

* From the sloppy humanist “Black-White-Beur¹” slogan of the 1980s to the so-called “social race”: confusion grows among Gallic leftists.

This article was written in 2015, because there were many debates around the “March for Dignity and Against Racism” supported by Angela Davis and organized in Paris on October 31, 2015, by several groups including the PIR². I slightly changed the text in this English version to include some additional remarks.

Following the academic partisans of cultural, decolonial and post-colonial studies who use concepts like “Black,” “White,” “non-White” and “people of color”, Gallic leftists think that they can play with old racist phenotypes under a cultural disguise and appear as “radical” and innovative – a lethal illusion and a self-destructive political regression in front of the rise of neopopulist and far-right parties and ideologies.



Légende : « Types humains : A : nordique, B : alpin, D : hindou, G : chinois, H : moi, I : noir, M : indigène australien ».

Nous avons ici changé la présentation d'origine, les photos étant dispersées tout autour de la double page du manuel. Par ailleurs nous en avons aussi supprimé quelques unes car au total la double page comptait 14 photos correspondant chacune à 14 « races » différentes. Nous en sélectionnons ici un choix représentatif de sept photos.

* *The Left and the Right want to reintroduce old racial phenotypes for different and sometimes opposed reasons, but the final result is the same for the ethnic minorities: European and Euro-American majorities assign non-European minorities to a so-called (social) race.*

On the other side, the increasing use of concepts like “racialized”, “social race” and “racialization” in all kinds of circles, the lobbying of the PIR and of many intellectuals eager to attract the media’s attention have pushed a minority of Marxists and anarchists to denounce as “racists” those who do not share their analyzes based on “class” criteria. Launching this kind of anathema in a discussion (an anathema which is also thrown by their opponents) remains totally unproductive if these comrades continue to consider racism as a secondary issue which the Revolution will resolve spontaneously; if they spend more time in violently criticizing anti-racists than in denouncing racists; if they ignore the

¹ «Beur », like « Rebeu », is a slang word for «Arab ».

² For more details see <http://www.mondialisme.org/spip.php?article2439>

theoretical reflection on racism during the last 50 years while at the same time proposing nothing concrete to fight against racism...

This text tries, beyond sectarian and sterile polemics around the above-quoted Parisian demonstration, to trace the rather different origins of the “social race” concept in the Anglo-Saxon world and in France, and the misinterpretations it created among its Gallic adversaries and partisans.

*** When did the “social race” concept become fashionable in France?**

There was a time (the early 80s) when all the left and a good part of the far left found “awesome” and “hip” to use new terms like “Black, White, Beur.” A generation and a few years later, these terms based on phenotypes, physical characteristics (obvious to all but decerebrated leftists), are part of the common vocabulary of all, right and left, far-right and far left. From the rapper Saïdou to the (“socialist”) Interior Minister Manuel Valls, from Alain Finkielkraut (a liberal intellectual who has become more and hostile to Muslims and foreigners) to Houria Bouteldja (spokesperson of the PIR), from Alain Soral (a fascist agitator) to Dieudonné (an anti-Semite stand-up comedian), the whole political and intellectual world uses these concepts, but also most “ordinary citizens.”

Full of good “multiculturalist” intentions in the 1980s, French social democracy (hated today by the proponents of the “social race” theory) actually paved the way for the absurdities of their leftist, libertarian and academic heirs. French social-democratic ideas on “social race” spoon-fed all those who explain today that the term “social race” is absolutely not related to (racist) phenotypes or physical characteristics.

By the way, those are the same who assert that “Whites” have privileges that “Blacks” or “non-Whites” have no access to. Or who say that words like “White” and “European” or even “Western” are synonyms.... but deliberately choose racial and racist concepts like “Whites”, “Blacks”, etc.

*** Incoherence reigns**

So, if I follow this trendy pseudo-theory is Obama a social “White” ?

Is a French unemployed worker, Franco-Gallic since 5 generations, who votes for Marine Le Pen and the National Front a social “Black” ?

