

Is Capitalism Gendered and Racialized?

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Capitalism is racialized and gendered in two intersecting historical processes. ... First, industrial capitalism emerged in the United States dominated by white males, with a gender- and race-segregated labor force, laced with wage inequalities, and a society-wide gender division of caring labor. The processes of reproducing segregation and wage inequality changed over time, but segregation and inequality were not eliminated. A small group of white males still dominate the capitalist economy and its politics. The society-wide gendered division of caring labor still exists. Ideologies of white masculinity and related forms of consciousness help to justify capitalist practices. In short, conceptual and material practices that construct capitalist production and markets, as well as beliefs supporting those practices, are deeply shaped through gender and race divisions of labor and power and through constructions of white masculinity.

Second, these gendered and racialized practices are embedded in and replicated through the gendered substructures of capitalism. These gendered substructures exist in ongoing incompatible organizing of paid production activities and unpaid domestic and caring activities. Domestic and caring activities are devalued and seen as outside the "main business" (Smith 1999) of capitalism. The commodification of labor, the capitalist wage form, is an integral part of this process, as family provisioning and caring become dependent upon wage labor. The abstract language of bureaucratic organizing obscures the ongoing impact on families and daily life. At the same time, paid work is organized on the assumption that reproduction is of no concern. The separations between paid production and unpaid life-sustaining activities are maintained by corporate claims that they have no responsibility for anything but returns to shareholders. Such claims are more successful in the United States, in particular, than in countries with stronger labor movements and welfare states. These often successful claims contribute to the corporate processes of establishing their interests as more important than those of ordinary people.

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THE GENDERED AND RACIALIZED DEVELOPMENT OF U.S. CAPITALISM

Segregations and Wage Inequalities

Industrial capitalism is historically, and in the main continues to be, a white male project, in the sense that white men were and are the innovators, owners, and holders of power. Capitalism developed in Britain and then in Europe and the United States in societies that were already dominated by white men and already contained a gender-based division of labor. The emerging waged labor force was sharply divided by gender, as well as by race and ethnicity with many variations by nation and regions within nations. At the same time, the gendered division of labor in domestic tasks was reconfigured and incorporated in a gendered division between paid market labor and unpaid domestic labor. In the United States, certain white men, unburdened by caring for children and households and already the major wielders of gendered power, buttressed at least indirectly by the profits from slavery and the exploitation of other minorities, were, in the nineteenth century, those who built the U.S. factories and railroads, and owned and managed the developing capitalist enterprise. As far as we know, they were also heterosexual and mostly of Northern European heritage. Their wives and daughters benefited from the wealth they amassed and contributed in symbolic and social ways to the perpetuation of their class, but they were not the architects of the new economy.

Recruitment of the labor force for the colonies and then the United States had always been transnational and often coercive. Slavery existed prior to the development of industrialism in the United States: Capitalism was built partly on profits from that source. Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994, 265) contend that the United States was a racial dictatorship for 258 years, from 1607 to 1865. After the abolition of slavery in 1865, severe exploitation, exclusion, and domination of blacks by whites perpetuated racial divisions cutting across gender and some class divisions, consigning blacks to the most menial, low-paying work in agriculture, mining, and domestic service. Early industrial workers were immigrants. For example, except for the brief tenure (twenty-five years) of young, native-born white women workers in the Lowell, Massachusetts, mills, immigrant women and children were the workers in the first mass production industry in the United States, the textile mills of Massachusetts and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Perrow 2002). This was a gender and racial/ethnic division of labor that still exists, but now on a global basis. Waves of European immigrants continued to come to the United States to work in factories and on farms. Many of these European immigrants, such as impoverished Irish, Poles, and eastern European Jews were seen as non-white or not-quite-white by white Americans and were used in capitalist production as low-wage workers, although some of them were actually skilled workers (Brodtkin 1998). The experiences of racial oppression built into industrial capitalism varied by gender within these racial/ethnic groups.

