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2023

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Recommended Citation
Burgos, Adam. "Internal Colonialism and Democracy." (2023) : 135-152.

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Philosophy Today
Volume 67, Issue 1 (Winter 2023): 135–152
DOI: 10.5840/philtoday202327472

Internal Colonialism and Democracy

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Abstract: This essay examines the relationship between African American internal colonialism and democracy, highlighting the complexities of democracy that make it both susceptible to oppressive violence at home and abroad, as well as a potential resource for emancipation and equality. I understand "internal colonialism" here to encompass various terms used by African Americans beginning in the 1830s, including semi-colonialism, domestic colonialism, and a nation within a nation. Much political philosophy assumes that society is "nearly just" or "generally just," or that oppression and injustice are found in societies that we nonetheless deem legitimate. Centering the complexities and possibilities of democracy instead shifts the focus to how democracy is compatible with violence and injustice, as well as their overcoming. Such a focus leads to a consideration of abolition democracy and the question of what the process of overcoming internal colonialism demands.

Key words: democracy, internal colonialism, colonialism, neocolonialism, neo-colonialism, abolition, Charles Pinderhughes, Robert L. Allen

No, I'm not an American. I'm one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million black people who are the victims of ***democracy****.—Malcolm X (1965: 26; emphasis added)*

The obvious consequence of a dual standard of human expectation is a unique system of ***democratic fascism*** *and a permanent condition of police or military repression aimed at the underclass and social dissidents.*
—Dhoruba Bin Wahad (1993: 64; emphasis added)

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home and abroad, as well as a potential resource for emancipation and equality. Internal colonialism is, simply, the idea that a colonized population can exist within the state to which it ostensibly already belongs, as a community colonized by other members of the same society rather than by a foreign invader. Of the various existing discourses of "internal colonialism," I use the term here primarily to encompass various terms used by African Americans beginning in the 1830s, including semi-colonialism, domestic colonialism, and a nation within a nation, to describe their situation within the United States with regard to the state and white power structure. Much political philosophy assumes that society is "nearly just" (Rawls 1999) or "generally just" (Kling and Mitchell 2019), or that oppression and injustice are found in societies that we nonetheless deem legitimate (Delmas 2018: 14). Centering the complexities and possibilities of democracy instead shifts the focus to how democracy is compatible with violence and injustice, as well as their overcoming.

In section one I grapple with the complexities of democracy, bringing out its variability, its promise, and its dangers. Section two contains an overview of the notion of internal colonialism, its relation to colonialism, and defense of its validity, specifically in the context of African Americans in the United States—African America—with a particular focus on the importance of class. In section three I look to abolition democracy and self-determination as a potential resource to combat internal colonialism, but also as illustrative of the vexations of democracy. There, I focus on W. E. B. Du Bois, as his analysis of abolition democracy in the context of the path from Reconstruction to Jim Crow illustrates the vagaries of democracy with which we begin. His view highlights the dangers inherent within abolition democracy, as well as the stakes of abolition.

The Vicissitudes of Democracy

What is democracy? Normative democratic theory offers many potential conceptions, from the thin notion of the equality of "one-person, one-vote" for representation, to something much more substantive within the processes of deliberation.[1] The thinness of formal voting rights nonetheless can be called democracy, and this is the core of the issue. Disenfranchisement through the power of the law such that equal formal rights remain protected gets to call itself democracy just as much as other more robust forms.

I do not want to linger on where exactly to draw the line between democracy and non-democracy, because if we leave aside unambiguous cases of authoritarian or monarchical rule, to name two alternatives, we are still left with a blurry mass of varied possibilities. Those forms of governance certainly exist, but we are better served analyzing certain aspects of the contemporary world by recognizing that

democracy itself is not only a contested concept amongst political theorists, but is also itself contested from within through political practice.

Certainly, most people associate democracy with regular free elections, a free press and free association, and the ability of the population to impact policy—that the people have a say in how they are governed. By that token, the United States and all other relatively similarly situated countries are democracies in some limited form. It is also true, however, that many social justice movements are premised on the promotion of democracy, alongside the claim that these societies are not democratic, or at least not democratic enough.

