

# The pandemic of racial capitalism: another world is possible

Layla Brown-Vincent

Visiting Research Fellow, Johannesburg Institute for Advanced Study

Assistant Professor of Africana Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston

## ABSTRACT

As the world grapples with the rising Covid-related death tolls, the recent deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks in the US and Collins Khosa and Petrus Miggels in South Africa have re-ignited the flames of indignation felt by Black and Brown peoples all over the world (A. Taylor 2020). These cases and countless others reveal the anti-people logic of the neoliberal state, dictating the daily operations of the US and its crony counterparts like Brazil. While the US government struggles with the nearly insurmountable difficulties presented by its grossly underfunded profit-driven healthcare system and its exceptionally inadequate ability (or willingness) to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, it becomes abundantly clear that while Corona is a virus of pandemic proportions, the true pandemic is racial Capitalism. The crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic has the potential to be exploited by neoliberal regimes in order to perpetuate suffering for the majority of people and accumulation of wealth for the few; or, it has the potential to inspire a radical socio-economic shift across the globe, which could lead to an improved quality of life for the underprivileged and the poor. By considering the neoliberal logics undergirding technologies of the disposability of life at play in the handling of Covid-19 in the US alongside the socialist logics of the preservation of life at play in the cases of Venezuela and Cuba, we can begin to see the ways in which an entirely different conception of the global order is possible. This article uses the Covid-19 crisis to expose the deadly anti-Blackness of the neoliberal socio-economic logic and suggests that another world is indeed possible if we can learn from the current crisis.

## Keywords

Covid-19, racial capitalism, socialism, alternative futures, neoliberalism

Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable.

Milton Friedman

It is not without hesitation that I begin this essay with the words of a man whose theories of “economic liberalism” were used to usher in an era of rampant neoliberal reforms which sustained coups against populist regimes in Chile and Argentina and almost single-handedly led the effort to privatize New Orleanian public schools in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Friedman’s quote provides critical context for the development of what he called economic “shock treatment,” and what Naomi Klein’s *The Shock Doctrine* subsequently exposed as a

“fundamentalist form of capitalism [which] has always needed disasters to advance” (Klein 2007, 7-9). In heeding the great Black feminist Intellectual Audre Lorde’s forewarning that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” (Lorde 2018) we also should not allow the master’s logics to dictate the possible futures we envision. The crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic, as exploited by neoliberal regimes, perpetuates suffering for the common people, while the wealthy few, like Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, become richer than ever. Despite the havoc it continues to wreak, the pandemic also has the potential to inspire a radical socio-economic shift across the globe, which could lead to better life quality for most of the world’s population. This article attempts to turn the above quote by Friedman on its head, by using the Covid-19 crisis to expose the deadliness of neoliberal socio-economic logic, and point to places to watch as we envision alternative futures.

When I first discovered, in the summer of 2019, that I had been awarded a writing fellowship in Johannesburg to begin in February 2020, the world had no idea that we would be approaching the end of life as we have come to know it. In recent years I have developed a deep fascination with apocalyptic genres of film and literature, including dystopian fantasies like the Hunger Games, The Children of Men, and The Handmaid’s Tale; zombie apocalypses like The Walking Dead, World War Z, and 28 Days Later; and disaster films like Contagion, Twister, and San Andreas. No doubt, some of these films and novels leave much to be desired; however, what I find most interesting about these particular genres are their meditations on the human condition. Each of these offers some version of what the authors and their co-creators envision human beings will return/devolve to when the end of the world (as we know it) arrives. What is more, these fictional accounts eschew renderings of the apocalypse as the “end of days” on earth and speak more to the etymology of the word as a “revelation,” an “unveiling” or an unfolding of things previously unknown, though not necessarily new. As the world grapples with the rising Covid-related death toll, the recent deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks in the US, and of Collins Khosa and Petrus Miggels in South Africa, have re-ignited the flames of indignation felt by Black and Brown peoples all over the world (A. Taylor 2020). The manner of death and subsequent handling of these cases and countless others reveal the anti-people logic of the neoliberal state, dictating the daily operations of the US and its crony countries, specifically Brazil, whose police killings have increased during the pandemic and disproportionately target Afro-Brazilians (Acayaba and Arcoverde, 2020). While the US government struggles with the nearly insurmountable difficulties presented by its profit-driven healthcare system, coupled with its gross lack of willingness to take the pandemic seriously, it becomes abundantly clear that while Corona is a virus of pandemic proportions, the true pandemic is racial Capitalism.

