

## **Blackness and Labor in the Afterlives of Racial Slavery**

A Special Issue of *International Labor and Working-Class History*

Franco Barchiesi, editor

### **CALL FOR PAPERS**

Between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, the history of labor on a global scale was shaped by the ambiguities and contradictions accompanying the legal abolition of Black slavery and the persistence of racialized coercion within putatively “free” contractual arrangements. Critical Black studies have placed such questions within the conceptual framework of the “afterlife” of slavery, defined by authors like Saidiya Hartman (*Lose Your Mother*, 2008) and Christina Sharpe (*In the Wake*, 2016) as a state of continuous vulnerability and endangerment of Black lives, shaping the present in ways that reflect the limitations and constraints of “freedom.” The afterlives of slavery, whose persistence is most evident in the continuously unaddressed demand that “Black Lives Matter”, also challenge labor scholarship.

The grounding of collective identities and human ontology in work and production has for long sustained progressive imagination, linked to either the idea of “free labor” or to struggles against the persistence of unfreedom within capitalist employment. Yet those narratives and representations have come under critical scrutiny through studies that, in the context of slavery’s afterlives, question the very meaning of labor as a deliverer of human emancipation, development, and citizenship. Civilizational norms and ideas grounded in “free” labor were central to colonialism as it globalized the subjugation of blackness in the post-emancipation era. Territorial conquest opening the way for settler rule and the displacement of indigenous peoples has benefitted from racially hierarchical labor regimes. Intersections of gender and race were also affected by work ethics and labor ideologies in ways that specifically determined the oppression and silencing of Black women, belying labor’s universalist promises.

Recent scholarship—for example works by Shona N. Jackson, Tiffany-Lethabo King, and Tiffany Willoughby-Herard—has innovatively questioned the history of labor in the Atlantic world by foregrounding blackness and racialization in practices of domination, cultural formations, and imaginaries of opposition to, and escape from, waged work. Critical interest in the global geographies of blackness has also focused on white supremacy, anti-blackness, and resistance in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, the Indian Ocean, and the South Pacific. Not only do such research and theoretical insights add to the complexity of experiences of work in relation to race, gender, or nation. They also problematize the ontological status of labor as an assumed signifier of human subjectivity, historicity, and progress.

This special issue of *International Labor and Working-Class History* will address the following questions:

- How do labor regimes and norms shape the aftermath and “afterlife” of racial slavery for global blackness between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?
- How do modalities of coercion and unfreedom shape transitions to legally “free” labor?
- How do racialized and anti-black labor practices and ideologies contribute to perpetuating racial domination, colonialism, and the displacement of indigenous societies?
- How are notions of gender inscribed in, and reproduced by, labor regimes in the afterlife of slavery?
- Through which material practices, cultural formations, and political imaginations do formerly enslaved and newly colonized populations question the normativity of labor?
- How do racial modalities of labor subjugation or imaginaries of resistance to capitalist employment “travel” and connect across global Black spaces?
- How do persistent relationships between labor and racial domination critically interrogate universalist labor norms and values?
- What are the conceptual and methodological challenges facing labor studies in relation to persistent racial subjugation and structural antiblackness in the “afterlives of slavery”?

Contributions are invited to explore these questions on a theoretical and/or empirical basis, with a preferential focus on the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. Manuscripts based on original research and grounded in theoretical analysis or global or comparative perspectives are especially welcome.

Prospective authors should send, by December 1, 2017, a cover letter (including address, e-mail details, and institutional affiliation), a two-page CV, and an abstract not exceeding 500 words. Depending on the outcome of the editorial review of the abstracts, full manuscripts (not exceeding 8,000 words) will be invited for peer review. The deadline for the submission of first drafts of full manuscripts will be May 31, 2018.

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