assigned at birth. This readily plays into binary ways of thinking/existing, and an aspect of transphobia is ignoring the existence of multiple sexes (biological) and genders.

White women were enslavers just like white men. That too is casually overlooked when feminist movements are discussed. The generationally ingrained superiority that white women have over Black women and women of color is not so easily unlearned with sayings like “I’m an intersectional feminist,” or having the mentality that white men oppress us (white women) too. For feminism and feminist theory to be effective, it has to be actively anti-racist, and “just because they [white women] participated in anti-racist struggle did not mean that they had divested of white supremacy, of notions that they were superior to Black females, more informed, better educated, more suited to “lead” a movement.”⁴¹ If you say you are a feminist, then you must be anti-racist and anti-capitalist too.

The exploitation of women and femmes of color under the turned-up noses of the white women in the feminist movements has been purposefully orchestrated to be ignored by those who benefit from white supremacy culture and capitalism. Many health-related things we take for granted, like hormonal birth control and the practice of gynecology, were formed on the acute for-profit violence and dehumanization of Black and Indigenous women. We see the same occurrences happening contemporarily, with the maternal and infant death rates being increasingly higher in Black communities than white ones.⁴² Black women and femmes being ignored or labeled dramatic when seeking medical services. Body bags being shipped to Native American reservations instead of pandemic medical and food supplies.⁴³ Sexism is so closely tied to white supremacy culture and capitalism, and if we want to fight one we have to dismantle the others.

Questions to consider and ask yourself:

1. Is my feminism intersectional? Do I feel a need to call myself an intersectional feminist to differentiate myself from other exclusionary feminists? Why do I feel the need to label myself as being separate – or better – from those in the same movement?
2. Do I only look up to “feminists” like Gloria Steinem and Hillary Clinton? If yes, why? Do I police how non-white feminists express their liberation and movement work? Where do I have internalized sexism in my thought processes and behaviors?
3. Where and how can I broaden my understanding of feminist movements around the world to center trans women and Black and Indigenous women of color?

⁴¹ bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (New York: South End Press), 56.

⁴² YWCA, “Maternal Health and Women of Color,” YWCA, January 2017, 1-3.

⁴³ Erik Ortiz, “Native American health center asked for COVID-19 supplies. It got body bags instead.” *NBC News*, May 5, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/native-american-health-center-asked-covid-19-supplies-they-got-n1200246>

Anti-Black Racism Explaining Fatphobia and Whorephobia

Many of the “phobias” that exist in social justice discussion, like fatphobia and whorephobia, are rooted in anti-Blackness and exploitatively racist beauty standards. “Preferences” we think we have for who we like to date, who we are attracted to, who we gravitate to, are all influenced by Eurocentric beauty standards created in an anti-Black white supremacist society. An attraction to or having a “type” of skinny, athletic bodied white women comes from the constant and persistent societal aversion and disgust towards Black and brown women and femmes. Continual unconsensual objectification of Black femme bodies aides in dehumanizing them. Your “type” or attraction preference is not of your own doing.⁴⁴ It needs to be interrogated for how it participates in anti-Black racial capitalism. Cultural appropriation plays a large role in cultural dehumanization, where people of non-white cultures are shamed for their cultural practices, but when white people “adopt” (re: steal) those practices, we are praised. Body sizes and types are different for people of different races, and the exotification of “trending” body types is only deemed socially beautiful if the person is white or has lighter skin. Fatphobia is inherently anti-Black women and femmes.⁴⁵ There are so many different ways that white society holds power and blame over Black and brown people, and there are many intricacies to what maintains fatphobia and how it is anti-Black. The reason fatphobia exists is because of anti-Blackness. We have ascribed negative associations to fatness due to Eurocentric beauty standards, food apartheid, land removal, red-lining, gentrification, and health crises.⁴⁶

Sex work is work. Decriminalize sex work.

Whorephobia is the hatred and oppression of, and violence and discrimination towards sex workers. If we connect who is systemically oppressed in western society and who is most discriminated against in job markets, we will find that queer and trans Black people especially Black femmes are left without societal safety nets or support. Whorephobia is anti-Black and supports the maintenance of white supremacy culture and capitalism because the people who are

⁴⁴ Hart, “Racial and Social Justice 202”

⁴⁵ Any person who takes up more space and doesn’t have white skin is policed on body size, what food they eat, what they wear, and how they hold themselves.

⁴⁶ Racism, ableism, sexism, and heterosexism are all health crises because of the way trauma manifests in our bodies in reaction to experiencing chronic stress from oppression.

systemically oppressed are not being exploited through and for the benefit of white institutions when they work for themselves.