Capitalist expansion across the American continent created additional groups of Americans who were segregated by race and gender into racial and ethnic

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enclaves and into low-paid and highly exploited work. This expansion included the extermination and expropriation of native peoples, the subordination of Mexicans in areas taken in the war with Mexico in 1845, and the recruitment of Chinese and other Asians as low-wage workers, mostly on the west coast (Amott and Matthaei 1996; Glenn 2002).

Women from different racial and ethnic groups were incorporated differently than men and differently than each other into developing capitalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. White Euro-American men moved from farms into factories or commercial, business, and administrative jobs. Women aspired to be housewives as the male breadwinner family became the ideal. Married white women, working class and middle class, were housewives unless unemployment, low wages, or death of their husbands made their paid work necessary (Goldin 1990, 133). Young white women with some secondary education moved into the expanding clerical jobs and into elementary school teaching when white men with sufficient education were unavailable (Cohn 1985). African Americans, both women and men, continued to be confined to menial work, although some were becoming factory workers, and even teachers and professionals as black schools and colleges were formed (Collins 2000). Young women from first- and second-generation European immigrant families worked in factories and offices. This is a very sketchy outline of a complex process (Kessler-Harris 1982), but the overall point is that the capitalist labor force in the United States emerged as deeply segregated horizontally by occupation and stratified vertically by positions of power and control on the basis of both gender and race.

Unequal pay patterns went along with sex and race segregation, stratification, and exclusion. Differences in the earnings and wealth (Keister 2000) of women and men existed before the development of the capitalist wage (Padavic and Reskin 2002). Slaves, of course, had no wages and earned little after abolition. These patterns continued as capitalist wage labor became the dominant form and wages became the primary avenue of distribution to ordinary people. Unequal wages were justified by beliefs about virtue and entitlement. A living wage or a just wage for white men was higher than a living wage or a just wage for white women or for women and men from minority racial and ethnic groups (Figart, Mutari, and Power 2002). African-American women were at the bottom of the wage hierarchy.

The earnings advantage that white men have had throughout the history of modern capitalism was created partly by their organization to increase their wages and improve their working conditions. They also sought to protect their wages against the competition of others, women and men from subordinate groups (for example, Cockburn 1983, 1991). This advantage also suggests a white male coalition across class lines (Connell 2000; Hartmann 1976), based at least partly in beliefs about gender and race differences and beliefs about the superior skills of white men. White masculine identity and self-respect were complexly involved in these divisions of labor and wages. This is another way in which capitalism is a gendered and racialized accumulation process (Connell 2000). Wage differences between white men and all other groups, as well as

divisions of labor between these groups, contributed to profit and flexibility, by helping to maintain growing occupational areas, such as clerical work, as segregated and low paid. Where women worked in manufacturing or food processing, gender divisions of labor kept the often larger female work force in low-wage routine jobs, while males worked in other more highly paid, less routine, positions (Acker and Van Houten 1974). While white men might be paid more, capitalist organizations could benefit from this "gender/racial dividend." Thus, by maintaining divisions, employers could pay less for certain levels of skill, responsibility, and experience when the worker was not a white male.

This is not to say that getting a living wage was easy for white men, or that most white men achieved it. Labor-management battles, employers' violent tactics to prevent unionization, [and] massive unemployment during frequent economic depressions characterized the situation of white industrial workers as wage labor spread in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the same period, new white-collar jobs were created to manage, plan, and control the expanding industrial economy. This rapidly increasing middle class was also stratified by gender and race. The better-paid, more respected jobs went to white men; white women were secretaries and clerical workers; people of color were absent. Conditions and issues varied across industries and regions of the country. But, wherever you look, those variations contained underlying gendered and racialized divisions. Patterns of stratification and segregation were written into employment contracts in work content, positions in work hierarchies, and wage differences, as well as other forms of distribution.