Is the king of Saudi Arabia a social “White” on one side but also, on the other side, a social “non-White” because he is a “Muslim”?!?!

Is a Gallo-French truck driver a “privileged” “White” but also a social “non-White” (since he is a proletarian)?

Who can believe that such absurdities will help us to fight against exploitation and against racism?

Who can believe that the use of terms which are well-anchored in the most reactionary mentalities, and used by all right and extreme right politicians, can be innocent and have no negative political consequences ? When a distinguished intellectual writes that race is a social construct exactly like class, does not he completely forget the biological meaning of “race” for more than two centuries ?

Such a frivolous and thoughtless attitude is astonishing from activists, and even more from theoreticians, who are so picky about language correctness. Their idealism (as opposed to a materialist conception of language) leads them to think that changing the spelling of words will help to change mentalities and fight sexism and patriarchy³. But this rigorous and rigid attitude about the importance of a politically correct and precise language, grammar and spelling mysteriously disappears when the same leftists and radical academics use terms which have been racially connoted for centuries as “Blacks”, “people of color” and “Whites”

Some comrades even use concepts like “White antifascists⁴” which are doubly absurd. This expression is absurd because “White” is a color, with varying shades, since the Asiatic or Latin-

³ They are unaware that many Asian languages do not make any difference between masculine and feminine words and that this situation has never changed anything to the relations of domination between men and women ... I could also add that Canada has reformed its grammar and orthograph thirty years ago and equality between sexes did not progress at all.

⁴ No anti-fascism can be based on a skin color (White or Black or whatever!). Antifascism must be built on clear political positions. We should not try to recycle the concepts of our enemies and false identitarian friends, even if we need to point out the paternalistic reflexes, of colonialist origin, within the Left or the Far Left.

American middle-classes and bourgeois, and often even lower classes, consider themselves as “whites”, an imaginary quality that most Europeans do not generally acknowledge them). It is as absurd as the expression “people of color”, a racist formulation used by Euro-Americans and Europeans.

Indifferent to the slightest theoretical coherence, the supporters of the so-called “social race” theory add to the list initially established by Anglo-Saxon identitarian intellectuals, “Muslims” and “Roma” to their catalog of “non-Whites” .

The list of the so-called “racialized” people looks more and more like an absurd inventory, because according to your mood you can add – or subtract – any subcategory... Indeed, curiously in France, Chinese, Pakistani and Bengali proletarians are never mentioned by those who denounce the “racialization” process led by the dominant “White majority” – racialization which they themselves encourage with their lousy concepts of social races.

One wonders why the Asian proletarians living in France (who are supposedly “non-White” too) can escape structural racism or basic racism. If one listens to the jokes of some popular stand-up comedians one can easily realize that Chinese people⁵ are the object of xenophobic and racist jokes. But these discriminations do not raise the smallest protest in the professional, “decolonial”, left anti-racist circles...

All this pretentious intellectual gymnastics would be comical if, behind these ideological maneuvers, there were not so many problems, unresolved from a theoretical and political point of view for all those who claim to radically change society and destroy capitalism and its State.

a) SOS Racisme

In France, social-democratic multiculturalism has had at least one positive consequence (apart from the very negative fact that it was funded by the Socialist Party when it was in power, i.e. by the state). Even the “Republic’s Natives Party” (PIR) sometimes recognizes that, during a brief period, the “SOS Racisme” association had a small positive and educational influence. And, from their identitarian point of view, they are right: the Socialist Party and its satellite associations, its intellectual fellow-travellers and paid propagandists, as well as its accomplices in the media (the daily “*Libération*” but also several weeklies and numerous state radio journalists) have transformed the purely racial qualifications of “Black/White /Beur” into so-called anti-racist labels in the minds of many youth revolted by the xenophobic propaganda of the National Front. These youth slowly became aware of French structural racism – a term unknown in the 1980s since the left and the far left superbly ignored the discussions in the Anglo-Saxon world around this concept. So the non-Gallic youth has learned to analyze its discrimination along racial lines... thanks to the Socialist Party !

