**Question 4B (**English 6320: Advanced Critical Theory): Examine the role of capitalism on racialization in the United States and other parts of the world. Consider Omi and Winant’s notion of racial projects, Stuart Hall’s theory of articulation, and Homi Bhabha’s discussions of post-colonialism as part of your argument. Show how rhetoric supports the theoretical assumptions.

Capitalism has played, and continues to play, a major role on racialization in the United States and other parts of the world. The forming of racial identities, the perpetuation of racial and racist discourse, and the racialization of social realities are all caught up in this economic system. While capitalism has led to numerous innovations and vast economic growth and freedoms, it is also directly implicated in the historical process of racialization and the historical, economic, sociological, and ideological presence of racism. Caught up in (and in many ways, creating) the web in which capitalism and racialization are connected is rhetoric. As Cornel West argues in “A Genealogy of Modern Racism,” it is discourse that serves as the vehicle for which racial and racist ideals are promulgated and advanced (90-95). This is echoed by Teun A. van Dijk when he states, “discourse is the principal means for the construction and reproduction of sociocognitive framework[s]” (323). This intricate connection between rhetoric, race, and capitalism is at the center of this essay.

To shed light on the complexity of racialization, I begin with Stuart’s Hall notion of “articulation.” Hall argues that theory about social formation and racial structuring usually only focuses on either economic *or* sociological factors, and suggests that a better approach to the complex phenomena of racialization include economic, sociological, political, and ideological factors. But, for Hall, these factors are not separate entities that can be reduced to their own basic, individual, and separate realms. The economic, sociological, political, and ideological, and the circumstances/societies/racial structures they create and perpetuate, are products of a combination and rupture of these factors which have “merged…in a strikingly ‘harmonious’ manner” (45). Thus, when we speak of capitalism’s role on racialization, we must not forget that sociological, political, and ideological factors and influences are always at play.

With that said, there is no doubt that economic, and more specifically, capitalistic, factors have influenced racialization in the United States and beyond. As Hall states, “the domestic reproduction of labor power…, the supply of cheap labor, [and] the regulation of the ‘reserve army of labor’” (61) are all central to racialization. A basic, but crucial, point is that **the economic system of capitalism creates the need for a labor force**. This need to create a labor force is central to the process of “othering”—a vehicle of which is racialization. Plainly said, power and wealth has been achieved in the capitalistic system through the historic racializing/othering of mainly non-White populations in order to create a cheap labor force. Two vivid examples of this are the American slave trade and the unequal treatment of the illegal Latin American workforce in the United States. The enslavement of Africans illustrates perfectly the articulation of economic, political, sociological, ideological, and political factors and their connection to rhetoric. As Cornel West illustrates in “A Genealogy of Racism,” it is through scientific, literary, political, and philosophical discourse that Africans (and others) were “othered” and labeled inferior to the White race (90-109). Through the discursive acts of scientists, “natural” historians, culture critics, philosophers (such as Kant and Hume) and political philosophers (such as Jefferson), Africans/Blacks were not only racialized but deemed inferior to the racialized group of White or Homo Europaeus (West). These notions of inferiority legitimized the slave trade (driven by capitalism) and made the enslavement of a non-White workforce seem natural to those conducting, funding, and agreeing with the slave trade.

The history of racialization of non-White and “native” peoples of the Americas also has direct links to caplitalism, modern economics, and rhetoric. Racial and nationalistic notions towards, among others, Mexican Americans, has led to their unequal treatment in the capitalistic workforce of the United States. The need (want) of a cheap labor force in the United States in order to increase profits, a hallmark of capitalism, is at the heart of this situation. The “othering” of Mexican Americans has made it easier for American businesses to pay them wages below the minimum wage (wages guaranteed to “true” Americans through laws) and, in some cases, in working them too many hours and in sub-par conditions. This “othering” not only occurs racially but linguistically. The Spanish language that these immigrants speak, along with their physical appearance and cultural norms, factor into the “normative gaze” (West) placed on them by the dominant group in the United States. Interestingly, the highly rhetorical realities of legal discourse and language have been at the center of this “othering” and in the exclusion and wanted-assimilation of immigrants by many of those in the United States. Through laws on business practices, language issues (such as the English-Only movement) and immigration reform, rhetoric has played a central role in the complex phenomena of racialization and “othering” which all are linked to ideological, political, economic and capitalistic forces. As Hall reiterates, “race is intrinsic to the manner in which the [non-White] laboring classes are complexly constituted at each of these levels” (61-62).

Another important theory that helps illustrate the link between racialization, rhetoric, and capitalism is discussed in Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s piece, “Racial Formation.” These two scholars believe that “racial projects” are at the heart of racial formation. They emphasize their belief that “there is no biological basis for distinguishing among human groups along the lines of race” (123). While scientific, and pseudo-scientific discourse has historically advanced the notion of biological difference (as shown in West’s “Genealogy…”), Omi and Winant stress that “racial projects” move beyond biological claim and help show the complex economic and ideological factors that push racialization, and racism, forward. For the authors, racial projects “do the ideological work” of linking issues of “structure and representation… [they are] simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (125). The battle for resources and economic advancement mentioned here, another centerpiece of capitalism, thus links this economic system to racialization.

An important point to make here is that not all “racial projects” advance racist ideologies. Racial projects may vary from Jim Crowe laws, essentializing rhetoric (e.g. all Asians are…), English-Only movements, to projects that attempt to battle racist ideals, such as the Civil Rights movement and affirmative action. What does connect these “projects” is the fact that they all have at their center complex issues of race. Also, important to the field of Rhetoric, they are all sustained by discourse. The arguing for, and passing of, laws involves persuasion; essentializing ideals are perpetuated and sustained through “everyday” (Essed) and systemic rhetoric; English-Only movements are directly linked to language, the already mentioned legal system, and issues of “voice” and silence; Civil Rights movements are organized and sustained through rhetorical acts; and affirmative action is defended and attacked through written, oral, and legal discourse. And in a contemporary view of Rhetorical studies, which focuses on issues of social construction and power, all these projects are knee-deep in issues pertinent to Rhetoric.