These patterns persisted, although with many alterations, through extraordinary changes in production and social life. After World War II, white women, except for a brief period immediately after the war, went to work for pay in the expanding service sector, professional, and managerial fields. African Americans moved to the North in large numbers, entering industrial and service sector jobs. These processes accelerated after the 1960s, with the civil rights and women's movements, new civil rights laws, and affirmative action. Hispanics and Asian Americans, as well as other racial/ethnic groups, became larger proportions of the population, on the whole finding work in low-paid, segregated jobs. Employers continued, and still continue, to select and promote workers based on gender and racial identifications, although the processes are more subtle, and possibly less visible, than in the past (for example, Brown et al. 2003; Royster 2003). These processes continually recreate gender and racial inequities, not as cultural or ideological survivals from earlier times, but as essential elements in present capitalism (Connell 1987, 103–106).

Segregating practices are a part of the history of white, masculine-dominated capitalism that establishes class as gendered and racialized. Images of masculinity support these practices, as they produce a taken-for-granted world in which certain men legitimately make employment and other economic decisions that affect the lives of most other people. Even though some white women and people from other-than-white groups now hold leadership positions, their actions are shaped within networks of practices sustained by images of masculinity (Wacjman 1998).

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Masculinities and Capitalism

Masculinities are essential components of the ongoing male project, capitalism. While white men were and are the main publicly recognized actors in the history of capitalism, these are not just any white men. They have been, for example, aggressive entrepreneurs or strong leaders of industry and finance (Collinson and Hearn 1996). Some have been oppositional actors, such as self-respecting and tough workers earning a family wage, and militant labor leaders. They have been particular men whose locations within gendered and racialized social relations and practices can be partially captured by the concept of masculinity. "Masculinity" is a contested term. As Connell (1995, 2000), Hearn (1996), and others have pointed out, it should be pluralized as "masculinities," because in any society at any one time there are several ways of being a man. "Being a man" involves cultural images and practices. It always implies a contrast to an unidentified femininity.

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the taken-for-granted, generally accepted form, attributed to leaders and other influential figures at particular historical times. Hegemonic masculinity legitimates the power of those who embody it. More than one type of hegemonic masculinity may exist simultaneously, although they may share characteristics, as do the business leader and the sports star at the present time. Adjectives describing hegemonic masculinities closely follow those describing characteristics of successful business organizations, as Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) pointed out in the 1970s. The successful CEO and the successful organization are aggressive, decisive, competitive, focused on winning and defeating the enemy, taking territory from others. The ideology of capitalist markets is imbued with a masculine ethos. As R. W. Connell (2000, 35) observes, "The market is often seen as the antithesis of gender (marked by achieved versus ascribed status, etc.). But the market operates through forms of rationality that are historically masculine and involve a sharp split between instrumental reason on the one hand, emotion and human responsibility on the other" (Seidler 1989). Masculinities embedded in collective practices are part of the context within which certain men made and still make the decisions that drive and shape the ongoing development of capitalism. We can speculate that how these men see themselves, what actions and choices they feel compelled to make and they think are legitimate, how they and the world around them define desirable masculinity, enter into that decision making (Reed 1996). Decisions made at the very top reaches of (masculine) corporate power have consequences that are experienced as inevitable economic forces or disembodied social trends. At the same time, these decisions symbolize and enact varying hegemonic masculinities (Connell 1995). However, the embeddedness of masculinity within the ideologies of business and the market may become invisible, seen as just part of the way business is done. The relatively few women who reach the highest positions probably think and act within these strictures.

Hegemonic masculinities and violence are deeply connected within capitalist history: The violent acts of those who carried out the slave trade or organized colonial conquests are obvious examples. Of course, violence has been an essential component of power in many other socioeconomic systems, but it continues

into the rational organization of capitalist economic activities. Violence is frequently a legitimate, if implicit, component of power exercised by bureaucrats as well as "robber barons." Metaphors of violence, frequently military violence, are often linked to notions of the masculinity of corporate leaders, as "defeating the enemy" suggests. In contemporary capitalism, violence and its links to masculinity are often masked by the seeming impersonality of objective conditions. For example, the masculinity of top managers, the ability to be tough, is involved in the implicit violence of many corporate decisions, such as those cutting jobs in order to raise profits and, as a result, producing unemployment. Armies and other organizations, such as the police, are specifically organized around violence. Some observers of recent history suggest that organized violence, such as the use of the military, is still mobilized at least partly to reach capitalist goals, such as controlling access to oil supplies. The masculinities of those making decisions to deploy violence in such a way are hegemonic, in the sense of powerful and exemplary. Nevertheless, the connections between masculinity, capitalism, and violence are complex and contradictory, as Jeff Hearn and Wendy Parkin (2001) make clear. Violence is always a possibility in mechanisms of control and domination, but it is not always evident, nor is it always used.