The brainwashing began with the small “yellow hand”, the symbol of the “SOS Racisme” association, with giant anti-racist concerts, anti-racist media propaganda mobilizing artists, filmmakers, musicians, actors, actresses, and so on. And gradually it became acceptable again for the layman to qualify men and women according to their ... racial phenotypes, and to use words like “White,” “Black” and “Beur.”, because these phenotypes were presented under a “cool” antiracist wrapping...

This evolution of leftish antiracism enabled the Franco-French who had racist prejudices and were afraid to openly voice them to freely use again racial concepts without the risk of being denounced as racists.

And the French (protofascist) New Right, who had already replaced in the 1970s a racial discourse by a so-called “cultural” discourse, clapped and approved this new situation which gave them more possibilities to intervene in the battle of ideas.

b) New niches in the intellectual field

Just like antifascism, the “left” (a very vague concept since it goes from the Labour Party to the extreme left and even, why not, to anarchism) has no skin color, but different political trends and strategies that must be analysed precisely if one does not want to sink into confusion and especially if one claims to conclude “alliances”.

The “anti-fascism” or the “left” (if we want to use these vague concepts) can only be defined on the basis of class criteria (we defend the interests of the workers, not the interests of all the “citizens”) and a total independence and hostility to the state.

⁵ The only Chinese stand-up comedian in France chose as his stage name «The Funny Chinese» which tells a lot about French racism against Chinese people....

At the same time, an offensive was organized in the academic world, which after the exhaustion of structuralism slowly adopted postmodern theories (deconstruction, post-colonialism, cultural studies, decolonial analyses, etc.). This offensive replaced, at the theoretical level, the soppy, social-democratic, moral anti-racism of the 80s which permeated the minds of many people, far beyond left and radical left militant circles. Left-wing academics who supported “deconstructionist” theories wrote texts which were sometimes just as incomprehensible as those of the most obscure disciples of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan during the 1970s. But they easily managed to give themselves a more radical look by partly reconnecting with the anti-imperialism of the 1950s and 1960s and to the more aggressive African-American identity politics, nurtured by the ideology of the SNCC, the Black Panthers Party and a plethora of nationalist-cultural movements⁶.

c) Rap and Islam with a new look

The African-American rap and hip-hop culture also appeared as “super cool” to the French left and extreme left. And especially as “French” rap was not (and still is not) built on a mono-ethnic basis like in the United States but on a multi-ethnic basis. This new musical evolution helped the youth to go beyond the moderate official multiculturalist discourses, which were sometimes too intellectual, ethereal and somewhat patronizing (like when a Franco-French tells you “Oh, it’s so nice and enriching you have several origins (cultures) in your family” or “Oh, your “*métis*” – mixed-race – child is so cute !”).

It gave these discourses a more assertive and identitarian tone, harder and more violent in its verbal expression, exactly like in Anglo-Saxon countries, but this happened in a discrete and almost unconscious way. This new factor of mass culture has made the word “Black” absolutely essential for French young people of African origin. Obviously, it also pushed French youth with North-African origins to invent a new identity and to define themselves as “*rebeus*” (*rebeus* and *beurs* are synonym slang words for “Arabs”). Rap culture has taken the ideological role devoted to SOS Racisme or it mixed rap ideology with the state anti-racism managed by the Socialist Party.

I have to mention at least one other influence: the new interest in Islam among the younger generations, an interest that has added yet another layer of confusion and identitarian division among young proletarians of Maghrebine, Turkish and African origins...

From now on, young people could combine a virulent and cool anti-racism (in any case strongly encouraged by the left-wing media) with a fascination for the rappers’ rebellious spirit (whatever their nationality or their origins, since rap has become global). And they could also dive into religious identitarianism in all its forms (sectarian-religious, nationalist or more politicized). This new religious-identitarian quest appeared to them all the more justified because their (Muslim) faith was mistreated and scorned in France by the state and the media; the fact that they were treated as a “minority community” (although France does not officially recognize “communities”) could make them believe that Islam was indeed the “religion of the poor and the oppressed,” adequate for the “*rebeus*” (Arabs), a term almost synonymous with French second-class citizens even for those belonging to the “third generation”⁷.

