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The whiteness of markets: Anglo-American colonialism, white supremacy and free market rhetoric

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ABSTRACT

Building on the burgeoning raced markets literature, I examine the function of markets in colour-blind racism. I argue that ‘the market’ is a useful rhetorical mechanism in everyday political thinking that reproduces white supremacy. To demonstrate this, I look at the work of white supremacist and early American political economist: Thomas Roderick Dew. Focusing on his political economy lectures, I find that the emergent study of markets gave Dew the language to frame the American racial order as the product of natural laws that generate social good. I suggest that the efficacy of his pro-slavery argumentation is contingent on an imbalanced imagination of market histories that over-represents the white experience. Using an un-colourblinding historiography, I amplify the different experiences of Native Americans and enslaved Black Americans as well as challenging the idealisation of the white settler, which exposes the assumptions behind Dew’s pro-slavery rhetoric. Turning to a children’s podcast in the twenty-first century, I reveal how ‘the market’ is a reconfiguration of the same rhetorical strategy, where the white experience is over-represented and idealised, ultimately reproducing the material outcomes of white supremacy: maintaining and deepening the racial wealth divide.


KEYWORDS

Raced markets; historiography; rhetorical analysis; American economic history; anti-racist political economy

Introduction

I am a pretty big fan of free markets, not only because they fill our world with all sorts of diverse products and services and give us more choice ... but it also helps us combat social injustices, too, and specifically racism. – Brittany Hunter (Hunter and Boyak 2021) from *The Tuttle Twins*

George Bonilla-Silva (2017, p. 2) describes colour-blind racism as explaining ‘racial inequality as the outcome of non-racial dynamics’ and points specifically to ‘market dynamics’ as one of the prominent explanans in this racial ideology. The opening quote from *The Tuttle Twins* – an American publisher of children’s books – may appear to be an incongruous example, because it does not seek to explain racial inequality. Instead, it frames markets as an apparently anti-racist social structure. The growth of a bespoke raced markets literature confronts this assumption (Saul 2018, Tilley and Shilham 2018, Watson 2018a, Kaplan 2021, Bhagat 2022). Markets can be, and historically have been, raced. However, what remains relatively under-researched in the raced market literature is the use of ‘the market’ in everyday political thinking to obscure the role of race in the economy. In this paper, I build on this scholarship by looking at the ideological function of markets in colour-blind

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racism. The central argument of this paper is that ‘the market’ serves as a rhetorical mechanism through which the ill-gotten gains of settler colonialism and white supremacy are reproduced.

In societies like the USA organised around race, the collapse of the biological theory underpinning white supremacy left an epistemic crater. However, far from inciting an urgent un-making of the material reality of white supremacy, the change in scientific consensus around race has prompted defenders of the racial status quo to turn to other ‘natural’ explanans for racial inequality. These political actors sought sufficiently persuasive arguments – rhetoric – that explain racial inequality as the product of a mechanism that is not racial. ‘To think rhetorically,’ according to Alan Finlayson (2012, p. 8), ‘is to think about how to bridge the gulf between what we “know” to be the case and what we think others imagine it to be.’ What The Tuttle Twins ‘know’ to be true and what they think others will find true is: markets are neutral. As such, markets cannot be racist. This common sense belief did not emerge spontaneously. While colour-blind racism as a coherent ideology has only emerged recently, Richard Saull (2018, p. 592) implies that colourblindness has a longer history, generated from ‘a pre-conceived and hidden default of whiteness’. I contend that there is a hidden default of whiteness in what The Tuttle Twins ‘know’ to be the role of markets in society, which has been constructed through previous iterations of argumentation and rhetorical acts in American white supremacist intellectual culture.

To demonstrate this, I put forward the case of Thomas Roderick Dew. A prominent white supremacist, Dew’s (1832, Brophy 2008) lasting legacy is his *Review of the Debates in the Virginia Legislature*, which provided a comprehensive pro-slavery argument in the aftermath of Nat Turner’s rebellion.¹ However, less emphasis has been placed on his status as one of the first American political economists, who reimagined the emergent study of market-based societies in Europe for an American audience. Instead of looking at his essays on slavery, I turn to Dew’s (1829) *Lectures on the Restrictive System* where he provides an abstract economic model of the colonial state – a peculiar configuration of land-capital-labour in the service of markets – that superficially reflects the history of the Anglo-American economy. It is in these lectures that I argue Dew reveals the rhetorical appeal of the language of markets in the process of naturalising the American racial order. This rhetoric, however, is substantiated by an imbalanced, idealised imagination of history. I propose Dew’s historical narrative can be un-colourblinded: exposing the erasure of Native Americans, the paradoxical inclusion and exclusion of enslaved Americans, and the idealisation of the colonial capitalist. Nevertheless, Dew represents an early example of the persuasive power of market ideology to frame the material advantages that white Americans enjoy in a positive light, which influenced American political thought long after his death.

I lay out the evidence for my argument in three parts. I begin by providing a condensed biography of Dew and pointing to his relevance in this analysis. I draw attention to a specific passage in his lectures on political economy, which I explain is an early example of a colour-blinded narrative of Anglo-American history. In the next section, I provide an un-colourblinding historiography of the rise of land and labour markets in the Anglo-American colonies, amplifying the different perspectives of Native Americans and enslaved Black Americans as well as questioning the idealisation of the economic behaviour of the white coloniser. These stories reveal that Dew’s arguments for the virtues of slavery were contingent on a misrepresentation of markets in American history. In the final section, I return to The Tuttle Twins podcast to un-colourblind their historical narrative of markets during the Jim Crow era. The use of ‘the market’ in the podcast, I conclude, is simply a reconfiguration of a white supremacist rhetorical strategy: cherry-picking from history to frame racialised institutions as a social good.

