

D . J o s e p h C h y a t t e

SID# 22150296
Two Rivers Correctional Institution
82911 Beach Access Road
Umatilla, OR
97882

June 29, 2017

Critical Resistance
ATTN: Abolitionist Reading Group
1904 Franklin St. #504
Oakland, CA 94612

Re; July 2017 Writing Response

To whom it may concern:

Enclosed you will please find "Killing the Poor Tonight: A Copernican Revolution in Racial Politics." This is my July 2017 Writing Response for the Abolitionist Reading Group.

Regarding the enclosed: typically I prefer to allow my writing to stand on its merits without any additional commentary from myself. However, given the potentially controversial content of this essay, I do feel the need to briefly caveat this work--if not for the general public, then at least the Abolitionist editorial board.

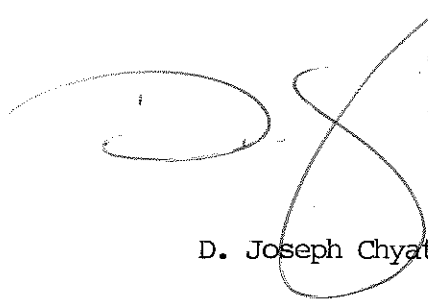
Within this essay I posit a series of questions that may be deemed provocative; however, my aim is not sensationalism. Instead, my intent is to initiate a conversation by calling into question several post-modern shibboleths. That said, I have intentionally left ample "room" within this essay to invite criticism and response. One such example is my treatment of the 1676 Bacon's Rebellion event, which I admit is at once both nuanced and grossly oversimplified. Again, this construct is intentional, with the hopes of spurring dialogue and response.

I hope this essay is received in the spirit in which it is written: in good faith and with sincerity. As stated, I do welcome and invite any and all criticism and counter-point. I only ask that any response avoid invective and ad hominem attacks--I feel there is far too much of that in today's discourse to the detriment of progress.

Of course, Critical Resistance and the Abolitionist have my full permission to use or not use the enclosed essay as either organization sees fit. You also have my permission to edit for length and to ensure good copy; however, I ask the gravamen of the piece remain undisturbed. Should you choose to publish the enclosed essay in any way, I request that you use "D. Joseph Chyatte" in the by-line. Please feel free to include my mailing address if you wish, which may be found at the top of this page.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to read and respond to the enclosed essay. Also, thank you for all of your hard work in continuing the anti-PIC conversation.

Yours in the struggle,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'D' followed by a vertical line that loops back to the top of the 'D'.

D. Joseph Chyatte

Killing the Poor Tonight:
A Copernican Revolution in Racial Politics

"I remember the day I became colored."
-- Zora Neale Hurston, "How it Feels to be Colored Me"

I was retching and gagging, physically ill, as I watched the video of Philando Castile's summary execution play over-and-over on the television. My eyes burning with tears and my teeth clenched, impotent rage consumed my body . . . thinking of Philando's partner--that strong, savvy, woman--and their small child in the back seat; and how the violence intrinsic to America has once again obliterated life, brutally altering the trajectory of one more innocent family.

As the videos of this incident evidence, Mr. Castile and his partner posed no threat; were compliant and calm; and were even travelling with a small child in tow. And yet, the executing officer claimed fear for his life during his interaction with the dark-skinned family. Given the Castile's acquiescent and respectful behavior, one is left with only the conclusion that it was their dark skin that gave rise to the officer's professed "fear." In short, by all accounts, Mr. Castille was murdered by an agent of the state because of the color of his skin.

In "The Abolitionist's" Spring 2017 meditation on/celebration of the founding tenets of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) great care is taken by editorial staff and contributors to include all people of color, and poor "whites," within the rubric of those whom suffer from capitalist police state/ Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) oppression. It may, in some ways, be construed as a tacit embrace of the post-modern, post-racial, ideal--one wherein the race-concept is acknowledged as anachronistic fallacy and supplanted with a socio-economic notion of oppressor/oppressed. If so, this naturally begs the question: in OUR discussion of state oppression, police power, and the PIC, do terms such as "white" and "black" still accurately reflect thought-objects predicated upon skin color, or have these terms evolved in response to capitalist exploitation to define social and economic status, irrespective of skine tone? In other words, have "white" and "black" become post-modern substitutes for

Friedrich Engels' and Karl Marx's "bourgeois" and "proletariat," respectively? In heated times such as ours, this is a dangerous question indeed.