Along with “racial projects,” Omi and Winant argue that the history of racial formation in the United States has moved through three stages. The U.S. has “progressed” from a “racial dictatorship” to a “racial democracy” and is now working under racial hegemony. From the early 1600s to the late 1800s, the racial dictatorship of the United States was enforced physically and rhetorically. Non-White races were deemed inferior through scientific, philosophical, and everyday discourse and, as discussed earlier, many times forced into hard labor and/or slavery. The era of racial democracy in the United States was perpetuated by racist laws (e.g. Jim Crowe) and continued racist discourse in the sciences, politics, literature, etc. In the contemporary era of racial hegemony, which “operates by simultaneously structuring and signifying” (Omi and Winant 131) and is an indirect perpetuation of dominant ways of being, non-dominant cultures continue to be suppressed in a number of ways. Some examples include the aforementioned English-Only movements (attacks on Spanish, Spanglish, Ebonics, and other non-Standard Englishes), essentialist characterizations of non-Whites in popular culture, and any number of “everyday” practices such as laws, regulations, and jokes. And because racial hegemony and “everyday racism” are always connected to systemic issues (Essed 189), they are once again directly connected to capitalism and rhetoric. The system of racial hegemony, that was once a racial dictatorship, sprouted from a system steep in racialized views and, in many instances, racist ideologies. The need for a labor force, created by capitalism, and the creation and perpetuation of racist scientific, ideological, and philosophical discourse, directly affects racialization in general *and* contemporary racial realities. Thus, the history of “race” has historically been caught up in the work of “othering” for the purpose of economic gain and economic suppression. And much (all?) of this work has been sustained, and battled, rhetorically through laws, speech, scholarship (such as that mentioned in this very essay) and everyday discourse.

Omi and Winant’s notion of the three eras of racial formation bring us to a discussion of colonialism and neo-colonialism. While a state of direct control symbolized early American colonialism, ultimately, indirect control and racial hegemony came to the fore. Racialized groups such as African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans have felt the historical force of the dominant group and its “normative gaze” (West). So while direct military and physical control is no longer the means of domination, neo-colonialism, the indirect control through economic and ideological means, persists. Wrapped up in neo-colonialism are again capitalism, racialization, and rhetoric. Groups are still racialized, and in order to achieve identity and economic resources within a capitalistic system, they employ different means. For Homi Bhabha, this struggle to succeed within dominant culture leads to bouts of “mimicry”, “mockery,” and ultimately “menace.” In this struggle, non-dominant, many times racialized, groups achieve a status of “almost the same but not white” (118). We can see this, in various degrees, among African Americans, Latino Americans, and, to use an oft-ignored example, Native Hawaiins, in their quest for a piece of the “American pie.” African Americans struggle for equality in the American workforce as they struggle against stereotypes and linguistic issues (i.e. AAVE). The struggle among Latino Americans is similar. Native Hawaiians, dominated by U.S. colonialism and neo-colonialism, struggle for identity and, important in a capitalistic system, land and resources. A rhetorical battle continues for the naming/labeling of Native Hawaiians by people in that group, people associated with that group, and the U.S. government/Supreme Court (Young). Beyond Hawaii, neo-colonialism persists among Alaskans, Puerto Ricans, and Indians who battle U.S. and British hegemony. In all cases, the highly rhetorical acts of naming/identity and law creation/passing are central and usually linked to some sort of economic gain/control.

A final and vivid example, briefly discussed earlier, of the connection between racialization, capitalism, and rhetoric involves Native Americans. Here the rhetoric of identity is key and directly linked to economic gain. Native Americans as a race had been attacked and deemed inferior since their first contact with Europeans. At its earliest, U.S. colonization and imperialism in the Americas worked to wipeout non-accommodating natives, but later, indicative of Omi and Winant’s thoughts on racial formation and Cornel West’s on the genealogy of racism, the Natives were seen as a childlike people who needed to be civilized. We see this in the rhetoric of the U.S. government and even missionaries such as José de Acosta who “regarded the Indians as inferior to Europeans” (Abbott 4). As for the U.S. government, we see numerous laws passed affecting/controlling Native Americans. One such law, the Dawes Act, succeeded in taking away at least eighty percent of the 138 million acres of land that the Native Americans “held” (Powell 44). In a capitalistic system land is money, and the U.S. government succeeded in taking away this means of profit from the Native Americans while simultaneously perpetuating “a language of Christian parenting and civic morality” (44). This “parenting” rhetoric echoes Cornel West’s discussion of White dominant forces working to “uplift” Black people in the 1800s and beyond (104). Interestingly, some Native American groups have used the land “given” to them to make large economic gains in the American capitalistic system through the building of casinos, hotels, and resorts. While this can be analyzed from multiple angles, it undoubtedly shows the continued link between capitalism and racialization.

As has been illustrated, the complex historical phenomena of racialization has direct links to both capitalism and rhetoric. The need for a labor force, accompanied by the struggle for money, land, and resources, within a capitalistic system, has led to racialization and racism. And the work of racialization and economic struggle has worked through an articulation of economic, political, sociological, and ideological forces and through rhetorical means. From racial projects to everyday acts of racialization and racism, rhetoric has been hard at work in everything from the passing of laws, to scholarship, to scientific theory, to the forging of identities, to the telling of racialized jokes. Race, rhetoric, and capitalism are inextricably mixed.

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