

Review

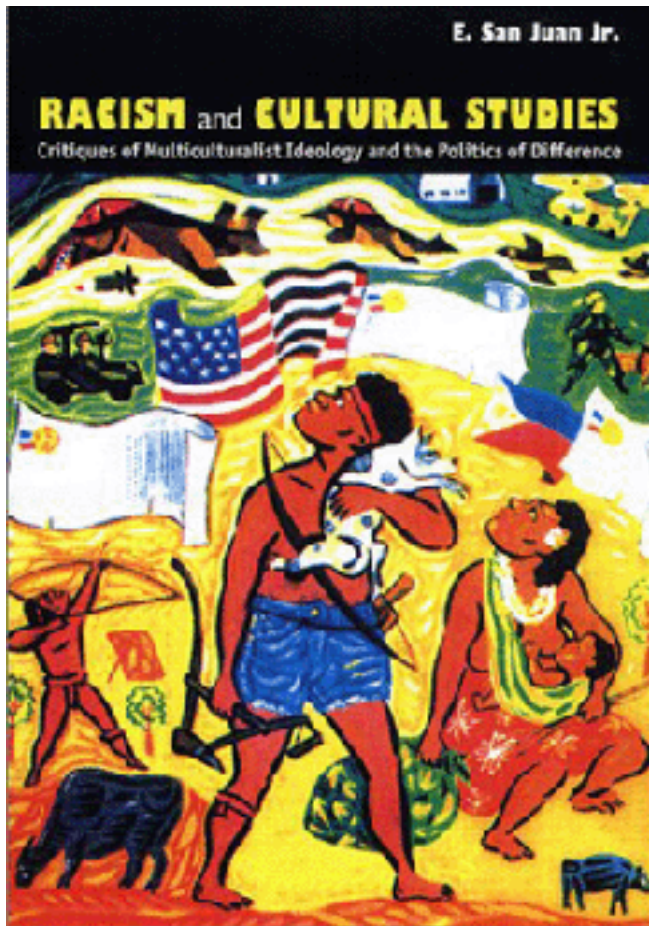
Jeffrey Arellano Cabusao

Racism and Cultural Studies: Critiques of Multiculturalist Ideology and the Politics of Difference. E. San Juan, Jr. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002. 428 pp. paper, \$24.95; cloth, \$74.95.)

. . . [N]eedless deaths, suffering, humiliation, and violation of human rights can be attributed to racism. . . . Racists are worldwide, planting their seed of racial superiority and national chauvinism. The real danger is when racists wield their evil with economic and political power to enforce policies that destabilize others, neutralize others, curtail the self-development and self-determination of others. We must not let the roots of racism spread for it is contagious. We must all work in concert with each other to stop the continuous creation of this dreadful disease -- this scourge that has cursed this world. Much of this happens right here in our own backyard. . . . "Our backyard" is USA -- quite a large territory, but this is where the concentration of work must be.[1](#)

--Yuri Kochiyama, longtime Asian American activist

In September 2004, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's assertion that the U.S. occupation of Iraq was illegal made headlines in the news. Unfortunately, this was nothing new for the millions involved in the global anti-war movement. The horrific daily accounts of deaths (tens of thousands of innocent Iraqis and over a thousand U.S. soldiers, many of whom are of the multiethnic U.S. working class) and the chilling photos of war (from Abu Ghraib to Filipino hostage Angelo de la Cruz) force us to confront the pain of history, from Vietnam to an even earlier period of U.S. Empire: its colonial occupation of the Philippines in 1899. Over a million Filipinos were slaughtered in that imperial encounter, which was vehemently denounced by U.S. intellectuals and activists such as Mark Twain and Jane Addams and by organizations such as the Anti-Imperialist League and the Black Citizens of Boston.[2](#)



