

**DECOLONIAL  
STRATEGIES,  
A.Y. 2021-2022**

Prof. MAURO FARNESI CAMELLONE

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# **INTERSECTIONALITY**

## **RACE - GENDER - CLASS**



# INTERSECTIONALITY

## RACE - GENDER - CLASS

### LESSON PLAN

1) **25.11.2021, 08:30-10:30**

Maria Lugones - Race, gender, and class

2) **29.11.2021, 12:30-14:30**

Kimberlé Crenshaw - Gender, race, and class

3) **30.11.2021, 12:30-14:30**

Sandro Mezzadra - Class, gender, and race

### MATERIALS

- Bibliography
- Crenshaw, K., "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989)
- Crenshaw, K., "Mapping the Margins - Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women" (1991)
- Lugones, M., "The Coloniality of Gender", in W. d. Mignolo, A. Escobar (eds. by) *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, 2010.
- Lugones, M., Price, J., "The Inseparability of Race, Class, and Gender in Latino Studies" (2003)
- Mezzadra, S., "Intersectionality, Identity, and the Riddle of Class" (2021)



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# **CLASS, GENDER, AND RACE**

**SANDRO MEZZADRA**

30.11.2021



## SANDRO MEZZADRA

Sandro Mezzadra teaches political theory at the university of Bologna. His scholarly work has centered on borders and migration, contemporary capitalism and globalization, Marx and workerism. With Brett Neilson he is the author of *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Duke University Press, 2013) and of *The Politics of Operations. Excavating Contemporary Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 2019).

Mezzadra, S., "Intersectionality, Identity, and the Riddle of Class" (2021)

## "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



p. 2: While **identity** is of course a fundamental category in European philosophy at least since Aristotle, its politicization is a much more recent phenomenon. One can say that it is only in the second half of the 20th century that the development of cultural anthropology and sociology lays the theoretical ground for such a **politicization**, which is unconceivable without taking into account the emergence in many parts of the world of **feminist movements as well as of a panoply of struggles against racial domination and for the rights of “minorities”**.

p. 2: Claims based upon identity played an important role in denouncing the **presumed “neutrality” and even universalism of political institutions** and in shedding light **on the continuity of past histories of conquest and domination**.

p. 2: More generally, **identity** provided a **language** for the articulation of claims and desires for **liberation of a multiplicity of subjects** whose oppression was predicated upon specific systems of oppression that were not targeted as such by established traditions of emancipatory politics. Struggles of racialized people or sexual minorities are good instances in this respect as well as claims proliferating within feminism along the lines that fracture the unitary figures of “the woman” and “**universal sisterhood**”.

## "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



p. 2: From this point of view, it is not surprising that **one of the first polemical targets of identity politics was the concept of class and class politics**. If one takes class as a collective subject (and even as a collective identity) whose **unity and homogeneity are immediately given** as an “**objective**” outcome of the relations of production, it is easy to see that there is **no space** here for a politics capable to grasp claims and movements articulated in specific terms — be it in gender or racial terms.

p. 2: Take for instance B.R. Ambedkar, the great spokesperson of the **Dalits in colonial India**. In the late 1920s he had several debates with the leaders of the Communist Party of India, always **pointing to the peculiarity of the position of the Dalits** and to the spread of practices of untouchability in the world of labor and emphasizing **the need to give priority to those questions in labor politics**. This is precisely what Communist leaders did not want to accept, leading to a split with Ambedkar.

# "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



## **Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar**

(Mhow Cantonment, 1891 – Delhi, 1956)

*The Annihilation of Caste* (1936)

"Buddha or Karl Marx" (1956)

## "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



p. 3: At the same time, my argument is inspired by a theoretical and political concern with the main forms of contemporary identity politics, which are nurtured by such notions as **“white privilege”** and by **“decolonial”** language and theories (Mezzadra, 2021: 30-33). While I remain wary of the **moralistic tones of identity politics today**, what troubles me more is the **tendency to simply affirm a subaltern identity as a closed and bordered one** (often in the framework of a race to establish **that identity as the most oppressed and humiliated**). **This makes alliances, convergences, and coalitions — as well as opposition — ultimately impossible** (Haider, 2018: 40).

p. 3: It is against this background that I ask in the last section of the essay whether it is possible, and even necessary, to **rethink the very concept of class** to open up a different political perspective **for struggles and movements** as the ones that are at the center of theories of intersectionality. Needless to say, this requires going beyond the traditional notion of class that I have sketched above, I admit, providing a kind of caricature.

