In 1959, the year Trinidadian activist and theorist George Padmore died, his friend and comrade C.L.R. James memorialized him in “Notes on the Life of George Padmore” for The Nation. James’s “Notes” does more for the late Padmore, however, than summarize his accomplishments in an obituary. Instead, it serves as perhaps the earliest reminder of Padmore’s critical influence in the decolonizing movement, offering a bold declaration about the Trinidadian thinker: “Padmore had more knowledge of African political movements and more personal contacts and relations with African politicians than any man living.” In James’s tribute we can begin to discern two crucial insights regarding the legacy of George Padmore. First, the theoretical and practical importance of his work to the twentieth century, especially regarding his role as an orchestrating mentor and strategist in African diasporic independence movements. Second, he was a figure whose critical work might be — and for some time has been — largely forgotten by history.²

Studies of Padmore, especially when compared with his contemporaries C.L.R. James and Frantz Fanon, remain few and far between. Recently, Lester Lewis and Cameron James have taken up the charge to “remember” Padmore not only by citing him as a vital theorist in the decolonizing movement — with Lewis labeling him the “forgotten man of history” — but also by reinstituting James’s call to recognize him as one of the founding figures of Pan-Africanism.³ Hakim Adi, Susan D. Pennybacker, Minkah Makalani, Leslie James, and Jeffrey S. Ahlman provide nuanced accounts of his complex and shifting relationship with the Communist Party and his critique of the Party’s treatment and analysis of racial inequality in particular.⁴ These criticisms would eventually contribute to his infamous disavowal of the Communist Party and with it, some accounts go on to suggest, his commitment to Marxism.⁵

There is certainly reason to question the extent to which his later Pan-African writings incorporate historical and dialectical materialism to engage the question
of black liberation. If we return to James’s tribute, we find a claim that emphasizes the ambivalent influence Marxism exercised in Padmore’s thought after his dramatic break with the Comintern in the mid-1930s. “[Padmore] was a Marxist and a revolutionary,” James writes, “and for thirty years this West Indian had one main purpose in life — the emancipation of Africa from foreign domination.”

James’s labeling of Padmore as a Marxist without comment offers a definitive stance on Padmore’s theoretical and political praxis, when the story surrounding both is much less conclusive. More to the point, and perhaps owing to his own Marxist commitments, James elides the complicated relationship Padmore articulated between Marxism and the emancipation of Africa.

We know from Padmore’s writings that “doctrinaire Marxism,” or Marxist theory that did not address the predicament of colonization and racial inequality under capitalism, haunted but also guided his intellectual work. From Padmore’s perspective, his break with the Comintern was the result of the Soviet and American Communist parties’ failure to adequately deal with the issue of race, particularly the persistent and extreme exploitation of disproportionate numbers of black peoples under capitalism. For scholars following James, the answers to questions about Padmore’s engagement with Marxism and communism in his writing and politics after the break with the Comintern are opaque. Where, for instance, Adi finds reasons to laud much of the work done by Padmore, he also questions the validity of the theorist’s critiques of the Communist Party. In opposition to Adi, Pennybacker argues that the “Marxist movement was integral to the person [Padmore] was in the twenties and early thirties, and his later evolution rested upon the realization of that movement’s failings in the 1930s.”

As Leslie James summarizes, this has tended to obfuscate the complexity of Padmore’s work:

During his lifetime, there was a tendency for colonial authorities to portray Padmore as a doctrinaire figure — a man who held only one position (a position which they rightly understood was in essence always against their own position of power) and who pressed that position upon the susceptible minds of young colonial nationalists. A rigid interpretation of Padmore and his politics has until recently also persisted in the few studies of Padmore that do exist...leaving little room for ambiguity, flexibility, or adaptability in his thinking. In these accounts, Padmore either “left behind” his earlier, “youthful” communist flirtation for his true position as a pan-Africanist, or he remained a committed Marxist who for decades “continued to think in terms of Comintern categories.”

To take seriously the question of Padmore’s Marxism, and different from the accounts above, I focus almost exclusively on textual analysis of the content of his work. By
doing this, I hope to more concretely discuss the obvious, hidden, and even absent threads of Marxist thought across important selections from his canon. Rather than fault Padmore for his break with Communism, I instead figure him as a radical thinker whose later work articulates a frustration, and even exhaustion, with the search for real, tenable solutions for the liberation of black peoples around the world. This, I argue, sometimes comes at the expense of a historical and dialectical materialism with the potential to synthesize and push his ideas further. I want to highlight, however, that this later tendency stands in stark contrast with his earlier use of the dialectic. In its most far-reaching insights, Padmore’s work speaks to the capacity of Marxism to articulate the connection between class and race, while the limitations of his later works forewarn us of the theoretical consequences of accepting any compromise with the capitalist economic system, especially as neoliberalism makes calls for “equality” of a different sort.

In what follows, I discuss George Padmore’s contributions to a critique of capitalism at the same time that I account for his contentious relationships with traditional Marxist theory in the later Pan-African political positions and writings. To do this, I travel backward through his canon in detailed selections from three works — *Pan-Africanism, How Britain Rules Africa*, and *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers* — as a means of recovering Padmore for studies of Marxism and race in the twenty-first century. The process of reading backward places both his early work, *Toilers* (1931), and later work, *Pan-Africanism* (1956) in relation to one another. Particularly, when read together the work from the 1930s makes clear the possibilities foreclosed upon in the work from the 1950s. In this way, I account for the specific, textual details of Padmore’s work in the 1950s, a decade during which he focused more narrowly on Pan-Africanism and African independence, as well as his work in the 1930s, a time during which he more pointedly applied a materialist dialectic to the analysis of class and race together.

Different from previous critics, reading backward leads me to Padmore’s most salient critique of capitalism — the “twofold burden [of] class and race” for an international black working class — in *Britain* (1936). The theoretical success of *Britain* is, on one hand, partly to do with the radical energy of the historical moment itself, which was a banner time for communist thought around the world. On the other hand, it is crucial to recognize that *Britain* was published after Padmore’s break with the Communist Party, at a time when he was committed to Marxist analysis but not to what he saw as an inflexible and flawed praxis regarding race. Put differently, it becomes clear that if we only read Padmore linearly, he seems to focus more and more narrowly on the emancipation of black peoples without considering their place as part of a larger, international working class. By instead reading backward, we can understand Padmore’s break with Communism proper as productively harnessed in *Britain*. There, we find him using the dialectic as it was intended — as a way to recognize the inability of reconciling unequal class and race relations under
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capitalism, and to rather place the two in productive and relentless tension with one another as a means of overcoming both. In what follows, then, I read Padmore’s contribution as a whole to be an enigmatic but critical negotiation at the juncture of class and race under capitalism.

In this way, Padmore offers a revolutionary lesson for twenty-first century Marxist conceptions of class and race about the necessity to recognize anew the particular forms exploitation and suffering take in any and every historical moment. If we hope to accommodate the myriad effects of capitalism in the twenty-first century, we need to continuously consider how to adapt a Marxist dialectic to speak meaningfully to an analysis of race. Our failure to contend with this in our current moment is perhaps why we see mounting critiques of racial inequality alongside, but not yet fully in dialectical conversation with, those of economic disparity. As the productive back and forth between Adolph Reed and Ellen Meiksins Wood as well as Asad Haider, Ta’Nehisi Coates, and Mark Lilla have shown us, the relationship between class and race remains one of the central issues for Marxists as we critique neoliberal notions of “equality.” More specifically, capitalism reveals itself to be increasingly capable of incorporating the idea of equality for individual identities at the same time that it diminishes the actual capacity for what Haider calls the “possibility of collective self-organization.” This should tell us how important the connection between class and race is for Marxists going forward in the era of neoliberalism.

It is insufficient, then, to claim that race is “extra-economic.” Our task is instead to hold class and race in dialectical tension with one another even as we understand the former to be the root of universal inequality. For this reason, we must take seriously the lesson of Padmore and resist any accommodations of or capitulations to neoliberal iterations of capitalist ideology, however momentary or strategic. Moving forward, we should commit to a constant, dialectical critique of capital that also keeps at the forefront of our minds the social relationships that are only made possible with the full liberation of the entire international working class. If we fail in this, we will continue to suffer, perhaps as farce, the burden of history handed to us by capitalism.

