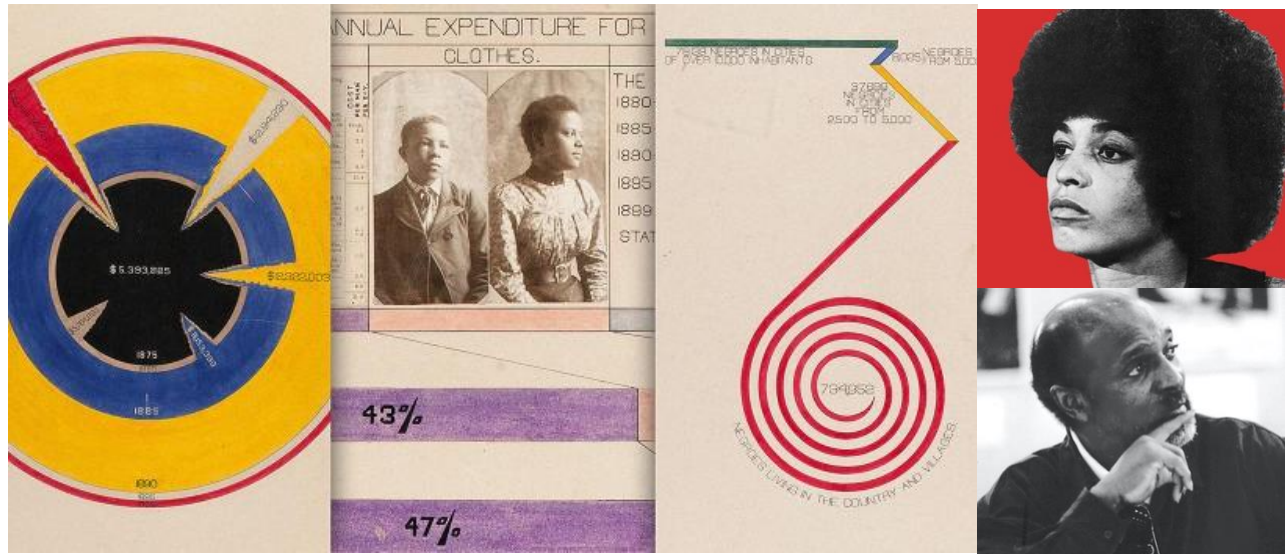


Theories of Racial Capitalism
Dartmouth College
Political Economy Project and Department of Government



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Course Description

This seminar explores theories of the historical relationship between ideologies of racial difference and practices of capital accumulation since the rise of the Atlantic slave trade. Students will examine the ways in which a host of thinkers, critics, and historians have formulated and employed the concept of “racial capitalism” to reimagine and confront the entanglement of race and capitalism in two central ways: first, as a theory of capitalism in which the movement, settlement, and economic exploitation of people of color is seen as indissociable from regimes of capital accumulation; and second, as a critique of standard accounts of capitalism that view racism as a cultural deviation from the market’s economic logic. We will begin by engaging contemporary theories of racial capitalism since the 1970s, paying particular attention to the theoretical arguments and historical methods scholars have used to think about racism as an internal and structural feature of capitalist development. We will then turn to key texts and constitutive moments in the histories of Black political thought and global capitalism that will invite us to reflect on “racial capitalism” as a conceptual and historical category for critically understanding the convergence of race and capitalism in a long-range international context. In addition to reading classic texts by Fredrick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, W.E.B. Du Bois, Cedric Robinson, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Barbara Fields, Saidiya Hartman, and others, we will focus on the socioeconomic transformations to which their works responded, including racial slavery, settler colonialism, Jim Crow, the underdevelopment of Africa, neoliberal economic reform, and mass incarceration. Through class discussions, writing assignments, and readings, students will be introduced to a wide range of theoretical and historical approaches to interpreting race and capitalism while also learning about key concepts and debates in critical race theory, Black feminist thought, and the history of political economy.