

(RE)TURNS TO CLASS

Marxism 2000 Conference Plenary Session

[transcript]

Doug Henwood: Thank you, it's a bit intimidating to be here, I'm used to speaking to thousands on the radio. But at least you can't see your audience drifting off to sleep or lunging for the tuner. It's more than a bit intimidating to step into Mike Davis' shoes on short notice and it's more than a bit awesome to share a stage with Angela Davis, but I'll do my geeky best under the circumstances. The assigned topic is "(re)turns to class" though I'm never sure how to pronounce those tricky parenthesis. I supposed the prefix is meant to imply that people who pledge some allegiance to Marxism need to get back in touch with one of its distinguishing obsessions. Without the prefix it's a recommendation to those outside the Marxian tradition to take a look at the concept. The implication to me is that radical social analysts have spent the last two decades or so thinking mostly about things other than class, race and ethnicity, gender and sex, and its time to resume thinking about class wiser for all the other thinking that has gone on in the interim. Or, as Kim Moody said in a piece in *New Left Review* a few years ago comparing the present with the 1930s, we have a potential to do class right this time.

Which leads me to a bit of a personal confession, ex-Catholic that I am. I used to be one of those hard-asses who thought there was too much attention being paid to peripheral matters like discourse and desire, and not enough to things like money as if money were unrelated to discourse and desire. I'm not one of those hard-asses anymore, much to the irritation of some unreconstructed hard-asses whose complaints are easily found on the Internet. The softening process actually started at the last Re-Thinking Marxism conference four years ago, during Judith Butler's plenary talk in fact, which eventually found its way into print as merely cultural, so I'd like to thank the organizers of that event for inspiring a little re-thinking of what I thought was Marxism. Having said that...having said that I wish I could launch into some grand synthetic grant, an interrogation say of the phrase, "gay as a three dollar bill" but I had to slap this together on very short notice which means exploiting my current preoccupations, specifically a book I'm finishing up, *A New Economy?*, to appear real soon now from Verso. There's a question mark at the end of that title just in case my inflection didn't make that clear.

You can hardly open a newspaper or turn on a TV, or at least tune to certain channels these days without hearing about a wondrous new economy, though it's sobering to learn that according to a Scudder Investments poll that over 80% of Americans have neither heard nor read of the new economy. The canonical version is relentlessly almost deliriously optimistic. It goes something like this: finally after a long wait the computer revolution is paying off economically. It used to be as the economist Robert Solo famously put it, that that revolution was visible everywhere but in the statistics. Now, with the US productivity stats surging forward, Solo's quip has to be retired. It took some time for people in organizations to learn how to use computers, broadly defined to include all other kinds of high tech electronic gadgetry, but now they finally learned. All

that hardware now linked from local area networks to the global internet along with the political regime of smaller government and lighter regulation, has unleashed forces of innovation and wealth creation like the world has never known before. Flatter hierarchies and more interesting work are the social payoffs; rising incomes and an end to slumps are the economic payoffs. Quality is now replaced quantity, knowledge replaces physical capital and networks replace old-fashioned hierarchies. The portion in the new economy discourse that's relevant to Marxism, and specifically to this panel, is that it's appropriated a lot of rhetoric about revolution, about the overturning of hierarchies, about the democratization of ownership and the workplace that used to be staples of radical politics. At the same time though, new economy rhetoric also rejects a lot of the old Marxian catechism, we are now post-material, scarcity is waning as a social force in an age of endless and almost costlessly reproducible good likes software and movies. Ownership too is waning as a social force. We also hear that physical capital doesn't matter anymore because knowledge, as everyone from George Gilder to Manuel Castells can tell you, is what matters not things, and place doesn't matter much anymore as long as you a cell phone and a good net connection. Honestly, I'm extremely skeptical about almost all these claims or I wouldn't have had a book to write.