**Pan-Africanism as a Mode of Frustrated Production**

To begin reading near the end of Padmore’s life is to treat with some seriousness Marx’s own lesson on history — the notion of the present inheriting the past. The past, of course, comes with potential gains and losses, but the losses compound if we forget this inheritance. Bertell Ollman writes that history in Marxism is,

> the story of the past, and like any story it begins in the past and proceeds forward to the present or however near the present one wants to take it. This is how it happened. This is also the order in which this story is usually told. It doesn’t follow, however, that this is the ideal order for studying the meaning of the story, especially as regards its final outcome. Marx,
for one, believed that we could best approach how the past developed into the present by adopting the vantage point of the present to view the conditions that gave rise to it — in other words, if we studied history backward.\textsuperscript{16}

For Marx, and thinkers following him, materialist history necessitates recognizing the particular conditions that have led to and shape the moment from which one reflects — a reading “backward” from the purview of the present. History, with an eye toward the development of capitalism in the twentieth century, reads as an intensification of offenses and expropriation, especially for peoples and lands occupied by imperial nations (even after, of course, decolonization).

The Cold War and decolonizing era is, of course, rife with contradictions. For many decolonizing theorists, colonized peoples, and black workers, the period directly before and continuing through WWII (or the Second War of European Imperialism, as it was known in decolonizing circles) produced drastic changes in the shape of radicalism.\textsuperscript{17} Specifically, in the aftermath of what Padmore and others saw as the broken promises of the Communist Party regarding race in the time leading up to and after WWII, the potential solidarity that had seemed possible in the 1920s and early 1930s appeared to many as significantly less possible.\textsuperscript{18} The post-WWII era must be read in the context of the 1930s, a time when the Communist Party, on which many black peoples had hinged their anti-imperialist hopes, had begun to engage in what many saw as conciliatory compromises. This was also the time when Padmore was removed from the Comintern and lambasted in Party publications and public speeches, leaving him (once the head of the “Negro Bureau” of the Profintern), and many black workers, looking for answers elsewhere.\textsuperscript{19}

In the years following the break with the Comintern, “elsewhere” for Padmore meant many locations and roles. When \textit{Pan-Africanism or Communism} was released, Padmore was acting as an advisor and organizer for the Gold Coast independence movement that would, in 1957, result in the creation of the nation of Ghana. It is difficult to summarize the importance Padmore played in contributing ideas, writings, and, as Jeffrey Ahlman describes it, providing “tutelage” to Kwame Nkrumah, who would become prime minister and then president of Ghana.\textsuperscript{20} Given Padmore’s own history as well as the fact that the world-historical revolution never produced the liberation of black people around the world, it is in some ways no surprise that certain sections of \textit{Pan-Africanism or Communism} are dedicated to maligning the shortcomings of communism, and by extension Marxist theory, in favor of Pan-Africanism.\textsuperscript{21}

The title itself poses an immediate dichotomy, that might register as an ultimatum by juxtaposing Pan-Africanism \textit{against} communism; the ‘or” establishing a distance between the two.\textsuperscript{22} In its considerations of communism, \textit{Pan-Africanism} specifically cites the problems of “doctrinaire Marxism,” which “has no particular appeal for colonial nationalists.”\textsuperscript{23} Notably, the most articulate and successful of Padmore’s
critiques, laid out in chapter XVI, “Communism and Black Nationalism,” focuses on the hypocrisy of Soviet and American Communism related to black lived experience. There, Padmore takes the opportunity to charge the Party with “opportunistic and cynical behavior,” specifically with regard to what he saw as their disingenuous incorporation of blacks into the Party. This he links to “ever-changing tactics of Soviet foreign policy rather than...altruistic motives.”

In certain moments, Padmore provides a strong case for a break with Soviet Communism from this perspective, as he cites the collusion on the part of the Soviets with “the [American] southern ruling class which they so delight to lambast,” a collusion that discredited Soviet praxis for black peoples.

Another key issue concerned Soviet support for military alliances and arms in the 1930s and 1940s, sometimes against colonized countries like Ethiopia. This perceived hypocrisy was especially painful, Padmore suggests, because the American Communist Party simultaneously demanded sacrifices of black Americans during WWII: “the Communists had the effrontery,” he writes, “to appeal to the Negroes to suspend their agitation for employment in war industries, the principle of equal pay for equal work, and abolition of racial segregation in the armed forces.”

Those who refused these demands “were denounced as ‘sabotaging the war effort’; ‘aiding the Axis enemy’; and endangering the ‘unity of the American people,’” all of which added unwanted complications to America’s fight with “fascism.” Ultimately, the Party’s refusal to forge solidarity across racial lines meant that “the expected revolution...failed to materialize [in Europe].” That “failure of the Western proletariat to come to the aid of the Soviet Republic” was, according to Padmore, ultimately due to racial divisions among an international working class. From Padmore’s perspective, the Party demonstrated a willingness to exploit subjugated peoples in favor of the immediate — frequently financial — interests of white workers. In other words, the Party neglected black Party members and did not actively encourage the white arm of the Western proletariat to create deeper solidarity with black members.

While the critique has some grounding, the book abandons radical energy as it moves forward. Near the end of the work, Padmore offers what ultimately serves as his thesis: that Europeans “of the left or right” inevitably fail “to realize that one of the first reactions of politically awakened self-respecting colored peoples is the desire to be mentally free from the dictation of Europeans, regardless of their ideology.” The idea, it seems, is to reject any Western-associated idea as complicit with imperialism. Among his critiques, Padmore maligns the Western tendency toward binary thought and action: “[the idea that] one must either be a Communist or an anti-Communist...is typical white man’s thinking.” The observation represents, at one level, a fair critique and rejection of hegemonic Western notions of thought. But if, as the title of the piece suggests, Africans and colonial peoples must “choose” a side — Pan-Africanism or communism — Padmore seems to have forgotten that this choice relies on a strategy he has decried only moments before, one with the potential to
further limit the freedoms of colonized peoples. In the most glaring of these amnesiac moments, Padmore seems to ignore the early and continued complicity of racism with capital, and the fact that capitalism is the ultimate ill behind Africans’ and Africa’s exploitation and suffering.

As a way of introducing a Pan-Africanist approach to the colonial question, for instance, Padmore invokes the “adaptations” of Lenin, in what initially appears to be a poignant revelation about the capacity of Marxism. “Marxism is not,” he clarifies, “a dogma to be mechanically applied, but a guide to action, according to local circumstances and the political development of a people.” Yet the inherent malleability Padmore intends to develop leads him to pacifying rationales. “The only force capable of containing Communism in Asia and Africa,” he writes at one point, “is dynamic nationalism based upon a socialist program of industrialization and co-operative methods of agricultural production.” While the notion could perhaps be understood as an initial step toward something resembling international unity within the diaspora and working class, the logic ultimately lies in propitiation.

The first of the steps, nationalism, Padmore traces back to Soviet Russia rather than burgeoning independence movements. Despite his supposed suspicion of Soviet methods, Africans should adopt the Soviet model of nationalism, Padmore reasons, because

> putting the interest of a foreign power first and that of one’s own country last is most unlike that of Russian Communists. They are the most patriotic and nationalist-minded people... Until African Communists learn to love their country in the same way...they deserve to be treated with contempt by their fellow-countrymen.

Despite his differences with the Party, Padmore manages here to recognize successful strategies used by Soviets, but his analysis stalls at the step of replicating the Soviet policy of “nationalism” to undergird, or justify, a policy of African nationalism. The cultivation of a small conglomerate of people, bound by the geo-political understanding of nation seems to be, as Padmore sees it, a practical and manageable tactic. Yet the most striking critique of this can be found in Padmore’s own work from the 1930s (a more thorough analysis of which I turn to in the next sections) where he argues against nationalism. Particularly, Padmore is adamant in his rejection of Garveyism at that time, pointing out that resting on nationalist ideology without also articulating a movement toward internationalism, necessarily introduces limitations to universal liberation. The appeal to nationalism is most troublingly born out, however, in his attempt to locate solutions in relationships with entities such as the United Nations and by in his citation of the United States as a model for change.

In the most striking example of capitulation, Padmore’s vision for Pan-Africanism — the last topic in the book — welcomes rather than rejects the nation-state structure
of the United States. In one sweeping passage, Padmore heralds the U.S. as an example to aspire to rather than as a challenge to structuring of African federations under a meritocratic system:

Pan-Africanism looks above the narrow confines of class, race, tribe and religion. In other words, it wants equal opportunity for all. Talent to be rewarded on the basis of merit. Its vision stretches beyond the limited frontiers of the nation-state. Its perspective embraces the federation of regional self-governing countries and their ultimate amalgamation into a United States of Africa.