Thomas Dew’s colourblinding

Within studies of American history, Thomas Dew is most known as a white supremacist whose pro-slavery political writings setback the campaign for abolition in Virginia. In *Review*, it is not difficult to uncover Dew’s vision of racial hierarchy. He lauds the racial order of the American South: ‘Color alone

here is the badge of distinction, the mark of aristocracy, and all who are white are equal' (Dew 1832, p. 113). While many anti-abolitionists in the same era framed the end of slavery as impractical, Dew argued that slavery was good for both the slave owner *and the enslaved person*. Alfred Brophy (2008) has demonstrated how Dew's pro-slavery arguments widely influenced American intellectual culture. And yet, comparatively little attention is paid to his earlier political economy *Lectures*, which Brophy (2008, p. 1110) briefly describes as 'a work of political economy emphasizing both virtues of the market and the greed of humans'. Brophy does not indicate, though, that there is a relationship between Dew's work on political economy and his white supremacist beliefs. However, I perceive in *Lectures* an important early example where the nascent study of political economy in Europe is adapted to explain the racial organisation of American society in economic terms.

The study of political economy was slow to move to the USA. While there is evidence that many Americans read works of political economy such as *The Wealth of Nations*, only one known institution of higher education taught political economy by the end of the eighteenth century: the College of William and Mary (Barber 1993 [1988]). This changed rapidly in the 1820s when two sets of lectures were published from leading academics at American institutions: *Lectures on the Elements of Political Economy* by Thomas Cooper (1826) and *Dew's Lectures* (1829). Cooper is an interesting case in his own right, but Dew is a significant figure specifically relevant to the analysis of this article for a few reasons. The works of Smith, Say, Ricardo, Malthus, and others were written in European contexts that did not automatically translate to Americans; they 'needed to be adapted to American conditions and American audiences' (Barber 1993 [1988], p. 6). While the English-born Cooper adopted an American identity later in life, the American-born Dew trained at William and Mary. As a consequence, Dew's lectures have a distinctive American style, clear references to the unique conditions of the USA, and citations of American figures such as Thomas Jefferson. Lastly, while Cooper equivocated on the issue of slavery, Dew was an unabashed pro-slavery advocate who explicitly stated his vision of racial difference in *Review*.

That said, there is no overt reference to race within *Dew's Lectures*. This may be why some histories of Dew treat his pro-slavery thinking as separate from his work in political economy. *Lectures* is an unremarkable political economy text, filled with themes familiar to historians of economic thought – division of labour, trade, the relative advantage of agriculture versus manufacturing, etc. The 'virtues of the market' Brophy references can be found in Dew's (1829, p. v) first lecture, summarised as: 'The principle of supply and demand which regulates present prices, will always ensure that supply which our wants require.' Dew (1829, p. 4) opens this lectures with the 'condition of man': to live in a world with unlimited wants, but with limited resources. He then directs his audience to the 'laws' regulating price, the interactions between consumer and producer ensures that prices are 'constantly gravitating' to a position in which the self-interest of all market participants is maximised (Dew 1829, p. 5). These ideas are relatively unremarkable, having little – if any – impact on subsequent political economy theory. By contrast, *Review* played a defining role in delaying the abolition of slavery. Dew's political economy writings, then, appear both unrelated to and less relevant than his white supremacist political work.

However, a closer reading of *Dew's Lectures* does indicate a racial conception of society. In particular, it is worth examining Dew's (1829, p. 25) abstracted description of the colonial state:

Suppose, then, a country comparatively empty of inhabitants, has at length been discovered by a civilized nation, and a company of colonists is sent out by the mother country to till and cultivate it. When they first arrive, they find good land ... devoid of exchangeable value, in consequence of its profuse abundance. Lands, favourably situated as to market ... will alone at first be taken into cultivation. Little or no rent will be paid on these lands, therefore the whole produce will be shared between capitalists who furnish the capitals, and labourers who furnish the labour.

It is not difficult for the reader to identify Anglo-American colonial community from this text. Only a few paragraphs later Dew himself draws the specific comparison between Virginia, USA, and Norfolk, England.

There are several noteworthy observations from this extract. This is the earliest example that I have found of an American making the now familiar claim that the American nation was capitalist from the moment it was settled. The words ‘capitalism’ and ‘capitalist’ are absent from the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Federalist Papers, key intellectual works describing the character of the newly independent USA in the 1770–1780s. The word ‘capitalist’ only appears in the subsequent 40 years, coming into common use in English debating clubs in the 1820s (McCallman, 1987). Unlike Dew, the Ricardian and Owenite debaters who used the word ‘capitalist’ in England used it in an explicitly *anti*-capitalist sense. Dew’s words, then, are also distinct in the positive appraisal of colonial capitalists. Even Cooper (1826, p. 123) describes the colonist as ‘a small consumer’ and derides them as ‘war-breeders’ who ‘add nothing to the wealth, and nothing to the strength of an empire’. Lastly, this is a narrative of the emergence of market society. It is the transformation of land ‘devoid of exchangeable value’ into land producing for markets that makes the Anglo-American colonial capitalist so profitable.