I want to suggest that democracy is a contested concept due to both its bare-bones structure and the content of that structure. In Plato's *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger provides us with an outline of the seven different ways to rule ("worthy titles") and be ruled available within society (Plato 1988: 690a). He first points out the rule of parents over their descendants, the well born over the not well born, the elderly over the young, masters over slaves, and the strong over the weak. Each of these five are "everywhere correct" (690a). But the Stranger has two more types of rule left to share. The sixth, "the greatest title," is "the natural rule exercised by the law over willing subjects, without violence," and is the rule of the prudent over the ignorant (690b–c). That most perfect and natural form of rule is then contrasted with the seventh possibility, which is as objectionable as the rule of the prudent is perfect. This last form is the opposite of prudential rule and is both "dear to the gods" and "lucky." Such rule occurs, "where we bring forward someone for a drawing of lots and assert that it is very just for the one who draws a winning lot to rule and for the one who draws a losing lot to give way and be ruled" (690c). We have, then, rule by perfectly prudential hierarchy on one hand, and complete chance on the other; the ultimate and undeniable justification for rule contrasted with no real justification at all. The latter is democracy.

Such a construal of democracy highlights its radical egalitarian potential and brings to the fore the most essential thing about the word that brings together the Greek *demos* and *kratos* as the rule of the people: it makes no distinctions within its boundary. That is, it does not draw any principled line between those who rule and those who are ruled, as do the other six types of rule Plato gives us. Hence, the drawing of random lots.[2]

The demarcation that occurs within democracy is different from that which occurs in the other six types of rule. The latter six are about who has whatever characteristic has been deemed worthy to rule: age, birth, prudence, etc. Democracy by definition lacks such a formal demarcation, since it chooses its leaders by random lot instead of principled criterion. Its alternative demarcation marks democracy as a unique form of rule and sets the stage for the relationship both between democracy and violence and between democracy and internal colonialism. Within democratic rule, that rule itself is always at stake, alongside whatever

other substantive or procedural issues are present. If democracy is the rule of the people, then the question arises: who comprises "the people"?

In the United States, for most of its history, the answer has been white people—first white men, but later white women as well. Only with the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were voting rights, generally taken to be the bare minimum needed for a democracy to exist, explicitly formally extended to the entire adult citizenry. Of course, in the years since there have been many attempts to undermine enfranchisement, including gerrymandering, poll closures, voter ID laws, and legislative and judicial decisions. At every step we can ask, to what extent are "the people" ruling? Such is the demarcation of democracy: a limit demarcation rather than an internal demarcation. Insofar as they are the ones who do have the power to rule, who count here and now as "the people"? Democracy always demands some form of this counting because it lacks any demarcation principle of its own, leaving its demarcation up to those over whom it would rule. To challenge the makeup of "the people," to offer or enact new iterations of the people, is to challenge those with power, those who are counted.

This instability, or slipperiness, of democracy can lead to its dismissal by scholars who see it as inadequate to ground a leftist politics. Jodi Dean, for example, inveighs against the invocation of democracy for leftist politics. She argues that the triumph of the discourse of democracy has rendered it obsolete because we call so many violent oligarchic regimes democracies:

> Democracy, though, is inadequate as a language and frame for left political aspiration. Here are two reasons why; there are others. First, the right speaks the language of democracy. It voices its goals and aspirations in democratic terms. One of the reasons given for the US invasion of Iraq, for example, was the goal of bringing democracy to the Middle East. . . . A second reason democracy is inadequate as an expression of left aspiration is that contemporary democratic language employs and reinforces the rhetoric of capitalism: free choice, liberty, satisfaction, communication, connection, diversity. (Dean 2009: 20)

Even though Dean correctly diagnoses some of the ills that are sanctioned by democracy, and how the language surrounding it has shifted, her conclusion that we ought to abandon the idea misses what is so unique, important, and complex about democracy itself, which is found in its particular form of demarcation and the force that demanding a new demarcation can have.

Democracy is radically underdetermined, a fact that we all too often forget. As Wendy Brown correctly notes, "no compelling argument can be made that democracy inherently entails representation, constitutions, deliberation, participation, free markets, rights, universality, or even equality" (Brown 2011: 45). Which of these modes of politics to use, or whether to use any of them at all, are at stake within democracy. Brown herself acknowledges a similar sullying of the language

of democracy as Dean, going so far as to call it an "empty signifier to which any and all can attach their dreams and hopes" (Brown 2011: 44). She highlights the incompatibility of democracy—rule by the people—with capitalism and globalization, which evacuates the people, but, unlike Dean, she does so while also recognizing the alternatives alive within democracy itself. For Brown, the conditions for the people to rule themselves must be in place, meaning that they must have access to the power to rule (50). Unfortunately, the current global capitalist landscape has resulted in the gradual erosion of this sort of access (46–50). Despite such a seemingly dire diagnosis, Brown nonetheless looks to alternative possibilities for democracy. Its uniqueness as a form of rule means that it is "an unfinished principle" (45). To take it seriously will mean taking seriously the task of authoring our own lives rather than "moralizing, consuming, conforming, luxuriating, fighting, simply being told what to be, think, and do" (55).