# "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



**NI UNA MENOS**

**NON UNA DI MENO (NUDM)**

**COORDINADORA FEMINISTA 8M (CF8M)**

p. 3: In **Argentina** and **Brazil**, the notion of intersectionality is used to **articulate and connect** the movements and claims of **indigenous** and **black women, rural** and **metropolitan communities, sexual minorities** and **women living in slums**, without losing sight of their **specificity**, while in **Italy** and **Spain** it allows addressing issues of migration, colonialism, and sexuality. In a way, one can say that **this appropriation and these uses of intersectionality prompted a re-politicization of the notion**, where what is at stake, to quote the words of Angela Davis, is “**not so much intersectionality of identities but intersectionality of struggles**”. ” (Davis, 2016: 144). Interestingly, this notion of intersectionality also played outstanding roles in the debates within the massive movement for black lives and against police brutality in the United States in the summer of 2020.

# "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



## "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



p. 3: I spoke of a **re-politicization** of intersectionality because over the last years in the United States the notion had become a kind of **standard academic reference** and its original political imprint had been to some extent neutralized (which does not mean of course that there were not many scholars continuing to do a very interesting and even radical work in the framework of intersectionality).

p. 4: (Referring to **Crenshaw** and De Graffenreid v. General Motors) The interplay of those boundaries effectively obscures and deletes a **specific subjective experience within the ranks of workers, the one of black women**. In focusing on such a neglected difference, intersectionality sets out to shed light on the parallel working of systems of oppression and domination that **hierarchize the working class**.



## "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



p. 4: While writings from the early stage of Black feminist thought (including such important names as Sojourner Truth and Ida B. Wells-Barnett) compose an important archive for anybody interested in the genealogy and prehistory of intersectionality (Gines, 2014), I would like to shortly dwell here on the debates about the condition of the **Black proletarian woman** in the Communist Party of the U.S.A. in the 1930s and in the 1940s. In the writings of **Louise Thompson** and **Claudia Jones** the questions of **race** and **sex** are indeed discussed from the point of view of the concept of **exploitation**, which will be later marginalized in the intersectional debate.



**Louise Thompson Patterson**

(Chicago, 1901 – New York, 1999)

"Toward a Brighter Dawn" (1936)

## "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



pp. 4-5: Writing in 1936, Louise Thompson provides in *Toward a Brighter Dawn* a striking analysis of the condition of black women, focusing on a “Southern road,” on “the plantations in the South”, and on “Bronx Park, New York”. The legacy of slavery runs through the whole article, which finds a dramatic apex in the description of the predicament of black domestic workers in the Bronx. Thompson speaks of a “slave market” in the Bronx, and casts it as a “graphic monument to the bitter exploitation of this most exploited section of the American working population – the Negro women.” And this is because they “**meet this triple exploitation** – as **workers**, as **women**, and as **Negroes**” (Thompson, 1936).



**Claudia Jones**

(Trinidad, 1915 – London, 1964)