In such a Commonwealth, all men, regardless of tribe, race, color or creed, shall be free and equal. And all the national units comprising the regional federations shall be autonomous in all matters regional, yet united in all matters of common interest to the African Union. This is our vision of the Africa of Tomorrow — the goal of Pan-Africanism.36

Despite descriptions that seem to champion equality, rewarding talent “on the basis of merit” introduces deeper issues for the election of officials or positions of consequence in an African Union. More particularly, Padmore advocates for individualized notions of talent and merit, concepts that historically perpetuated oppression even as the tenets of democratic universalism rang across the world. Given the realities of the system in which Africa (and the world) found itself at the time of Padmore’s writing, such a philosophy automatically privileges those with the wealth and power to access “talent.” Without a substantial economic overhaul of this system, rewarding talent and merit would almost inevitably privilege those willing to subscribe to European imposed criterion for merit. In other words, a meritocracy would disproportionately recognize those already in positions of power (or those with extensive training in the cultivation of “talent” within colonial systems).

Just as important, the allusion to the United States — and a “United States of Africa” — suggests that an African Union would produce autonomous but united nation-states. The idea does not reflect on the ways that a United States of Africa and a “Commonwealth” might reproduce rather than challenge the logic of imperialism. As it moves forward, Padmore’s vision for Pan-Africanism continues to expose the contradictions of a United States of Africa. This is particularly glaring given Padmore’s earlier critiques of nation-states within capitalism — specifically the Soviet Union’s actions preceding WWII — as the reason he cited for breaking with the Communist Party.37 Padmore claims that Pan-Africanism will move beyond the mistakes of the Soviet Union — namely the appearance of participation in capitalist imperialism — at the same time that it will concretely incorporate African federations, or nations, into a world (and therefore capitalist) economy.

In passages surrounding this, Pan-Africanism removes virtually all traces of the
idea that Africans reject Western thinking, a special irony given Padmore’s bitter assessment of Soviet complicity with the policies of the American South. Citing the need for the “younger generation of Africans” to enact change, Padmore clarifies that this generation will take its cues from “under the stimulus of Western political ideas and technocracy.”

Rather than championing the potential of a truly international working class, Padmore’s method defers to capitalism: African peoples will find emancipation by adopting political ideas and technology from an exploitative world economic system. Ultimately, his invitation for collaboration is extended not to workers, but rather to their nations, and thus the ruling class. Appealing to “progressive forces in Britain,” Padmore requests “‘know-how’ missionaries — men and women with technical knowledge and skills who are willing to go out and help the Africans... and help to raise their standards of living.” This moment might, on one hand, act as a step toward African peoples taking ownership of the means of production, which would be an emancipatory gesture. Yet, on the other hand, the notion of “help” fails to fully acknowledge the economic reality of a capitalist mode of production — and the critical role Western missionaries played in disguising expropriation as aid.

Even as Pan-Africanism promotes “looking above the narrow confines of race” in its consideration of colonial capitalism and uneven development, the articulated goal in 1956 is myopic. More specifically, the very real lived experiences of inequity in capitalism foreclose on the idea that racial unification will end universal suffering. In short, local solutions, however rooted in praxis and flexibility, will remain local because they fail to emphasize connections to future stages.

Following Pan-Africanism, and as a part of his work in the Ghanaian decolonizing and independence movement, Padmore continued to organize coalitions of theorists and activists both internationally and within the continent of Africa. These conferences served as a sounding board for his theory of Pan-Africanism, particularly in response to criticism he received from many in the decolonizing movement. While some found the theory too focused on internationalism, others thought the idea of “federations” too narrow. As a way to consider these criticisms, Padmore, along with Kwame Nkrumah, tried to reimagine Pan-Africanism in collaboration with others. Perhaps the most famous example is the Conference of Independent African States and the All African People’s Conference of 1958. There, we find evidence for Padmore’s willingness to adapt Pan-Africanism in the resolutions that were adopted at the end of the All-African Conference.

While Padmore and Nkrumah began the All African Conference with a “provisional agenda” that was reminiscent of Padmore’s 1956 text, the resolutions reflect the challenges the conference attendees raised to the theory. For this reason, the resolutions are staunchly more radical than Pan-Africanism and the logic set forth by the “provisional agenda.” Indeed, the ten resolutions open with an explicit condemnation of “colonialism and imperialism” and move on to eschew “political and
economic exploitations of Africans by imperialist Europeans.” The resolutions go on to explicitly state that “African States should pursue in their international policy principles which will expedite and accelerate the independence and sovereignty of all dependent and colonial African territories.” Among the most important resolutions was a change to Nkrumah’s policy of non-violence at the urging of a young Frantz Fanon, who cited the inevitable and ethical battles fought by colonized peoples for their independence. St. Clare Drake also notes at the conference there was “a big map of Africa” superimposed over “a picture... of a very strong black man breaking his chains,” underneath which Padmore and the other Conference organizers “had paraphrased Marx and Engels, ‘You have nothing to lose but your chains. You have the continent to regain.’” We might cite the revisions as well as the presence of the map as evidence for Padmore’s renewed focus on an international, as opposed to national, program. In this vein, it is also worth recognizing that Padmore and Nkrumah did eventually espouse the idea that “any talking about small federations” was “a continuation of colonial balkanization.”

On one hand, then, the resolutions adopted at the end of Conference suggest that Padmore did not envision the kind of compromise suggested by the idea of a “United States of Africa.” On the other, the allusion to a United States of Africa during and after the Conference reveals a theoretical contradiction that is difficult to square for Marxists. Such “contradictions and complexities” formed, as his biographer Leslie James puts it, Padmore’s intellectual and theoretical process, which were “constantly being reformed by contemporary events.” These contradictions are perhaps best encapsulated by the fact that, near the end of his life, Padmore was working on a book on “tribalism.” The project fell under the larger umbrella of Pan-Africanism and emphasized “the bitter internal struggles he himself underwent in thinking through African nationalism” as well as “a confrontation between metropolitan organizer-intellectuals and colonial nationalist politics.” The historical context of the Cold War contributed, no doubt, to the immensity of the problems he engaged and the propensity of those problems to appear to change shape frequently.

Yet, as James describes, Padmore had tried to directly confront, in Pan-Africanism or Communism, “the history of communism within black nationalist movements” and had “roundly rejected any serious threat of communism as a political force not only in Africa, but in the Caribbean and United States.” More important, according to James, Padmore imagined that “Pan-Africanism... offered an ‘ideological alternative’... to Communism.” Much like Padmore, James does not always distinguish between the theory of communism as an economic alternative to capitalism and the policies and actions of the American and Soviet Communist Parties. At the end of Padmore’s life, then, we are left to wonder to what extent he envisioned Pan-Africanism as an alternative to communism itself. We do not need to speculate, of course, on the viability of Marxism without international communism.

Padmore addresses what we might call a productive next step 25 years prior,
interestingly enough, in *Negro Toilers*. In that work, as well as in *How Britain Rules Africa*, Padmore lays out a program of change and analysis that gets much closer to something like the transformation of capitalism in conversation with black liberation. Reading backward to his work from the 1930s, then, helps to highlight the later theory’s movement away from imagining a worldwide revolution.

**Toiling Toward Revolution**

*Negro Toilers* from 1931 and *How Britain Rules Africa* from 1936 are the energetic and inspired products of contradiction and crisis in a decade of economic devastation. The environment into which they were released indicates an intellectual and political milieu desirous for points of entry into the colonial question. In the period, the issues of racial inequity and suffering are addressed from a range of radical stances, most notably in the international Communist Party. In particular, thousands of black intellectuals found potential in the Party as it took up an international dialogue on class and race. In an article published the same year as *Britain*, for instance, the leader of the Black Communist Party of America, James W. Ford, clearly outlines an international emergency: “The world is caught in the middle of a great crisis,” he writes, in which “masses of people” are “on the brink of starvation.” “Present day capitalism,” Ford writes, “has not been able to satisfy these needs and is less and less able to do so. There are those who say that by reforming capitalism it can be made to fill the needs of the masses. We shall show that this is impossible.” Ford’s unambiguous description, and the direct identification of the increasing exploitation of black peoples under capitalism, broadens the scope of concern beyond the United States and to the wider world. Just as important, Ford connects suffering in the Great Depression and suffering in the colonies, suggesting that capitalist exploitation produces swathes of starving, laboring people around the world. The article’s clear explanation of exploitation not only establishes a clear vision of what was at issue economically, but also speaks to the radical potential contained in that decade.