Sex work and sex trafficking are two completely different things. Sex work is a consensual career choice; sex trafficking is unconsensual violence and enslavement. Our society has a tendency to punish people for voluntarily trying to make a living outside of what is deemed societally acceptable. Instead of questioning and interrogating the ways in which institutions functioning under white supremacy culture and capitalism create environments for homelessness and unstable income, we look to and blame the individual. Legislature like SESTA (Stop Enabling Sex Trafficking Act) and FOSTA (Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act) were created to continue to harm Black trans women and femmes, and trans women/femmes of color, and stop them from making profit in the name of fighting sex trafficking.⁴⁷ If capitalist society can't do what it has been created to do - exploit women and femmes of color for white institutional gain - then it will do everything in its power to limit, arrest, and kill said women and femmes to violently remove their body autonomy. Politicians saying they're against sex trafficking and therefore support the increased police presence in predominantly Black and brown neighborhoods are actually saying that they are against Black and brown entrepreneurs. Increased police presence also increases community policing leading to greater criminalization - which affects children through the school to prison pipeline - and is another form of dominance and power hoarding. Police presence adds allowances for white people to continue to feel entitled to Black and brown bodies. The criminalization of sex work is not unique but is specific in the sense that it explicitly utilizes physical violence and control over Black bodies. Similar if not the same type of control and violence exists in other job environments and even schools through constant police; in every environment, Black bodies are policed. Like any other job sex work has the potential to be dangerous and unsafe. Sexual assault in corporate offices and racial discrimination in every job field is already rampant. Putting sex workers into a separate job category that pities them or infantilizes them ignores the exploitation and violence that Black queer and trans women and femmes experience in every other job and aspect of society. Listen to sex workers when they say that legislature like SESTA/FOSTA removes their already limited safety nets accessible online and puts them more at risk of experiencing danger and violence when working.

⁴⁷ (@radicalroadmaps), "made this into a more finished handout," Instagram, September 18, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B2jplO9Af3z/?igshid=1vx7cv0rwz0az>

Questions to consider and ask yourself:

1. Do I police people on what they eat and the clothes they wear? Do I hold judgements towards people whose bodies look different than mine? Why do I feel the need to do that? What function does policing others bodies that have in my life? Do I only police Black women of color?
2. How do I exoticize Black and Indigenous people of color? Do I do it purposefully to increase my comfortability with the racist status quo in our society?
3. Why does someone's profession make me uncomfortable? Why can I watch movies that glorify sex workers but then shame and police people in my life for doing the same thing? Why am I more comfortable with a billionaire exploiting thousands of workers than I am with a sex worker making their own money consensually and loving their job? Why am I disgusted by one and not the other?



@radicalroadmaps

Classism: The Power-Hoarding of the Elite Made Allowable by White Supremacy & Capitalism

Classism, like sexism, is another of what I'd call transient oppressions when experienced by white people. Having white privilege makes classism an entirely different entity than experiencing classism and racism jointly. Classism and "class separation was [and is] temporal and situational...class barriers can be transcended; face barriers cannot," and this is where we see impoverished white communities consistently voting against their best economic interests to appease their white worldview.⁴⁸ The white racial worldview is addicting and insidious, making it so that white people, regardless of social class or economic status, adhere to their whiteness for the inherent wealth and power it creates.⁴⁹

The increasingly widening wealth gap in the United States is a symptom of capitalism, specifically visible due to late capitalism. Capitalism creates a system of haves and have-nots, and the longer it thrives on other systems of oppression, the existence of a middle class dwindles. As we are seeing now, resistance to defund racist and violent institutions like the police is rooted in the fact that the police are what protect capitalism (and therefore whiteness). Not just as a violent institution or force of people, but as a culture that monitors productivity and associates how productive you are to your work and value as an individual. Capitalism breeds classism, and Davis brings up the point that, while individual acts of sexism and racism need to be interrogated and called out and in, it is the employers, capitalists, politicians, and policy makers who are the real enemies.⁵⁰ Those who hold power, especially fiscal power, work to consistently reestablish the status quo of making the rich richer and keeping the poor poorer.

Inherited wealth is a prime example of how white supremacy culture and capitalism are intertwined. White people had from around the 1620's to 1964 to amass wealth, whereas Black and African-American people and communities weren't legally, socially, or economically able to start until 1964.⁵¹ What followed, racial discrimination, defunded inner-city schools, redlining, housing segregation, gentrification, school-to-prison-pipelines, mass incarceration, and furthered income disparities, worked to make generational wealth impossible for Black people and communities. This is also where we see cyclical poverty being weaponized by white institutions to

⁴⁸ Smedley and Smedley, *Race in North America*, 209.