Drawing on Oliver Cromwell Cox’s description of the United States as the “lusty child of an already highly developed capitalism” (Cox 1962, 3-4), Charisse Burden-Stelly’s articulation of racial capitalism notes that one of the many techniques deployed and perfected by the US

in its pursuit of accumulated wealth was its “lack of concern for the political and economic welfare of the overwhelming masses of its population, least of all the descendants of the enslaved” (Burden-Stelly 2020). In this sense, the pandemic of racial capitalism as it manifests through Covid-19 is truly apocalyptic. If we take, as a point of comparison, the neoliberal logics of the disposability of life at play in the handling of Covid-19 in the US alongside the communal logics undergirding socialist projects which attempt to preserve life in Venezuela and Cuba, for example, we might have a better understanding of the multiple worlds that exist and perhaps find ways of being that are much more conducive to the conditions of life. More importantly, we might begin to see the ways in which an entirely different conception of a global order is possible, even if flawed. The Covid pandemic has forced several contradictions to the surface where world-order conceptions are concerned, particularly as regards to which communities are deemed expendable and who ‘the state’ believes needs to be regulated and controlled. “Racism and capitalism mutually construct harmful social conditions that fundamentally shape Covid-19 disease” and social inequities (Laster Pirtle 2020, 504). In light of this, I will focus my attention on those countries with alternative visions of a socialist-oriented future.

On Monday, 23 March 2020, with just 77 confirmed Covid-19 cases, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro announced a series of measures to prevent a catastrophic loss of life in the country. These measures included a six-month suspension on commercial and residential rents, as well as capital and loan interest payments; public and private sector workers were guaranteed a special government bonus; job dismissals as a result of quarantine were outlawed; a special agricultural plan to ensure the contents of the Local Food Production and Provision Committees (CLAP) food boxes would be available to over seven million families, and telecommunication companies were barred from cutting customers services for six months. President Maduro concluded his public announcement by assuring the Venezuelan people that he would use “all his power and consciousness to protect jobs” and the most vulnerable people during the lockdown (Dobson 2020). Cuba, on the other hand, was busy sending teams of medical doctors to foreign countries, such as Italy and South Africa, as part of its long-standing global medical diplomacy program, which was developed and realized as a project of the Cuban Revolution. As Cuba and Venezuela worked to help contain the virus at home and abroad, the US government was busy covertly orchestrating multiple coup attempts (Trevithick 2020; Blumenthal and Cohen 2019). Cuba and Venezuela represent the two countries in the Western hemisphere with the longest standing national experimentation with socialist political governance. They also happen to be among the countries in the hemisphere with the most promising Covid-19 containment programs thus far.

On the opposite end of the political spectrum, Venezuela’s southern neighbor Brazil, under Jair Bolsonaro, and the US under the leadership of Donald Trump have consistently ranked in the top three Covid-19 hotspots globally. During the first two weeks of June, Brazil and the USA continued to ease lockdown restrictions despite recording some of the highest

rates of virus contraction and death since the pandemic began. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro reportedly referred to the coronavirus as a “little flu” in March and later declared that he was “sorry for all the dead, but that’s everyone’s destiny” (Bolsonaro 2020). At the same time that Venezuela was implementing laws and policies to ensure the lives and livelihoods of its citizens over the first six months of the pandemic, Donald Trump, after reluctantly advising citizens to stay home, was already contemplating reopening the country for business in late March. Trump’s party mate, Texas Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, sent a letter to Fox News anchor Tucker Carlson saying the following:

I think there are lots of grandparents who would agree with me that I want my grandchildren to live in the America I did [...] I want them to have a shot at the American dream. But right now, this virus, which all the experts say that 98% of all people will survive [...] is killing our country in another way [...] it could bring about a total economic collapse and potentially a collapse of our society. [...] So, I say let’s give this a few more days or weeks but after that let’s go back to work and go back to living (Patrick 2020).