Most importantly, though, we can see that Dew’s capitalist is raced. Sent from a European (coded ‘civilized’) ‘mother country’, Dew’s capitalist is a white man. Invisible in Dew’s description of the American capitalist system are the first inhabitants who received no rent – the First Nations – and the labourers who received no wages – enslaved African people and their descendants. Lisa Tilley and Robbie Shilliam (2018, p. 538) have described colourblindness in the context of political economy as ‘the obfuscation of race from the economy’. If the efficacy of markets in colour-blind ideology is that they are apparently non-racial, it is this obfuscation – the hidden default of whiteness – that sustains their explanatory power. Nowhere does Dew explicitly label the American capitalist ‘white’; it is always the capitalist, the labourer, the farmer, the individual, the American, the man. Other scholars have demonstrated that representing the specific white experience as simply the ‘condition of man’ is foundational to white power. ‘The claim to power,’ Richard Dyer (1997, p. 12) writes in his essay on whiteness, ‘is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity.’ Elaborating on Sylvia Wynter’s (2003) concept of ‘over-representation’, Shilliam (2021, p. 83 emphasis in original) uncovers evidence of hidden assumptions that white men represent ‘*the only true image of humanity*’.

By only including the white experience, Dew makes the peculiar interests of the white Anglo-American coloniser stand for the only true economic image of humans in America. The high profits from the low rent would allow the capitalist to ‘rapidly augment capital’ and the labourer to store value to ‘soon become a new capitalist’ (Dew 1829, p. 26). Dew tacitly argues that the white American coloniser has become profitable not *because* he was white, but as the impartial reward for mastering markets. Dew (1829, p. 26) concludes, ‘nothing can more clearly indicate the prosperity of a nation, than high profit’. As the white coloniser profited from the capitalist system, then implicitly all Americans profited from the system. In this way, Dew’s *Lectures* are more insidious than the *Review*. Dew presents the distribution of wealth that favours white Americans as the *natural* product of the laws of political economy. Dew’s abstracted history of Anglo-American markets, then, is also an early example of a colourblinded argument.

Why specifically were *market dynamics* so appealing for Dew’s white supremacist logic? To apprehend this, I suggest un-colourblinding Dew’s narrative of Anglo-American history. That is, the role of race in the early American economy – and specifically markets – must be rendered visible. If the white colonial capitalist is over-represented, an un-colourblinding historiography requires a correction of this imbalance in representation. This begins with amplifying the different perspectives of both Native Americans and enslaved Black Americans in Anglo-American history. In *Seeing Race Again*, the authors state that ‘the market subject of classical capitalist theory ... [rests] upon an ideal of interchangeability wherein differences are said not to matter’ (Crenshaw et al. 2019). An un-colourblinding method takes these differences seriously. Identifying these different experiences – including how they have been ‘erased’ (Tilley and Shilliam, 2018) or have even been paradoxically treated as both ‘included’ and ‘excluded’ (Tilley 2021, Bhagat 2022) – will uncover the underlying logic of dehumanisation justifying why these experiences should be excluded. Additionally, I

suggest submitting Dew's words to 'the project of "making whiteness strange"' (Dyer 1997, p. 14). By examining the peculiarity of the white American economic experience, it is difficult to see the economic behaviour *internal* to white Americans as coherent, let alone ideal.

Un-colourblinding Dew's colonial economic history

In this section, I provide an alternative account of the emergence of Anglo-American markets. I proceed by scrutinising the three agents in Dew's history: the (erased) landlord, the (included-excluded) labourer, and the (non-ideal) capitalist. It is the relationship to land and labour 'markets' that structured the Anglo-American colonisers' different racialisation of 'Red' Native Americans and 'Black' enslaved Africans (Wolfe 2001). The different experiences of these racialised groups reveals how early American markets served white Americans' efforts to permanently remove the First Nations from their land and to disallow enslaved Americans agency in their own lives. These efforts were thwarted by the intergenerational resistance and rebellion of indigenous communities, enslaved people and their descendants *in spite of these raced markets*. Turning, then, to the less laudable economic histories of the American settlers exposes the fecklessness, incompetence and cruelty excluded in Dew's abstracted model of the colonial state. Dew's imagination of the colonial history, then, serves to obscure how the real markets were principally flexible institutions in which white Americans could accrue wealth through unscrupulous means. It is from these misrepresentations that Dew makes his argument that slavery is a social good.

My intention is not to provide a comprehensive economic history of colonial America, but to highlight what Dew obfuscates in his narrative. As Dew himself draws a connection between the USA and England, I focus on the Anglo-American colonies and the USA. The impact of English law and culture on the political ideologies of the early American nation is well-established in historical literature (for example Williams 1994 [1944], Morgan 2003 [1975], Allen 2012 [1994], 2012 [1997]). This is not to absolve other European powers of the consequences of their colonial influence. But there are many distinctive features to English colonialism in America, which some scholars argue relate in part to England's unique historical, cultural relationship with markets (Wolfe 2001, Greer 2010, 2014, Allen 2012 [1994], Wood 2016 [2002]). From the sixteenth century, England was anomalous in its use of rental markets to manage peasant revolts; by the early seventeenth century, this historical preference for markets as a method of negotiating power informed the Anglo-American colonial model (Brenner 1976, Wood 2016 [2002]). It is this relationship between English culture, markets and Anglo-American colonialism that made the language of political economy so suitable to Dew's process of cultivating political rhetoric in defence of white supremacy.