One of my favorites of the new era celebrants is an NYU accounting professor named Baruch Lev. One of the things that makes him a nice target is that he's not a mere journalist, like me, but a professor at a brand name business school. Lev argues that his five hundred year old discipline is simply inadequate to the ineffable glories of 21st century capitalism. Today knowledge, not things, rule. That's a fashionable point of view that assumes our ancestors were dolts as if he wheel and the power loom weren't productive embodiments of knowledge in their own time. Things get interesting when Lev gets specific. One of my favorites of his claims and others are detailed in the book, which of course will be available soon from Verso, is his idea that accountancy undervalues assets that are associated with the company's brand which let a company sell its products and services at a higher price than its competitors. This is a version of one of the cornerstones of new paradigm thinking the curious doctrine that brand equity, the financial value that stock markets assigned to names like Nike and Mickey Mouse, is a kind of capital like a lathe or even a piece of software. It's easy to see how privately held assets of that more convectional sort can contribute to social wealth, unless they belong to a bomb factory their produce can make people better off even if the profits they generate are appropriated by a relative handful of managers and shareholders. But a brand, as Naomi Klein puts it in her excellent book *No Logo*, is a kind of collective hallucination. Nike may gain from selling shoes at \$150 that cost a few dollars to make as do its ad agencies in he media where it plasters its swoosh, as does Michael Jordan for hawking his branded shoes, but its hard to see a society as a whole gains. I'm leaving aside the fact that there are actual workers who make the swoosh festooned objects. These simply disappear in new paradigm analysis. Just because the economy is hyper fetishized doesn't mean are no human toilers lurking behind it. But let's get to the Nike brand issue. Nike's gain from its brand mystique is simply other than just loss.

Lev has some more curious ideas. The most curious perhaps being that accounting is far too fixated on the transaction, the exchange of money for a good or service. Rejecting

several centuries of capitalist history in which the sale of a commodity for more money than it took to produce it, profit, was the system's driving force, Lev argues instead in the new economy value is created in far more a-material ways. When a drug passes its clinical test, he says, huge value is created but there's no transaction nothing changes hands, nobody buys anything and nobody sells anything. When a software passes a beta test it suddenly too becomes valuable but there is no transaction. Or think about how value is destroyed. When a big old company is late in figuring out how to enter the world of e-commerce, huge value is destroyed but there's no transaction. Lev is speaking here from the view of the stock market, which is what creates or destroys value by his criteria. But what he seems to forget is that these movements of value, of stock market value, anticipate transactions. The new drug or the new piece of software is valuable only because it will result in future sales. If no one buys these products, the value is illusory. So too is the destruction of value. If the lumbering is slow with its website it only matters if it loses sales to nimbler competitors. It's hard to see how even the most advanced outpost in the new economy can leave the transaction behind forever. For now investors may be willing to buy the stocks, well not anymore, for a while investors were willing to buy the stocks of dot-coms, whose prospectuses provided years of vast and expanding losses, but we saw after the dot-com stock carnage over the last several months that that indulgence had a fixed if surprisingly long life span.

New economy thinking is inseparable from the bull market. It's both its intellectual by product and its retrospective justification. Not to pick on Lev, though he's an irresistible target, but the relation is nicely illustrated by his further claim but since the market value of companies in the standard 4 or 500 index is about seven times their underlying book value, in the US knowledge assets count for six of every seven dollars of corporate market value, and he says this with an exclamation point in the original. So you see, knowledge assets drive the new economy, how do we know this? Because the stock market tells us so. How do we know the stock market is right? Well, we just know it is. A historical look at Lev's measure of corporate America's IQ from 1945-1998 makes a remarkable reading. By that measure corporate America got three times smarter, or more knowledgeable take your pick, from 1948-1968 then came down with a serious bout of idiocy or ignorance between 1968 and 1981, maybe it was all the drugs, only to recover during the Reagan years, maybe it was Ron's personal example, but then achieved unprecedented levels of genius in the 1990s. Indeed corporate America's brainpower tripled between 1990 and 1998, truly these are wondrous times.

Lev makes a juicy target but you hear lots of uncomfortably similar stuff on the left, information is a directly productive force say many, but what is information? Maybe it's a chip design, or a drug formula but in that case the information is inseparable from a complex manufacturing process that nonetheless ends in a commodity exchange for money. The designs and formulas are vigorously protected by intellectual property lawyers. Society as a whole would probably be better off if Intel's gross margins weren't 62% and Africans with AIDS would certainly be better off if drug prices were a lot lower, but capitalism has never been organized to maximize social welfare. Intellectual property lawyers are the class lawyers in expensive suits as much as pinkertons were in Carnegie's day. Or this information such as organizational structure and management

technique, which is about how best to exploit your workforce. Or this information like motivational technique which is about disguising that exploitative relation. Most paradigm challenging may be the stuff that's limitlessly and costlessly reproducible like software and videos. The movie industry is going to great lengths to protect the code that prevents DVD's from being copied. So far the expensively suited class warriors are winning this battle. Software may no longer be copy protected but despite all the threats from open source and free software, not to mention the justice department, Microsoft remains one of the greatest and most profitable monopolies the world has ever seen. Even if the DVD codes were cracked and Microsoft busted up, industries of this sort represent a surprisingly small share of economic life. Indeed in the labor market the mundane will prevail over the chic IT stuff for a long, long time.