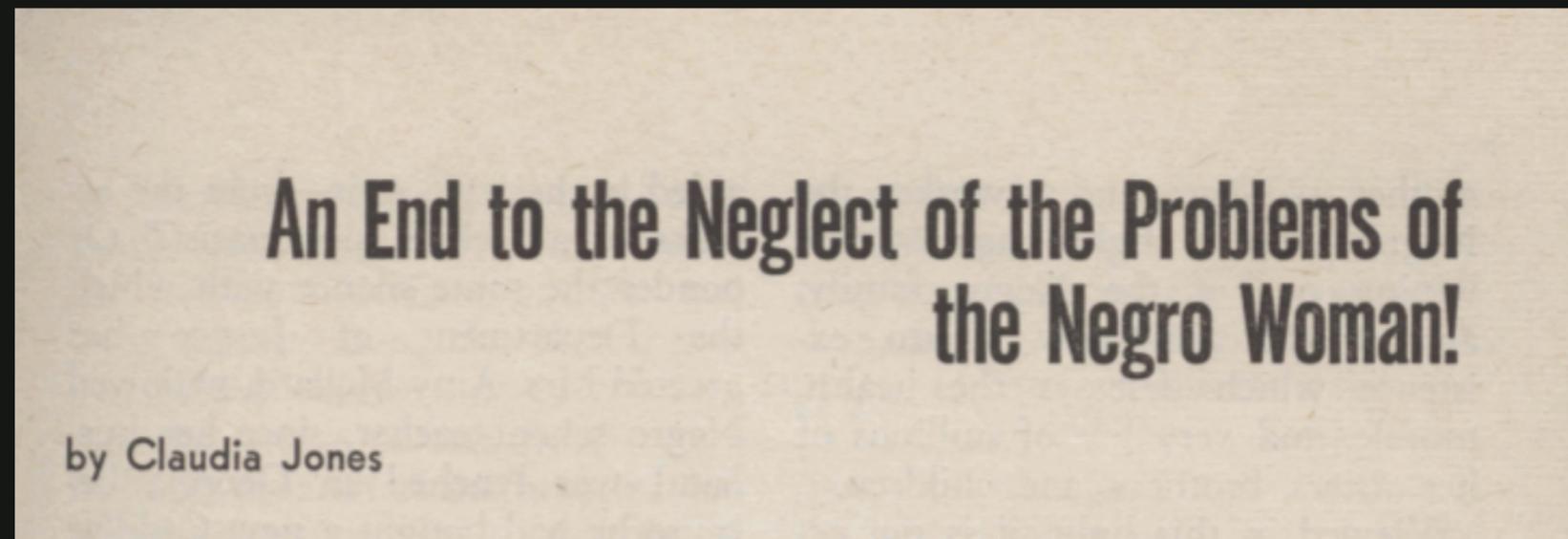
*An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!* (1949)

## "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



p. 5: Her *An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!* (1949) starts with an emphasis on the growth in the militant participation of black women “in all aspects of the struggle for peace, civil rights and economic security” (ibidem). It is in front of this intensified militancy that Jones calls for a new understanding of the role of black women and for an end to the neglect of that role permeating the labor movement.

p. 5: Even the experience of exploitation is hierarchized, as black women clearly demonstrate. As Jones writes, “not equality, but degradation and super-exploitation: this is the actual lot of Negro women!”



## "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



p. 5: **"Triple exploitation"** and **"super-exploitation,"** the concepts introduced by Linda Thompson and Claudia Jones, are **clearly attempts to use a Marxist language** to come to terms **with the specific condition of black working women**. The proposed diversification and even **hierarchization of exploitation** raise **however several problems**. This is particularly the case **when the notion of exploitation is understood in purely economic terms and strictly connected to a narrow interpretation of "productive labor"**. Such an economic concept of exploitation has long been prevailing in Marxism, including in the United States, and **it allowed a subordination of all forms of oppression** (for instance, in Thompson's words, oppression "as women, and as Negroes") to exploitation itself ("as workers") and to the related class politics. Consequently, several activists and scholars began to **underscore the autonomy of those systems of oppression** (say, sexism and racism) and to prioritize struggles against them, in many cases completely obscuring the relevance of exploitation. This is what characterizes the mainstream of debates on intersectionality, which are often shaped by a **conceptual opposition between oppression and exploitation**.



## "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



p. 6: Nevertheless, it is important to remind that the notion of oppression in intersectional debates is characterized by an emphasis on “irreducibility” (of the single systems of oppression), which goes hand in hand with an emphasis on “simultaneity,” i.e. with the claim that those systems “are experienced simultaneously and are inseparable” (Carasthatis, 2016: 57). There is a clear tension here, and while the critique of “single axis” thinking is a constitutive moment for theories of intersectionality, **one can say that the principle of “irreducibility” has often tended to obscure the one of “simultaneity”**.

## 2 "THE COMBAHEE RIVER COLLECTIVE STATEMENT" (1977)

We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women’s lives as are the politics of **class** and **race**. We also often find it difficult to separate **race** from **class** from **sex oppression** because in our lives they are **most often experienced simultaneously**. We know that there is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual, e.g., the history of rape of Black women by white men as a weapon of political repression.