⁴⁹ Smedley and Smedley, *Race in North America*.

⁵⁰ Davis, *Women Race & Class*.

⁵¹ Pinto, Erica. "The Unequal Opportunity Race."

keep Black communities and communities of color poor and disenfranchised: banks not giving out loans to Black people, assets and inner-family monies being passed down generation after generation being white-specific because of how racial capitalism has formulated whiteness as being inherent to access to and power of monetary wealth. Capitalism and white supremacy culture cultivated the environment for classism and racial class struggle (and violence) to survive, and if we want to talk about closing the disparaging wealth gap in the U.S., we need to center anti-racism and anti-capitalism, focusing on the voices of Black femmes and Black queer and trans folk.

“In any workplace where white people retain most of the leadership positions, control the decision making (especially over who gets hired and fired), and are overall receiving the largest share of pay, “diversification” efforts are really just tokenization” - @thecomradecloset⁵²

Questions to consider and ask yourself:

1. What function does donating money to Black and brown organizations serve? Am I trying to alleviate feelings of guilt? Do I truly value the redistribution of wealth?
2. Do I blame the individual instead of systems of oppression and institutions of power?
3. What do monetary reparations mean to me? Do I have a practice of reparations? Do I research where my money is going before donating to a non-profit? Why do I inherently trust non-profits but feel uncomfortable directly redistributing money to Black and brown people and organizations in my own community?

Queerphobia and Transphobia: Defenders of White Supremacy and Capitalism

The concept of the gender binary and binary ways of thinking comes directly from white colonization rooted in capitalism and exploitation. As previously discussed and sociologically speaking, capitalism started in England with the fall of the Feudal system, and the mentalities and behaviors that came from that were instilled in those enslaved and colonized. That includes traits of white supremacy culture and capitalism like either/or thinking, worship of the written word, only one right way of thinking, and paternalism. Before white colonization, the existence of trans and queer folk in Indigenous cultures all over the world was normalized; the objectification and ostracizing of queer identities came with colonization.⁵³

“Over the years, when I’ve asked different Nishnaabeg elders about queerness, they often say that we didn’t have that. Then when I ask if two women ever lived together intimately, without men, they will remember stories of queer couples, not as queer people, but just people who lived like that, as something that wasn’t a big deal, as if it were a normal inconsequential part of life. What

⁵² (@thecomradecloset), “A short and straightforward post as I work on some bigger and more complicated projects,” Instagram, July 29, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B0g859rAv0W/?igshid=1askpmmj6u1sv>

⁵³ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*.

these elders and Alex are describing is a gender variance that existed in many Indigenous communities prior to the strategic implanting of the colonial gender binary.”⁵⁴

The very existence of queerness allows for the existence of variety, of diversity, of divesting from conformity and assimilation. Institutions of power fear that for the very reason that it would be more difficult to control and exploit people if they had “individual self-determination or agency.”⁵⁵ Simpson discusses queerness as survival. Being fluid in our identities and not adhering to gender roles enables us to have the ability to hone multiple skills and talents, making us more versatile humans of our own determination.⁵⁶

“All of this evidence points to what Two Spirit and queer (2SQ) people have always known from living as 2SQ in settler colonialism: 2SQ bodies and the knowledge and practices those bodies house as Indigenous political orders were seen as an extreme threat to settler society, sovereignty, dispossession, and the project of colonization, colonialism, and assimilation.”⁵⁷

Body autonomy is a powerful tool for self-respect and self-love, as well as community respect and connection. Queerness is inherently resilient, which is why colonial institutions used Jesuit missionaries, social workers, teachers, and social service networks to force the assimilation of the gender binary.⁵⁸ Simpson writes about assimilation and coercion as forms of exploitation, “coercing someone into wearing something they are not comfortable wearing, using gendered pronouns that they do not want us to use, erasing queerness from every corner of the universe” and making non-binary genders and identities hated forms of existence function to maintain the rigidity of control.⁵⁹ We still see this with the murders of Black trans women at the hands of police and cis men, which is why genocide and colonization can never be referred to as things of the past; we will never be in a post-racist/sexist/classist country while racist white institutions exist to further their exploitative rule. These systems that stem from exploitation, colonial rule, anti-Blackness, anti-indigeneity, anti-queerness, and colorism just change shape, and are causing the same violent destruction as they were hundreds of years ago. The internalization of these exploitative systems makes white supremacy culture and capitalism so insidious and sustainable.

⁵⁴ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, 123.

⁵⁵ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, 129.

⁵⁶ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*.

⁵⁷ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, 126.

