ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE BLACK INTERNAL COLONY *

by

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the concrete historical reality to which the "colonial analogy" is now being applied in the United States. While focused on the economic aspects of the Black experience as an internal colony in America, most of the analysis can be generalized to the experiences of other colonized racial groups in the nation.

There are several primary considerations pertinent to this analysis that are elaborated elsewhere in this volume. It is enough to note at this point that the analysis of the experience of racial groups in the U.S., as they parallel those of colonized or formerly colonized nation-states, has been marked by overly facile reasoning, some hasty identification of similarities and differences, as well as premature and sweeping generalizations. This paper attempts to deal first with the historical experience and present the condition of black people in the United States. It goes on to locate this experience within the broader context.

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of the experiences of other colonized people of color around the world. Throughout, we want to keep present that the colonization of African people and other racial groups within the U.S. was nothing more than the logical extension of America's international, colonial involvement, which was itself necessary to further capital accumulation during the formative phases of the American empire.

In addition, we want to stress the principal feature of the racial dimension in internal colonialism: the forceful conquest and domination of people of color by Europeans for purposes of economic exploitation. It is the failure to grasp the essence of the contradiction between races, inherent in colonialism and internal colonialism, that has robbed conventional Marxist analysis of much of its relevance for black people. Race has always been a significant and relatively independent force in shaping material reality in capitalist society. It is a fact that white workers as well as white capitalists have reaped tremendous material rewards from black enslavement and internal colonization.² Since the conventional Marxist analysis, however, has not viewed race as a primary referent in world history, racism has not been treated as a significant social force. Black and Third World analysts have launched a serious effort to correct this deficiency by building on what is useful and pertinent to present realities in Marx but also bringing the facts of racism to the center of attention.³

It is these two essential reference points — internal colonialism as the domestic face of world imperialism and the racist conquest and exploitation of people of color by Europeans — that set the principal themes of this paper.

Economic Aspects of Internal Colonialism

The paramount importance of the economic motive in colonialism is often stressed. The same holds true for situations of internal colonialism. The purpose for which Africans were forcefully colonized in the Americas was to establish an abundant supply of inexpensive labor, and, subsequently, to serve other exploited roles in the process of capital accumulation. We shall interpret these economic motives and activities as being aimed at the extraction of "surplus value" or "economic surplus" from the black internal colony.

Our definition of surplus value comes mainly from Marxist theory. Surplus value is the value which the worker produces