# "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



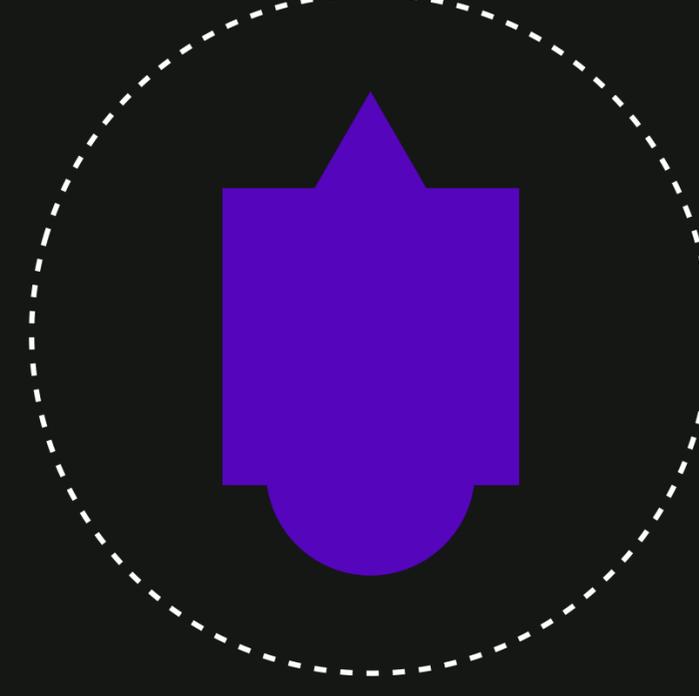
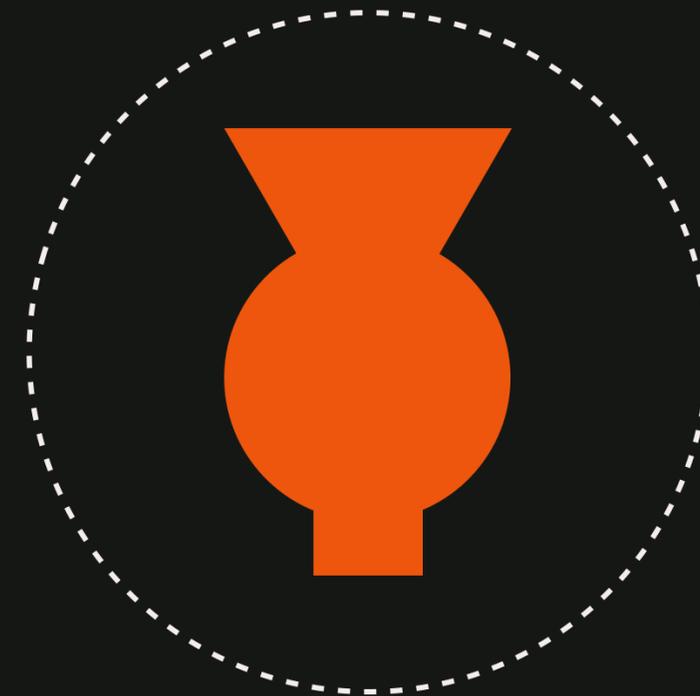
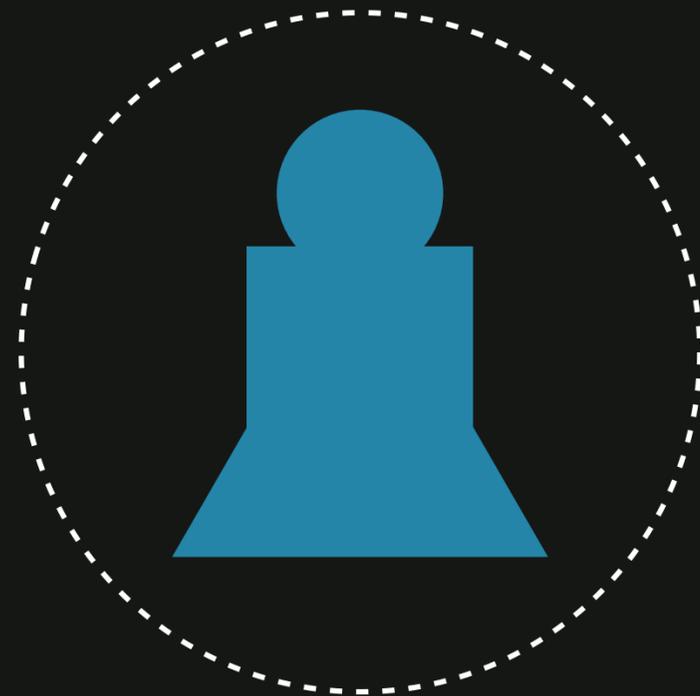
Sexual orientation