Filipino Americans are still haunted, traumatized by the brutal Philippine-American War (considered to be the "first Vietnam"), not only through daily news coverage of the occupation of Iraq, but also through the ways in which the U.S. nation-state racializes them as "Others" as well as sustains its neocolonial stranglehold on the Philippines. In early 2002, Collin Powell, whom Harry Belafonte publicly criticized as G.W. Bush's "house slave," declared the Philippines the "second front" in the U.S. global war on terrorism. The Abu Sayaaf bandit group -- a counterinsurgency tool created by the CIA and the Armed Forces of the Philippines -- was used to justify the deployment of thousands of U.S. troops to the Philippines. It was no surprise, especially to those familiar with the history of U.S. Empire, to discover that Powell, on August 9, 2002, listed the major progressive Filipino insurgency groups, the peasant-based New People's Army and the Communist Party of the Philippines, part of the coalition called the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, as "terrorist." The underbelly of U.S. "democracy" abroad, in this case, is the containment and attenuation of (to

the point of annihilation) the broad, popular Philippine movement for genuine national sovereignty. Subsequently, Filipinos in the United States -- although still subjected to forms of racial indeterminacy (questions such as "What are you?" "Where do you really come from?" are hurled at them daily) -- are terrorized, racially profiled, not unlike Arab Americans, by the Department of Homeland Security. At this moment, approximately 300,000 Filipino/Filipino Americans are targeted for deportation.

People of color and other oppressed and exploited sectors of the U.S. nation-state -- a racial formation -- are realizing that history is viciously repeating itself. We see this in the ways in which images of U.S. colonial occupation from different historical moments seem to overlap: hooded Iraqi prisoners naked, sexually molested, and beaten juxtaposed with images of Filipino insurgents, at the turn of the twentieth century, cruelly subjected to various torture techniques. Notice how Homeland Security's aggressive surveillance and repression of progressive popular forces in the United States and abroad resonate with COINTELPRO or with McCarthyism. These particular forms of the return of the repressed offer glimpses of the underlying reality of U.S. Empire: white supremacy and racist subjugation, exploitation of millions of working and poor bodies of color around the globe. In this milieu of intensified global crisis and emergency, Cultural Studies must broaden its scope to include the hinterlands of Empire and engage with the many worldwide who, because they are deeply concerned with peace, genuine democracy, and social justice, are taking a firm stand to challenge the brutality of U.S. imperial hegemony.

E. San Juan, Jr., one of our most important and prolific Filipino cultural theorists and a major critic of Establishment postcolonial discipline, offers a crucial intervention for our times. In a previous book, *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*, San Juan argues that the progressive insurgent forces of the Philippine National Democratic mass movement play a vital part of the "postcolonial" subaltern resistance, but have been muted and silenced by post-al studies.³ San Juan's *Racism and Cultural Studies* expands this critique in fresh and innovative ways that speak directly to our current collective desire for peace and freedom.

Boldly pushing against the historical limitations of fashionable theoretical trends of the academy, San Juan urgently asks us to reclaim the rich and dynamic Marxist traditions (both Western and Third World Marxisms) of theorizing the connection between cultural production and the struggle for radical social transformation (the twin tasks of ideological and material struggle). In *Racism and Cultural Studies (RCS)*, San Juan offers a rigorous historical materialist method for regrounding the dominant "new times=new politics" post-al model of contemporary Cultural Studies. This alternative methodology, in *RCS*, shifts us from reified notions of difference to a dialectical regrounding in which difference is conceived as, in the words of Red Feminist Teresa Ebert, "difference within a material system of exploitation."⁴ This shifting of grounds enables San Juan to bring to the fore the importance of analyzing the complex ways in which difference -- race, gender, sexuality -- is historically produced and reproduced within class society. A leitmotif of this book is the advancement of Marx's challenge to idealism. It is not enough to interpret the world. We must collectively and creatively struggle for a radically transformed society in which difference will no longer be produced by racialized and gendered divisions of labor (exploitative social relations of production). Instead, genuine differences would emerge: each lives "according to her/his abilities and needs."