In a 23 March Fox News interview with Tucker Carlson, in response to that letter Patrick further asserted:

Tucker, no one reached out to me and said, “As a senior citizen, are you willing to take a chance on your survival in exchange for keeping the America that all America loves for your children and grandchildren?” And if that’s the exchange, I’m all in. [...] I just think there are lots of grandparents out there in this country like me, I have six grandchildren, that what we all care about and what we love more than anything are those children. And I want to live smart and see through this, but I don’t want the whole country to be sacrificed. And that’s what I see (Patrick 2020).

Patrick’s comments expose the logic underpinning the vast majority of governmental decisions made in response to the growing pandemic, that capital is more important than life. As the world was just beginning to understand how the virus operated and which demographics were most likely to contract the virus, much of the national and international dialogue centered around the notion that the young and the relatively healthy were at low risk of dying from the disease. Many (particularly those on the right) went so far as to suggest that ‘herd immunity’ was the best way to handle the virus until a vaccine was developed (Limbaugh 2020; McKay 2020), a heavily disputed claim (Dowdy and D’Souza 2020). One of the many problems with this logic is that it would require exposing our elderly and sick, two populations already deemed expendable by capitalist logic, to a virus that has no cure, condemning them to almost certain death. In response to the absurd notion that a certain percentage of the population is expendable, Bree Newsome Bass tweeted on 24 March 2020 that “everyone arguing that 1-2% of the population dying isn’t a big deal need to identify 1 or 2 close family members or friends they are willing to offer up to death at the moment for capitalism. Name them” (Newsome Bass 2020a). In a follow-up tweet, she further demanded: “Say their names out loud and speak it into the universe with the same ease you condemn others to death” (Newsome Bass 2020b). At the time of drafting this essay, this tweet had been liked more

than 150,00 times and had been retweeted over 40,000 times. Fortunately, the argument that a sizeable portion of the population should willingly sacrifice their selves is losing traction at the moment; however, the fact that it ever had any should be of great concern to us all.

Of even greater concern is the latest revelation that, according to Bob Woodward's new book on Donald Trump, Trump was fully aware of the possibility of catastrophic loss of life but decided to play the danger down in order to avoid national panic (Kenny 2020). Much has been made of the specificities of Donald Trump's mishandling of the Covid-19 Pandemic in the United States. However, this characterization of the havoc wrought by the virus on the American public places too much of the blame on Trump's gross incompetence and ignores the historical continuities of the neoliberal logic at play. Mike Davis explains the long "stop-and-go cycle" of pandemic preparedness that facilitated our present state of disaster (Davis 2020, 21). Davis explains that in 1998 the Clinton administration created a National Pharmaceutical Stockpile under CDC management expressly to deal with the pandemic threat. In 2003 the Bush Administration changed the name to the National Strategic Stockpile and handed control over to Homeland Security. At that point, there were 105 million N-95 respirators in the stockpile. In 2009 Obama distributed 100 million of those masks during the H1N1 emergency, but rather than using public funds to replenish the stockpile for the public good, Obama argued: "that a better and cheaper solution was to help the private sector develop the production capacity to meet surging demand in a pandemic crisis" (Davis 2020, 22). The notion that such a public and far-reaching concern like pandemic preparedness should be left to private sector interests demonstrates a logic that values profit over life, one that cannot be read as the singular folly of the Trump administration. Most significantly, the reasoning undergirding these narratives and ultimately policy decisions call our attention to the logic of disposability driving the technologies of death under global racial capitalism.