According to projections from the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics, there will be three times as many cashiers as system analysts in 2008, six times as many retail clerks as computer programmers, and seven times as many waiters, waitresses, and soda jerks and computer engineers. Law enforcement officers and protective service workers, that's the official jargon for security guards and private detectives no like, these will outnumber computer professionals, the computer professions I just mentioned, by almost 20%. It may be that artists, intellectuals, and journalists – and journalists rarely fall in the first two categories, think that everyone's a knowledge worker these days but rags and guns greatly outnumber mice as the standard tool of a service worker and will continue to do so as far as the eye can see. And drawing at a point from Ursula Hughes in the 1999 edition of the Socialist Register, while the physical commodity won in the classic definition that you can drop on your foot, may be diminishing an importance relative to services. Many of those services are the commodification of activities that were once performed without the exchange of money, and much of that labor, whether paid or unpaid, is disproportionately performed by women. McDonald's replaces the home cooked meal, commercial laundry has replaced in house washing, paid child care replaces the unpaid maternal kind, and now there are signs all over Manhattan advertising a service called UrbanFetch.com which will do your shopping for you, but remains to be seen whether this, like many E-schemes has any real future to it. Apropos paid childcare- a delicious factoid about the U.S. labor market is that parking lot attendants, mostly male and guarding valuable things like cars, are paid more than childcare workers who are mostly female and guarding valueless things like children. Services formally performed by non-profits, like education, are increasingly the realm of profit seeking entities from Chris Whittle and Benno Schmidt's Edison project to the University of Phoenix. By focusing just on the form of the commodity good or service, partisans of the weightlessness so common to a new economy discourse, overlook the monetized social relations behind even the most insubstantial, or apparently insubstantial, virtual wares. Monetized social relations may be encouraging myths of weightlessness in one largely unappreciated way as well. As Barbara Aaron Wright noted in a very fine essay on the growth of domestic labor several months ago in Harper's, "To be cleaned up after is to achieve a certain, magical weightlessness in materiality. Almost everyone complains about violent video games, but paid house cleaning has the same consequence abolishing a sect. A servant economy breathes callousness and solipsism in a served and it does so

all the more effectively when the service is performed up close and routinely in the place where the people live and reproduce.”

Aaron Wright ties the growth and the professional managerial classes use of domestic labor to the broad polarization of U.S. society. The polarization of incomes which creates an affluent upper-middle class, capable of hiring a plentiful supply of poorer women, and the polarization of work, where as she says, “So many the affluent devote their lives to such ghostly pursuits such as stock trading, image making, and opinion polling which renders physical work largely invisible to the opinion making class. With our shoes made in Indonesia, cars assembled in Mexico, and a Jamaican to scrub the toilet, it’s easy to think that the stuff just doesn’t matter anymore. Which isn’t to say that the 18 million U.S. factory workers don’t matter anymore.” If I had the time, I’d point out that domestic auto employment today is 130,000 people higher than the day NAFTA took affect – but I don’t have the time to go into that. One of my other favorite new economy stories is about the democratization of ownership thanks to stock options and mutual funds. This is supposed to be a final resolution through the markets of class conflict.

Lets look first at options, which are supposedly making employees into owner-partners. The national center for employee ownership, a boosterish organization, estimates that between seven and ten million non-managerial workers receive stock options in early 2000, up from just one million a year earlier. Managers in an earlier NCEO study conceded, still receive the lion’s share of available options. The latter release fails to mention that even the ten million represents under 10% of total employment. These options frequently serve as a fantasy-laden substitute for actual cash money paid out by firms that are loosing pots of money. A San Francisco fed studied the impact of IPO’s in the California economy, estimates at some 134,000 employees enjoyed options in stock between 1997 and 1999 with an unrealized value of \$68 billion, an average of about \$500,000 per lucky worker. That sounds like a lot, but the author of the study failed to offer any perspective. Perspective might have interfered with the dominant spirit of celebration. Option granted workers represent just under 1% of employment in California and their unrealized wealth equal just 7% of the state’s personal income.

Big news for the optioned number of workers and big news for Northern California real-estate brokers and Jaguar dealers, but not something that changes the fundamental of the U.S. Economic and class hierarchy. And the financial market center examined 50 representative firms in the fortunate 500, and found that 21% of those options were awarded to the top five executives, with non-managerial employees getting little or none or the booty. Further, the center discovered that most of these firms were severely underestimating the eventual cost of these options to the firms when the holders exercised those options. For a while, granting options might seem like free money, but at some point firms are going to have to come up with the shares which they can do only by issuing new ones which dilutes the value of existing shares and thus irritating their existing share holders. Or by buying up the shares in the open market which will cost them real money, but these things are some things to worry about in the future, when things of course will be limitlessly prosperous and wonderful. Finally, to bring this exercise in the dismal science to a close, what about the overall wealth distribution