⁵⁸ For more information on Jesuit missionaries read *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

⁵⁹ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, 130.

Similar to classism and sexism, white queers have the ability to fall back on their whiteness to maintain the benefits of racism. The transphobia and racism that exists in the queer community is evidence that whiteness holds its own power, and that power is stronger and more addicting than anti-queer and sexist oppression. In *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements*, Charlene Carruthers discusses this, as well as the necessity of transformative movements connecting different oppressions to one another, and our own personal behaviors and motivations behind activism.⁶⁰

Black and Indigenous queer and trans people should be the focus and centralized leaders of all activism because of the power of queerness to destroy institutions that uphold racial capitalism. Our movements will remain stagnant and one-dimensional if cisgender heterosexual people continue to ignore the existence and radicalness of Black and Indigenous queer and trans folk. Pride as a march and month long celebration started out as protests and riots against police brutality led by Marsha P. Johnson, a Black trans woman.⁶¹ Continuing to forget that pride exists because of anti-racist and anti-capitalist rioting means that our community will do exactly what white supremacy culture and capitalism want it to: exploit the work and lives of Black and brown people while ignoring the violence they experience at the hands of white people and institutions.

“I don’t think we would be where we are today, encouraging even larger numbers of people to think within an abolitionist frame had not the trans community taught us that it is possible to effectively challenge that which is considered the very foundation of our sense of normalcy.”

- Angela Davis

Questions to consider and ask yourself:

1. What does gender mean to me? How do I express it? What would it look like if we lived in a society without gender roles? Where do I hold judgements for trans and non-binary folk? Does queerness make me uncomfortable? Why? How does that serve me in my own identities?
2. Do I feel the need to police other people’s gender expression? What practices can I adopt to cycle out of that mentality? Is my queerness anti-capitalist and anti-racist? What practices do I have to hold myself and other white members in the LGBTQA+ community accountable to checking ourselves for anti-Blackness, transphobia, or classism?

Poetry Interlude: “Genesissy” by Danez Smith

⁶⁰ Charlene Carruthers, *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements* (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2018).

⁶¹ (@mpjinstitute), “PRIDE WAS A PROTEST. PRIDE WAS A RIOT,” Instagram, June 1, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CA.5a035Ausz/?igshid=1utm6ly7x91ac>

and on the 8th day, God said “let there be fierce”
and that’s the story of the first snap
the hand’s humble attempt at thunder,
a small sky troubled by attitude

and on the 9th day, God said “Bitch! Work!”
and Adam learned to duck walk, dip, pose, death drop
Eve became the fruit herself, stared the lion in the eye
and dared the queen to bite

and on the 10th day, God wore
a blood red sequin body suit, dropped it low,
called it a sunset

and on the 11th day, God said “Guuuuuuuuuuurl, come here”
and the trees leaned in for gossip
the water went wild for the tea
the air tight with shade

and on the 12th day, Jesus wept
sad so many of his sons would shame his sons
for walking a daughter’s stride
for how his children would learn to hate the kids

and on the 13th day, God barely moved
he laid around Heaven dreaming of glitter,
pleased with the shine of it
sad so many of his children
would come home covered in it
the parades cancelled due to a rain
of fists and insults and bullets and rope

and on the 14th day, God
just didn't know what to do with himself

2.

the Lord begat man
man begat sin
sin begat a new joy
a new joy begat hate
hate begat Leviticus
Leviticus begat Sister Rosa
Sister Rosa begat that ugly rumor about Dwayne
but that ugly rumor begat the truth
but the truth begat the need to pray or run
but the need to pray or run begat his knees
and that's a kind of praying too
but their knees begat his mouth splattered all over the him-colored dirt road
his mouth splattered all over the him-colored dirt road still begat a song
the song begat a hymn at the sweet boys funeral
the sweet boys funeral still begat Sista Rosa's still disgusted head shake
Sista Rosa's still disgusted head shake begat the world that killed the not a boy child
and stole her favorite dress off her cold shimmering body
and that can't, just can't, just can't come from God right?