It is in this spirit of connectivity and solidarity that *Toilers* sets out a project for “the workers of the metropolitan countries.” Padmore identifies the strategic goal of educating workers inside the cores of capitalism on “the methods which the capitalists of the ‘mother’ countries adopt to enslave the black colonial and semi-colonial peoples.” *Toilers* urges readers, themselves workers, to “understand that it is only through the exploiting of the colonial workers... that the imperialists are able to bribe the reformist and social-fascist trade union bureaucrats and thereby enable them to betray the struggles of the workers.” The explicit goal is one of encouragement for workers across the world to “join forces... against the common enemy — World Capitalism.” Padmore echoes Lenin when he claims that the situation of workers and colonized peoples within capitalist imperialism can be traced to “the acute rivalry among the imperialist nations in their struggle for the re-division of the world.” The effects of the “imperialist war,” he argues, materialize concretely — and not
abstractly — for workers rather than capitalists, and still more so for the “Negro masses.” Particularly, Padmore opines, capitalists “create and foster artificial racial differences among the toiling masses, and by doing so divide the workers and thereby exploit all of them more effectively.” In this analysis, then, race is a mechanism that uses divisions within the working class to strengthen the exploitations of capitalist imperialism.

Padmore’s critique is salient and sophisticated, even by current academic standards. The “pamphlet” as he calls it, works to demystify the international division of labor in capitalist imperialism. Recently, Adolph Reed has suggested that this is precisely the goal of Marxism in conversation with race today:

A Marxist perspective can be most helpful for understanding race and racism insofar as it perceives capitalism dialectically, as a social totality that includes modes of production, relations of production, and the pragmatically evolving ensemble of institutions and ideologies that lubricate and propel its reproduction. From this perspective, Marxism’s most important contribution to making sense of race and racism...may be demystification. A historical materialist perspective should stress that “race” — which includes “racism,” as one is unthinkable without the other — is a historically specific ideology that emerged, took shape, and has evolved as a constitutive element within a definite set of social relations anchored to a particular system of production.

Toilers is broadly congruent with Reed’s version of Marxism, elucidating as it does the ways capitalist imperialism benefits from the division of workers across racial lines. Effectively, the concept of the race — and the juridical implementations of racism with it — does some of the work of alienating workers for capitalism. With a commitment to examining the ideological contradictions that arose with imperialism, Padmore gives specific consideration to race as a real and lived experience of inequality. At the same time, he suggests that race and racism would easily lose their power if the social relations which foster them were absent. Padmore’s explanation clarifies the means by which race as a concept moves around and outside the consciousness of the people, on whom it depends for momentum.

The rivalry between imperialist nations, Padmore suggests, speaks to a crisis in capitalism, the burden of which is often placed on black colonial peoples. Padmore delineates the expansion of capitalism:

the imperialists, whether American, English, French, Belgian, etc., etc., are frantically trying to find a way out of their difficulties. In order to do so, they are not only intensifying the exploitation of the white workers in the various imperialist countries by launching an offensive through means
of rationalization, wage cuts, abolition of insurance, unemployment, etc., but they are turning their attention more and more towards African and other black semi-colonies... In this way the bourgeoisie hope to unload the major burden of the crisis on the shoulders of the black colonial and semi-colonial masses.\textsuperscript{62}

Here, race fulfills a sinister function in twentieth-century capitalist imperialism. Particularly, capitalist imperialism surplus by reducing costs and further expanding into a racialized periphery. Padmore’s critique of race as a categorization under capitalism speaks to the need for solidarity across racial divides. At the same time, Padmore acknowledges the ways racialized peoples endure different forms of oppression in the uneven capitalist world system, going on to expand the concept of the nation.

In the following line, we can nearly detect a connection to Pan-Africanism in what Padmore calls a “national race.” “The oppression of Negroes,” he writes, “assumes two distinct forms: on the one hand they are oppressed as a class, and on the other as a nation. This national (race) oppression has its basis in the social-economic relation of the negro under capitalism.” However, in the next sentence, Padmore clarifies: “National (race) oppression assumes its most pronounced forms in the United States of America, especially in the Black Belt of the Southern States... and in the Union of South Africa.” Here, Padmore specifies that the imposition of national boundaries is the work of capitalism, both within and across these geopolitical spaces. What is more, capitalist nations engender and encourage racial divisions within working-class movements, a fact that impedes unity while also serving the purpose of allowing white workers to imagine themselves as somehow “above” working-class blacks.

The section from \textit{Toilers}, “Black Slaves in the New World,” elaborates that even black peoples in the Northern United States are subject to these divisions. As a result, “we find that the less class-conscious white workers, like the capitalists, have the tendency to consider the Negro workers as social outcasts — members of a pariah race.” In these analyses, Padmore asserts that race must be a consideration if capitalist imperialism is to be understood fully. To do this, he carefully links race to economic inequity, and to the ideas of uneven development, accumulation by dispossession, and the subsidizing of a capitalist class by a toiling mass. And in these moments, the precise means by which race relates to the broader working class begins to materialize.

Padmore makes an effort, in the final pages of this first work, to articulate the necessity of economic analysis and class unity across national borders. To incorporate race into the analysis, he advocates that white workers recognize the difficulties of their black counterparts:

the white workers must realize that in the present condition of world capitalism one of the aims of the imperialists is to find a way out of their
difficulties by using the Negro workers... to worsen the already low standards of the white workers. Because of this the struggles of the Negro workers against the capitalist offensive must be made part and parcel of the common struggle against imperialism.\textsuperscript{66}

Padmore here synthesizes the relation between race and class under capitalism: the capitalist economic mode of production underlies the difficulties of both black and white workers; the conditions of the workers are related and mutually dependent; and the nation is a crucial mechanism by which we can understand the exploitation of racialized peoples.

Near the end of \textit{Toilers}, Padmore takes to task trade unions and reformists, as well as Garveyism, for their myopic views on class and race, respectively. The trade unions set as their “chief task,” he says, the betrayal of “the struggles of the Negroes on the economic front.”\textsuperscript{67} Garveyism, for its part, is indicted for attempting to isolate race as the primary concern for black workers. More particularly, “black landlords and capitalists who support Garveyism,” Padmore warns, “are merely trying to mobilize the Negro workers and peasants to support them in establishing a Negro Republic in Africa, where they [the former] would be able to set themselves up as the rulers in order to continue the exploitation of the toilers of their race, free from white imperialist competition.”\textsuperscript{68} It is this moment, as I mentioned above, which allows us to critique Padmore in \textit{Pan-Africanism} for ideas quite similar to Garveyism in spirit. The slogans “A Negro Republic in Africa” and “Back to Africa” are seen here, in \textit{Toilers}, as tied to the capitalist system.

In \textit{Toilers}, Padmore recognizes the ways that this might easily privilege trained, educated, and elite black leaders while neglecting to change the foundation of capitalism. We see here also the potential critique of meritocracy, which is likely to develop at the expense of those who do not receive a Western-dictated education or those, perhaps more crucially, who live outside Anglophone colonies. As an answer to \textit{Pan-Africanism}, \textit{Toilers} sets right many of the questions and problematic positions outlined in the former’s efforts to combat racial equity around the world. As Padmore frames it in the final lines of \textit{Toilers}: “[The Negro Workers] must realize that the only way in which they can win their freedom and emancipation is by organizing their forces millions strong, and in alliance with the class-conscious white workers in the imperialist countries, as well as the oppressed masses of China, India, Latin America and other colonial and semi-colonial countries, deliver a final blow to world imperialism.”\textsuperscript{69}

As a further development of this, \textit{Britain} offers a still more sophisticated and detailed analysis for understanding race and Marxism, with relevance for our present. In the final selection from Padmore, I highlight the unique theoretical insights of \textit{Britain} in his canon. Appearing soon after Padmore’s break with the Communist Party over the issue of race, \textit{Britain} represents a thesis on the bridge between Marxism and
analyses of racial inequality in the context of capitalist imperialism. It is Padmore’s frustration with what he saw as insufficient analysis of race, I argue, that enables him to confront the contradictions of race within capitalism from a Marxist perspective. As a result, he offers his sharpest dialectical consideration of race and class.