The erased landlord

As in the field, so in the cabinet, there are moments to be seized as they pass, and they who preside in either, should be left in capacity to improve them. – John Jay (2001 [1787]), Federalist 64

Blink and you may miss this subtle reference to market ideology in one of the most important founding documents of the American nation: improvement. It is this concept that served as the ideological history behind Dew's claim that colonial land was 'empty of inhabitants'. Massachusetts's first English governor, John Winthrop, labelled the land *vacuum domicilium* (or roughly 'empty land') despite the very visible inhabitants: the Powhatan tribe. Winthrop (as cited in Wood 2016 [2002], p. 159) extensively describes the quality of Native Americans settlements to justify this description of 'empty', stating 'for the Natives in New England they inclose noe land neither they any settled habitation nor any tame cattle to improve the land by'. This is several decades before John Locke (1690) published his *Second Treatise of Government* that builds a theory of private property around several key themes including the relationship between improvement and 'waste land'.

Ellen Wood (2016 [2002]) argues that Winthrop's use of the term 'improve' is not a coincidence. The concept of improvement – an expression of growing profitability of the land through cost-savings, labour savings or increased productivity – was already a key criterion in tenancy agreements in English rental markets from the sixteenth century. Locke's theory that transformation of waste land – or as Dew described land 'devoid of exchangeable value' – into land producing for profit is a validation of the existing English land ownership model. But the use of markets to assess the value of land and land rights was a peculiar feature of English culture. As Crow Creek Sioux scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (1997, p. 10) notes, the intellectual tradition of indigenous peoples in North America is 'religiously opposed to exploiting nature for profit'. So in effect, Winthrop's justification for the land dispossession was: Native Americans are not English.

Alan Greer (2010, 2014) researches colonial strategies to move wealth from the Western hemisphere back to Europe, observing a strange feature of English colonialism: the use of market exchange to secure ownership of territory. English colonialism is 'an anomalous case', characterised by an emphasis on 'the complete elimination of Native tenures – often through the ritual of purchase – before establishing colonial tenures on legal *tabula rasa*' (Greer 2010, p. 723). English colonisation has at times been described as 'voluntary' or 'consensual' because land dispossession took place via commercial transaction (Banner 2005). The description of this exchange has again occasionally been framed through the familiar laws of supply and demand: the First Nations had land and the English colonists had goods, creating ideal conditions for 'fair' exchange. Greer (2014, p. 79) objects to this evaluation, arguing that the 'marketplace' narrative serves 'ideological purposes'. In academic communities dominated by colonising cultures, gaps in knowledge inhibit historians from recognising the First Nations did not have the same understanding of the terms of the exchange as the colonisers. Greer (2014, p. 84) explains that the English 'emphasis on written documents, composed in the English language and incorporating tenets of English law' made the land contracts 'triple alien' to the Native Americans. For example in Narragansett, one language of the Algonquian people, there is no translation for the English conception of the phrase 'to buy land' (2014, p. 80). When many Native Americans did sign these land purchase agreements, they saw the contracts as more of an expression of an ongoing relationship, such as access to the land or agreements to trade. When tribes contested the interpretation of these agreements, the contracts were often enforced through violence.

It is worth emphasising that the purpose of the ritual of purchase was not to integrate Native Americans into a reproducing system of market exchange. Rather, these transactions were intended to be final, permanently removing Native Americans both from the land and English eyes. This is unusual because other European colonial strategies took the land with the people (Wolfe 2001, Greer 2014). This is not to suggest that other forms of European colonisation were somehow gentler, but that English colonialism was distinctively malevolent. English colonisers attempted to manifest *vacuum domicilium* into reality. The relative absence of Native Americans in Dew's *Lectures* is not from a lack of knowledge. Dew (1829, p. 46) does briefly mention them: 'One great reason why Colonies ... do not thrive so rapidly ... is because generally from the dread of savages, the wildness of the country, or other causes.' By labelling pre-colonial America as 'empty of inhabitants' and diminishing Native Americans as 'savages', Dew reinforces this pernicious form of othering that erases the existence of entire nations of human beings. As the Oglala Lakota scholar Richard Meyers (2016, pp. 137–8) explains the First Nations were 'dispossessed of their inherent rights to exist'; their continued existence today is precisely because of the efforts Meyers and other indigenous activists like him to assert their status as 'sovereign political and cultural entities'.

The included-excluded labourer

[H]e has waged cruel war against human nature ... captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere ... this piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of

Great Britain. determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold. – Thomas Jefferson (1776), Draft of the Declaration of Independence

Where land markets were used to erase First Nations, the slave markets were used to turn human beings into commodities. Jefferson's denouncement of the slave market was removed from the final version of the Declaration. Plantation slavery remained a defining feature of the early American nation, enriching Dew's father following the end of the Revolutionary War (Mansfield 1967). In *Lectures*, Dew (1829, p. 8) argues that each individual in the market system should pursue their own self-interest 'as the interest of the nation is of course identified with the interests of the individuals who compose it'. Essential for pro-slavery advocacy was agreement that enslaved people did not qualify as 'an individual'. Dew's analysis of the American economy needed a unique category for these people who were integral to the wealth of the nation, but needed to be paradoxically both included and excluded from the market model.

Describing 'slaves' in *Lectures*, Dew (1829, p. 10) explains:

But here it is very evident you would consider them in the light of property alone, like horses and cattle, and not like men. When his horse runs wild, the farmer loses his service; so when the slave escaped, or was liberated, his labour would be lost to him. The happiness, rights, &c. of the slave are in this case supposed to be merged completely in those of the master.