numbers? And here I'm looking at wealth – bank accounts and stock holdings rather than income because wealth and equality matters a lot, is paid a little less attention to and may matter even more than income and equality. Wealth insulates its lucky holders from personal economic crises like unemployment or sickness. It offers the opportunity to go to school, start a business, or make big purchases without going into debt. It confers a degree of social prestige and political power, and it can be passed across generations. By contrast income is a lot more ephemeral. You can have a good year followed by a bad one. But wealth, if it's not recklessly invested, is usually there through thick and thin. Wealth is also more closely tied to Marxian notions of class since ownership of the means of production these days usually takes financial form now that complex mediated social relationships have replaced direct ownership.

Lets start at the top, the Forbes' 400. The newest numbers, the ones from 2000, that are in the current issue of Forbes, but haven't gotten a chance to look at them yet so I'm working with last years. Lat year the 400th controlled 1 trillion dollars, up 35% from the previous year. That was 2.4% of total U.S. household net worth, accounted for by just .00004% of U.S. households. The 400's share of total wealth has tripled since the great bull market began in 1982. That's not a picture of democratization for sure. Broadening out to the top 1% that slightly less elite group controlled over 40% of total net worth in 1998, about 4 times their total share of income. The top's 1% share has been pretty flat over the last decade or so, but flat at a level that's the highest since the days surrounding the 1929 stock market crash. These numbers include pension accounts and 401k's, the supposed instruments of mass financial democratization. These figures I've just been quoting are based on sorting households by their net worth, under which assets can be held in many forms. If you look just at stock holdings, the top 1% of shareowners held almost half of all stock in 1998. The top 10% controlled 86% of all share holdings. The bottom 80% of the population just held 4% - how democratic indeed. What has been democratized in recent years is debt. The biggest growth in credit card and mortgage debt in recent years has been among the bottom half of the income distribution. The rich get richer, and the poor borrow some of their excess cash.

Let me conclude though on two optimistic notes. First, the fact that our ideologists have been busily producing tales of our democratization and with them, tales of a new flexibility and self-management in the work place suggest there's some great desire for such among the masses, a desire that mythmakers feel the need to fulfill. That suggests that there's at least some imaginative appeal left to the socialist project, even if it's not articulated as such. Unfortunately though, the ownership of even small amounts of mutual funds can have a toxic psychological effect leading people to fantasize at their owners too, and that their material interests are aligned with those of their betters when in fact the bull market of the last 20 years has been largely powered by an increase in corporate profitability and the ruling class' celebration of its multiple political triumphs from the busting of PATCO to the collapse of the USSR. But, since I'm trying to be more optimistic these days, I'll move beyond that gloomy reservation to say that when I first started talking about the new economy a few years ago, one of the things that seemed truly new was the sense of resignation, even despair, among radical intellectuals and activists. Over the last couple of years though, there has been a massive upsurge of

activism. Not just in Seattle, which is almost getting embarrassing to mention; it makes me feel like an old-timer recalling the good old days of Yore, but also on campuses, and right now in Prague. Forbes's Magazine, once again, did a series of Ads a few years ago with the tagline 'All Hail The Final Triumph Of Capitalism' then final took on the meaning of irreversible. Now it's not completely unreasonable to hope that another meaning was being unconsciously vented by the magazine's copywriters, the last gasp of the old before something new manifests itself. Lets hope so, thank you.

Angela Davis: Thank you. First of all, I'd like to thank Steven Cullenberg and all of the organizers of this conference for having invited me to speak at one of the plenaries. It's wonderful to see so many people who associate themselves with the Marxist tradition, and especially so many young people. And of course the recent defeats and disarray have meant that many people assume that capitalism has achieved a stage of permanence, and this conference is suggesting that the party indeed is not over. I've been asked to talk about class, and the prison industrial complex. And I want to begin by saying that the vexed histories of Marxist theories and praxis in the U.S. over the last three decades have traversed in complex ways. Fervent attempts to make categories like race, gender, sexuality conversant with the Marxist category of class. Of course Cedric Robinson's recently republished *Black Marxism*, and I recommend it to all of you, but of course you should have read it already. Cedric Marxism examines the central role of Marxism and the formation of black intellectuals like W.E.B. Dubois, C.L.R. James, but I want to first comment on the prevailing assumption regarding Dr. Martin Luther King's understanding of anti-capitalist struggles – that it wasn't till the end of his life that he began to broaden his conceptualization of the movement for black equality, beyond civil rights and began to think globally and in terms of class struggle.