**How Britain Advances a Revolutionary Theory**

*How Britain Rules Africa* provides a mediating point in the complicated relationship between Marxist class and race analysis in the twenty-first century. Like *Toilers*, *Britain* is the product of a deep dialectical engagement with these issues in the middle of the 1930s. Because *Britain* considers capitalist imperialism to be the explicit target of its critique, I believe it provides a crucial key for a Marxist theory of race today. Particularly, *Britain* includes in its critique an elaborate analysis of the lived experiences of black workers and colonial peoples, realities that are today often distorted by the politics of neoliberalism.

Padmore acknowledges, much like Asad Haider has in recent years, the historical realities of racial inequality that have accompanied the capitalist mode of production. In this way, *Britain* pushes past the idea that identity politics will provide meaningful change under capitalism. Rather, the text sees capitalism as colluding with racist policy when such collusion is convenient, allowing it to also incorporate lived experience into a sophisticated, structural analysis of exploitation.

Written only five years after *Toilers*, but also after Padmore’s break with the Party in 1933-34, *How Britain Rules Africa* represents an intellectual feat for the theorist. Padmore’s critical insight on Party politics in the 1930s enables, in a culminating moment for his work, a productive dialectical mediation between race and class. Here, Padmore outlines a salient, applicable theory of race and class in the era of capitalist imperialism, which functions as an economic righting of Party politics. At the outset of *Britain*, Padmore describes in detail the particular ways Africa serves British imperialism: “as an agrarian hinterland for the industrialized West, a source of supply for raw materials, a market for manufactured commodities, an outlet for the investment of surplus financial-capital in exploiting... and last but not least, Africa provides an outlet for European settlers.”

Padmore then isolates his analysis to those “territories which form a part of the British Empire.” These early clarifications make possible both precision and historical specificity, while placing British imperial history in the broader totality of capitalism.

In particular, *Britain* makes clear the geopolitical logic undergirding social relations by emphasizing racialized organizations of national and political power. These organizations of power, he suggests, distract from a direct engagement with capitalist imperialism in the twentieth century. *Britain’s* first chapter discusses the intervention of capitalism in African history, providing a Marxist understanding of imperialism and race as they were developed through colonial violence. Padmore divides this history into two historical periods: “the Slave Trade Period, from the
fifteenth to the nineteenth century” and “the Post-Slave Trade Period, from the eighties of the nineteenth century to the end of the World War.”73 A third, marginal period referred to as the “age of free trade” is included, with a quick summary that explains the transition from slavery to wage labor as one that was economically motivated.

The abolition of slavery, Padmore elaborates, corresponds with “the Industrial Revolution,” which saw slavery become “less and less profitable owing to technological changes in production.”74 While Padmore does not explicitly detail a “materialist” approach, this is clearly the place from which his thinking springs. Specifically, he describes how “the tremendous profits derived from the slave trade... provided much of the primitive accumulation of capital for the development and expansion of British industrial capitalism.”75 He ends the chapter by observing: “the conquest of Africa reflects the whole trend of the development of economic imperialism.”76 To attempt to understand a part of capitalism, Padmore surmises, is to attempt to understand the whole. Capitalism is never isolated and must expand to exist, and so it depends on a class of workers for whom existence is merely subsistence. Supposed evolutions in the social and political status of formerly enslaved black peoples — across the historical “periods” of imperialism, or before and after the slave trade — are tempered by the continued experience of race exploitation.

Race, as Padmore writes it in Britain, functions in a variety of ways, all of which he traces to capitalism because it is the mode of production through which the particular inequalities he analyzes come to be. In essence, “imperialist oppression and exploitation” are “allied with racial ignorance and arrogance.”77 As a result of this alliance, “Blacks carry a twofold burden — class and race.”78 The connection that Padmore notices, then, makes possible a more specific historical and materialist analysis of race than is possible with Pan-Africanism. Unlike the conclusion of the 1956 text, which emphasizes racial unification, Britain incorporates an explicit awareness of historical and “present conditions”: “the ideology known as race-prejudice or white-chauvinism, is part and parcel of the capitalist system, and can only be eradicated by a fundamental change in the present social system.”79 More specifically, a mere acceptance of democratic republics, an African Union or any other conciliatory geo-political pacifism, Padmore goes on, will only to perpetuate the problem. This is because the problem is, at its base, capitalism.

As a means of approaching these issues, Padmore suggests that oppressed peoples think in terms of “Africa for Africans,” a request that perhaps appears limited in its view of the world-historical economic system of capitalism.80 However, Padmore states that this is an “immediate task” and one “most appropriate... under present conditions.”81 Padmore’s approach in Britain, then, offers concrete incremental steps on which a unified working class might build. Padmore pays specific attention to the present situation as it has been shaped in the past and as it exists now. In essence, the work of socialism cannot stop, Padmore suggests, at the level of the nation. Rather,
Padmore argues for “socially progressive” nationalism in the colonies, a means of organizing which, because it does not wield hegemonic power and privilege, is both distinct from the nationalism of imperial nations and can expand beyond the strategic confines of the nation or even continent. Unequivocally, Padmore clarifies that resting contentedly at nationalism, democracy or peaceful co-operation within a capitalist world system necessarily creates reactionary and regressive politics. The later concessions of Pan-Africanism here bear the full weight of a Marxist critique, but from Padmore himself. Britain expresses confidence that “the struggle will assume the form of an Anti-Imperialist Peoples’ Democratic Movement of the now subject races against the dominant and privileged minority.” The movement Padmore envisions cannot “stop only at what Marx called the ‘bourgeois-democratic stage.’” Padmore invokes a Bantu nationalist journal to highlight the problems with stopping at democracy: “Modern democracy,” the journal asserts, “is a democracy only of the white skin peoples of the world, and its philosophy is that of brazen spoilation, and the violation of human rights of all whose color is black.”

Equivocal or ambiguous positions in the struggle against imperialism — especially with regard to the position of race — run the risk of concessional change. Put differently, the continuation of a status quo will continue to kill millions of people of color, as it has in the past; democracy under capitalism occasions white-dominated enterprises. Extending “democratic” projects and nations, the logic follows, will necessarily extend racial oppression and exploitation.

According to Padmore, moving beyond white democracy and privilege requires education in the form of “the development of labor technique, for the more advanced forms of production... the more it becomes necessary to raise the education level of the people.” We can directly juxtapose this with Padmore’s notion of a meritocracy from Pan-Africanism. For the people to have any control over their own situation, Padmore reasons, they must break with a capitalist system that fundamentally exploits their work by divorcing them from the ownership of the means of production — a “socially backward system.” With the goal of “throw[ing] light into dark places” representing all corners of a capitalist world, Padmore states definitively: “as long as capitalism exists, it will make no fundamental difference whether or not Africans are being exploited in a mine or on a plantation owned by British capitalists on the one hand, or by a joint-stock company... on the other hand. Capitalism is capitalism, regardless of how it tries to disguise itself.” Padmore goes on to connect the critique to a broader international working-class solidarity, wherein he includes “British workers — the rank and file of the trade unions and the Labour Party,” who he hopes “will repudiate any... attempt to get them to endorse” what he calls “pseudo-socialistic” plans.

If the end of capitalism requires thinking about labor techniques and the end of class and race distinctions, it also necessarily means refusing to cooperate in a system maintained by either of these things. Padmore’s position in 1936, then, sounds not unlike the position of Marx himself. What Padmore adds, of course, is a
specific consideration of race that Marx could only begin to glimpse in his historical moment. Padmore asserts that without the sweeping away of the capitalist mode of production, class antagonisms — including those that have been transposed onto racial distinctions — will fail to disappear. The later logic of Pan-Africanism, or a meritocratic United States of Africa, hardly allows for the destruction of class — and cannot, therefore, allow for the destruction of racialized forms of class relationships. Padmore’s canon allows us to see concretely that the struggle against racial oppression must always be understood in relation to a struggle against the capitalist economic mode of production and its particular social relations. This was a fact that Padmore seemed to accept before the temptation of localized solutions rooted in immediate praxis became too great.