3.

a hymn

I am on the battlefield
for my Lord, for my lord
I am the battlefield, my lord

*and I promise him that I,
I, I will serve until I die
I am on the battle field
For my lord*

4.

a not-hymn for her

*I am the battle field
my lord my lord
I battle my lord
and I promise him that I, I, I die*⁶²

⁶² Transcribed from Danez Smith, spoken word: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mXffmQgp4

The Hypocrisy of the Climate Crisis and Whitewashed Environmental Justice Movement: Environment Justice Necessitates Social and Economic Justice

Historically, like other activist and justice movements, Black and Indigenous voices have been ignored and shoved aside in fights for environmental justice. Also like other justice movements, the lived experiences and lives of Black people and people of color have not been considered essential or focal to the movement's longevity and success. The public view of environmental movements is extremely whitewashed, are typically unsafe spaces for Black and Indigenous people, and wholly inaccessible to those who don't have a high income. Farmers are stereotyped to being white men — because Black and Indigenous people have been systematically removed from their land — and white people have largely capitalized over the farming and agricultural industries in unsustainable ways. Capitalistic society's goal is exponential growth and expansion at the expense and violation of the natural world, so any "attempts to "green" capitalism, to make it "ecological," are doomed by the very nature of the system as a system of endless growth;" that is why environmental movements must be inherently anti-capitalist.⁶³

"No amount of "green," "organic" or "ethical" consumption will defeat racial fascist capitalism either because every example of consumer activism fails to identify capitalism as the problem.

Instead, it shifts the conversation around sustainability to a matter of consumer choice."

- @subversivethread⁶⁴

The propaganda of telling working class people and individuals that recycling is going to stop the climate crisis, instead of placing carbon regulations and taxes on big corporations, is a purposeful way of racial capitalism shifting the blame. It's easy to point at someone using a plastic straw and say that they are killing the Earth. It's easy to blame people for not paying the city to recycle. As a society and whitewashed environmental movement, we villainize lower income people who out of necessity are already living a less materialistic and consumeristic lifestyle than middle and upper class people. Lower class communities who buy used clothing and rely on public transportation are divesting from capitalism by necessity. Meanwhile middle and upper class people tote metal straws but are unwilling to shift their lifestyle to enact real systemic change. This hypocrisy ends up shaming and putting the work on people of lower economic class, and people and communities of color. This also cycles into ecofascism, which is the mentality that some

⁶³ Murray Bookchin, *Remaking Society: Pathways to a Green Future* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989).

⁶⁴ (@subversivethread), "On Capitalism Climate Crisis and Anti-Fascism," Instagram, August 24, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/B1kJL_CgDVe/?igshid=72nzudo9zh4w

people should be sacrificed by their government or ruling body of people for the “common good” of the natural world. The mentality of “the weak will die but it’s ok because it helps the climate” is fueled by anti-Black and anti-Indigenous exploitative racism. The concept of overpopulation is also fueled by racial capitalism because it is so much easier to blame families with a lot of kids than corporations for wrecking the natural environment and destroying and using up natural resources.

Taking people from their land, destroying the land and the people, and destroying people’s ability to support themselves through growing their own food and cultivating the land is a militarized tactic that capitalism has created. Capitalism makes the concept of being close to nature, in the sense that you can cultivate the land you are on to sustain yourself, elitist and inaccessible. Nature is not apolitical. Going into nature for escapist reasoning, to get away from the news or what is going on in the world, is ignoring how the “narratives of white outdoorspeople” are centrally uplifted, and how nature and wilderness have a violent “history of genocide and colonization on which the country was founded.”⁶⁵

The still poisoned water in Flint, Michigan is an environmentally political act harming Black and brown families and community. This racial violence isn’t new either, what with Indigenous communities historically not having clean water, stemming back generations.^{66 67} Housing discrimination, redlining, and segregated neighborhoods enforce environmental racism because of where landfills, power plants, and factory and industrial buildings are built. In Kalamazoo, Michigan, it is clear to see which neighborhoods are segregated, who predominantly inhabits those neighborhoods, and which corporations have latched on to the land to build the ugly, large, polluting buildings. The government and corporations are purposeful in their exploitation of the land and Black and Indigenous communities, making environmental justice synonymous with racial and social justice.

“‘Humanity’ isn’t what caused the climate crisis. Capitalism did.” - @JamieMargolin⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Carrot Quinn (@carrotquinn), “The outdoors community is a white supremacist community,” Instagram, March 16, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BvFvSxHav0/?igshid=vn44bgt965tz>

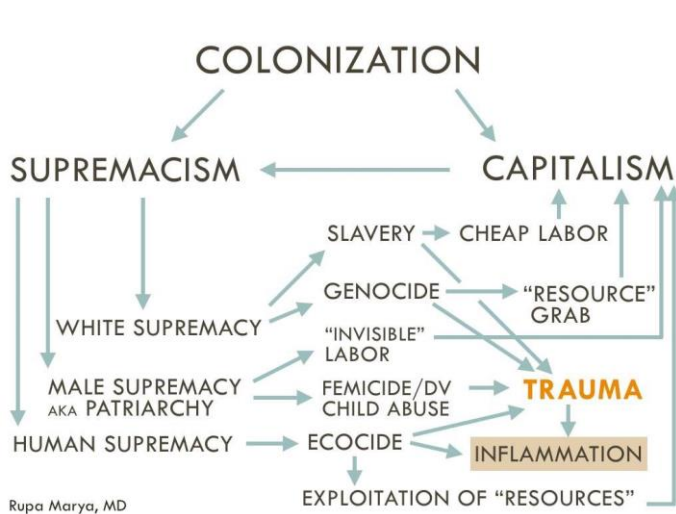
⁶⁶ Allen (@lilnativeboy), “Happy #GivingTuesday!” Instagram, December 3, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B5n7zBrAwV8/?igshid=p4hq8x045msp>

