

Interested in further reading? There are many great books relevant to the topic at hand and times we live in. We recommend the following:

A People's History of the United States – Howard Zinn

Abolition Now! – CRIO Publications Collective

American Babylon – Robert O. Self

An Indigenous People's History of the United States – Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

Anarchism and Its Aspirations – Cindy Milstein

The Black Jacobins – C. L. R. James

Black Reconstruction – W. E. B. Du Bois

From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation – Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

From Civil Rights to Human Rights – Thomas F. Jackson

The Half Has Never Been Told – Edward E. Baptist

Hammer and Hoe – Robin D.G. Kelley

The Marx-Engels Reader – Robert C. Tucker

The Origins of the Urban Crisis – Thomas Sugrue

Policing Los Angeles – Max Felker-Kantor

Poor People's Movements – Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward

Power and Powerlessness – John Gaventa

Racecraft – Barbara J. Fields and Karen Elise Fields

The Society of the Spectacle – Guy Debord

Toward Freedom – Toure Reed

Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour—Peniel E. Joseph

Why Marx Was Right – Terry Eagleton

The Wretched of the Earth – Frantz Fanon

and anything and everything by Noam Chomsky

Racism and Capitalism

a very brief introduction to
what we're up against

by the Black Flag Bonsai Club

Racism pervades all facets of American life.

From policing and incarceration, to housing and education, to employment and wealth—the list goes on—black and brown Americans are systemically oppressed by institutions which reduce them to a subordinate status. But you already know this.

One thing connecting all the ills of racism is capitalism. Ask yourself, who or what are the police so violently protecting? It ain't you!

Police exist to ensure the social order. The current deeply unequal order can only be enforced with excessive brutality. This is capitalism.

When thinking about solutions to police brutality, especially against black and brown people, we need to recognize that the material conditions of American cities where many black and brown people live—rising inequality with little hope for vast numbers of people—factor into the epidemic of police brutality.

The militarized forces occupying our communities are protecting the ruling class and their property. The police use brutal violence to defend a social order that screws over the vast majority of people, especially black and brown folks. If we don't move beyond capitalism to a more just economic system, our present condition of systemic racism, including rampant state violence, will continue.

As of 2016, the median net worth for white families was \$171,000, while for black families median wealth was a mere \$17,150.¹ How is that possible?

From slavery to the Black Codes, from Jim Crow to red-lining, from the so-called “war on drugs” to a prison-industrial complex, from a for-profit healthcare system to deeply unequal schools, capitalism has allowed the white ruling class to amass their wealth through the exploitation and exclusion of black and brown folks. Some people call this racial capitalism. But really, it's just capitalism.

Across the history of the United States, many working-class black people have instinctively understood the connection between racism and capitalism. Enslaved blacks certainly understood that their existence as a class of forced labor enriched white plantation owners. After the abolition of chattel slavery, black sharecroppers certainly appreciated that their lack of basic civil rights and general vulnerability enabled large landowners to more easily exploit their labor. Black industrial workers undoubtedly recognized that a racial division of labor discouraged collective action on the part of labor as a class, thus allowing their bosses to depress wages on the whole and get that much richer off exploited labor.

In short, racism is what helps make capitalism go, and capitalism is what reinforces racism. We can't get rid of one without the other. If we want justice, we must rid the world of racism *and* capitalism. We have nothing to lose but our chains!

¹ Brookings Institution, “Examining the Black-white Wealth Gap,” February 2020.