**Padmore Today**

One of the most complex contradictions of existence in the neoliberal era of capitalism is, as Imre Szeman frames it, “conscience,” particularly our exposure to “a deliberate political program of neoliberal moral education in the language of the market.”90 In other words, neoliberalism teaches us to recognize an ostensibly increasing equality for marginalized identities by appealing to equitable representation in and access to the market, in the spheres of production and consumption. At the same time, neoliberalism masks the relative stagnation of, and decrease in, worker wages and the widening gap between the working and capitalist classes that results from it. In our responses to the trap of neoliberalism, then, Marxists risk occupying a position that appears antithetical to equality. Rather than suggest, as neoliberalism does, that racial inequality can and will be solved with more time and progress, Marxism must offer a viable response to such claims. To do this, we should consider the precise ways that neoliberalism accommodates and even encourages individual rights as a way of subverting collective action. This demands a real recognition that suffering and exploitation in our world are and have been racialized much of the time. We must emphasize this reality as a part of the mechanism of capitalism, or the way that neoliberalism has evolved to perpetuate class division at the same time that it calls for equality in an economic system that we know to be unequal in its very foundation.

Marxist discussions of the relationship between race and class in the twenty-first century have a storied history, even when we limit that discussion to the United States in the past 10 or so years. According to Ellen Meiksins Wood’s “Class, Race, and Capitalism,” racial hierarchy currently operating in the United States does not directly correlate with class relations, but instead represents a substitute for previous models of civic status hierarchies in non-capitalist and pre-capitalist forms of society. In effect, Wood argues that the era of capitalism necessarily ushers in civic equality, while revealing such gains to be insufficient for dealing with class inequity. To the extent that we focus on civic status and racial hierarchy, she points out, we will obscure our consideration of class relations, the true source and site of reproducing
inequality. Among the most salient and insightful of her claims is the articulation of the overlap and simultaneous difference between race and class inequality:

While the eradication of class would have a profoundly transformative effect on racial divisions, the eradication of racial hierarchies would not fundamentally transform the nature of capitalist class relations, even though it would, in the U.S. in particular, deprive capitalism of one of its most useful mechanisms of reproduction. Capitalism will always have a working class, and it will always produce underclasses, whatever their extra-economic identity. It can adapt to changing conditions by changing the meaning of race and ethnicity, so that one group can displace another at the bottom of the ladder (as Hispanic groups have in some cases replaced African-Americans); or the boundaries of racial categories can, if necessary, be redrawn. It could even survive the eradication of racial, or any other “civic” categories altogether.91

Wood’s insight regarding the inequity produced by class — as distinct from race — touches on a fundamental truth in capitalism: the resolution of racial inequality would nevertheless allow class inequality to persist. Indeed, as Wood says, “The relation between capital and labour is, juridically, a relation between free and equal individuals, who (at least in ‘liberal democracies’) share every legal and political right,” while “the division of the working class by means of race serves the interests of capital.”92

We find moments, however, where Wood moves on too quickly from the complexity of the experience of race in late capitalism:

However disproportionately African-Americans may be represented in the working class, and especially in its lowest ranks, they do not constitute the whole of that class; and their “extra-economic” racial status cannot define the category “working class”, as civic status once defined serfs and slaves.93

To fully unpack Wood’s passage, returning to Padmore is helpful. The strength of Britain’s analysis comes from its frustration with the shortcomings of the Party in its consideration of race. Britain is the product of Padmore’s deep belief in Marxism’s ability to accommodate the complicated experience of race. His attempt to see Marxism accomplish this shortly after his break with the Party, I have argued, engenders a dialectical mediation of this historical and lived experience, while ultimately recognizing class as the foundation of inequality. No doubt Padmore’s early commitment to Marxism allowed him to acknowledge that while black peoples carry a “twofold burden,” this cannot be resolved through the institution of political equality.
As Padmore puts it in a passage from *Britain* I quote above, “as long as capitalism exists, it will make no fundamental difference whether or not Africans are being exploited in a mine or on a plantation owned by British capitalists.”

Despite their agreements on class relations, the juxtaposition of *Britain*’s carefully and inclusively phrased mediation with Wood’s short passage above permits us to see what are often the objects of critique aimed at Marxists’ analyses of the “twofold burden” of race and class in capitalism. Phrases like “however disproportionately” and “extra-economic,” particularly, appear to dismiss the preponderance of black Americans in the working class, “especially in its lowest ranks.” The discussion, too, of working-class difficulty juxtaposed with pre- and post-civic status designations is unfortunate, as it fails to consider fully how black Americans continued to experience the inherited historical, political, and economic complications of exploitation from enslaved ancestors whose descendants continue to be colonized around the world long after serfdom and slavery ended.

In his “Rejoinder” to Wood, Adolph Reed contrasts “individual prejudice, bigotry and stereotyping — symbolized famously in Cornel West’s and other prominent black people’s difficulties in getting cabs in Manhattan — to labor market segmentation, anti-immigrant agitation, redlining, racial profiling, gerrymandering, coded attacks on the poor and the public sector, the corporate glass ceiling and police brutality.”

What a consideration of class and race must do, Reed ultimately argues, is to “[make] sense of these different relations and [seek] to understand how they operate concretely to shape and reproduce capitalist political economies,” particularly in “a society such as the United States in which racial stratification emerged as a mutually constitutive element of capitalist institutions and evolved and became institutionalized in tight, practically indissoluble connection with them.”

We would do well to pause with the Wood and Reed debate, alongside Padmore, to wonder at the inevitable effects of twenty-first-century capitalism, and by extension neoliberalism, on Marxist analyses. That is, it is by virtue of a great deception on the part of capitalist ideology that Marxist analyses often offer caveats when they acknowledge race, or the forms of suffering and exploitation experienced by millions of people of color under capitalism. This tendency of Marxists to justify considerations of racialized suffering arises counterintuitively, I argue, from our failure to question the successful campaign of neoliberal logic — a fundamental championing of the individual, tied to an abstract equality, codified alongside “monetarism, deregulation, and market-based reforms.”

In his discussion of class and race, Asad Haider advocates embracing a real discussion of the concerns addressed by identity politics while recognizing their grounding in individualism. His responses to Ta’Nehisi Coates and Mark Lilla’s analyses of the election of Donald Trump eschew looking to the past for a better liberalism, as Lilla does, or relying on identity politics to explain the predicament of inequality in the twenty-first century, as Coates does. Instead, Haider argues, we
should understand identity politics, on their own, to reinforce structural oppression:

In its contemporary form, rather than its initial form as a theorization of a revolutionary political practice, identity politics is an individualist method. It is based on the individual’s demand for recognition, and it takes that individual’s identity as its starting point. It takes this identity for granted and suppresses the fact that all identities are socially constructed. And because all of us necessarily have an identity that is different from everyone else’s, it undermines the possibility of collective self-organization. The framework of identity reduces politics to who you are as an individual and to gaining recognition as an individual, rather than your membership in a collectivity and the collective struggle against an oppressive social structure. As a result, identity politics paradoxically ends up reinforcing the very norms it set out to criticize.97

He describes Lilla and Coates’s methods as “ultimately mirror images of each other, in their failure to recognize that overcoming white supremacy is not an ‘identity’ issue, one which is restricted to the interests of a particular racial group, but rather at the center of a universal program for emancipation.”98

What makes Haider’s arguments particularly compelling is his refusal to abandon the radical principles from the past, particularly what he calls “insurgent universality” in distinction to “juridical universalism.” To exemplify this, he returns to the critical moment of the French and Haitian Revolution, citing the latter’s introduction of insurgent universality to the former’s juridical universality. With these historical coordinates in mind for our work in the present, Haider looks to the future: “It is still possible to claim the legacy of this insurgent universality, which says that we are not passive victims but active agents of a politics that demands freedom for everyone.”99

“Universality,” Haider claims, “equally refuses to freeze the oppressed in a status of victimhood that requires protection from above; it insists that emancipation is self-emancipation.”100 It is ultimately in this spirit that I read Padmore’s Britain, and also why I advocate reading backward to the historical moment when he saw class and race in tension with one another in communist circles. In Britain, it is through an application of Marxist theory that he harnesses the dialectical potential of this tension.