These are general exhortations, to be sure, and such authoring is capable of going in many directions, egalitarian and fascist alike. Instead of illustrating the weakness of democracy, however, these varied outcomes and possibilities point to something essential about the concept: democracy provides unique support for resistance to injustice even as the language of democracy has been co-opted in all sorts of ways. To put it another way, we ought not view democracy as wholly inadequate to urgent political tasks dealing with injustice. But what sorts of resistance does democracy point to? What is democratic resistance? It is important to first narrow the focus to the necessary context, given the wide variety of ways that democracy could be possibly deployed.

Robert Jubb has recently argued for the disaggregation of authority relating to political resistance and its justification (Jubb 2019). Once we abandon the Rawlsian criterion of a nearly just society in justifying civil disobedience, we confront a wide range of unjust societies within which we need to justify and understand the stakes of resistance, as well as whether "civil disobedience" in the liberal sense is a viable mode of resistance in various contexts in the first place. The differences among unjust societies justify different types of resistance depending on the structure of political authority.[3] With regard to the internal colonialism of African America—which is the focus of this article—multiple questions arise: What are the contours of this context? What conception of democracy is appropriate for best understanding this context? With the goal of ending internal colonialism, what sorts of resistance are relevant within that context? Taken together: how do democracy, internal colonialism, and resistance come together in the context of the United States and African America? We have seen how varied democracy can be, and how it engenders political struggle over itself. In light of that struggle, the following section outlines the history and contemporary state of internal colonialism theory, beginning with some debates over how to construe colonialism itself, since these considerations greatly impact how we might understand its internal variant.

Colonialism and Internal Colonialism

Understanding internal colonialism necessitates first outlining colonialism itself, as the former concept has often been elaborated through its relation to the latter. The contours of colonialism remain of intense philosophical interest, as a recent debate between Lea Ypi and Laura Valentini illustrates. Ypi's view of colonialism locates its unique wrongness in "the creation and upholding of a political association that denies its members equal and reciprocal terms of cooperation" (Ypi 2013: 158). In response, Valentini claims that Ypi's procedural definition is ambiguous, and either underdetermines or overdetermines colonialism. She concludes that there is no distinctive procedural wrong, and that its wrongness lies in its many other abhorrent aspects (Valentini 2015: 327). When it comes to territory, Ypi's defines colonialism as "a practice that involves both the subjugation of one people to another and the political and economic control of a dependent territory (or parts of it)" (Ypi 2013: 162). She therefore avoids drawing any specific sorts of determinate territorial boundaries within the definition, which will be important.

There are also many classical examples of the analysis of colonialism coming from the experience of the colonized. To take one such example, in his classic text *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Albert Memmi highlights the economic aspect of colonialism and the pull of raising the standard of living for the colonizer, for whom a "change of environment is really one of economics" (Memmi 1991: 5–6). Such a colonizer will only seriously consider returning home "if one day his livelihood is affected, if 'situations' are in real danger" (6). This economic motive has always been the essence of colonialism, not "the prestige of the flag, nor cultural expansion, nor even governmental supervision and the preservation of a staff of government employees" (6). The colonizer knows, at least eventually, that his economic benefits come at the expense of the colonized, and so knows at some level of his illegitimate status (8). This colonizer, according to Memmi, is "a foreigner, having come to a land by the accidents of history, he has succeeded not merely in creating a place for himself but also in taking away that of the inhabitant, granting himself astounding privileges to the detriment of those rightfully entitled to them" (9). In being privileged, and illegitimately so, he is a usurper (9). Additionally, more than being merely an economic phenomenon, colonialism has a psychological aspect that includes the attitude of the colonizer toward the colonized (10).