One of the main goals of *RCS* is to confront the insidious ways in which racism is gendered, sexualized, and "naturalized" through U.S. nationalism. *RCS* advances the central argument of San Juan's earlier, groundbreaking *Racial Formations/Critical Transformations (RF/CT)*, 1992), now a classic in U.S. Ethnic Studies. In *RF/CT*, San Juan asserts that one of the major achievements of the organizing efforts of people of color and their allies (activists and cultural workers) during the late 1960s/early 1970s is the creation of a sophisticated historical materialist analysis of the following: 1.) the U.S. nation-state as a "racial-socioeconomic formation," and 2.) racism as "an international political force."⁵ Instead of falling prey to an economically deterministic reading of race as epiphenomenal, race and class are theorized as dialectically intertwined via the concept of internal colonialism.⁶ The underlying assumption of this "Third World" political worldview is that "(r)acially categorized groups [within the U.S. nation-state] like Blacks, Chicanos, Native Americans, and Asians are both exploited as workers and oppressed as colonized peoples."⁷

The analytical framework of internal colonialism opened critical spaces for activists of color within the United States to align themselves in solidarity with national liberation movements of the Third World. Asian American activist-teacher Glenn Omatsu recalls that the Asian American movement, which emerged from grassroots organizing, developed an international theoretical perspective. The Asian American movement linked, in theory and in praxis, various lessons gained from struggles waged within the internal U.S. colonies as well as within the Third World. Asian American activists were drawn to "Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Che Guevara, Kim Il-sung, W.E.B. DuBois, Frederick Douglass, Paulo Freire, the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords, the women's liberation movement, and many other resistance struggles."⁸

The cardinal premise of *RCS* is the notion that the U.S. nation-state is a racial polity, a thesis which philosopher Charles Mills proposed in *The Racial Contract* (1997).⁹ Within the U.S. racial polity, racism -- alongside its ideological twin, white supremacy -- functions as the organizing principle of the division of labor and unequal distribution of resources and wealth. This "racial divide constitutes 'a form of stratification built into the structure of U.S. society' as a Herrenvolk democracy."¹⁰ By returning us to the basics of understanding the centrality of white supremacy/racism in the development of U.S. capitalism, *RCS* offers an inventory and an advancement of dialectical methodological approaches that can be utilized to critique how the U.S. racial polity came to be, so that we can radically transform it. Given the expansive reach of U.S. Empire, one can no longer ignore how racism organizes global capitalism (international racialized and gendered divisions of labor, asymmetrical power relations between the global North and South) and sustains U.S. imperial hegemony around the globe.

Just as Engels reminded his readers of the late nineteenth century that the difference between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is one that is historically created by capitalism in order to maximize profits,¹¹ San Juan reminds us of how contemporary global capitalism produces and utilizes "difference" (racialized and gendered) to reproduce itself as a system of exploitation. San Juan acknowledges that we do, however, live in "new times," but this "new-ness" must be contextualized properly: "New post-Cold War realignments compel us to return to a historical-materialist analysis of political economy and its overdeterminations in order to grasp the new racial politics of transnationality and multiculturalism."¹² Richard Appelbaum's meditation on capitalism and "difference" can help us contextualize our "new times." He argues that capitalism "has always reinforced class divisions with divisions based on race, ethnicity, gender, and other forms of ascription."¹³ San Juan refers to other scholars who illustrate Appelbaum's claim. Edna Bonacich (1996) critiques how multiculturalism, as an ideology, ultimately justifies the exploitation of the surplus labor of immigrant women of color in the Los Angeles garment district. Glenn Omatsu (1994) examines the role of racism in a "one-sided class war" against the U.S. multiracial working class. Racism divides people of color, for example Korean Americans and African Americans in Los Angeles, in order to bolster the "fierce class war waged by the U.S. corporate elite against both the U.S. working masses and their international rivals (Japan, Germany)."¹⁴

In these "new times," transnational corporations, under the control of the U.S. corporate elite, are able to move across borders to exploit the surplus labor of Asian and Latina women in the internal colonies of the United States and within the "free-trade zones" of the global South. If we are to come to grips with the effects of the history of U.S. Empire, it's crucial for the broad U.S. Left to reckon with the fact that 8 million domestic workers, or overseas "contract workers" (OCWs), from the Philippines, a U.S. neocolony, are exploited all around the globe: the Middle East, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, and various European countries.¹⁵ On an average, four OCWs return daily to the Philippines in coffins.¹⁶ To be sure, many Third World people do not have the luxury to generate ludic readings of transnational corporations (TNCs) as "free floating signifiers," a post-al position that renders TNCs completely unaccountable to any nation-state. What is needed is an unflinching critique of the U.S. nation-state, U.S. nationalism, and white supremacy/racism. U.S. imperialism, then, must be at the center of our analysis if we are truly committed to the struggle for social justice.

