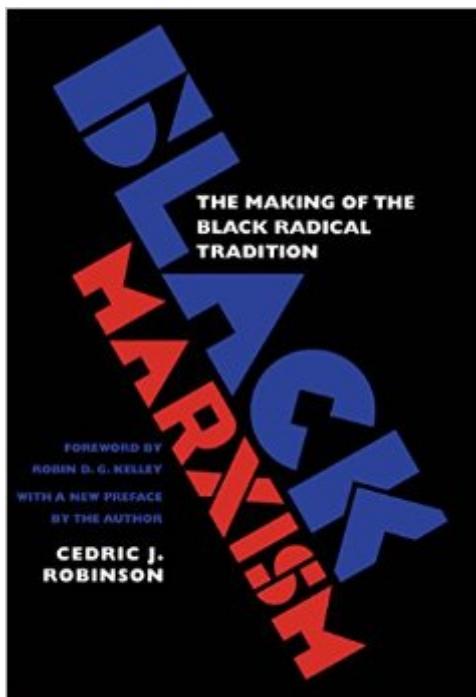


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Black Marxism: The Making Of The Black Radical Tradition



Synopsis

In this ambitious work, first published in 1983, Cedric Robinson demonstrates that efforts to understand black people's history of resistance solely through the prism of Marxist theory are incomplete and inaccurate. Marxist analyses tend to presuppose European models of history and experience that downplay the significance of black people and black communities as agents of change and resistance. Black radicalism must be linked to the traditions of Africa and the unique experiences of blacks on western continents, Robinson argues, and any analyses of African American history need to acknowledge this. To illustrate his argument, Robinson traces the emergence of Marxist ideology in Europe, the resistance by blacks in historically oppressive environments, and the influence of both of these traditions on such important twentieth-century black radical thinkers as W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, and Richard Wright.

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Customer Reviews

It's time that Robinson's work receives the attention it deserves. No other book on African and African American thought that I know of shows such a keen ability, or even acknowledges the need for, a contextualization of black radicalism within the larger currents of world history. Unlike most intellectual histories which restrict themselves to national or racial boundaries, Robinson addresses the emergence of Marxism within western civilization, reaching back to the medieval and even classical periods, and shows how its thinkers were guided by ethnocentric and universalistic tendencies that caused them to miss the way that class solidarity has been thwarted by nationalism

and ethnicity, and of how socialism as envisioned by European radicals has never been monolithic but has adapted itself to local and regional folkways. My only criticism of this work is that Franz Fanon is not included in the list of important black thinkers (Du Bois, James and Wright) to be discussed. Fanon's synthesis of nationalism, communism and existentialism as phenomena to be considered simultaneously for analyzing postcolonial movements seems to fit Robinson's discussion very well, so I'm surprised he receives such little attention. Otherwise, this is a wonderful and surprising study, which I highly recommend, and one that surpasses the unfortunate practice of so many books on African thought that refuse to recognize the dialectic between black and European intellectuals.

Cedric Robinson in Black Marxism has extensively researched the historical conditions and forces that created capitalism. His knowledge and research regarding the history of European racism, labor and especially slavery, as more nuanced and complex than originally put forth by Marx. He critiques Marx's eurocentrism and short-sighted view of history and revolution. His major supposition is that slavery is and has always been the driving force behind capitalism. Even if you are not interested in Marxism, the completeness of the survey of the Irish, the Slavs, the Italians, and the arc of history that highlights subjugation and opportunity within these distinct nationalities that led to the advancement of the capitalists project.

In some instances, the sources that Robinson quotes from the 1800s are easier to understand and are more to the point than his interpretation of events. He's done a wonderful job of providing historical context.

Upon completion of this treatise all readers should receive a Master's Degree in Black Studies. Robinson provides a detailed and complex study of Black Radicalism and Marxism's relation to it. This book works on a number of levels; Historical, Sociological and Philosophical. I think one of the book's strong points is that it broadens the reader's mind to other interpretations of Black Radicalism. His analysis of DuBois, and C.L.R. James' transformation is interesting along with his dissection of Marxian / Lenin dogma. Also, the way he traces the origins of racism in European culture to early Ethnic Group stratification in antiquity is insightful.

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