Memmi's view brings to the fore a potential difficulty for clarifying the relationship between colonialism and internal colonialism: an important aspect of Memmi's definition is that the colonizer is a foreigner, which at first glance would turn a term like "internal colonialism" into a contradiction. Memmi is not alone in ascribing this focus to the term. Indeed, even the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry for "Colonialism" starts out by stating that it uses the term to

"describe the process of European settlement, violent dispossession and political domination over the rest of the world, including the Americas, Australia, and parts of Africa and Asia" (Kohn and Reddy 2022). One subtle difference, however, is the historicized nature of this latter compared to Memmi's, insofar as it does not attempt to define a concept as such, but to describe a specific historical phenomenon.

In addition to the presence of a foreign agent, a second potential difficulty in approaching the term is the difficulty of clearly demarcating between colonialism and imperialism. The discourses surrounding terms like "colonies," "postcolonial," and "settler colonial" are quite unstable, making such a line impossible to systematically draw (Pitts 2010: 213–14). In her study of what she calls "domestic colonies," Barbara Arneil notes that such a demarcation only appears difficult because we include reference to a foreign invader in our definitions of colonialism. Thus, she directly challenges Memmi's definition. Arneil uses her focus on explicitly planned domestic colonies to cast doubt on the coherence of the concept of internal colonialism. Her case studies include progressive thinkers who advocated for domestic colonies as positive developments, such as utopian socialist colonies and African American utopian colonies (Arneil 2017: 15). Due to the prevalence, especially in the nineteenth century, of explicitly planned domestic colonies—such as farm colonies, labor colonies, and utopian colonies—we should not include a foreign agent in any definition of colonialism, but rather differentiate between domestic and international versions (2–3). After rejecting the necessity of a foreign element for definitions of colonialism, Arneil focuses on how proponents of internal colonialism define the term as necessarily including domination (9). As we look to the development of the concept of internal colonialism, of central importance is the fact that the *relation* between the dominant and dominated groups is the same in both traditional and internal colonialism. Or, as Robert L. Allen has put it, the "structures of domination and subordination" are the same (Allen 2010: 3). In either case we are dealing with "a system of racial discrimination buttressed by violence" (4).

We are now in a position to address the literature on internal colonialism. Scholars pinpoint several overlapping paths leading to the language of "internal colonialism" taking center stage in the United States in the 1960s. One is the body of work from Latin American economists known broadly as dependency theory, and more specifically the idea of the "development of underdevelopment" (Gutiérrez 2004: 284). Another source is the 1955 Bandung Conference in Thailand, which brought together many of the newly or soon-to-be independent colonies of Europe to discuss self-determination (Arneil 2017: 6). A third, which serves as the focus of this section, traces the notion of specifically–African American internal colonialism (Pinderhughes 2010: 71). As the work of Charles Pinderhughes and Robert L. Allen in particular illustrate, class must remain central in any workable analysis

of African American internal colonialism, an analysis of which will encompass political, social, psychological, economic, and cultural aspects.

Pinderhughes outlines the trajectory of the notion of "African America," beginning with the Black Convention Movement's 1830 call for solidarity with African Americans in Ohio after a vicious white riot in Cincinnati in 1829 resulted in half of the city's Black community fleeing to Canada (Pinderhughes 2011: 237). From Martin Delaney and Frederick Douglass, through Du Bois, to Harold Cruse and Malcolm X, Pinderhughes traces a long tradition of activists viewing African America as a "nation within a nation" (Pinderhughes 2010: 71). Prominent in that tradition is Kwame Ture and Charles Hamilton's 1967 *Black Power*, which analyzes Black-white colonial relations in light of the legislative and judicial gains of the Civil Rights Movement. In this text, Ture and Hamilton understand colonialism as a relation or set of relations between colonizer and colonized:

> Black people in this country form a colony, and it is not in the interest of the colonial power to liberate them. Black people are legal citizens of the United States with, for the most part, the same *legal* rights as other citizens. Yet they stand as colonial subjects in relation to the white society. Thus institutional racism has another name: colonialism. (Ture and Hamilton 1967: 5)

Describing the constitution of white power, they add that, "politically, decisions which affect black lives have always been made by white people—the 'white power structure'" (6–7). That is, colonial power in this context is underwritten by the white power of institutional racism.

