

# Another cosmic hoax Perpetrated upon us by Colonialism

We live under a *social* contract

Frank H. Joyce

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a review of

*The Racial Contract* by Charles W. Mills. Cornell University Press 1993

No, we don't. We live under a racial contract. Calling it something else, such as a social contract is part of the racial contract's system of concealing itself.

The late Charles Mills clarified this matter quite definitively in *The Racial Contract*, a 133-page book published in 1993.

For most of my adult life I have wrestled with the question, is everything about race? I have concluded that it is. The Racial Contract was of immense help to me in figuring that out.

Here's how Mills puts it in the introduction:

“Ironically, the most important political system of recent global history—the system of domination by which white people have historically and in certain ways continue to rule over nonwhite people—is not seen as a political system at all. It is just taken for granted; it is the background against which other systems, which we are to see as political, are highlighted. This book is an attempt to redirect your vision to make you see what, in a sense, has been there all along.”

Engulfed as we are in raging controversies about the use of the n-word, book banning, statue removals, school curriculum, and environmental racism, it has become easier than ever to grasp the centrality of race to the essence of the United States. But not that easy.

Centuries of distraction and denial are not effortlessly dissolved. They do not disappear of their own accord. Left, liberal, and neo-liberal (whatever that is) thinking still relegates white supremacy and white racial identity to some sort of subordinate status to the real deal: economics. Often expressed more directly as class.

That's how I saw it for decades. As a side note for discussion another time, the white way of thinking also dismissively treats violence, gender, culture, spirituality, and relations with other life forms as lesser categories for understanding the behavior of homo sapiens. The writing of the late bell hooks is very helpful at understanding these connections.

Here's one set of assumptions to start thinking differently about race.

White people of all classes participated in race-justified settler colonialism.

Very few white people of any class opposed it.

There were white people of all classes who supported race-based capitalist slavery.

There were white people of all classes who opposed race-based capitalist slavery. This was true of the abolitionist movement in the 1800s and it is true of the anti-racist movement now. White people of all classes are racist.

White people of all classes are anti-racist.

Making matters a little more complicated, to paraphrase, U.S. author and anti-racist activist, Ibram X. Kendi, a white person can do an anti-racist thing in the morning and three racist things in the afternoon of the same day.

The white left has always struggled with race not just from an analytic perspective, but from garden variety racist attitudes as well.

Sometimes, as with self-proclaimed socialist Jack London, the racism has been overt. In 2017, the East Bay Express published an expose on London that included this paragraph, “His 1911 novel *Adventure* includes a white man who ‘rode pick-a-back on a woolly-headed, black-skinned savage.’ Enough said.”

In other cases, the left has been functionally white supremacist in more passive ways, just as with white supremacy writ large. To be clear, there is nothing to suggest any superior anti-racist insight or practice within the annals of anarchism either.

In *The Dawn of Everything*, David Graeber and David Wengrow demystify the superficially different, but essentially the same ideas of the big-name western thinkers, white supremacist to a man, including Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

In *The Racial Contract*, Charles Mills did what Graeber and Wengrow do, but almost thirty years earlier. The critiques overlap somewhat although Mills’s is through the lens of white supremacy.

Counterintuitive though it might seem at first glance, the possibilities for building a multiracial, multiethnic, multigender, multinational political movement are now greater than they have ever been. Both of these books are essential reading for formulating its intellectual framework.

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