⁶⁷ Tracy Frisch, “The Four Invasion: Nick Estes on Indigenous Resistance and the Vision of a Better Future,” *The Sun*, May, 2020, <https://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/533/the-four-invasions#:~:text=Nick%20Estes%20is%20a%20historian,Catholic%20teacher%20from%20North%20Carolina>.

⁶⁸ Jamie Margolin (@Jamie_Margolin), Twitter, March 19, 2020, https://twitter.com/jamie_margolin/status/1240844425414070273?lang=en

Questions to consider and ask yourself:

1. Whose land do I walk on? Do I know the Indigenous communities in my city/town? Do I have a practice of reparations related to the land? What do those reparations look like?
2. What is “property?” What is “personal property?” Do people really own land if it is stolen? What would the land and our society look like if we had access to free housing?
3. Do I only turn to white environmental activists like Greta Thunberg for hope and inspiration? Is the literature I read about ecology and environmentalism only written by white men?
4. What are my practices of mindfulness with the land I walk on? Do I believe in reciprocity? If I take from the land, what can I give back? What do I have to offer to the land? What does sustainability mean to me?



“Know the ways of the ones who take care of you, so that you may take care of them. Introduce yourself. Be accountable as the one who comes asking for life. Ask permission before taking. Abide by the answer. Never take the first. Never take the last. Take only what you need. Take only that which is given. Never take more than half. Leave some for others. Harvest in a way that minimizes harm. Use it respectfully. Never waste what you have taken. Share. Give thanks for what you have been given. Gift a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken. Sustain the ones who sustain you and the earth will last forever.”

Braiding Sweetgrass, Robin Wall Kimmerer

Rest and Relaxation as Resistance: Having a Place in Movement-work⁶⁹

Since capitalism thrives off our individual relationship to productivity and perfectionism and our own self-worth, self-care and rest is inherently anti-capitalist. I don’t say this lightly, and it is important that we recognize white supremacy culture and capitalism being closely intertwined in our daily lives, personalities, and identities; especially within our self-care routines. Self-care doesn’t just mean having a glass of wine while taking a bath. It doesn’t only include face masks, drinking water, and taking naps. It means seeing a therapist or counselor if needed. It means picking a part your personality to see where systemic oppressions reside. White supremacy culture

⁶⁹ Listen to: Take Care by Tasha <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-V46pdxEcs>

and capitalism harm our bodies and minds,⁷⁰ so being anti-racist and anti-capitalist and interrogating our behaviors are forms of self-care through self-radicalization.

Questions to consider and ask yourself:

1. What are my self-care practices? Do I value rest? Do I police and judge self-care practices of others? Are my self-care practices rooted in liberation for all? Do I practice anti-racism and anti-capitalism as self-care? What does that look like for me?
2. Do I use self-care to escape from how I participate in oppressive systems? Do I have healthy boundaries with myself that allow me to be active and vocal against systemic oppression and racial capitalism AND take a step back to reflect and rest?
3. Where in my body do I hold stress? Can I pinpoint where in my body I feel guilt, uncomfortability, anger, or stress when discussing privilege and oppression? Am I curious about that? How will I use my breath to fight for liberation today?

Where are we now? COVID-19 is the Virus. Capitalism is the Pandemic. Racism is the pandemic.
Late to respond to the pandemic, but quick to re-open the economy.

If there was a perfect example of late capitalism and white supremacy culture functioning as one to harm millions, it is now. Look at who is dying in faster rates from this virus in comparison to others: Black people, immigrants and refugees still forcibly and violently detained, Indigenous communities, people behind bars. Those historically and contemporarily exploited by the government functioning under racial capitalism are being denied testing, medical care, or financial support.