Religion

Age

Ability/disability

1



**NOT AN ADDITION, BUT DIFFERENT FORMS OF OPPRESSION  
or STRUGGLES WE FACE (AND TACKLE)**

## "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



p. 6: What is at stake **here is the risk of an identity politics** that takes the specificity of a system of oppression as an **exclusive framework** not only for analysis but also for the **process of subject constitution**. The point is **not to propose as an alternative a hierarchization of oppressions and consequently of struggles and claims, which is anathema to theories of intersectionality**. It is rather to shift attention to the **unitary** moment in the working of systems of domination and oppression and to work toward the **establishment of spaces of convergence for diverse and heterogeneous subjects**. A focus on a specific system of oppression can well be an important moment in a process of subjectivation, even necessary to **break processes of marginalization** and to open up new vistas of liberation. Nevertheless, when the “identity” forged by such focus becomes **frozen** it paradoxically risks **replicating the boundaries of the specific system of oppression it sets out to contest**. And it becomes **an obstacle to wider processes of subjectivation**.

# "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



**SUBJECTIVATION**

**IDENTITY**

**IDENTITY POLITICS**

**PRIVILEGE**

**ALLY**

**COALITION**

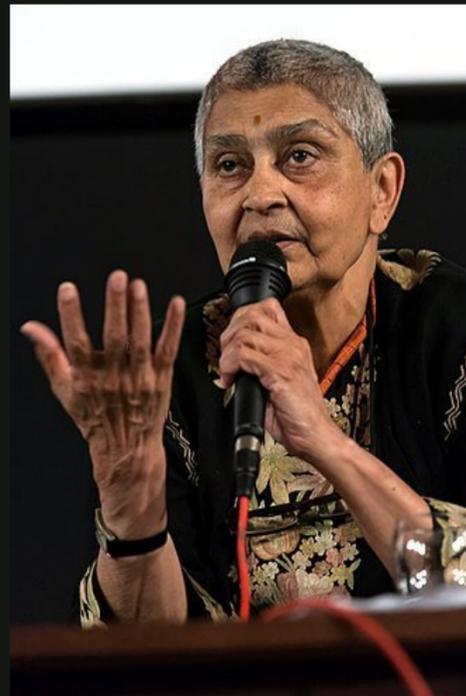
**INTERSECTIONAL COALITION**

# "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



## STRATEGIC ESSENTIALISM

**Strategic essentialism** is a strategy by which differences (within a group) are temporarily downplayed and unity assumed for the sake of achieving political goals. It is a major concept in postcolonial theory, was introduced in the 1980s by the Indian literary critic and theorist **Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak**.



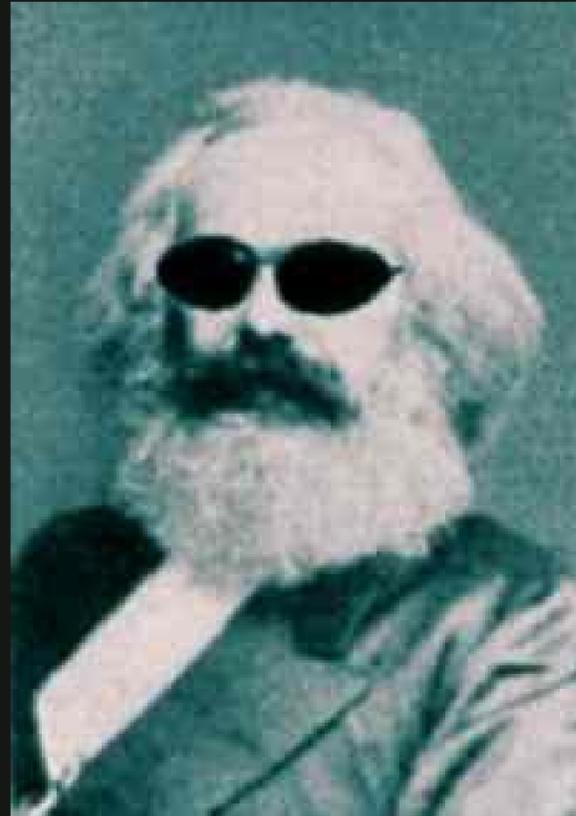
### **Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.**