If we read through Padmore’s canon linearly, we see his thinking shift from an emphasis on black toilers “join[ing] forces with their white brothers against the common enemy” of world capitalism, to something further and further toward the maintenance of the capitalist system.101 Put differently, we can read the trajectory of Padmore’s work over the course of 25 years — from Marxist in 1931’s The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers to African unionist in 1956’s Pan-Africanism or Communism — as not only representing his disillusionment with Communism and its inability
to deal with the “colonial question” but taking up an increasingly localized and concessional view of change. We can also read, however, dialectically — or against the development of capitalism — Padmore’s lesson for the present. The unevenness of his work is productive for our understanding of not just the ideological contradictions of his historical moment, but our own. More particularly, in much the same way that Britain provides answers in 1936 to questions raised by Pan-Africanism in 1956, we are reminded that without addressing the economic and social set of pressures laid out by history, it is impossible to change the nature of capitalist exploitation in the present and future. Reading backward through Padmore allows us to see that the burden of history weighs heavy, particularly on the living.
Notes


2. See Paul Trewhela, “A Critique: Pan-Africanism or Marxisms?” Searchlight South Africa 1.1, (September 1988). There South African critic Paul Trewhela describes the complexity of Padmore’s legacy, even for Pan Africanism: “Among members of the Pan Africanist Congress, George Padmore has been rewarded as “the leading theoretician of Pan Africanism” and as “the Father of African Emancipation” (42). However, Trewhela also describes a general failure to recognize Padmore’s importance, no doubt a historical and political problem stemming from Apartheid in the case of South Africa: “It is characteristic of the mental poverty of existing political tendencies in South Africa that Padmore is so little read, even by his co-thinkers among the Pan Africanists” (42).


5. Minkah Makalani’s In the Cause of Freedom (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) makes an interesting case for what he calls “a new crop of scholars who do not argue for two Padmores — the Padmore who pushed Comintern policies and the later Padmore who broke with the Comintern to take up pan-Africanist causes” (9). Among the many issues with this way of thinking, according to Makalani, is that “Padmore left the Comintern because he believed it had abandoned the cause of African liberation from British and French imperialism, a cause he had pursued through the ITUCNW. Rather than marking a turn to pan-Africanism, his break with the Comintern reflected a long-standing concern with pan-African liberation that took on a different valence in his writings but that had informed his activism well before 1933” (9). Makalani’s description emphasizes Padmore’s continued commitment to Pan-African liberation, a fact borne out by his work. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Padmore’s break with the Comintern not only represents a break with the Communist Party, but also historical materialism in certain instances. My reading of the sometimes nationalist impulse in Pan-Africanism or Communism here attempts to address the complexities of this.


7. See St. Clare Drake’s comments in his lecture (co-edited with George Shepperson), “The Fifth Pan-African Congress, 1945 and the All African People’s Congress, 1958,” Contributions in Black Studies 8.5 (September 2008). There, Drake cites not only Padmore’s turn away from “the Communist movement” (54) after a clash with the Soviet Party in 1933-1934, but also teases that Padmore,
who “had once been a revolutionary,” sometimes “slipped back into his old communist way of thinking” (44). See also Pennybacker From Scottsboro to Munich. Pennybacker usefully summarizes that Padmore “did not immediately gravitate to those more politically moderate than he,” (79) suggesting that Padmore did move to more moderate political positions later in life.

8. See James George Padmore and Decolonization from Below and Drake “The Fifth Pan-African Congress.” According to both Leslie James and St. Clare Drake, Padmore maintained a fraught relationship with Marxist theory throughout his life. As James describes it in his biography, “Padmore worked to rehabilitate his political career outside the bounds of the international communist movement. The complexity of Padmore’s engagement with Marxism and his commitment to Comintern thinking... belie any single conclusion because they stood the test of time in varied ways and in unforeseen moments” (35). Drake notes Padmore’s complicated understanding of the need to forge black solidarity before larger class solidarity as follows: “This was always Padmore’s kind of prediction: ‘You’ve got a chance to drive them to the left but they ain’t going to put down their tools to free you.’ The last time I saw Padmore was in 1959, just before he died, and he was still handling this same line. I think he died with this line.” Drake goes on to argue that “If you read Pan-Africanism or Communism? he’s still carrying a kind of anti-Soviet line in that book, but what he’s saying is he thinks you can be a Marxist-Socialist without necessarily carrying the line of any European or Asian Communist Party” (56).

9. Like that of Makalani, the diligent work of Adi, Pennybacker, James, and Ahlman on Padmore’s relationship with the Communist Party and his connection to Marxism is indispensable for any study of Pan-Africanism and the decolonizing movement more broadly. Adi’s historical accounts of the details and development of Pan-Africanism and its overlaps with communism, as well as the ITUCNW, while invaluable to this study, occasionally seem most intent on discrediting Padmore’s critiques of the Communist Party. The introduction to the book, for instance, begins with the claim that Padmore’s complaints against the Party “were easily dismissed” (Pan Africanism xiv). This is, in some ways, offset and even overcompensated for by Pennybacker when she emphasizes that Padmore’s participation in “later life in a propaganda-group” was the result of his “understanding of what global revolutionary politics required” and goes so far as to tell us that his “talents would readily have been appropriated by other movements...had his vision been weaker than his ambition. His wit and brilliance...alone would have made him a ready contender for celebrity” (Scottsboro 102). James and Ahlman, for their parts, offer excellent recovery projects on Padmore’s life and place in African liberation movements, with Ahlman focusing on Padmore’s time in the Ghana independence movement and his advising relationship with Kwame Nkrumah.

10. To her credit, Pennybacker’s linking of the particular decisions of the Communist Party in the 1930s with Marxism thinking and praxis aptly highlights the conflation of Communism and Marxism in not only Padmore’s critiques, but also in the intellectual and political imaginary of Marxists and non-Marxists alike.

11. James, George Padmore and Decolonization from Below 16.

12. It is important to note that Padmore wrote the three pieces I engage here for different purposes: The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers was a pamphlet commissioned by the Comintern, written for an audience of workers, black and white, around the world; How Britain rules Africa was written
particularly for British workers, in an attempt to provide information as well as create solidarity with black workers; Pan-Africanism or Communism was intended in much the same way as Britain, but for an American audience. Despite the different rhetorical intentions and audiences of these pieces, they each represent an important theoretical contribution in Padmore’s canon, which now extends beyond their original design.

13. The lively and important debates from late 2017 between Asad Haider, Mark Lilla, and Ta’Nehisi Coates focus on the election of Donald Trump and the underlying connection to class and race, often understood by the latter two in terms of liberalism or identity politics, as crucial to any analysis of formal or political equality. Adolph Reed and Ellen Meiksins Wood’s famous debate — which also featured Maurice Zeitlin and Steven Gregory — explores the extent to which unequal race relations are the product of the capitalist economic system.

17. See Makalani’s In the Cause of Freedom. There, Makalani frames the issue: “[Black radicals] confronted a U.S. Communist Party leadership that repeatedly proved either indifferent to questions of race or openly hostile to black radicals’ organizing initiatives and ideas” (5).
18. See Kurt B. Young’s “Towards an 8th Pan-African Congress: The Evolution of the Race-Class Debate,” Journal of Political Ideologies 16.2 (16 June 2011): 145-167. Young provides a useful summary of twentieth-century developments in what he calls “Black Marxism.” He writes: “by the early part of the decade, leaders, activists, scholars and others representing various regions throughout the African world began to construct an alternative view of their post-WWI condition, the forces responsible for it, and the mechanisms for transforming their political and economic oppression... This alternative view concretized throughout the middle of the 20th century into a more mature set of statements about the nature of the Black experience. It became a type of ‘Black Marxism’... an ‘ideology which adapts the tenets of Marxism to the situation of African Americans’... However, the regions of the African Diaspora that gravitated to one form of Marxism or another during this era were somewhat small such that by the 1940s, that energy seemed to decline” (150). Even in the instances where nationalist movements depended upon elements of Marxist theory, it should be noted that these movements emphasized much less than historical predecessors a class-based approach to understanding race and colonization.
19. See “An Open Letter to Earl Browder,” The Crisis 42.10 (October 1935). Padmore articulates the reasons he believes he was ousted from the Party in the public forum of The Crisis, taking the opportunity to challenge the prevailing narrative. In “An Open Letter to Earl Browder,” Padmore directly addresses the general secretary and chief executive of the American Communist Party to hold him accountable for the “lies and slanders” perpetrated against him, particularly the accusation that he had supported the “bourgeoisie of Liberia” (302). Padmore ends the piece with the biting criticism: “I can understand political differences between us, but when you accuse me of being a police agent this is going beyond all sense of decency and fair play. But I leave you in the hands of
the Negro masses. From now on there can be no more compromises; even the imperialists never dared to slander me in this way” (315). It is worth stating definitively that the anti-racist and anti-imperialist legacy of the Communist Party is still underemphasized if not blatantly ignored in historical annals. Despite this, the Communist Party made many complicated political partnerships following the Popular Front era. Among these were the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact (as well as the subsequent German-Soviet Frontier Treaty), compromises with imperial countries, and problematic American political endorsements. These partnerships collectively resulted in some black Party members expressing distrust of and, in many cases, formal resignation from the Communist Party, which they had previously lauded for its anti-racism and anti-imperialism work. For more on the break of many black members from the Party during the 1930s, see Paul D. Amato “The Communist Party and Black Liberation in the 1930s,” International Socialist Review 01, (Summer 1997) https://isreview.org/issue/1/communist-party-and-black-liberation-1930s. Amato captures the sense of confusion and even contradiction surrounding black membership in the Communist Party in the late 1930s forward, a change he associates with Stalin: “In Harlem, the CP was instrumental in organizing a 25,000-strong demonstration of Blacks and Italian-Americans against Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia at a time when anti-Italian sentiment was high in the Black community. The CP’s anti-imperialism, however, was tarnished when the New York Times revealed that Stalin was selling oil and other material to Mussolini’s government. A number of Blacks defected from the CP as a result of this revelation.”