Black and brown people are the majority of “essential” workers, but not the ones being uplifted and called heroes. Janitors and grocery store workers are not being praised in the same light doctors are. Calling them heroes is propaganda put forth by exploitative white institutions. Why don’t we pay nurses aids, physician assistants, cashiers, grocery clerks, restaurant workers, and teachers more? Why do we disparage the work of nurses, cashiers, plumbers and waiters at every turn, when in fact they ARE essential and should be treated as such? Why did the United States government wait so long to respond to a global pandemic, but instantly respond to Black Lives Matter protests with the National Guard, tear gas, and riot gear cops? These questions should be interrogated when analyzing the effects of the coronavirus. The United States is historically reactive to protecting white establishments and institutions and people, but lacks any

⁷⁰ A great book to read on this is *My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* by Resmaa Menakem

proactive thinking while at the same time participating in the deaths and murders of Black and brown people.

Angela Davis and Naomi Klein in the webinar “We are the Rising Majority: Movement Building in the Time of the Coronavirus Crisis” which aired April of 2020, talk about capitalism having created exactly what we are seeing and experiencing: the climate crisis, the war on nature, the sacrifice of life for profit, a for-profit healthcare system in the U.S.⁷¹ Disaster capitalism, explained by Klein, is corporate opportunism that says “how can I further enrich my own interests?” Davis brings the apt point that there are already millions of people being forced to shelter in place, and therefore in more dangerous environments of dying from the virus; prisons, immigrant detention camps, jails, countries and communities being forcefully inhabited by imperialistic nations, such as Palestine.⁷² Capitalism begets imperialism and vice versa. The key takeaway from this powerful webinar was that now is the time for us to demand radical change. Defund and abolish the police. Destroy ICE. Take cops out of our public schools. Richly fund public schools. Decarceration coupled with food security and free housing. Radical and comprehensive sex education. Fund mental health services. Land and money REPARATIONS.

Questions to consider and ask yourself:

1. What does a community without police look like to you? What community values do you have that uphold respect for and trust in others? Where would you like to see redistributed money go? What social services do you notice are lacking in your community?
2. Does your community ask its most oppressed and disenfranchised members what they need? Who can you call in your local government to answer that question? In local organizations?
3. How am I showing up for the Black Lives Matter movement? If this all is new to me, am I making sure that I am utilizing the resources I have access to – to better educate myself – and not asking people of color for enlightenment/education?
4. What are my views on global imperialism? Do I have any? How can I better educate myself on neo-liberalism, global imperialism, and trans-national corporate capitalism?

“When you talk about a revolution, most people think violence without realizing that the real content of any kind of revolutionary thrust lies in the principles and the goals that you’re striving for – not in the way you reach them.” – Angela Davis, 1972, California State Prison Excerpt from the Black Power Mixtape

⁷¹ Klein, Naomi. “We are the Rising Majority: Movement Building in the Time of the Coronavirus Crisis.” [Webinar] April 2, 2020.

⁷² Davis, Angela. “We are the Rising Majority: Movement Building in the Time of the Coronavirus Crisis.” [Webinar] April 2, 2020.

Violence, Destruction, and Compost as a Radical Form of Change

There are so many necessary places and jobs in a justice movement, and violence is one of them. We've seen white America disparage Black protestors for using violence to make their voices heard. How can you compare the breaking of a storefront window to the murder of a human being? This is not an isolated incident, Black people and communities have been gaslit on the effects of racism and racial capitalism since the inception of this country. You cannot compare violent protesting to the insurmountable and growing state and institutional violence enacted on Black and Indigenous people of color. Nikki Silvestri looks for parallels between social justice movements and soil, compost, and nature. Silvestri says that it is "about the cycle of creation, sustaining, and destruction" and that we are seeing a lot of destruction going on in the world right now.⁷³ Specifically in terms of justice, destruction of what power is, destruction of racist and capitalist institutions, and call for the destruction of others. "Destruction is a necessary part of the cycle of change, and the cycle of life," and intentional destruction is what we are witnessing, experiencing, and participating in; intentionally destroying what needs to transform and change.⁷⁴ Many transformative justice activists like Nikki Silvestri, and Leah and Naima Penniman root activism back to nature. Compost is the literal change and transformation of natural matter through destruction. Food scraps, egg shells, grapefruit peels, nasty smelling piles of old food gets destroyed by bacteria, insects, bugs, and animals to be transformed into beautiful, rich, life-giving soil. Violence and destruction has its place in our movements of destroying institutions that uphold and maintain white supremacy culture and capitalism, and it is necessary in order to create a society that values human lives, Black lives and Black joy, creativity, and sustainable rest over profit and expansion.