(Calcutta, 1942)

*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (1999)

## "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)

p. 7: While in this case the subjectivity and identity of the collectives involved remain untouched, an intersectional coalition is a **space of convergence** for a multitude of diverse and heterogeneous people, within which new subjectivities and even identities are continuously fabricated in a common struggle for liberation. **Needless to say, the very unity of a coalition is not given in advance, it is itself at stake in this process of subjectivation.**



**CLASS, RELOADED**



## "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



p. 7: The critique of the economistic notion of exploitation that I sketched above led to a marginalization of class, and even capitalism, in many debates on intersectionality. As it happened in cultural and postcolonial studies (Mezzadra, 2011), capital and capitalism were confined to the **realm of “economy”** while **class was often identified with white, male, heterosexual workers in a standard employment relation**. Differential systems of oppression like sexism and racism were considered to operate at the margins of capitalism, which could definitely instrumentalize the processes of hierarchization generated by them without ceasing to remain a fundamentally homogenizing power. **I am convinced that such an understanding of capitalism is deeply flawed**, and that a different way to look at the history and contemporary working of capitalism could provide us with an effective way to tackle the question of the **“simultaneity”** of systems of oppression raised by theories of intersectionality.

## "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



pp. 7-8: What is at stake here is what we can call the **production of subjectivity** that is required for the very existence of that **commodity** (labor power). The differential fabrication of hierarchized bodies, where systems of oppression like sexism and racism have prominent roles to play, emerges as a crucial moment **in the production of labor power as a commodity**, which is according to Marx the cornerstone upon which no less than the existence of capitalism is predicated. The very boundary between production and reproduction, as well as between productive and unproductive labor appears tested and blurred from this point of view. **And it is easy to see that a merely economic understanding of capitalism and exploitation becomes untenable.** The moment that I called of a production of subjectivity has rather **multiple dimensions that must be acknowledged as internal to exploitation.** We are confronted here with **a panoply of (exploited) subjective figures, whose experience of oppression and exploitation is definitely mediated by different subject positions** (where for instance **racism, sexism, or heteronormativity** can be prevailing) while their “simultaneity” is orchestrated by **the operations of capital.**