As corporate capitalism developed, Connell (1995) and others (for example, Burris 1996) argue that a hegemonic masculinity based on claims to expertise developed alongside masculinities organized around domination and control. Hegemonic masculinity relying on claims to expertise does not necessarily lead to economic organizations free of domination and violence, however (Hearn and Parkin 2001). Hearn and Parkin (2001) argue that controls relying on both explicit and implicit violence exist in a wide variety of organizations, including those devoted to developing new technology.

Different hegemonic masculinities in different countries may reflect different national histories, cultures, and change processes. For example, in Sweden in the mid-1980s, corporations were changing the ways in which they did business toward a greater participation in the international economy, fewer controls on currency and trade, and greater emphasis on competition. Existing images of dominant masculinity were changing, reflecting new business practices. This seemed to be happening in the banking sector, where I was doing research on women and their jobs (Acker 1994a). The old paternalistic leadership, in which primarily men entered as young clerks expecting to rise to managerial levels, was being replaced by young, aggressive men hired as experts and managers from outside the banks. These young, often technically trained, ambitious men pushed the idea that the staff was there to sell bank products to customers, not, in the first instance, to take care of the needs of clients. Productivity goals were put in place; nonprofitable customers, such as elderly pensioners, were to be encouraged not to come into the bank and occupy the staff's attention. The female clerks we interviewed were disturbed by these changes, seeing them as evidence that the men at the top were changing from paternal guardians of the people's interests to manipulators who only wanted riches for themselves. The confirmation of this came in a scandal in which the CEO of the largest bank had to step down because he had illegally taken money from the bank to pay for his

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housing. The amount of money was small; the disillusion among employees was huge. He had been seen as a benign father; now he was no better than the callous young men on the way up who were dominating the daily work in the banks. The hegemonic masculinity in Swedish banks was changing as the economy and society were changing.

Hegemonic masculinities are defined in contrast to subordinate masculinities. White working class masculinity, although clearly subordinate, mirrors in some of its more heroic forms the images of strength and responsibility of certain successful business leaders. The construction of working class masculinity around the obligations to work hard, earn a family wage, and be a good provider can be seen as providing an identity that both served as a social control and secured male advantage in the home. That is, the good provider had to have a wife and probably children for whom to provide. Glenn (2002) describes in some detail how this image of the white male worker also defined him as superior to and different from black workers.

Masculinities are not stable images and ideals, but [shift] with other societal changes. With the turn to neoliberal business thinking and globalization, there seem to be new forms. Connell (2000) identifies "global business masculinity," while Lourdes Beneria (1999) discusses the "Davos man," the global leader from business, politics, or academia who meets his peers once a year in the Swiss town of Davos to assess and plan the direction of globalization. Seeing masculinities as implicated in the ongoing production of global capitalism opens the possibility of seeing sexualities, bodies, pleasures, and identities as also implicated in economic relations.

In sum, gender and race are built into capitalism and its class processes through the long history of racial and gender segregation of paid labor and through the images and actions of white men who dominate and lead central capitalist endeavors. Underlying these processes is the subordination to production and the market of nurturing and caring for human beings, and the assignment of these responsibilities to women as unpaid work. Gender segregation that differentially affects women in all racial groups rests at least partially on the ideology and actuality of women as carers. Images of dominant masculinity enshrine particular male bodies and ways of being as different from the female and distanced from caring. ... I argue that industrial capitalism, including its present neoliberal form, is organized in ways that are, at the same time, antithetical and necessary to the organization of caring or reproduction and that the resulting tensions contribute to the perpetuation of gendered and racialized class inequalities. Large corporations are particularly important in this process as they increasingly control the resources for provisioning but deny responsibility for such social goals.

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