Ahmed Shawki. Black Liberation and Socialism

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Main content

There is a greater sense of alienation and powerlessness in Black America," argues Ahmed Shawki, just when "the need for an organized movement of resistance has grown more urgent" (11). This book seeks to provide the historical and theoretical context for the revival of the movement by outlining the struggle for Black liberation in the United States and its connection to socialism. The result is a readable and interesting survey that seeks to connect capitalism to racism and racialized oppression, and detail how the rise of the US as an imperial power "only deepened ... the ideology of racism" (241).

The first two-thirds of the book forms a fairly standard overview of a struggle for Black liberation from the establishment of slavery through the Great Depression and World War II. Shawki begins by exploring slavery and race in the US through Reconstruction and the rise of industrial capitalism in the late nineteenth century, arguing that standard histories have focused on race while ignoring the "material connection between capitalism and the development of racism" (23). His treatment outlines how race was used to profit from the labor of enslaved peoples and points out that Black Abolitionists like David Walker, Henry Highland Garnet, Martin Delany, and most specifically Frederick Douglass had a nascent understanding of this materialist connection. Their arguments set the tone for the struggle that was to come in the Civil War and Reconstruction, when the realities of racism did not evaporate with emancipation, but became more...