Dr. King gave a very interesting tribute to Dubois immediately after his death and I want to share that with you. "We cannot talk of Dr. Dubois," he said, "without recognizing that he was a radical all of his life. Some people would like to ignore the fact that he was a communist in his later years.." And then King goes on to say, "It is worth noting that Abraham Lincoln warmly welcomed the support of Karl Marx during the Civil War and corresponded with him freely. In contemporary life," this of course was in the 60s, "the English-speaking world has no difficulty with the fact that Sean O'Casey was a literary giant of the 20th century and a communist. Or that Pablo Neruda is generally considered the greatest living poet though he served in the Chilean Senate as a communist. It is time.." Dr. King concludes, "To cease muting the fact that Dr. Dubois was a genius and chose to be a communist. Our irrational, obsessive, anti-communism has led us into too many quagmires to be retained as if it were a mode of scientific thinking." Now today it appears that this irrational, obsessive, anti-communism may have begun to atrophy as the memory of a socialist community of nations recedes, but it has been replaced by an irrational, obsessive, affirmation of capitalism. As a matter of fact, and I'll say this to Doug because of your references, I was driving to the airport Thursday evening, the San Francisco Airport, and I saw this gigantic billboard- reddish, pink billboard with enormous words, "Capitalism Served Fresh Daily" by Forbes that is.

I was also listening to the news, I had been listening for the traffic information, and I was listening to one of those all news stations, and precisely at the moment that I saw the billboard the news reporter announced a new report about the discrepancy between wages and available housing in the bay area. Apparently, in the San Francisco Bay area, in order to rent a two-bedroom apartment one must now earn \$28.00 an hour, or as much on the stock market. We are all now invited to join the Capitalist party. Even some children as Gayatri Spivak pointed out yesterday afternoon, no one who makes minimum wage can afford an apartment any longer. So listening to that report, I thought about the welfare to work programs across the country and it occurred to me that a single mother with a family to support, will now have to move to Nebraska in order to be assured of housing. Otherwise, she may very well end up in one of the countries' new women prisons – but that's an aside.

I want to engage for a moment in some more historical reflections, and I guess I am allowed to do this since most of the time I get associated with a particular historical era, although I try hard to point out that this is the year 2000. Many people introduce themselves to me by saying “I come from the 60's” as if it were a place where one can return to. Speaking of the 60's, during the height of the black liberation movement prominent leaders like James Foreman for example, influenced as they were by such figures as Frantz Fanon, argued against what was called at the time reactionary nationalism. Foreman for example, I remember a black youth conference in, I believe 1967, in which he gave a talk arguing that the prevailing skin analysis needed to be complimented with a class analysis. Of course, with respect to gender during that same period, socialist feminism emerged as a theoretical and activist category that indicated a critical relationship to Marxian frameworks that was not primarily about inserting gender into a theoretical milieu of fundamentally informed by class, but it was about troubling the masculinization of class. The masculinist conceptualizations of class, and this may be the year 2000 but there still is a great deal of troubling to be done in that respect.

Even as intersectional analyses have become increasingly sophisticated, in what Corbina Mera has called the requisite mantra of race, class, and gender is incorporated into our thinking and our practices. Class has tended to dropout- the gender and race analyses often, originally designed to both trouble and deepen class analyses have frequently tended to displace or replace class. I mean I just have to say this, as much as we try to contest this it seems that the dominant assumption remains that class is the province of white men- I just had to say that. Of course this conference takes place in the aftermath of two major demonstrations against the effects of globalization, which brought a much-needed sense of revitalization and hope to radical activists and thinkers. Those demonstrations served for example to highlight the anti-sweatshop campaign, especially as that campaign in turn highlights gender and points to its connection with immigrants rights, the immigrants rights movement. As very specific ways in which organizing is directly engaging with the structures of class in the era of globalization and its cross-cutting relations to gender and race. Of course another important presence in the recent demonstrations has been the movement against the prison industrial complex. The question I want to focus on this evening is how an analysis of the prison industrial complex helps us to systematically incorporate this category of class into our theoretical

understandings and our activism. I also want to suggest that thinkers like Herbert Marcuse and Cedric Robinson, Avery Gordon and their critical appropriations of Marxian ideas help us to rethink the value of utopian imagination, at a time when it is as difficult to imagine a world without prisons as it is to imagine a world without capitalism. The context of the ideological struggle confronting us is one that has been shaped by the ease with which we have embraced in both scholarly and popular frameworks, the designation underclass. The rapidity with which it conceptually devours and racializes ever larger groups of women and men should give us cause to rethink the Marxian categories that have historically served to explain the material and ideological expulsion of ever larger numbers of people from the working class.

