

**Not So Black and White: A History of Race from White Supremacy to Identity Politics**, by Kenan Malik, London, Hurst Press, 2023, 328pp., £20(hardback), ISBN 978-1787387769.

'Not So Black and White' is a book which undoubtedly asks the reader to take more than a cursory look at the past to understand our political present. Malik undermines the idea that identity is the necessary locus of belief and values, underscoring – importantly – that we shouldn't presuppose where an individual's social or political allegiance should lie on the basis of their ethnoracial background. This review will evaluate Malik's detailed and earnest attempt at locating and critiquing contemporary identity politics in the history of race and race relations.

The book is divided into sections and sub-chapters. The first section looks at the genesis of concepts of equality, race and racial hatred in early European philosophical thought and colonial rule. The strongest parts of the book are these earlier chapters, filled with nuanced historical case studies which challenge popular as well as academic ideas around 'race'. Some of these include the notion that racial categories came before racial prejudice, and that racial ideology was the driving force of European slavery. Malik argues that the ideological thrust behind early racial classification in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was so firmly in motion that the science of eugenics simply served to bolster and legitimise existing hierarchies. He makes a similar argument that slavery was a pan-racial practice by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with African slavery not driven by, but certainly later justified by, racial ideas. Through this, he builds his case that many of the practices we associate with racism – exploitation, disenfranchisement, dehumanisation – have their roots in enduring ideas about the poor. Thus, we cannot understand 'race' in a contemporary context without understanding its historical co-constitution – or more so for Malik, its synonymity – with class struggle.

In defining the genesis of Whiteness in chapter 3, Malik does well to outline the ways in which historically racialised groups, like the Irish, 'became' White, and maps the antecedents of present-day anxiety (expressed in conspiracy theories like the Great Replacement Theory) about the erasure of the White Anglo-Saxon race. Race is embedded within a larger global history of class and status inequality, to understand the co-option of non-European ideas and values by European elites, built into their own enduring narrative of racial superiority. He maintains throughout that a lot of issues that seem to do with race are better understood the prism of class. As a result, Malik reduces 'Whiteness' - a developed field of contemporary academic study and a powerful analytical tool - to phenomena such as cultural appropriation. This renders it an easy target for critique. The issue is the misappropriation and misconceptualisation of white identity and its crude equivalence with absolute privilege, but this distinction often gets lost. Malik does take the political right to task, challenging simplistic understandings of race and racism - that race only goes as deep as skin colour hatred, or that White people are worse off than non-Whites. He is right to highlight, nonetheless, the precarity of social progress towards racial equality, and that we are all - left and right - implicated in its backslide.

In the second part of the book, Malik outlines the departure of anti-racist struggle from class struggle in anti-imperialist and anti-fascist movements which, in his view, undermined efforts for not only racial but working-class emancipation. In chapter 6, he takes 20<sup>th</sup> century Pan-African, postcolonial scholar-activists and Black intellectuals, such as Frantz Fanon, to task exploring the tensions in their work around race and racial emancipation, and specifically their relationship to and theorisations on 'authentic' 'Black' identity. Albeit briefly, he locates class politics in the anti-imperialist thought of CLR James, George Padmore and W.E.B. DuBois. In chapter 8 he also complexifies simplistic assumptions about the US civil rights movement, foundational to transatlantic ideas about racial inequality but, for Malik, often heedless of

issues of class difference within racial groups. Of Black Lives Matter, Malik suggest that oversight of class within the movement has risked its co-option by Black elites. With a right-wing ethnically diverse elite Cabinet in the UK, and wealthy Black and Asian Republican darlings the political ranks in the US, it is more important than ever to unpick crude equivalences between racial uplift and class emancipation.

Again, Malik provides plenty of nuance to support his arguments around the need to better understand the co-constitution of race and class, but, particularly towards the end of the book, he somewhat labours his point. He states that Black people have suffered disproportionately from police violence, but is at pains to underscore that working-class people of all racial backgrounds have too. It's fairly unconvincing to argue that spotlighting anti-Blackness in US policing distracts from issues of poor policing practice overall. Indeed, understanding the colonial antecedents of the UK and US criminal justice system highlights quite plainly why its punitive and hyper-racialised character serves no one, but especially not Black individuals.

Malik states that within a neoliberal context of pessimism around the ineradicability of racism, we've seen a shift in anti-racism from the material to the symbolic, to demands for representation and to be 'seen'. He under-theorises the corporate and political appropriation of symbolic anti-racism, particularly by liberal White America, laying blame with, amongst others, contemporary proponents of critical race theory. His class-led analysis in chapter 9 even directs critique at the CCCS (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) under Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart, stating that they applied a distorted cultural lens to the working classes which displaced the political and economic aspect of their struggle. He makes a valid point that the constant micro struggles around the parameters of 'authentic Blackness' can be exhausting and socioeconomically irrelevant. However, identity claims are not purely racially self-interested. They are often rooted in legitimate perceptions of dehumanisation, relative deprivation and historical disenfranchisement, whether clearly articulated or not.

In this book, Malik seems to takes 'identitarians' and the political left to task to a far greater degree than the coded (and often uncoded) white supremacisms of influential politicians and contemporary intellectuals. However, he deftly highlights the glaring contradictions and inconsistencies in those who decry identity politics whilst championing the idea of white nationalism through the notion of racial self-interest. Furthermore, his critique of right and left identitarianism is convincing and useful for the academic (sociologist, historian, political scientist) and non-academic activist alike, looking to make sense of contemporary race politics and locate it within a larger, complex history of inequality.

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