The 2005 riots and the politicians’ failure to respond with radical social measures only confirmed and accelerated these diffuse trends, of various origins, since they combined

- the strategies of the “socialist” political elite and of the multicultural intellectual left,
- the communication plan of revolted rappers in search of media recognition,
- the development of religious groups (often sectarian, i.e. Salafists) in the working class suburbs populated by North-African migrants, groups who were often eager to be recognized by local municipalities in order to get subsidies and facilities;
- and the ambition of young left-wing researchers in search of university chairs and friendly contacts in the media and publishing houses.

⁶ In France, who knows, for example, that African-Americans today have their own “Christmas” festival, under the name of Kwanzaa, a profitable “mainstream” business originally imagined by an Afro-American nationalist leader, Maulana Karenga, whose militants were involved in several murders of Black Panther Party militants ?

⁷ The first generation often keeps its original nationality, but very rarely the second generation and certainly not the third generation. But in the eyes of many Franco-French they are still... foreigners (or to be more precise, «foreign-looking», i.e. not «racially » French).

New small identitarian political forces (CRAN, PIR, CCIF⁸, etc.) were born and their most networked representatives sought to occupy the mediatic field, with some success. The identitarian entrepreneurs joined their forces with the academic racializers. And they were discreetly supported by the partisans of the Muslim Brothers or other Muslim groups who wanted to take advantage of the new identitarian mood in France, historically hostile to “communities.” The pseudo-theories of the “social race”, imported from the United States, have therefore been useful for these French careerists to consolidate the multiculturalist demolition work started by SOS Racism and its division of the exploited into the categories of Blacks, Whites and Beurs (BBB). They went from BBB to BNBMR, Whites, Non-Whites, Muslims and... Roma. The left identitarian currents left have not mobilized their (small) forces to defend the Roma, it is just for them a very radical chic attitude, but they made alliances with some Muslim groups.

The ideological justification of the identity-based division of the exploited along racial (without quotation marks) and religious lines is now well developed in France, and it obviously accompanies a material and social evolution that manifests itself in all Europe. An evolution marked by a growing individualism, an accelerated atomization, an increasingly fragmented structuring of tasks in and outside companies (decrease in the size of production units, development of teleworking and self-entrepreneurship, computerization etc.) that promote the revival of imagined communities, be they regional, religious (Jewish, Christian and Muslim) or “ethnic” – a polite word for race.

*** A poor, dogmatic and uninformed response**

Unable to make the necessary mental revolution, and to question their historical inability to analyze the deep roots of racism, the left and right identity politics in the Anglo-Saxon world (for already half a century !), and the harmful multiseular influence of religion, some anarchists and some Marxists suddenly began to denounce, on social networks or in public meetings, as “racists” all the partisans, be they sincere or not, of the bogus “social race” theory.

They gave the impression that the real danger today was not racism but anti-racism, a classic attitude that can be found in other far-left currents (and sometimes in the same currents) on the issue of current anti-Semitism. The real enemy of many “anti-Zionists” is not anti-Semitism at all, but those who denounce the permanent influence and current changes of anti-Semitic propaganda.

Thus some Marxist and anarchist websites or blogs rushed into this complex discussion without really having studied the subject of racism in depth neither in France, nor in the United States nor in Great Britain.

*** Ultimate, radical and ridiculous mistake.**

This confirms that even the most radical defenders of the (working) “class” are immersed in the ideological climate created by French social democracy during the 1980s ... without realizing it. They denounce as “racists” the partisans of the harmful “social race” theory; they do not make any effort to study the origins of this ideology, its successes and their avatars in the Anglo-Saxon and French Left; they do not question the profound transformations of the “workforce” in the advanced capitalist countries; they do not engage in serious self-criticism; nevertheless, they think they will be able to win the political battle against the promoters of the “social race” theory. A theory “based in fact on racial phenotypes and “common sense” related to the observation of physical differences between human beings – i.e. between “races” that have been taught or recognized as scientifically and biologically based during the last 300 years.