Dew does not provide any evidence for why the enslaved person should not be considered human. He assumes his reader – undoubtedly a white man – will find this 'very evident'. Extraordinarily, only two paragraphs later, Dew (1829, p. 10) states, 'when one individual is enriched by the loss of another, this adds nothing to the national wealth; on the contrary, diminishes it by faulty distribution.' But as Nat Turner's rebellion indicated, enslaved people regularly affirmed that their happiness was not aligned with the white Americans who enslaved them.

Nevertheless, the tendency to examine the presence or absence of market mentality in plantation slavery is still often evaluated through the sentiments of the white slave owner. For Charles Post (2011), slave owners were not incentivised to specialise, to adjust to market signals, and to use labour-saving technologies in the same way other capitalist producers did at the same time. By contrast, John Clegg (2020) argues that the slave owner was specialised in the production of enslaved people themselves. In each of these accounts, though, it is principally the white slave owner's relationship to markets that is considered when evaluating the extent to which market mentality is or is not present. In a footnote, Clegg concedes that enslaved people were not dependent on markets. Nevertheless, he qualifies, 'if slaves valued their own wellbeing (and ultimately their own lives) they had to follow orders, and since those giving the order were market dependent, the competitive "rules of reproduction" of the latter were indirectly imposed on their slaves' (Clegg 2020, p. 91). Here again the enslaved human is subsumed, only a footnote in the broader interests of 'those giving orders', white slave owners.

Scholars today do not need to assume what enslaved people thought of markets. We can reference their histories. Research on the Gullah/Geechee people have found that some escaped enslaved people built self-sufficient communities that were not dependent on markets (Matory 2008). Enslaved people had knowledge of the land, often keeping their own plots to produce food to sustain themselves. This may have been in part born out of necessity. Frederick Douglass (1845, p. 25) explains that he had seen other enslaved people 'spending part of their nights and Sundays in fishing for oysters, and in this way made up for the deficiency of their scanty allowance'. He also describes the food given to the enslaved people as that 'which would bring very little if offered for sale in any northern market' (Douglass 1855, p. 78). When enslaved people faced lack of provision for their self-reproduction, markets were not a solution. Douglass's depiction of the sale of the produce from the plantation to the market only as the role of one of the white employees. Markets were spaces for white people.

There was one way in which markets were very central to the enslaved people's lived experience: they were aware of how much they or their loved ones would be worth if they were 'offered for sale

in the market' (Douglass 1855, p. 55). In early American markets, enslaved Black Americans were *included* as market *commodities*, but *excluded* from being market *agents*. Enslaved women were specifically aware of their unique exchange value. White plantation owners used enslaved women – intersectionally exploited for their race and sex – to biologically reproduce enslaved babies as a form of investment to manage debt, or in other (disgusting) words 'a rare form of capital that grew "naturally"' (Crenshaw 1989, Clegg 2020, p. 85). When cornered by slave catchers, Margaret Garner took the life of her two-year old daughter and attempted to take her own before being captured. Reflecting on the act of killing her own child, she said, 'Now she will never know what a woman suffers as a slave' (as cited in Davis [2019 [1981]], pp. 17–18). Garner could not refuse to sell her labour to her owner nor could she refuse her owner's demand that her child be sold. Garner's story is a reminder that while the denial of agency in markets left enslaved people with very few options where they could exercise their free will, they did so nonetheless.

The non-ideal capitalist

The spirit of enterprise, which characterizes the commercial part of America, has left no occasion of displaying itself unimproved. – Alexander Hamilton (2001 [1787]), Federalist Paper 7

There remains an assumption within Dew's narrative that market capitalism was a boon to the whole American community. Without the drive to pursue economic self-interest, Dew (1829, p. 7) explains, 'this favored land would be nothing more than that dreary wilderness which our forefathers found it more than two centuries ago'. Here it is worth returning to Dew's *Review* to see how his pro-slavery rhetoric was evidenced in part by his vision of the superiority of the capitalist mode of production. Dew (1832, pp. 29, 79) characterises the modes of production of Native Americans as 'constant roaming through the forest in search of game' and those of Africans as 'the rude agricultural state'. This is consistent with a broader colonial worldview that sees 'a lack of cultivation or, indeed, land cultivated according to traditional methods by Non-Europeans' as a 'sign of cultural and moral inferiority' (Bhandar 2018, p. 118). Consequently, not only is slavery not harmful, it generates a social good for enslaved people. Dew (1832, p. 29) explains that colonial expansion and slavery 'renders mankind less dependent on precarious and diminishing production' and 'converts the idler and the wander into a man of business'. However, this conclusion is contingent on silencing the body of evidence that shows many weaknesses in the Anglo-American market economic system. Less commendable behaviour must be hidden to make the white settler embody the ideal capitalist.

The weakness of the English capitalist model of production was evidenced in the very first permanent settlement of Jamestown. James Parisot (2019, p. 25) provides a history of these first settlers, noting: 'Rather than sending over potentially self-reproducing families, or laborers and farmers who could work the land, a disproportionate number of settlers were gentlemen.' This miscalculation of the societal composition required to reproduce English agrarian capitalism had devastating consequences for the early settlers. In the winter of 1609, there were roughly 500 people living in Jamestown. By the spring of 1610, only 61 people were still alive. It is worth contrasting this historical reality against Dew's pro-slavery rhetoric. Dew describes the life of Native Americans as 'wretchedly and scantily supplied with provisions', but Jamestown's inability to produce sufficient crops left them reliant on the generosity of the Powhatan tribe to survive (Dew 1832, p. 12, Morgan 2003 [1975]). He also claims that 'savages' would 'feast on the murdered prisoners' during times of famine, asserting that 'domestic slavery seems to be the only means of ... abolishing the practice of murdering the captives' (Dew 1832, pp. 12–13). While anthropologists have since debunked these cannibal myths about indigenous peoples, there *is* evidence that the starving Jamestown settlers turned to cannibalism when their supplies were fully exhausted (Morgan 2003 [1975], Obeyesekere 2005).