According to Ture and Hamilton, internal colonialism is characterized by three specific relations. The first is political: indirect rule. As they write, "the white power structure rules the black community through local blacks who are responsive to the white leaders, the downtown, white machine, not to the black populace" (10). These token leaders are co-opted by the white machine and practice assimilationist politics (11). Such a process of co-optation serves to widen the gap between these Black elites on the one hand and the Black masses on the other and is common, Ture and Hamilton argue, under colonial rule (13). The second is economic, specifically the idea that political power goes hand in hand with economic deprivation (16): colonialism exists for the enrichment of the colonizer, which requires economic dependency. Ture and Hamilton apply this situation to Black America by writing, "exploiters come into the ghetto from outside, bleed it dry, and leave it economically dependent on the larger society" (17). Malcolm X repeatedly returned to this very point in his speeches, as in "The Ballot or the Bullet," for example (Malcolm X 1965: 38–39). Additionally, these actions are not only consciously carried out by individual people, but "one way or another, most whites participate in economic colonialism. . . . This is not to say that every single white American consciously oppresses black people. He does not need to" (Ture and

Hamilton 1967: 22). Rather, the racist political power of institutions infiltrates the economic forces that exert themselves on Black communities. The third relation is the set of social repercussions caused by the political and economic rule by those external to the community, which they pinpoint as the sedimentation of inferior status among all Black-white vectors (23). Ture and Hamilton state that their goal in elaborating "internal colonialism" is the redefinition of the Black community, including its values and goals, in such a way that pushes back against its external creation and definition by white power (22).

Continuing on the theme of economic dependency, Robert Allen's intervention comes with his 1969 *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*. While class is an underlying theme in Ture and Hamilton's outline of the three aspects of the internal colonial relation, Allen makes class central to his account. Arguing against the claim that legislative and judicial progress meant that the internal colonialism framework was no longer needed, Allen tracks the shift that he saw, in the wake of the dismantling of Jim Crow, from internal colonialism to internal neocolonialism. His argument rejects the assumption that, due to the political rights granted in the 1960s, African Americans had gained entry into society in a meaningful way. Allen replies that while "the situation of black people has changed in recent years," those changes should be seen as a "mixed blessing" (Allen 1990: 13). Rather than the assimilation of African Americans into the dominant mainstream of US society, the granting of certain political rights instead means that

> black America is now being transformed from a colonial nation into a neocolonial nation; a nation nonetheless subject to the will and domination of white America. In other words, black America is undergoing a process akin to that experienced by many colonial countries. The leaders of these countries believed that they were being granted equality and self-determination, but this has proved not to be the case. (14)

Just as theorists of internal colonialism have often based their analyses on how it mirrors accounts of colonialism, Allen does the same with neocolonialism. He explicitly cites Kwame Nkrumah's understanding of the concept as an influence. Nkrumah understood neocolonialism as "based upon the principle of breaking up former large united colonial territories into a number of small non-viable States which are incapable of independent development and must rely upon the formal imperial power for defense and even internal security" (Nkrumah 2004: xiii). Central to this understanding of neocolonialism is indirect rule, which Allen ties to the workings of capitalism (Allen 1990: 16). As the more radical Black Power movement displaced the mainstream civil rights organizations that had dominated the previous years, the country's corporate elite saw a real threat to economic and social stability. In response, they attempted to co-opt the new movement and subtly transform its leaders and rhetoric from advocacy for social

transformation to support for the status quo (17). Crucially, the corporate elite found an ally in the recently formed Black bourgeoisie.[4]

Allen describes the Black bourgeoisie as a militant Black middle class—professionals, technicians, executives, professors, government workers—who were members of the Civil Rights Movement but, due to its failures, skeptical of integration. They aligned with the Black masses in rejecting the old Black elite, and sincerely supported the Black Power movement, but still looked to their own interests as a class distinct from the Black masses. "In effect," Allen writes, "this new elite told the power structure: 'Give us a piece of the action and we will run the black communities and keep them quiet for you'" (19). White corporatists accepted this arrangement and gave their endorsement to their new tacit agents, with the result that formal political equality has not meant an end to some form of colonial relationship. Black power has instead been reimagined as Black capitalism (18).[5]

Allen revisited this framework in 2005, providing more evidence that his claims about internal neocolonialism need to be taken seriously. One trend he noticed was co-optation. Economically, the intervening years saw a growing distance between the Black middle class and the Black underclass, as well as the failure of Black capitalism to make a dent in the white corporate structure. In fact, the opposite occurred, with white corporations aggressively entering markets geared at African Americans, such as Black hair products, at the expense of Black-owned companies (Allen 2005: 5–6). Politically, there has been a significant rise of Black elected officials, but the hope that they would facilitate Black empowerment has largely gone unrealized, as the Democratic Party has ensured that their accountability is to the party and not the Black community (6).[6] A second trend was repression, in the form of the FBI's violent and illegal sabotage of Black Power groups and the rise of the prison-industrial complex in the 1980s, leading to an astronomical rise in Black incarceration (6–7). This resulted, on the one hand, in the empowerment of a small minority of African Americans who remained beholden to the white economic and political power structures, and on the other hand, the disempowerment and incarceration of Black radicals and Black youth (7). These dual strategies have only increased the class contradictions within African America, echoing neocolonial strategies carried out elsewhere (Pinderhughes 2011: 250).