*** Positive origins of the social race concept and its current negative evolution**

The opponents of the “social race” theory are just as superficial as its supporters.

The first ones, Marxists or anarchists, have trouble admitting that in 150 years they have produced nothing really useful to understand and specifically fight racism⁹ ... The fundamental progress in the

⁸ CRAN = Representative Council of Black Associations ; PIR : Republic’s Natives Party ; CCIF : Collective against Islamophobia in France.

⁹ I can’t resist to tell you this anecdote: an experienced ultraleft militant phoned me to share his criticism of a text I wrote and, in the course of the conversation, he told me: “O yeah, that’s true, I did not remember you had black blood.” When I hear such stupidities from an ultraleft, you can easily

understanding of racism was mainly made by third world and African-American activists and academics most often outside the militant field, at least outside those who defend a working class perspective. This should still pose a question to the defenders of Marxist or anarchist orthodoxy.

On the other hand, the partisans of the “social race” theory, and especially the new converts in the militant circles in France, share a total ignorance (voluntarily or involuntarily, who cares ?) of this notion’s history ...

Its inventors wanted, at the beginning, to show that the races were “social constructions”¹⁰, i.e. that they did not have any biological or genetic basis. And this was and is a perfectly right move. This was already explained in detail in a famous collection of scientific articles published by UNESCO in 1951 and 1952 to definitively demonstrate the falsity of racism. All supporters and opponents of the pseudo-theory of the “social race” should begin by reading these texts, published more than half a century ago.

It is only after this international shift in the biological and social sciences in the mid-1950s that some political currents began to use it as a militant tool – and not always wisely and very consistently. Let’s note in passing that the leaders of the national liberation movements in the Third World (Mao Tsé Tung, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, Amílcar Cabral, Ben Bella, etc.) did not use words like “White,” but “Europeans,” “colonialists,” “imperialists,” etc.

The only problem about the race-social-construct theory is that one can’t say that race does not exist, that it has no scientific (biological) basis and at the same time describe it very precisely with physical terms and biological terms, because the notions of “White” and “Black” are not concepts like proletarians, bourgeois or petty bourgeois. It is impossible to identify a member of a social class just by looking at its physical appearance or skin color. Even a worker with callous hands can become a capitalist. A “White” man, for example, will never become a “Black” man and vice versa.

Concepts like those of “Black” or “White” are immediately perceptible to the eye, especially if they are accompanied by the description of certain physical traits, as it was still done fifty years ago, including in French Republican-Universalist textbooks. That is why, if we use these concepts for “radical” purposes, even with the best antiracist intentions, it is next to impossible to stand out from the prejudices which are common even among sincere anti-racist people, not to speak of most ordinary people.

This interpretation becomes even more dubious (and indeed becomes racist) when these so-called radical militants, like those the PIR or like many Afro-American, African, Amerindian nationalists, are opposed to “mixed-race” relationships. In this case, they just return to the biological dimension, the purity of the race, but they conceal their racist ideological change by pretending that they only want to defend their national, ethnic or religious culture, exactly like the extreme right does...

Today, among certain radical left and anarchist militants, one can watch the same phenomenon that has taken place on the extreme right. The far-right no longer dares to use racial characteristics or denominations (by the way, let’s not forget what Marx wrote about “the Negro-Jew Lassalle”¹¹) and now claims that there are fundamental “cultural” differences between peoples and that these peoples should not mix to better preserve their originality and their specificity... against capitalist globalization.