While survival remained a challenge, the persistent problem for the Virginia Company was labour shortages. Dew (1932, p. 12) avers that Native Americans could not be slaves 'because their labour is worthless'. But this is a *posthoc* rationalisation of a 'historical accident' of English colonialism: the

more widespread use of European plantation workers (Allen 2012 [1994]). David Galenson (1984, p. 3) demonstrates that the rise of the well-known indentured servitude system emerged from this preference for European labourers, which endured until the end of the seventeenth century. The harsh environment and high costs of transport deterred European workers, so the Virginia Company turned to land as an incentive. The Virginia Company would pay for the passage across the Atlantic in exchange for a fixed period of service, for roughly 4–6 years, and often with the promise of land to labourers at the conclusion of the contract (Galenson 1984, p. 9). The ‘innovation’ of this model was the availability of land, which, it is worth emphasising, was only available through dispossessing the First Nations.

The absence of landlords Dew describes was not simply land dispossession, but also the failure of Anglo-American governors to establish landlord-tenant farmer relations. By the middle of the eighteenth century, tenant farmers composed as much as 30–50 per cent of the Anglo-American population (Shammas 1978). On the surface, the tenancy social relations appeared similar to those in the home country. Surveys of tenant farming in New England reveal “‘development” leases: low rent with tenants’ promise to make improvements’ (Shammas 1978, p. 491). By establishing the rental system, the tenant farmers’ improvements should have increased the value of the tracts (parcels of land), allowing the lord proprietor to increase rents. But as Gregory Stiverson (1977) uncovered in his research, this objective was never manifested. A document describing the conditions of proprietary tenements in 1767–1768 showed that ‘many tenants had made *no improvements* on their lot’ (Kent County Unpatented Certificates, no. 121 as cited in Stiverson 1977, p. 20, emphasis in original). Far from creating a competitive tenant market, these colonial landowners struggled to find new farmers to lease the land. In some cases, the destruction of the land either through stripping all of the timber or exhausting the soil made the tracts unmarketable. Debts owed to shopkeepers for household goods could impact a tenant’s ability to remain in the territory, causing tenant farmers to abandon their tracts and to move to the ‘Carolinas’ – a word that often just meant further west (Stiverson 1977). Here, both ‘Carolinas’ and ‘west’ are English words that obscure the named places that served as home to First Nations for millennia.

The capacity for any white settler to encroach on Native American lands and live outside of market obligations generated regular labour crises for white capitalists. But Galenson (1984, p. 9) has observed that many were hesitant to make transition of enslaved Africans, as planters subjectively viewed them as lacking necessary ‘European skills’. As conditions in England improved in the 1680s, the price of indentured servitude rose by 60 per cent (Galenson 1984). The primary appeal to transition to enslaved Black plantation labour was a simple cost savings (Williams 1994 [1944]). But while there are many competing motivations for the emergence of plantation slavery, this appeal of cost savings was largely contingent on the permanent, inherited status of people who had no agency within the labour market. The highest return was with children. Galenson (1984, p. 11) explains:

[C]olonial planters typically did not train adult Africans to do skilled jobs, preferring to wait and train either slaves imported as children or the American-born offspring of African adults in skilled crafts.

That these planters could profit from the American-born children of African slaves was the product of Anglo-American colonial legal reforms in the 1660s; Virginia and Maryland respectively established that a child’s status of enslavement was determined by ‘the condition of the mother’ and that ‘all Negroes ... shall serve Durante Vita’ (for life) (Handlin and Handlin 1950, Allen 2012 [1997]). Chattel slavery enabled the colonial capitalist to circumvent labour market competition and avoid, as Dew claimed, ‘the whole produce [being] shared between capitalists who furnish the capitals, and labourers who furnish the labour’.

These three histories – the erased landlord, the included/excluded labourer and the non-ideal capitalist – are vastly more complex than the abstract model of colonial capitalist production that Dew lays out for his students. As Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd and her co-authors (2018, p. 2) explain, ‘colonization and the economies of racial subjection serve as conditions of possibility’ for

both the USA and its capitalist system. So while everywhere there is the language of capitalism, ultimately land dispossession provided an escape from market imperatives for white labourers and the slave trade provided a captured labour supply for the white capitalist. These weren't markets driven by fair competition or equality amongst market agents. These markets were raced white to give an undeserved advantage to the European coloniser over the First Nations and enslaved Black people. Nonetheless, as the knowledge of markets and capitalism grew, political economy provided the pro-slavery advocate Dew the language to cast the white American as a clever, enterprising capitalist hero. But this image of the early American as the ideal capitalist is a *post hoc*, white construction of American history. It both exaggerates the economic achievements of white colonisers and erases the different experiences of those who are not white.