Conclusion (Though Not Really)

This work is not done and will never be done until everyone is free. Our movements must be rich with inclusion and centering of voices ignored, those of Black women and femmes, queer and trans Black and Indigenous people of color. History is repeating itself because white-based and white-led movements have ignored what Black and Indigenous people of color have been and

⁷³ Nikki Silvestri (@nikki_silvestri), "Change, Destruction and Discomfort," Instagram, June 9, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/tv/CBOBaT8B9RO/?igshid=2pj4533v3vdw>

⁷⁴ Silvestri, "Change, Destruction and Discomfort."

are saying. Pass the mic, use your body as a shield if you can (though not in a white savior way!), protest, read, listen, be loud. Justice requires us to look deeply at ourselves, to question where in our beings we participate in the upholding of injustice, and to imagine what we would look like if we were practitioners and protectors of liberation, freedom, and love. Because what is justice if not love?

In answer to what white people can do about our white privilege:

- “1. Give up your power
 2. Don’t tell anyone about it”
- Ericka Hart

“All that you touch, you change.
All that you change, changes you.
The only lasting truth is change.
God is change.”

- Octavia E. Butler

**Black and Indigenous People and People of Color to Follow, Hire, and Learn From
(a non-exhaustive list)**

Ericka Hart & Ebony Donnley on Instagram as @ihartericka
Website: <http://ihartericka.com/>
Podcast: Hoodrat to Headwrap

Leah and Naima Penniman on Instagram as @leahpenniman & @naimainfinity & @soulfirefarm
Website: <http://www.soulfirefarm.org/>
YouTube: Soul Fire Farm

Nikki Silvestri on Instagram as @nikki_silvestri
Website: https://linktr.ee/nikki_silvestri

Sonya Renee Taylor on Instagram as @sonyareneetaylor
Website: <https://linktr.ee/sonyareneetaylor>

Layla F. Saad on Instagram as @laylafsaad
Podcast: Good Ancestor Podcast
Website: <http://laylafsaad.com/>
<https://linktr.ee/lavlafsaad>

Vivien Sansour on Instagram as @vivien.sansour

Alán Pelaez Lopez on Instagram as @migrantscribble
Website: <http://www.alanpelaez.com/>
<https://linktr.ee/MigrantScribble>

J Mase III on Instagram as @jmaseiii
Website: <https://jmaseiii.com/>

adrienne maree brown on Instagram as @adriennemareebrown
Website: <http://adriennemareebrown.net/>
Podcast: How to Survive the End of the World, Octavia's Parables

Allen on Instagram as @lilnativeboy
Website: <https://linktr.ee/lilnativeboy>

Dr. Jennifer Mullan on Instagram as @decolonizingtherapy
Website: <https://linktr.ee/decolonizingtherapy>

Jimanekia on Instagram as @jimanekia
Website: <https://linktr.ee/jimanekia>

Cameron Glover on Instagram as @thecameronglover
Website: https://sales.cameronglover.com/links?r_done=1

Ev'Yan Whitney on Instagram as @evyan.whitney
Website: <https://linktr.ee/evyan.whitney>
Podcast: The Sexually Liberated Woman

Marsha P. Johnson Institute on Instagram as @mpjinstitute
Website: <https://marshap.org/>

Afrosexology on Instagram as @afrosexology_
Website: <http://www.afrosexology.com/>

No White Saviors on Instagram as @nowhitesaviors
Website: <https://nowhitesaviors.org/>

Rachel Cargle on Instagram as @rachel.cargle
Website: <https://www.rachelcargle.com/>

Alok Menon on Instagram as @alokvmenon
Website: <https://www.alokvmenon.com/>

Kali Sudhra on Instagram as @kali.sudhra

Lady Dane Figueroa Edidi on Instagram as @ladydanefe
Website: <https://www.ladydanefe.com/>

Kokumo Kinetic
Website: <https://www.amazon.com/Reacquainted-Life-Kokumo/dp/1627290168>

Raquel Willis on Instagram as @raquel_willis
Website: <http://www.raquelwillis.com/bio>
<https://linktr.ee/raquelwillis>

Ahya Simone on Instagram as @ahyasimone
Website: <https://ahyasimone.live/>
<https://linktr.ee/ahyasimone>

Femme Queen Chronicles: <https://fqchronicles.com/#:~:text=Femme%20Queen%20Chronicles-,FEMME%20QUEEN%20CHRONICLES,by%20black%20trans%20women%20themselves.>

Black Trans Prayer Book: <https://theblacktransprayerbook.org/>

Playlist of music made by Black Trans artists:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIOZ6ghAdwB1vKhmKxTlIncXM8TIDNGMN>

Powerful Digital Package released on the 2019 Trans Day of Remembrance:
<https://zora.medium.com/tagged/know-their-names>

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@snitch_stitch. Instagram.

@subversive.thread. Instagram.

@thecomradecloset. Instagram.

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