The advantage of such a class-focused neocolonial understanding of African American internal colonialism is visible in how it can respond to criticisms of the internal colonialism framework. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, for example, rejects the framework of internal colonialism, pointing out that the capital benefits of Black exploitation went to only a small fraction of capitalists instead of society as a whole. For this reason, she suggests, exploitation was not a motor of American capitalism in the way that colonial resource theft was for other countries (Taylor 2016: 196). On Nkrumah's account the unequal benefit of exploitation is characteristic of colonialism in general. While colonies were *presented* as a source of

wealth, they failed to mitigate the class conflicts of colonizer societies because the profit from colonies "found its way into the pockets of the capitalist class and not into those of the workers" (Nkrumah 2004: xii). On Nkrumah's reading, Taylor's rationale for not describing African America as an instance of internal colonialism in fact describes colonialism itself. While Taylor objects to the idea of internal colonialism insofar as she sees a disanalogy with colonialism, Nkrumah observes that in many instances of colonialism we see the very dynamic that Taylor outlines regarding African America—the fact that the wealth mined from colonialism did not flow to society at large. Taylor's objection, then, becomes instead a reason to endorse the neocolonial lens.

Another complaint against the concept of internal colonialism concerns language. Here, Pinderhughes's framing, building on Allen's work, provides a reply. Arneil objects that proponents of internal colonialism theory use that language only as metaphor, which blunts its force (Arneil 2017: 15). While some do—including Robert Blauner and Tommie Shelby (Blauner 1969; Shelby 2016: 283)—this is not always the case. Pinderhughes, for example, is emphatic that "internal colonialism" is not analogical or metaphorical. We can better understand his rationale if we note that Arneil, in focusing only on *planned domestic colonies*, centers only endeavors that colonizers themselves referred to as colonies, seeing this as the only way to draw the line between actual and metaphorical uses of the term "colonial." However, it seems wrongheaded to think that the only way to figure out what counts as the empirical historical reality of colonialism is to take the colonizer's word for it. While Arneil looks to the word of colonizers as to what counts as a colony, Pinderhughes places the colonized and the land on which they live at the forefront of his account, leading to his argument for understanding the term literally.

Of course, the origins and early history of the US are obviously and straightforwardly colonial. This goes for the Indigenous population who were exterminated, betrayed, and driven onto reservations, as well as for the African, and then African American, population who were kidnapped, enslaved, and treated as fungible commodities. These were colonized groups. Pinderhughes resists Arneil's claim that understanding African America in terms of internal colonialism erases the situation of Indigenous peoples and the colonization they still face (Arneil 2017: 10), making clear that the two cases must be understood side by side: "Both Native Americans and African Americans were colonized peoples under the English-governed thirteen colonies" (Pinderhughes 2010: 75). The question for Pinderhughes then becomes: if African Americans were colonized under those conditions, what has happened to change their status (Pinderhughes 2010: 76)? If we can see no clear process by which this colonization has not been abolished, then we must conclude that it remains, even if in a different form.

Opposite Arneil, then, Pinderhughes centers the colonized, and through this his novel geospatial account comes into view. It answers a potential imprecision

found in much of the literature, namely, "was/is all of Black America a single colony, or not?" (Pinderhughes 2011: 246). Pinderhughes answers in the negative, against Allen and Rod Bush, among others (Pinderhughes 2019: 245–47; 2010: 75). He argues for the existence of many colonies that make up African America, rather than one diasporic colony:

> My preference is to define colony as settler confiscated land plus the land on which the colonized reside. Then, regardless of declared independence by the colonized, unless the conditions of the colonized are equalized to that of the dominant population, those geographic concentrations of systematic subordination (the colonies—of the colonized) are quite durable and will continue to exist, even if they move and are re-concentrated (the colony/ colonies are re-formed) in another location. (Pinderhughes 2019: 250)