Historically many of the debates surrounding the relationship between state-sanctioned punishment and radical social movements have focused on the place of the lumpenproletariat in Marx's ideas about class. Of course Fanon insisted that the lumpenproletariat was a key to the success of the Algerian revolution, and this was wielded against Marx's dismay of what he called the refuse of all classes. Advocates of the lumpen – and I could mention some names – failed to grasp the reason why Fanon argued for the organizing of the lumpenproletariat. Only the unemployed including and especially prisoners were entirely outside of the capitalist system of production, and as outsiders they alone were capable of effectively challenging the system. Of course, a decidedly a non-Marxist position. However, Fanon argued with Marx that the lumpenproletariat could be easily transformed into collaborators with colonialism and for that reason alone, needed to be organized. And I'm quoting from *The Wretched of the Earth*, "If this available reserve of human effort is not immediately organized by the forces of rebellion, it will find itself fighting as higher soldiers side by side with the colonial troops." Parenthetically, but not insignificantly, neither Marx, nor Fanon envisioned the lumpenproletariat as gender. Consequently the implications of this potential counter revolutionary, on the one hand, or revolutionary force on the other hand, the implications of it being constituted, as a masculine force could never be addressed.

What about class in this contemporary era of the prison industrial complex? The prison industrial complex is a relatively new concept, which I didn't really help to originate. It was, I think Mike Davis who originated the notion, and I thought Mike would be here this evening and wanted to ask him. In 1995 he wrote an article in *The Nation*, on a prison in California – Calipatria Prison, and the title of that article was, 'Hell Factories And The Feel- A Prison Industrial Complex.' According to Mike Davis, "An emergent prison industrial complex increasingly rivals agro-business as the dominant force in the life of rural California and competes with land developers as the chief seducer of legislators in Sacramento. It has become a monster that threatens to overpower and devour its creators, and its uncontrollable growth ought to rattle a national consciousness now complacent at the thought of a permanent prison class." Now two years ago, a group of scholars and activists, as Stephen pointed out, organized a conference at UC Berkeley, which was entitled, 'Critical Resistance- Beyond The Prison Industrial Complex'. Mike Davis was a major presenter at that conference and as a matter of fact, and two of the organizers, Ruth Gilmore who teaches at UC Berkeley, and Dylan Rodriguez who is finishing his degree there are presenting here at Rethinking Marxism 2000. When we began to organize that

conference one of our major tasks was to encourage the popularization of the term, Prison Industrial Complex. We were of the opinion that a shift in the language used to discuss the expanding prison system would have the effect of encouraging a multi-prong analysis that would involve, and I'll list some of the components of that analysis.

First of all, the political economy of prisons and, Ruth Gilmore has a fourth coming book on the political economy of California prisons. Second of all, the place of prisons and the global economy. Number three, the political, social, and cultural implications of a rapidly growing population of prisoners. Two million people are in prison now, 150,000 of them are women. The overwhelming majority of them are people of color. That is to say, Black people, Latinos, increasing numbers of Asians, Native Americans. As a matter of fact, I think Native Americans have the highest per-capita rate of imprisonment. Number four, a new vocabulary with which to imagine a social landscape no longer dominated by prisons. Number five, and these are in no particular order, the role of gender in shaping a prison population over determined by race and class. Number six the role of prisoners. The role of prisoners as subjects and objects of social change. This is something Dylan Rodriguez addresses in his work. Last Spring, I took part in a research group sponsored by the University of California, Humanities Research Center- research group on the prison industrial complex. Some of the participants included Ruth Gilmore, Nancy Scheper-Hughes David Goldberg, Gina Dent, Avery Gordon. One of the central texts we decided to read, or rather reread was 'Policing The Crisis' by Stuart Hall et al.

So this evening I want to return to the last chapter, it sounds like I'm giving a sermon, chapter and verse. I do want to turn to the last chapter for the insights I think we can call regarding ways of thinking about class struggles deeply inflected by race and gender in this era of the prison industrial complex. And so I want to quote somewhat extensively from a passage in chapter 9, which contextualizes that oft sighted phrase 'Race is the modality in which...' Come on now, this is rethinking Marxism 2000 'Race is the modality in which class is lived'. Then of course there's the other version, 'Gender is the modality in which race is lived', but let me quote this passage. "Race is intrinsic to the manner in which the black laboring classes are complexly constituted at the economic, political, and ideological levels. Race enters into the way Black labor, male and female, is distributed as economic agents on the level of economic practice, and the class struggles, which result from it. Into the way the fractions of the Black laboring class are constituted as a set of political forces in the theater of politics, and the political struggle, which results. And in the manner in which that classes articulated as the collective and individual subjects of emergent ideologies and forms of consciousness, and the struggle over ideology, culture, and consciousness which results. This gives the matter of race and racism a theoretical as well as practical centrality to all the relations and practices, which effect Black labor. Race is the modality in which class is lived. It is also the medium in which class relations are experienced. This does not immediately heal any breaches or bridge any chasms but it has consequences for the whole class whose relation to their conditions of existence is now systematically transformed by race. It determines some of the modes of struggles; it also provides one of the criteria by which we measure the adequacy of struggle to the structures it aims to transform."

