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Book Review

**Entering theWorld of Black Internationalism: A Review of Roderick Bush's
"The End of White World Supremacy"
The African World
By Bill Fletcher, Jr.**

BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor

Bill Fletcher, Jr appears this week on [The Journal](#) with Bill Moyers

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Roderick Bush, [The End of White World Supremacy: Black Internationalism and the Problem of the Color Line](#) (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 258 pps.

St. John's University Professor Roderick Bush has offered a very thought-provoking and challenging examination of the construction of racial capitalism (in the USA and globally) and the Black radical currents that have risen in response. As such, this book is one that not only must be read, but must be contemplated. Bush counters many views regarding the history of social movements in the USA, but he also places before the reader issues that must be considered when envisioning a truly emancipatory movement for social transformation.

Central to Bush's framework is the notion that racism cannot be separated from capitalism. This thesis, while certainly not new, is internationalized by Bush. Bush describes the emergence of capitalism as, from the outset, a global phenomenon and one that could never have been successful had it not been for the combination of the African slave trade and the invasion and conquest of the Western Hemisphere. This framework is critical and distinguishes his analysis from those who tend to look at capitalism as an abstraction to which matters of race and gender are added like bits of silly putty.

The practical implications of this framework are significant. If race is not an add-on to capitalism but, instead, is central, then a progressive politics that is not explicitly anti-racist should be inconceivable. Further, that efforts to construct a progressive, if not Left, politics that fail to appreciate the significance of race are doomed to failure.

US history, and indeed that of the Western Europe, demonstrates that Bush's thesis is more than correct. Efforts at building progressive politics that ignore race tend to encounter a crisis. US history is littered with such examples, including the Populist Movement of the late 19th century/early 20th century. Yet, as Bush explains, the phenomenon is not only one within the USA. Insofar as one understand "race" as a social/political construct that has no relationship to science, but is related to colonialism and the expansion of capital, Bush's analysis helps one understand the challenges, indeed crises, that have been encountered by progressive social movements in European countries that were also hubs of colonialism. European communist and socialist movements that downplayed the importance of challenging colonialism and racism often found themselves complicit in colonial oppression. One notorious example of this was the French Communist Party that was quite late in recognizing that the struggle for Algerian independence was one that it needed to actively support.

What intrigued me about the book, however, was the framework that Bush lays out for understanding Black radicalism. In using the term "Black internationalism" Bush suggests, not so much a separate political current, but rather an approach to the struggle for Black freedom that has been a component part of much of what has come to be known as Black radicalism. In reading the book I was trying to understand the difference between Pan Africanism and Black internationalism, at first not sure whether this was a distinction without a difference. Actually, Pan Africanism represents a certain ideological current within the Black freedom struggle whereas Black internationalism represents an approach that contextualizes the Black freedom struggle internationally. As Bush illustrates, looking at the career of both Malcolm X and the later Martin Luther King, one sees their efforts to place the struggle for Black freedom not in the context of a minority fighting for rights, but rather in the context of the struggles that were underway globally for national liberation and against colonialism and neo-colonialism. What Bush offers is a way of understanding that such an approach was not unique to Malcolm and King, nor to the 1960s, but represented an approach that went back at least to the early 19th century.

A Black internationalist approach is not a romantic framework. Bush helps the reader to understand Black internationalism as a combination of the result of the enslavement of Africans, brought to the Western Hemisphere, on the one hand, and the reality of our - Black people - conducting a freedom struggle in the heart of an empire, on the other. Black internationalism means confronting imperialism, whether one emerges from a nationalist, Pan Africanist, socialist, communist, or some combination of each, tradition. It is to be distinguished from those who have seen the Black freedom struggle as unique and apart from other global struggles for justice.

While I overwhelmingly recommend this book, I found that I had differences with Bush on a few matters. Substantively, while Bush demonstrates the connection between modern racism and capitalism, he seems to downplay the manner in which it was constructed in the USA as a method of social control. In that sense I was surprised that he did not reference the work of Theodore Allen whose two volume work, *The Invention of the White Race* ([Volume One](#), [Volume Two](#)), examines the development of modern racism beginning with the invasion and occupation of Ireland by the English. This is not an insignificant point. While racism develops in conjunction with capitalism

and is used by the capitalists to help to explain and justify colonialism and slavery, it is critical to recognize that the 17th century contained various experiments in social control, a period during which the colonial ruling elite had great difficulty subordinating the working population. White supremacy comes to be hard-wired into the system, not something in any way apart from the racial capitalism of the thirteen colonies and eventually the USA.

A second substantive concern I had revolved around the entire question of nationalism. Bush gives a passionate defense of nationalism as a mechanism that logically emerges in the face of national oppression and racism. I am in agreement. Yet there is little contained in the book that is a developed critique of the evolution of nationalism, not only in the USA among African Americans but globally. Nationalism, as a political current, has always had two aspects: one that united a specific people and helped them to achieve their identity, often in the face of ridicule and oppression from a more powerful nation or empire; and, on the other hand, one that excludes "others." Nationalism, for much of the 20th century was overwhelmingly progressive, if not revolutionary, in its fight against colonialism and empire. But it was also a nationalism that tended NOT to restrict itself to a particular ethnic group. Vietnamese nationalism, for instance, was inclusive of various ethnic groups within Vietnam. The nationalism of the revolutionary forces of Guinea-Bissau was not limited or defined by one tribe, but was a nationalism that was attempting to be a force for the construction of a new nation, one that included different ethnic groups.

In the face of what Egyptian theorist Samir Amin calls the crisis of the national populist project, nationalism in the global South (and Eastern Europe for that matter) has become far more complicated. It has *tended* in the direction of *ethno-nationalism* where the nation comes to be identified with a particular ethnic group or nationality rather than being defined by the people on a territory who have come to share a common history and experience. Consider, for instance, Hutu nationalism in Rwanda which saw itself as flourishing only through the subordination and eventual extermination of the Tutsi.

While nationalism among African Americans continues to have a mainly progressive character, it is certainly the case that matters have become more complex over the last twenty to thirty years. Ethnic nationalism has emerged within Black America in which, for instance, "Black" is no longer the inclusive category used in the 1960s and 1970s, but for many people means African Americans native to the USA who are the descendents of slaves brought to the shores of North America. Further, among some sections of Black America, our interests have come to be defined not so much vis-à-vis white supremacist national oppression, but rather against other oppressed groups of color. A deeper examination of this might have been useful. This may be an unfair criticism in light of other work by Bush, but given the nature of the material he was addressing, both this point regarding nationalism and the earlier one concerning social control probably needed a place in this otherwise excellent book.

My final point is one that I raise reluctantly. [*The End of White World Supremacy*](#) is a well-researched and documented book. Of this, there is no question. Yet Bush tends to present his material very often through the voices of others. In that sense the book tends toward a literature survey. While it is useful to know what other authors are writing concerning the same subject, I kept finding myself wanting to know, much more explicitly, the thinking of the writer whose book I had in front of me. In that sense, I wanted more of Bush's own, original thinking, rather than commentary on the insights of others.

That said, this is a very important book to read. I was excited by the fact that Bush was prepared to push the limits and raise approaches and analyses that are other than mainstream. It did not stop there for me. Not only was the book thought-provoking, but it was equally inspiring, in part because Bush recounted the contributions of Black radicalism to the Black freedom struggle. In so doing Bush made a serious effort to continually demonstrate the manner in which the theories for liberation were internally constructed rather than brought to the Black freedom movement from others.

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