RCS unequivocally argues that the problem of the 21st century continues to be the color-line; thus, it's imperative to advance the race-class dialectic, developed by past insurgent subaltern struggles, for our contemporary times. This project includes not only grasping the historical trajectory of the U.S. nation-state as a racial order, but also

seriously critiquing the purpose and function of U.S. nationalism in late global capitalism. In other words, given the re-composition of global capitalism within our post-Cold War moment, we must give priority to interrogating the race/nation dialectic upon which the U.S. nation-state operates. First, we must understand the process by which the U.S. nation-state develops as a racial polity within the context of the historical development of global capitalism (in relation to other nation-states, the formation of a core and periphery, etc.). The development of a U.S. Empire (American occupation of countries such as the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Cuba at the turn of the twentieth century and, now, Iraq) is dependant upon the U.S. nation-state's racialized genocidal foundation situated "around the axis of white supremacy" (extermination of Native Americans, enslavement of Africans, exploitation of Latinos and Asians). Second, we must then comprehend how U.S. nationalism -- "the self-identification of peoples based on the perceived commonality of symbols, beliefs, traditions, and so on"¹⁷ -- functions as the very ideology that produces and reproduces racialized class exploitation within and without the boundaries of the U.S. nation-state. This process of disentangling U.S. nationalism and the U.S. nation-state as separate, yet interconnected historical constructs, is extremely useful for our efforts in fusing both ends of the classic (U.S.) civil society/state dialectic against the current of ludic post-al logic. The overarching emancipatory vision of *RCS* is one that anticipates the (re)emergence of collective counterhegemonic struggles from the U.S. internal colonies. A crucial task for the U.S. Left is expressed in the following passage:

What is imperative for the oppressed working masses, especially the internally colonized people of color in the United States, is a radical critique of U.S. nationalism as the enabling ideology of racialized class domination (Giroux 1995; San Juan 1999b). White supremacist practices inform the functional core of this ideology. Given the historical specificity of U.S. capitalism, class struggle cannot be theorized adequately outside the conjunctures of the racial formation in which it acquires valency.¹⁸

One of the many movements for social justice currently developing within the U.S. internal colonies (the U.S. "Third World") is the struggle for Black reparations. Prominent African American activist-scholar Manning Marable argues that the demand for Black reparations exposes how racism has deeply penetrated both U.S. civil society and state: "the unequal distribution of economic resources, land, and access to opportunities for social development was sanctioned by the federal government."¹⁹ The demand for Black reparations forces white society to confront the violent history of the United States, and how that history (genocide, slavery, colonization) is replicated, by the state and its various ideological and repressive apparatuses, in the daily lives of people of color. Without a doubt, the fight for Black reparations is a necessary first step toward the abolition of "whiteness" and white supremacy within U.S. society.²⁰ *RCS* emphatically argues for a radical structural transformation of our racist class society: "without a thoroughgoing overhaul of the social division of labor and legally sanctioned property relations sedimented in state and civil society, any claim to achieving genuine equality will remain a hypocritical formality."²¹ Mobilizing for this kind of structural transformation also requires a flexible, yet historically concrete analysis of ideology, culture, and the development of collective human agency. This is where Cultural Studies can intervene.