Pinderhughes thus avoids the issue of how such a dispersed group could be considered a single colony. On the geo-spatial view, African Americans are a single colonized group, but one that exists across many different colonies. The view is especially adept at accounting for population upheavals such as the Great Migration.[7]

With our understanding of the unstable and potentially unfinished conception of democracy alongside a view of internal colonialism focused on class analysis, we can now inquire into the possible resources that democracy might have for mitigation or abolition of the internal colonial relation. Democracy is often invoked by those fighting racism, colonialism, and imperialism, placing democracy on the side of progress or justice. What, then, is the relationship of internal colonialism to democracy, and how does a concept often seen as central to both democracy and decolonization—self-determination—play a role in *internal* decolonization?

Abolition Democracy and Self-Determination

With regard to the first question, Pinderhughes sees three avenues for the abolition of a colonial relation: assimilation, ethnic cleansing, and positive abolition. Assimilation means the elimination of the "social process of systemic and systematic discrimination or differential treatment such that an equality of life outcomes, i.e., an equality of result exists between a culturally differing nationality and the dominant power population" (Pinderhughes 2019: 252). This was the path taken by certain so-called white ethnic minorities in the United States such as the Italians and Irish.[8] Ethnic cleansing entails systematic harassment or discrimination of an oppressed group by internment, killing, or expulsion. Lastly, positive abolition involves "conscious assertive action" and a "systematic set of policies" that actively transform the inequality experienced by the members of the colony (252). The outcome of such a process is "a genuine equality of condition and outcome" for the formerly colonized that is on par with the

general population of the former colonizing group (252). As none of these three possibilities have come to pass, and alternatives do not seem to be forthcoming, then we must conclude that the colonial relation persists in a different form.

Both Allen and Pinderhughes point to self-determination as central to African America's liberation from colonial status (Allen 2005: 2; Pinderhughes 2011: 240). Self-determination is often connected to the idea of a nation and "a people," and has been central to much theorizing about decolonization (Stilz 2015; Stilz 2016). Allen highlights the importance of self-determination within his analysis of the shift from colonialism to neocolonialism in the late 1960s, noting that African American self-determination was effectively captured by one small segment of that population—the emerging Black bourgeoisie—at the expense of the masses: "self-determination has come to mean control of the black community by a 'native' elite which is beholden to the white power structure" (Allen 1990: 19).

A difficulty when considering self-determination in cases such as African America, however, is the distinction between nation and national minority. This distinction is drawn from Lenin, for whom only a nation could achieve self-determination, while a national minority could only hope for regional autonomy (Pinderhughes 2011: 241–42). Pinderhughes notes the potential reactionary potential of nationalism, complicating Lenin's dichotomy, but follows Lenin in looking to democracy as a means of achieving self-determination. But what does this look like? He is clear that while "the abolition of internal colonialism will require the sweeping transformation of American society" (248), there are democratic measures that can be taken. To lead toward positive abolition, they must yield equality of outcome for internal colony residents relative to that of the historically dominant population, including, against Lenin, self-determination without traditional independence. Pinderhughes mentions, for example, "electronic participatory democracy, community control, fully informed news, discussion and debate in a genuine truth-seeking format, and broad democracy in regional autonomous zones (and encompassing fully funded collective reparations)" (Pinderhughes 2019: 252). The only way to make these happen in a way that avoids the co-optation that was involved in the shift to neocolonialism is for a major mass movement to take hold, one that importantly overcomes the class divisions emphasized by Allen as central to neocolonialism (253). Pinderhughes's ideas for the positive abolition of internal colonialism center systematic policy changes, but he also knows that such changes will only meaningfully occur if they are backed by a mass movement from below.

This dual necessity is the only way to even begin accounting for the effects and afterlives of slavery, which Allen and Pinderhughes emphasize must be at the center of understanding the internal colonialism of African America. Du Bois constructs his view of abolition democracy with the same focus, writing that "the true significance of slavery in the United States to the whole social development

of America, lay in the ultimate relation of slaves to democracy" (Du Bois 1998: 184). The crucial question in light of this relation was whether Black people would be incorporated into new institutions and a new social order that codified and respected their freedom. Echoing the ambivalent nature of democracy with which we began, Du Bois positioned abolition democracy against white democracy, and highlighted the different ways that coercive force manifested itself in that struggle (Lester 2021: 3085). Du Bois did not reject the power of state coercion, but instead pointed out how it would have to be used if the possible future of abolition democracy was going to be realized (3083). This would have to manifest in institutions of abolition democracy, which were never fully put into place (Davis 2005: 91–92).