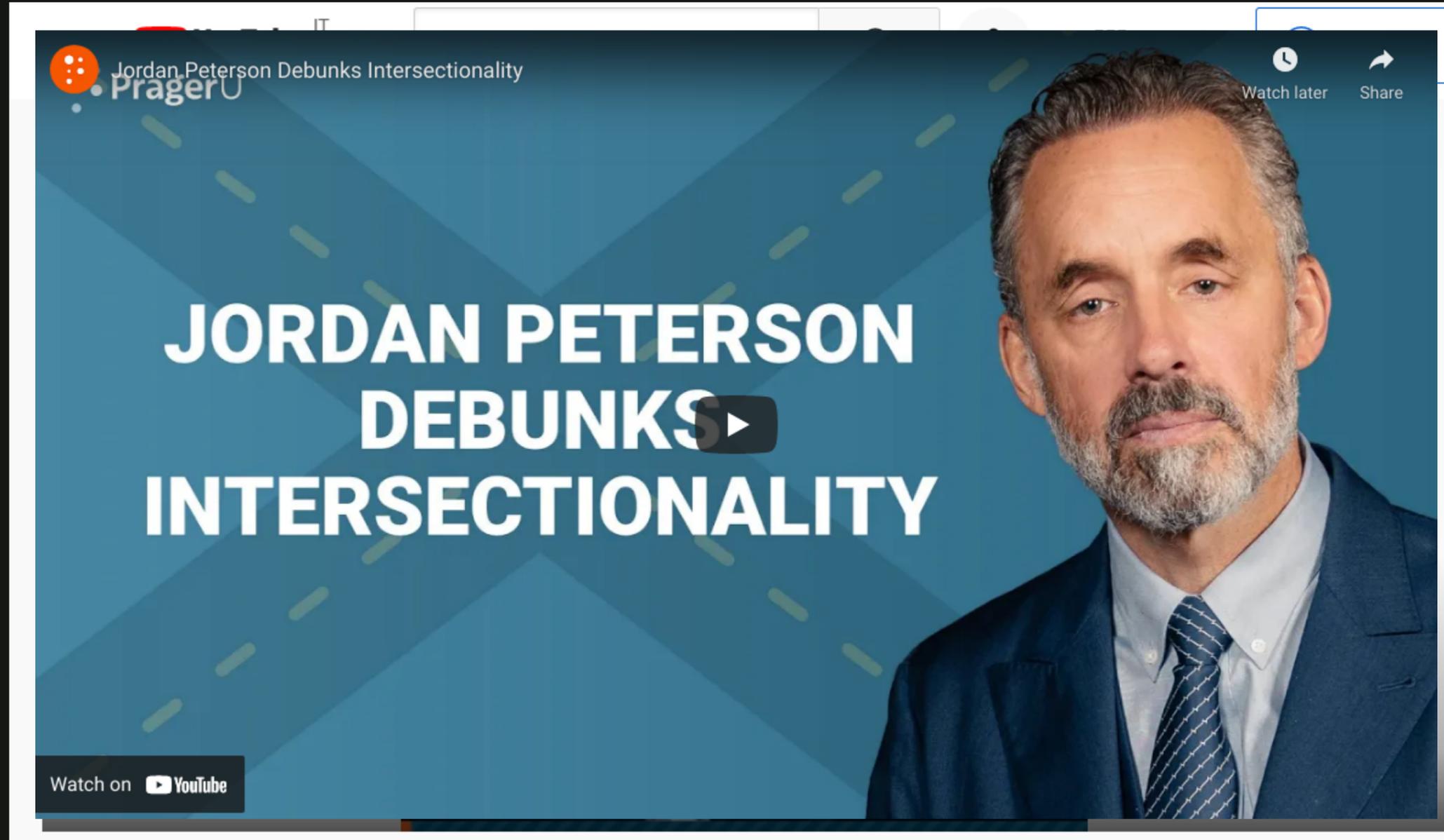
## "INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE RIDDLE OF CLASS" (2021)



p. 8: **Class** is today composed by this multitude of differences living, toiling, and struggling under the pressure of capital's exploitation. **Multiplicity is the hallmark of class.** While I emphasize the relevance of a non-economistic notion of exploitation for rethinking class today, **there is a need to add that class politics today requires a panoply of movements and struggles that go well beyond the boundaries of class.** Once we acknowledge the constitutive relevance for the working of exploitation of, say, racism and sexism, mobilizations against them, which may well include people who are not "exploited," are of the utmost importance —and can never be considered as addressing a kind of "secondary" contradiction—. Parallel to such transversal struggles there is a need to forge and practice new forms of solidarity and spaces of convergence, where intersectionality becomes a method for a multiplicity of encounters and for counteracting any ossification of identity politics.

p. 8: The notion of class, a "multitudinous class" or a **"intersectional class"** to put it with Michael Hardt and Toni Negri (2019: 84), provides a subjective name to that base and opens new lines of investigation and political intervention. And the reinvention of intersectionality that I mentioned above (as an "intersectionality of struggles", to remind the words of Angela Davis) seems to foreshadow **a new politics of solidarity and even a new class politics.**

# DEBUNKING THE "DEBUNKER"



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmNUbf1OHes>

# DEBUNKING THE DEBUNKER



## Jordan Peterson

(Edmonton, Alberta 1962)

Is a Canadian professor of psychology, clinical psychologist, YouTube personality, and author. He began to receive widespread attention in the late 2010s for his views on cultural and political issues, often described as conservative. He is considered to be a member of the intellectual dark web.

Intellectual dark web: The intellectual dark web (IDW) is a loosely defined informal group of commentators who oppose what they regard as the dominance of **identity politics**, **political correctness**, and **cancel culture** in **higher education** and the news media within Western countries.

(wiki)

# DEBUNKING THE DEBUNKER



## **Ben Shapiro**

(Los Angeles 1984)

American conservative political commentator, media host, and political debater. He writes columns for Creators Syndicate, Newsweek, and Ami Magazine, serves as editor emeritus for The Daily Wire, which he founded, and hosts The Ben Shapiro Show, a daily political podcast and live radio show.

(wiki)