Cultural Studies must engage current movements for social justice, both here and abroad, if it is committed to social transformation. Only social justice movements (Black reparations, anti-war mobilization, multiethnic labor struggles, working-class and peasant based Third World national liberation movements, international Palestinian support

movement, etc.) have the power to break open spaces for intellectuals in which they're able to unlock the liberatory potential of Cultural Studies. The history of Cultural Studies (CS) -- from working-class British Cultural Studies to U.S. Ethnic, Women's, and Lesbian/Gay Studies -- proves this point. By aligning itself with, and committing itself to building, mass movements for radical social transformation, CS will be able to challenge how it has been institutionalized by the corporatized academy and eventually claim its historic responsibility. Marx reminds us that it is within the site of culture that oppressed and exploited women and men (social beings) begin to challenge their dehumanizing conditions: they "become conscious of [class] conflict and fight it out."²² Here, they struggle to make sense of the racialized and gendered contradictions of class society.

At this historical moment, only a multiethnic united front mass movement against the U.S. occupation of Iraq can liberate the repressed radical traditions of struggle within the field of Cultural Studies, ranging from Raymond Williams and Jean-Paul Sartre to radical U.S. "Third World" cultural workers of color such as Carlos Bulosan and Audre Lorde. The evolving anti-war movement will be able to envision a radical alternative to global capitalism only if people of color/Third World peoples play a central role, and only if white progressives challenge, with every fiber in their bodies, their investment in whiteness/white supremacy, which undergirds the U.S. nationalism that informs, gives shape to the current U.S. global war against terrorism.

Far from advocating a method of mechanical causality or economic determinism (post-ality's caricature of Marxism), San Juan's *RCS* provides a breathtaking synthesis of various methods developed by prominent figures of both Western and Third World Marxist traditions -- running the gamut from Antonio Gramsci to Frantz Fanon. *RCS* offers us sharper theoretical tools at a time when our intellectual landscape has been saturated by contemporary ludic theories of globalization (Hardt and Negri come to mind) that valorize civil society (abstracted from the state) in ways that culturalize (dematerialize) hegemony, divorce nation from class, conflate the nationalism of oppressed neocolonial nation-states with the nationalism of oppressor nation-states, and, ultimately, displace collective working class and subaltern agency. Each chapter within *RCS* expands upon the critique of the U.S. nation-state as a racial polity. San Juan addresses an extraordinarily broad range of critical topics within Cultural Studies such as the following: sexuality and U.S. nationalism within late global capitalism, Asian American literary studies, critiques of ethnicity paradigms, postmodern and postcolonial literary and cultural criticism, the interchange between Western and Third World Marxisms (San Juan provides an absolutely brilliant reading of Raymond Williams and Frantz Fanon).

The extended afterword, which focuses on the current Philippine mass movement for genuine national sovereignty in relation to the Filipino Diaspora, illustrates the dialectical method of global cognitive mapping for our new times (post-Cold War and post 9/11) proposed throughout the book. Here, San Juan unleashes a powerful critique of the function of post-al theories of transnationalism within contemporary studies on Filipina/o experiences. San Juan critiques Nicole Constable's *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers*.²³ He argues that the anti-foundationalist analytical framework of Constable's study, whether unintentionally or not, ultimately flattens the unequal relations of power between the United States and the Philippines (the latter being a neocolony of the former). In other words, political economy and history are sacrificed for micro-politics. The agency of the Filipina domestic worker, then, is located purely within the politics of consumption (asking for more catsup and napkins at McDonald's, an example from Constable's work). The politics of production -- and the process by which exploitative social relations of production can be transformed -- are completely erased.

Filipina subalterns have always spoken, but, unfortunately, ludic theories of transnationalism only muffle their voices of struggle and disregard their potential for collective transformation. The dialectical interaction between organized forms of resistance within the Filipino Diaspora and the progressive mass movement for genuine national sovereignty in the Philippines will ensure the development of collective Filipina/o agency.²⁴