The extreme left, on the other hand, is taking the same slippery slope with its ridiculous use of the theory of social races based on ... skin color. It is quite “normal” in a way that, like the PIR and other cultural nationalists, some far left militants are opposed to “interracial” relationships because they think it’s the best way to defend the cultures of ex-colonized people, as well as national or religious traditions. They are defending now hidden racist conceptions, even if it is not the intention of those brave “White” militants who are so sorry of not belonging to the good “social race”.

understand why I am skeptical about the ability of Marxists (or anarchists) to understand and fight racism...

¹⁰ Social classes are also “social constructs” just like the nation, the state or even the family. Nevertheless, most social scientists don’t question the existence of the state which finances their research and pays their salaries. They don’t criticize the national myth on which their employing state is based !

¹¹ “*It is now quite plain to me — as the shape of his head and the way his hair grows also testify — that he is descended from the negroes who accompanied Moses’ flight from Egypt (unless his mother or paternal grandmother interbred with a nigger). Now, this blend of Jewishness and Germanness, on the one hand, and basic negroid stock, on the other, must inevitably give rise to a peculiar product. The fellow’s impurity is also nigger-like* » , letter to Engels of July 30, 1862.

Because, whatever they say, the militants' imaginary world turns around their guilt of not belonging to the good "social race". It recalls us 20th century Stalinist or anarchist/syndicalist/workerist discourses against "petty bourgeois" or intellectuals who should make amends for their "wrong" social background or constantly prove that they were not "betraying the working class" whose "historical interests" were defended by their party or grouplet.

Once these reservations have been clearly expressed, if we want to counter the harmful diffusion of "social race" theories, we will have to seriously get down to work, comrades, and not content ourselves with mere invectives!

Y.C., December 2015 (slightly modified in January 2017)

PS. The concept of race in the United States has NEVER broken with its biological basis, including demographic statistics, quotas in universities and the public service, passports and administrative forms. Those who use the concept of "whiteness" for example in the States as a "social construct" insist that to be "White" is not linked to the skin color but to your acceptance as an authentic American. In other words, the "White"/"Black" divide corresponds to the American/Unamerican divide. Another reason for me to reject the use of ambiguous concepts linked to the skin color. The fact that not all Europeans were considered as "White" (i.e. Americans) from the start and that the Jews were accepted as "White" (Americans) only after the Second World War could be very well dealt with concepts like "Euro-Americans" or "authentic Americans" without any reference to race.

To use this concept in a country like France which has not been structured by slavery (except for the French West Indies of course) and all its racial categories and subcategories, is to forcefully impose lousy concepts under sociological pretexts; it gives a pseudo-scientific legitimacy to the racist prejudices that always existed in France.

It is no coincidence that the term "métis" does not exist in the United States, or more exactly if it is often considered an insult because it puts forward biological racial criteria. The United States is indeed the country of the "one drop rule" according to which a person with "Caucasian" phenotypes was considered "Black" if one of his ascendants was "Black." All the Southern states (but also certain Northern states), after the Civil War, adopted such laws to justify segregation in all public places spaces and to exclude also those who were only "White" in appearance... The United States has been living under the influence of a biological racism that has conditioned the mentalities of its inhabitants for three centuries ; it also conditioned and still conditions the struggles against discrimination in America, since even today one of the basic anti-racist arguments in the United States is to tell "Whites" that 30% of them have at least three "Black" ancestors among their ascendants (going back five generations).

This is not the case at all in France where "métissage" has been valued for a long time, even it's very often patronizing ...

To consider "Muslims" also as a "social race" is to introduce a second equivocal just as deleterious. Who knows that in England or the United States, for example, the term "Muslims" in the current vocabulary, including the leftists' vocabulary, refers to the "Arabs" in the broadest (and false) sense, and thus includes Turks, Berbers, Iranians, and even Pakistanis and Bengalis. It is therefore also a very vague concept that mixes ethnobiological references perfectly accepted (since we are in countries where the theories of biological races are considered eligible), references to national identities and an arbitrary religious and fantasized assignment, which reveals xenophobia and a crass ignorance.

But the supporters of "social races" theories have nothing to say about that because they are persuaded to hold the Holy Grail of Truth on racism ...