And yet, it is not a new question--Bernard Wolfe and the Almighty Mezz explored the racial-identity/socio-economic/PIC nexus all the way back in 1946 with the publication of Really the Blues. And, as referenced above, Marx and Engels suggested that the only material distinction amongst people are economic ones--that "race" is a canard used to obfuscate and mischaracterize the perpetual struggle between the economically oppressed and their oppressors.

While I do not arrogate to have any answers, perhaps turning to the roots of systemic and institutionalized American racism can be instructive. In pre-United States 1676, mainland America's first populist uprising occurs in response to the tension and violence European colonialism creates on the continent. Remembered eponymously as "Bacon's Rebellion"--after the movement's leader, Nathaniel Bacon--this popular uprising consists of economically disadvantaged citizens, regardless of color, banding together to oppose the policies of Governor William Berkeley and the Virginia Colony's planting elite.

There are both military and political components to Bacon's Rebellion: beyond the violent interactions of the Berkeley and Bacon factions, Nathaniel Bacon also succeeds in getting himself elected to the Virginia Assembly. While the colony's bourgeoisie power structure ultimately stymies Bacon's assumption of legislative authority, what is important is that Bacon's military and political successes turn on the movement's populist amalgam of dark-skinned folks of African descent and light-skinned people of European descent--to wit, "blacks" and "whites." The only diagnostic of membership in either Bacon's or Berkeley's camp is socio-economic status--at its most basic, the uprising is a class struggle between the so-called haves and have-nots.

The Virginia Colony elite immediately note with concern this demographic-dynamic, and begin taking affirmative steps to divide the colony's workers into opposing groups easier to control. Thus, immediately after Bacon's Rebellion, the first anti-miscegenation laws appear in North America, as well as other ordinances that systematically target and oppress dark-skinned people of African descent. By design, these laws intentionally alienate poor "whites" from poor "blacks." Prior to the post-Bacon "race codes," the only identity-salient is socio-economic status: poor "blacks" and poor, indentured, "whites" intermarry, conduct business together, and generally live side-by-side as equals. One can draw a clear and unambiguous causal line from the 1676 Bacon's Rebellion event to the genesis of institutionalized and systemic American racism.

So, institutionalized American racism has deep roots, and is created by an elite, bourgeoisie, class to protect their property holdings by dividing, disenfranchising, and alienating the proletariat. In this light, racism and its parameters--viz. "black" and "white"--are simply tools the bourgeois use to affect capitalist oppression. In the recent past, other anti-PIC activists--such as Larry Hoover and, later in his life, Malcolm X--became painfully aware of this reality, and did everything within their power to mitigate it.

That is because there is an unfortunate circularity in asserting the only way oppressed and marginalized peoples may overcome violence and subordination is by a reactionary retreat into the very same arbitrary identities capitalism imposes to divide, and thereby dominate, the worker. If an alienating skin-color-racial-identity is a invention of capitalist/colonialist oppressors, then it makes little to no sense to hold to that imposed identity as a per se truth. Perhaps the Movement's anti-capitalism/anti-PIC ambitions are better realized by seizing and re-branding the anachronisms of "black" and "white" to become qualifiers more apropos to describing the nature and essence of the class struggle. Not in some trans-racial, Dolezalian cultural appropriation sort of way, but rather as a radical re-orienting of perspective--a "Copernican Revolution" in racial politics, if you will.

But that's all easy for me to say, prisoner or not, my skin is "white." In the seconds preceding Philando Castile's execution there were no considerations of American history or fundamental economic truths. That cop simply saw a dark-skinned man, panicked, and then gunned him down. Have no doubt, Mr. Castile was murdered by institutional and systemic racism, intentionally created to preserve social and economic disparity through the use of police agents as lethal weapons. So what do, or what should, words like "black" and "white" really mean? I, for one, do not know. But for Mr. Castile and his loved ones there can be no doubt, for if Philando had looked like me, he would still be alive today.

Critical Resistance

ATTN: Abolitionist Reading Group
1904 Franklin St., # 504

Oakland, CA

94612

PAID