For Du Bois, these new institutions required stronger internal support in the face of the intransigence of the white planters and racists. The necessary foundation of abolition democracy was "temporary dictatorship" to ensure education, legal, civil, and voting rights for Black people in the South (Du Bois 1998: 185). This was a "policy of coercion" that "advocated Federal control" (186). Du Bois advocated for the full force of the state in the positive abolition of slavery beyond its merely negative sense, even "a dictatorship of far broader possibilities than the North had at first contemplated" (580). Such force was necessary due to the outpouring of violence against the gains of Reconstruction. Leading up to the election of 1868, "a civil war of secret assassination and open intimidation and murder began and did not end until 1876, and not entirely then. . . . Secret Democratic organizations were formed, and all well armed. . . . They all paraded nightly" (474). According to Du Bois, the gradual replacement of "the wrong leaders by a better and better sort" was what was needed, but which never came (581). Instead, state efforts to combat the likes of the Klan were cut off as the propertied classes of North and South came together.

We have seen this dynamic play out again in the wake of the civil rights legislation of the 1960s and the turn to neocolonialism affected by capitalism, just as the forces of capitalism won the day in Reconstruction. What does abolition democracy tell us about self-determination and the possibilities for the positive abolition of internal colonialism?[9] As in Ture and Hamilton, Allen, and Pinderhughes, self-determination is central in Du Bois's analysis of the promise and failure of Reconstruction. Democracy as such is not a panacea, as Du Bois's positioning of abolition against white democracy clearly illustrates. Furthermore, any contemporary approach will have to account for the strategies that emerged in the shift from colonialism to neocolonialism, and the success of these strategies by the corporate elite to consolidate their power through a new matrix of racial and economic relations. Any new institutions, to be transformative, must avoid the co-optation of the shift from colonial to neocolonial. Reconstruction was undone by a failure of the state to adequately impose its will, while the Black Power movement was undone by a combination of state violence and capitalist strategy.

If democracy is to be able to play a role in the abolition of internal colonialism, it must be democracy driven by, and in the name of, the self-determination of African America—the sort of democracy identified by, fought for, and brought into being by a mass movement of the colonized and their allies, that both challenges and transforms the contours of state power. Only by beginning with the historical details and complexity of the colonial relation and its evolution, especially in relation to capitalism, can democracy play a transformative role.

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Notes

1. The early twentieth century debate between Walter Lippman and John Dewey illustrates how such contestation over democracy's meaning and import might play out. See Whipple (2005) for an overview.
2. Alexander Guerrero (2014) has recently argued for the retrieval and relevance of this mode of governance.
3. Jennifer Kling and Megan Mitchell use "generally just" to differentiate their analysis from a Rawlsian starting point, precisely to confront the specific racial injustices of contemporary US politics (Kling and Mitchell 2019).
4. See also E. Franklin Frazier's (1957) seminal analysis of the Black bourgeois class.
5. For an updated argument against the efficacy of Black capitalism for Black liberation, see Jared Ball's recent book, *The Myth and Propaganda of Black Buying Power* (2020).
6. There is a clear parallel here to the colonized intellectuals as opposed to the colonized peasantry explained by Fanon (2005: 10–13).
7. While economic exploitation and political oppression clearly come together within the colonial relation, it is worth mentioning that there is also an essential cultural aspect. Frantz Fanon outlined how colonialism affects the culture of the colonized, not by destroying it, but by mummifying it. As a result, it is afforded a sort of pseudo-respect that objectifies it and reifies it, fixing it in time and space through exoticism and oversimplification. A cultural hierarchy and the dominance of the colonial culture is established, and a guilt complex emerges in colonized subjects (Fanon 1994: 34–35). Allen similarly combines the cultural with the political and the economic. On his account, the "native" culture is broken up as family and community are destroyed, which in the case of African America has its roots in the violence of enslavement (Allen 1990: 13).
8. Noel Ignatiev (2009) argues that Irish assimilation was only possible because of their participation in racist social structures that kept Black people subordinated.
9. Another prominent paradigm for addressing internal colonialism is reconciliation, though I don't have the space to address it substantively here. Short (2005) outlines its shortcomings.

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