21. Pan-Africanism appears a year after the Bandung Conference of 1955. Bandung was the first “intercontinental conference of colored peoples, so-called colored peoples,” as President Sukarno of host country Indonesia would quip in his opening remarks. Bandung was notable for its open discussion of colonial influence and the practical ends to it. Padmore’s last work, then, appears in a time when Pan-Africanist thought was part of a larger, international tide toward decolonization.

22. See John D. Hargreaves, “Review of Pan-Africanism or Communism by George Padmore,” African Studies Review 15.3 (December 1972): 519. There he highlights the Cold War context of the piece, suggesting that Padmore intentionally framed the title as a choice, because “while colonial governments, in West Africa at least, had by 1956 begun to distinguish Pan-Africanism from Communism with more success than at the time of the 1948 Accra riots, influential sections of the European (and still more of the American) public... still needed to be taught the difference, if they were to acquiesce in the early transfer of power for which Africans were now suddenly able to hope.” See also Kivin P. Tunteng, “George Padmore’s Impact on Africa: A Critical Appraisal,” Phylon 35.1 (March 1974): 33-44.


24. Padmore, Pan-Africanism or Communism 268.

25. Pan-Africanism or Communism 285. Padmore relies, interestingly, on a direct quote from an editorial “Disturbing ‘Good’ Race Relations,” published in the October 1935 edition of The Crisis, in which an anonymous black author (perhaps Padmore himself) goes into great depth regarding the relationship between the Soviets and the ruling class of the Southern United States. The author fumes about the Soviet Communists: “They are always ranting about capitalist exploitation and
robbery and drawing themselves up in their holier-than-thou attitude, but whenever opportunity presents itself they are in the midst of the arms and munitions races, military alliances and the garnering of profits. All of which makes The Crisis continue to look with jaundiced eye upon the ‘Self-Determination for the Black Belt’ proposal of American communists...we maintain that the mere existence of the proposal proves that the idea of separateness is uppermost in the minds of the Red brain trust and not the idea of oneness. And in advancing this theory of separation Communists are hand in hand with the southern ruling class which they so delight to lambast” (305). While the quote from Crisis advocates a seemingly similar agenda to that offered by Padmore in the later analysis, as he continues in Pan-Africanism, his logic grows increasingly accommodationist.

26. Pan-Africanism or Communism 290.
27. Pan-Africanism or Communism 311.
28. Pan-Africanism or Communism 290.
29. Pan-Africanism or Communism 272.
30. Pan-Africanism or Communism 342.
31. Pan-Africanism or Communism 320. See also Peggy Ochoa’s “The Historical Moments of Postcolonial Writing: Beyond Colonialism’s Binary,” Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature 15.2 (Fall 1996): 221. “If we accept the descriptions of colonialism and its effects offered by writers such as Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Abdul JanMohamed,” she writes, “we will conclude that colonialism fosters dualistic, Manichean thinking.” Ochoa continues, “the antithetical pairs advanced by colonial discourse do not allow for a record of alternative thinking because one of the most powerful distinctions between colonizer and colonized is the emphatic difference between a speaker with agency and the figure of the silent or silenced.”

32. Pan-Africanism or Communism 323.
33. Pan-Africanism or Communism 316.
34. Pan-Africanism or Communism 349.
35. For more on Padmore’s ambivalence regarding the Soviet Union at this time, see Leslie James’s George Padmore 97.
36. Pan-Africanism or Communism 356.
37. Pennybacker writes, “Padmore placed weight upon both Soviet entry into the League of Nations in 1934 and Soviet oil sales to Mussolini in 1935, consistent with his earlier writings on Abyssinia” (101).
38. Pan-Africanism or Communism 350.
39. Pan-Africanism or Communism 351.
40. St. Clare Drake describes Padmore’s attempts to address the critiques of Pan-Africanism at the conferences: “It was organizing the two conferences that led Nkrumah and Padmore to a new Pan-African perspective. In the 1955 book regional federations had been visualized as first steps toward All-African unity, but organizing a conference that had people coming from Ethiopia as well as North Africa as well as other parts of Africa led to the proclamation of another slogan: “The Sahara no longer divides us, it unites us...They were now talking about a united political entity as large as the U.S.A., the Soviet Union, or China...The perspective at this Pan-African conference...and its aftermath was not fifty African states, it was continental government of the continent” (“The Fifth Pan-African Congress, 1945” 49-50).
43. Shepperson and Drake, “The Fifth Pan-African Congress, 1945” 50. At the Conference, Fanon “made a speech in French denouncing the whole conference call about non-violence, saying that this was a betrayal of his brothers who were dying for African freedom here today.”
46. James, George Padmore and Decolonization from Below 143: Padmore’s “demand for national parties, and his support for Nkrumah’s nation-building projects, sat uneasily with his transnational, modern vision of postcolonial Africa.” This results in a complicated theory of federations that often does not fully translate to an international (as opposed to transnational) vision.
47. George Padmore and Decolonization from Below 2.
48. George Padmore and Decolonization from Below 143.
49. George Padmore and Decolonization from Below 143.
50. George Padmore and Decolonization from Below 143.
51. My description of possibility and energy includes the capacity for disagreement regarding concepts, as well. In note 26 above, The Crisis engages a critique of Soviet and American communism, while also adhering to the principles of theoretical communism. We might think of both James W. Ford’s piece “The Communist’s Way Out for the Negro,” and The Crisis editorial, then, as engaging a conversation with the aim of keeping alive radical potential.
56. The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers 6.
57. The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers 7.
58. The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers 111.
59. The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers 111.
60. The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers 68.
62. The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers 5-6.
63. The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers 5.
64. The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers 5.
65. The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers 55.
66. The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers 124.
67. The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers 124.
68. The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers 126.
69. The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers 126.
72. See “Book Notes,” *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly* 18.3 (December 1937): 293-296. *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*’s review of Padmore’s book highlights the economic foundation Padmore tracks in his work. See also R.J. Bunche’s “Review: How Britain Rules Africa by George Padmore,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 6.1 (1937). There, Bunche describes Britain as “lack[ing] nothing in terms of honest, frank (brutal, at times) appraisal, and pungent criticism. The perspective is definitely that of the African subject peoples, and their case is ably defended with historical, political, statistical, and human analysis” (75). Bunche continues, “The Africans, Mr. Padmore states, are proletariats” and their “burden he finds to be two-fold — class and race” (75).


76. *How Britain Rules Africa* 32.

77. *How Britain Rules Africa* 3.


82. *How Britain Rules Africa* 333. Here, Padmore argues that while “‘Colonial-nationalism’ cannot be put on the same plane with ‘imperialist-nationalism,’” nationalism movements must also consider the different forms of “indigenous capitalist classes” as well as the “homogenous” versus “developed” class divisions within less developed and more industrialized colonies, respectively.


84. *How Britain Rules Africa* 332.


86. *How Britain Rules Africa* 388.


89. *How Britain Rules Africa* 394.


92. “Class, Race, and Capitalism” 278.

93. “Class, Race, and Capitalism” 280.


95. Reed, “Rejoinder” 310.


100. Haider, Mistaken Identity 113.
101. The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers 7.