I don't really have time to consider how and account of the impact the prison system at each of these levels: economic, political, ideological would create significant shifts in the way in which we think about and organize around class issues. But I do want to suggest that the imprisonment of two million bodies demands that we examine the adequacy of struggles that do not take into consideration that criminalization is a routine mode of racialization today, and that it has profound effects on the constitution of the working class. The office of policing the crisis conclude their extensive study of the moral panic over mugging with a warning that it is important, urgent even, to engage in practice with the quote, "Economic, political, and ideological conditions producing crime, and which thus produce a racialized sector of the class which is being systematically driven into crime, but we should not mistake," the authors argue, "proto-political consciousness for organized political struggle and practice." I should say parenthetically, that the notion of crime is one that is constructed. Crime is not something objective, that's what the whole book is about, an examining mugging.

The point they make in the very last pages of 'Policing the Crisis' is that even in those organizations like The Black Panther Party of the late 60's and early 70's, even those organizations that have seen the wage list as their primary constituency have achieved only limited successes. The authors conclude, and I quote again, "There is as yet no active politics, no form of organized struggle, and no strategy which is able adequately and decisively to intervene in the quasi-rebellion of the Black Wage List, such as would be capable of bringing about that break in the current Faust appropriations of oppression through crime. That critical transformation of the criminalized consciousness into something more sustained and thorough going in a political sense.

Of course this was the unfinished, and perhaps then unrealizable task undertaken by George Jackson. The formulation by the authors of "Policing the Crisis" precisely echoes Jackson's own words. This is one of the issues Dylan Rodriguez takes up in his work on prisoner discourse. Recent collections of prisoner's writings Gale Chevigny's volume and Bruce Franklin's volume as well as writings by prisoners like Mumia Abu-Jamal may not accomplish this transformation but they do provide alternative knowledges of the punishment system.

The social space of the prison is accessible to the public primarily through the scholarly and popular discourses associated with social scientific discipline, such as criminology and sociology. Because commonsense ideas regarding imprisonment tend to rely on the well rehearsed statistical information linking rising rates of incarceration to penal strategies that putatively minimize crime. Because of this more complicated conversations regarding the place of punishment in U.S. society, tend to be relegated to a marginal status. Many of these conversations are happening within prison, among prisoners. If you look at Bruce Franklin's anthology of prison literature in the 20th century, Franklin uses prison writing to construct an insider history of U.S. prisons. Gale Chevigny and her volume, which is entitled "Doing Time", Chevigny's approach is more sociological. She organizes writings, prisoner writings around themes like time, and routines, and racism, work, family, writing and views of the outside world. Her collection represents prison both as an aberrant social formation with its totalitarian character and

attendant brutality, and at the same time as a stable community of individuals who try to lead relatively normal lives. As the writing itself is produced within, an attest to the tensions between these two opposing representations of imprisonment. The anthology tends to be both an expose' of the institution and at the same time and unwitting affirmation of its permanence. But this isn't the fault of the anthology, nor of its contributors. Indeed some of the most powerful pieces reveal that even as we are tempted to think about prison in the simplistic terms with which it is represented in popular discourse, 'do the crime do the time' for example. The complicated social relations within the prison indicate the extent to which this institution designed to sever its inhabitants from the larger society, is more closely tied to that society than we would imagine.

For example, Susan Rosenberg's short story entitled "Lee's Time", evokes the pervasive sexual coercion that is a defining feature of women's prisons. Further complicated, by the racism that remains linked to structures of state punishment. Which isn't to say that sexual violence is not also linked to structures of state punishment, indeed it is. But in the instance of this short story, a white prisoner reflects on the way racism troubles the hierarchy of guard and prisoner. The legacy of George Jackson's attempts to transform criminal consciousness into a more productive political consciousness is still very much alive among many of the men and women who inhabit the space of the prison. As a matter of fact, prison is a place that is very much connected to the past and if you've ever been into a prison, and if you've ever read descriptions of prisons in the early twentieth century, the late nineteenth century, you find it remarkable that while there have been many changes in a fundamental way, very little has changed. But in connection with the critical resistance conference I was referring to, we received thousands of letters from prisoners. Prisoners who wanted to participate in the conference. Prisoners who wanted to add their ideas to our efforts to develop a critique of the prison industrial complex. And as a matter of fact I learned that very recently on Black Solidarity Day, when is Black Solidarity Day? Well we don't celebrate it on the west coast so we're, but I know in New York, do you know what I'm talking about? Do you know what I'm talking about? Does anybody? When is it? No it's not in February, it's not...okay well anyway. On Black Solidarity Day, interestingly enough, prisoners at Sing Sing in New York, organized a session entitled, conducted by the prisoners themselves, entitled The Prison Industrial Complex. And I happen to find one of the talks delivered at that section, on the Internet.