'The market' in the Tuttle Twins

All throughout history there are examples of free market capitalism helping to combat racism. – from the synopsis of 'Can The Market Combat Racism?' (Hunter and Boyak 2021)

While this history of Thomas Dew may be described as esoteric, there is a disconcertingly familiar affinity for markets in some everyday rhetoric in the USA. The Tuttle Twins podcast is a rare example of market enthusiasts explicitly stating their understanding of the relationship between race and markets, expressed in simple terms designed to persuade children. While Bonilla-Silva (2017, p. 4) provides a comprehensive, illuminating outline of colour-blind racism, the description of colour-blind racism as a 'new' ideology that emerged post-Jim Crow can misdirect attention away from the historical foundations of the core concepts. Dew's *Lectures* indicate that the process of using market dynamics to form arguments that obscure the role of race in the economy and naturalise racial hierarchies began *before* Jim Crow. The podcast, then, offers an opportunity to draw a comparison between the explanatory power of markets in Dew's white supremacist ideology and The Tuttle Twin's colour-blind ideology. Here, I specifically pay attention to the titular subject of the podcast – 'the market' – that serves as a rhetorical device to frame market mechanisms as a social good, further obscuring the role of race in histories of markets.

What is 'the market' doing in The Tuttle Twins podcast? The podcast tells two stories of markets during the Jim Crow era. The first is of Sputnik Monroe, a white wrestling performer whose fanbase was predominately composed of Black Americans. He leveraged his position, refusing to perform unless the white wrestling managers allowed his Black audience to sit anywhere a white fan was permitted (WWE 2022). The second is of the white owners of the Sear's business, who moved to a catalogue model when facing financial straits that was particularly – although accidentally – attractive for Black consumers (Farzan 2018). 'The market,' presenter Connor Boyak (Hunter and Boyak 2021) explains, 'can kind of pressure people to ... be like, well, is it worth it to me to be mean to Black people or would I rather save my business and keep providing for my family?' 'The market', then, is not itself doing anything. It is not an independent entity combating racism. Rather, it is a representation of this decision-making where Monroe and the Sear's owners weighed potential monetary gain against racial prejudices, ultimately choosing profit. These actions were not expressly anti-racist. Rather 'money is a powerful incentive', which The Tuttle Twins argues is evidence that 'the market is the true instigator of social change' (Hunter and Boyak 2021).

This concept of 'the market' may seem very distinct from the principles of supply and demand that Dew outlined, but only in that The Tuttle Twins leave unspoken what instigates social change: the pricing mechanism. Matthew Watson (2018b, p. 108) provides a roadmap for understanding the relationship between market theory and the *political rhetoric* of 'the market':

Rhetorically ... the very idea of equilibrium is rich in symbolism. It translates in theoretical terms to the point at which all potential welfare gains within the economic system are exhausted ... It is commonly assumed that it is 'the market' itself that produces equilibrium, or at the very least the pricing dynamics of market institutions perform that feat ... the otherwise large jump between the market concept and market ideology maybe

reduces to a rather smaller jump ... 'the market' comes across as something that should be nurtured into existence ... it is the ultimate arbiter of what is a good and what is a bad economic decision.

Dew did not use the term 'equilibrium' – a subsequent development in economic thought – but it is economic self-interest in relation to the pricing mechanism that he argued would best ensure the wants of the whole national community were effectively supplied. 'The market', Watson observes, is common shorthand for this logic. The Tuttle Twins have made the rather small logical jump from 'the market' as the process for producing welfare gains to 'the market' as the ultimate arbiter of a *racist or non-racist* economic decision.

Importantly though, Dew's example warns that the abstract language of markets can obscure the role of race in real markets. Through an un-colourblinding historical lens, it is evident that The Tuttle Twins also tell an imbalanced, idealised history of markets in the intervening period to legitimise their claims. Excluded from The Tuttle Twins history of Jim Crow markets are the voices of Black Americans. In her memoir of living in Jim Crow South Carolina, Mamie Fields (as cited in Farzan 2018) explains:

Some of them did think colored people oughtn't to have a certain nice thing, even if they had enough money to buy it. Our people used to send off for certain items. That way, too, the crackers ... wouldn't know what you had in your house.

Fields' words suggests that she only felt compelled to buy from the Sear's catalogue to avoid racist interactions with white general store owners. It is significant that the Sear's catalogue was 'the market' to The Tuttle Twins, but the Southern general stores were not; Sputnik Monroe was 'the market', but the white wrestling managers who segregated seating were not. 'The market' as a social good only works by excluding racist economic actors, idealising market decision-making. Like Dew, The Tuttle Twins must cherry-pick from the historical record of markets to demonstrate their argument.

Most importantly, The Tuttle Twins must silence the role markets played in the 'Separate but Equal' precedent that *defined* Jim Crow. Homer Plessy is another voice absent from the podcast who is particularly relevant. It was his challenge to a Louisiana requirement that he sit in 'equal but separate accommodations' of a train because of his race that brought *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) to the Supreme Court. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1998, p. 549) explains that the underlying logic in *Plessy* was a belief that 'a market was somehow free' and that the unequal treatment of Black people was 'a neutral evaluation'. Dew's work may not have been the direct source of the Supreme Court justices' logic, but Dew is indicative of the appeal of the language of markets to naturalise the American racial order that thrived in American intellectual culture before the twentieth century. Dew's ideas did not perish with his death or even at the end of the American Civil War. His *Lectures* continued to be taught at William and Mary until at least 1888 (Whitaker 1993, p. 38). Dew played an important role as the first outspoken white supremacist to adapt political economy for young white American students, who would go on to be legislators, businessmen, educators and, importantly, judges. While cautious not to exaggerate his influence, Brophy (2008, p. 1137, emphasis mine) has demonstrated Dew's intellectual impact well into the early part of the twentieth century, concluding:

Dew was, obviously, a very smart and well-educated man, telling other very smart and well-educated people that what they were doing was right. And in this he seemed to have convinced a lot of people – including the generation that came afterwards and were the educators *during the period of Jim Crow*.