An interdisciplinary tour de force, *Racism and Cultural Studies* offers timely critiques and suggestions for advancing a unique "methodology of the oppressed" that may, for the moment, seem submerged or repressed in the industrialized global North, but is, as I write, being tested and refined in the overexploited global South where the wretched of the earth have been proclaiming through protracted organized mass struggles (based on a worker-peasant alliance, as is the case of the Philippines) that "another world is possible." In the "Third World," subalterns have articulated this notion long before it became the clarion call of the young and courageous anti-globalization movement in the North. As we continue to develop a global anti-war movement, I urge all of us to engage San Juan's *Racism and Cultural Studies* -- to learn from his lessons in dialectical analysis and his suggestions for creating strategies for cognitive mapping, to listen to his impassioned appeal to activists, insurgent intellectuals (both organic and academic), and all democratic minded people to critique the central roles that white supremacy, racism, and U.S. nationalism play in the process by which global capitalism wrecks havoc on the daily lives of millions all over the world. After a careful reading of this book, one will appreciate its ability to articulate in new and imaginative ways a politics of hope in these perilous times -- its ability to provide an intervention that can, to quote Raymond Williams, "make hope practical, rather than despair convincing."²⁵

Notes

¹ Yuri Kochiyama. "Challenges of Diversity: Talking the Talk to Walking the Walk" (Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, November 2, 1996.) In *Discover Your Mission: Selected Speeches & Writings of Yuri Kochiyama*. Russell Muranaka, et al (eds.) Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1998.

² Schirmer, Daniel B. and Stephen Roskamm Shalom, eds. *The Philippines Reader: A History of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, Dictatorship, and Resistance*. Boston: South End Press, 1987.

³ E. San Juan, Jr. *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.

⁴ For an excellent critique of post-al difference see Teresa Ebert's *Ludic Feminism and After*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1996.

⁵ E. San Juan, Jr. *Racial Formations/Critical Transformations: Articulations of Power in Ethnic and Racial Studies in the United States*. New Jersey/London: Humanities Press, 1992. p. 45.

⁶ Robert Blauner. *Racial Oppression in America*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

7 E. San Juan, Jr. *Racial Formations/Critical Transformations*. (1992) p. 45.

8 Glenn Omatsu. "The 'Four Prisons' and the Movements of Liberation." In *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s*. Karin Aguilar-San Juan, ed. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1994. p. 31.

9 E. San Juan, Jr. *Racism and Cultural Studies: Critiques of Multiculturalist Ideology and the Politics of Difference*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002. (RCS) p. 25. See Charles Mills. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.

10 RCS, 26; Mills. *The Racial Contract*, 25. See also Pierre Van den Berghe's *Race and Racism*. New York: John Wiley, 1978.

11 Friedrich Engels. *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. 1880, 1892. In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2nd ed. Robert C. Tucker, ed. New York/London: WW Norton & Company, 1978.

12 RCS, 42.

13 Appelbaum quoted in RCS, 42. See Richard P. Appelbaum. "Multiculturalism and Flexibility: Some New Directions in Global Capitalism." In *Mapping Multiculturalism*, ed. Avery Gordon and Christopher Newfield. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

14 Ibid, 42. See also Edna Bonacich. "The Class Question in Global Capitalism." In *Mapping Multiculturalism*, ed. Avery Gordon and Christopher Newfield. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. And, see Glenn Omatsu. "The 'Four Prisons' and the Movements of Liberation." (1994).

15 Ibid, 42.

16 Delia D. Aguilar. "Globalization, Feminism, and Filipino Diaspora." 2002. In *The Red Critique*. September/October 2002. <<http://www.geocities.com/redtheory/redcritique/SeptOct02/index.html>>.

17 RCS, 36.

18 RCS, 33.

19 Manning Marable. "In Defense of Black Reparations." November 09, 2002. ZNet Commentary. <<http://www.zmag.org/sustainers/content/2002-10/30marable.cfm>>.

20 David Roediger. *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History*. London; New York: Verso, 1994.

21 RCS, 27.

22 Marx, Karl. Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. 1859. In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2nd ed. Robert C. Tucker, ed. New York/London: WW Norton & Company, 1978.

[23](#) *RCS* 366-368. See Nicole Constable. *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997.

[24](#) *RCS*, 380-381.

[25](#) Raymond Williams quoted in *RCS*, 313.