But the point I want to make, in this presentation as I move toward my conclusion is that class solidarity has never been an easy task. The historical presence of racism and male dominance within the labor movement attest to that. But it is even more difficult to think about solidarity with prisoners. And especially prisoners, men and women alike, who despite their imprisonment continue to be evolved in the productive process. Prison labor is one important ingredient of the prison industrial complex. Although it is certainly not it's defining feature. An increasing proportion of the 50 billion dollar corrections budget goes to private corporations. And I believe the criminal justice budget, if we want to look at the entire criminal justice budget, its approximately 150 billion dollars. Very rapidly approaching the magnitude of the defense budget. According to Joel Dyer there are now 18 telephone companies competing for the prison market. And they generate 1 billion

dollars, on prison phone calls alone. He points out that one pay telephone in a prison can generate 15 thousand dollars a year. Collect phone calls, prisoners make to their generally very poor relatives.

But as Dyer and others have pointed out, one of the most revealing aspects of the market driven punishment industry, is the emergence of an industry called prisoner brokering. And during Doug Henwood's presentation about all of these activities that used to be performed without generating profit, I thought about this new business called prisoner brokering where entire companies generate enormous profits simply by finding cells for prisoner's bodies, from one end of the country to another. And he points out in his book that he spent, I think one day, making telephone calls finding out where, I don't know whether he was posing as a broker, but he spent one day making telephone calls and did work that would have amounted to over 400 thousand dollars in profit, finding cells for prisoners.

During this last section of my presentation, I want to raise some questions regarding, to return to the theme of prison labor. I want to raise some questions regarding the relationship between the labor unions and prison labor. We know that in the 1970s around the time of the Attica rebellion, serious efforts were undertaken to organize unions, particularly in California prisons. But what about today? Considering the state of the labor movement today and the declining proportion of U.S. workers who are union members, I believe that we've hit the lowest percentage since the industrial unions began to organize during the 1930s. I mean considering that it would seem that any drive to organize the unorganized needs to take up the issue of organizing prisoners. Any drive to organize the unorganized, needs to take up the issue of organizing prisoners.

At the last convention of UE, United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers, at their last convention a resolution was cast bearing the title "Curb the Prison Industrial Complex." And they point out in the resolution, that quote "this enormous and growing prison population represents a huge pool of cheap labor that directly threatens the wages and conditions of those of us who work on the outside of the walls." While they acknowledge that at present, only a small percentage, a relatively small percentage of prisoners are employed by private corporations, they go on to say that state's selling of prison labor to private companies at the cost of jobs on the outside, is not unlike forcing former welfare recipients into workfare jobs that in many case, were held by non-prison union workers. The abuse of prison labor by private corporations is also the moral and practical equivalent of NAFTA. Like the labor parties and unions of earlier generations we must declare loudly and firmly that as free workers we will not be forced to compete with the un-free. Now, let me finish because they make 5 demands and I just want to briefly go through those demands. They resolved at the convention, called on the congress to prohibit the use of prison labor by private companies for private profit. That the displacement of private or public sector workers by prison labor be strictly prohibited. That criminal penalties be imposed on companies making use on inmate labor for purposes related to strike breaking. And they demand that until use of prison labor for profit is prohibited, all such labor performed by inmates be compensated at no less than the prevailing wages and benefits. And the resolution urges that prisoners participating in

work programs be covered by workers compensation and occupational safety and health laws and receive social security credit.

Now of course, now I'm at the beginning of a new talk, which would closely examine the implications of this resolution. But suffice it to say that it marks an important beginning. Even with its deeply ambivalent posture with respect to class, solidarity, reflective, I might add, of a similar ambivalence with respect to workers in the southern countries within the context of globalization. The resolution, the resolution fails to consider the implications of labor performed directly for the state as opposed to labor for private corporations. It is hesitant to name race except in the historical context of references to the post labor convict lease system. And it stops short of calling upon the union to organize the unorganized who do not live in the free world. But such a position would necessitate a very different notion of who counts as working class. And such a position would require us to assume the abolitionist stance of imagining a world without prisoners. Thank you.

[end]