By framing markets as a neutral arbiter, Dew, the Supreme Court justices and other white supremacists were setting a favourable arena in which white Americans could negotiate power well into the future. In a remarkable piece of historical demography, J. David Hacker (2020) has estimated that enslaved people from 1619–1865 contributed 410 billion hours of labour to the American economy. Claudio Saunt (2015) recently created a visualisation of the 1.5 billion acres of land seized by the US government from Native Americans only since 1776. The rent for the 1.5 billion

acres and the wages for the 410 billion hours of labour remain unpaid. This does not fully account for the total debt, as it does not include the value of the lives taken to enforce land dispossession and slavery. Regardless, there has never really been an attempt to redress the vast redistribution of purchasing power away from both the First Nations and the descendants of enslaved Africans and into the pockets of white Americans. White supremacy provided a sort of ‘wage’ for white Americans that is still paying dividends today (Du Bois 1998 [1935], Roediger 2007 [1991], p. 13).

At the heart of the Jim Crow ‘Separate but Equal’ doctrine was what Crenshaw (1998, p. 549) describes as ‘racial market ideology’ or the belief that if Black Americans ‘wanted social inequality, they would have to get in there (in the market) and work for it’. There are very good reasons, though, for those disadvantaged by the material impacts of white supremacy to be sceptical of market solutions. As Mason Gaffney (1994, p. 61) elucidates:

If one’s grandfather was a slave when the Land Office was parcelling out Federal lands to the friends and cousins of corrupt Congressmen, one may be excused from believing Utopia will ensue from limiting all future changes to “win-win” Pareto-optimal changes from the inherited status quo.

If today’s markets are influenced by purchasing power and if white Americans hold more purchasing power due to historic injustices, then market interactions are still likely to favour white Americans.

This final point is relevant to the political context in which The Tuttle Twins released the podcast: only a few months after the largest Black Lives Matter protests in the history of the USA. Watson (2018b, p. 109) suggests that a political appeal to ‘the market’ is a rhetorical strategy to ‘mask a structure of decision-making’. In the context of raced markets, ‘the market’ masks the structure of *racialised* decision-making in real markets. ‘The market’ obfuscates the role of markets in the dehumanisation of people who were not racialised as white for centuries. ‘The market’ obfuscates the role of racial market ideology during Jim Crow in defending the wealth inequality generated from that history of dehumanisation. Finally, ‘the market’ obfuscates the role of race in future market decisions. In response to a growing movement for racial economic equality, Boyak (Hunter and Boyak 2021) equips children with this one solution:

We want to all fight racism. We all want to fight injustice. But ... we need solutions based in incentives in the market ... So I think that’s the lesson. The market can work if we let it.

But there is no independent entity delivering racial justice. There is only an obfuscating rhetorical device that discourages action in the urgent call to un-make the material reality of white supremacy.

Conclusion

Contrary to The Tuttle Twins’ claim, all throughout history there is evidence that markets reproduce white supremacy. American market society was built on a racialised conception of productivity where white Americans were portrayed as superior to those who were not racialised white. The configuration of political concepts that sees markets as a neutral arbiter of national welfare proved a powerful tool in the legitimation of white supremacy, as seen with Thomas Dew. Modern adherents of market ideology attempt to disavow these intellectual foundations by reimagining racism as an unfortunate deviation from an otherwise noble market paradigm (Seamster and Ray 2018, p. 318). But the material reality of racial inequality in markets persists. By teaching children to let ‘the market’ work, The Tuttle Twins advocate for the resolution of racial inequality within the very institutions that have entrenched it. So while the conception of markets travelled a great deal from Dew’s ‘condition of man’ to The Tuttle Twins’ ‘the market’, endorsing markets as the solution to society’s problems ultimately reproduces the material outcomes of white supremacy: maintaining and deepening the racial wealth divide.

These observations should urgently prompt us to consider what an anti-racist theory (and *pedagogy*) of political economy should look like. This is particularly pressing when, as Gurminder Bhambra (2021, p. 311) contends, ‘the greatest blind spot of political economy’ is the failure to acknowledge the significance of settler colonialism and racism in the development of capitalism. The study of our

economic system today should begin with a recognition that the ‘conditions of possibility’ for capitalism are raced markets that transform nature into profit and human beings into commodities (Byrd et al. 2018; Bhambra 2021). I have provided evidence that amplifying the different perspectives of the First Nations and Black Americans can illuminate the hidden default of whiteness in economic concepts. Their experiences of dehumanisation are the political histories ‘expediently glossed over’ in economic teachings, which are behind the named abstractions of market production: land, capital and labour (Watson 2018a, p. 556). Jessica Kaplan (2021, p. 398) argues that this separation of economic ideas from their social context obscures the ‘irreducible intermingling’ of economic identities with race, yes, but also gender, religion, sexuality and even ecological dynamics. If race is a fictitious hierarchy of human beings, then an anti-racist political economy is constructed by locating and elevating these under-represented dimensions of the human experience in our field.

Note

1. Nat Turner was an enslaved Black man who led more than 70 enslaved people and some free Black Virginians to revolt against white enslavers in 1831, where more than 50 white Virginians were killed. White mobs killed 100–200 Black enslaved and free Virginians in retaliation. The rebellion prompted the Virginian legislature to consider the abolition of slavery in 1832 (Breen 2015).

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