In his *Twenty Theses on Politics* Enrique Dussel, drawing on the work of Rousseau, offers an understanding of politics beyond the logic of domination. Dussel suggests that politics should be understood as "an activity that organizes and promotes the production, reproduction, and enhancement of the lives of the members of that community" (Dussel 2008, 14). There is no denying the dire economic straits the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela finds itself in now, particularly after the price of oil on the global market dropped precipitously. Since the election of President Hugo Chavez in 1998, the Bolivarian Revolution has been a beacon of hope for globally dispossessed peoples, who saw in the revolution a 21<sup>st</sup>-century alternative to neoliberal racial capitalism (Piitso 2020). Over the past two decades or more, despite its vast imperfections, the Bolivarian government, in cooperation with its poor, Black, and Brown citizens, has demonstrated an overwhelming concern with a "will-to-live" or "the fundamental material determination of the definition of political power" (Dussel 2008, 14). The US and Brazil's (among others) lack of concern for life and preoccupation with capital exhibits a neoliberal technology of disposability through structural anti-Blackness, in particular, discrimi-

natory legislation in housing, employment, and police practices which maintain and reinscribe inequality. Conversely, Venezuela, and Cuba's experimentation with socialism at the level of the state demonstrate a logic that lends itself to the preservation of life over capital. Could it possibly be that Covid-19 is the critical turning point in the demise of Capitalism that Marx predicted so long ago? This question and the present reality necessitate that we consider what the spread and varied global successes of containing the virus show us about the value of life in Capitalist vs. Socialist societies.

### Hurricane Corona

Since the beginning of the Coronavirus outbreak, I have had the fortune of being 'locked down' at the Johannesburg Institute for Advanced Study among a community of writers and scholars. Observing the spread of the pandemic so far from my home in the United States, I have witnessed the cruelty of anti-Blackness and its disproportionate impact on poor Black communities all over the world. The disparate racialized impact of Covid-19 in conjunction with state repression and police violence against Black bodies is a manifestation of what Foucault theorized as biopower or a form of racism which is "bound up with the workings of the state that is obliged to use race, the elimination of races and the purification of the race, to exercise sovereign power" (Foucault 1997, 258). Covid-19 initially entered South Africa through the bodies of wealthy white travelers returning from Italy. Early on, the virus was even referred to as a disease of "white globe trotters" (Everatt 2020). For the first few months, the Western Cape (the province with the highest percentage of white South Africans) was the virus hotspot. There were even early discussions across social media platforms that Black people were immune to the virus (Watson 2020). In South Africa, these myths were fueled by the reality that the earliest public cases of the virus (outside of China) were in predominantly white nations and the virus took longer to spread on the African continent. As the South African government eased the lockdown in an attempt to allow the economy to rebound, the virus found new strength among the most vulnerable, the poor Black population of the country.

The Coronavirus, much like Hurricane Katrina, reveals the myriad ways in which race/class/inequality/oppression are endemic to American society specifically, and racist, neo-liberal capitalist structures of governance more generally. The unrelenting state-sanctioned violence visited upon Black people in the US, coupled with the Trump administration's gross mishandling of the Covid-19 pandemic, reveal a "biopolitical agenda in which the logic of disposability and the politics of death are largely structured around race and class inequality" (Giroux 2006, 181). When Katrina made landfall, the US as a nation witnessed "the collapse of one of society's most basic covenants – to care for the helpless – [which] suggests that the elderly and critically ill plummeted to the bottom of the priority lists as calamity engulfed New Orleans" (Abelson and Rohde 2005). The Coronavirus pandemic is a painful reminder of this broken covenant, only this time the calamity has reached global proportions. In the wake of

Katrina, there were frequent characterizations of New Orleans as a Third World Refugee Camp. Henry Giroux has argued that the Black bodies left floating in the wake of Hurricane Katrina “laid bare the racial and class fault lines that mark an increasingly damaged and withering democracy” and “revealed the emergence of a new kind of politics, one in which an entire population are now considered disposable” (Giroux 2006, 174): Covid-19 is the latest in that saga of revelations.

My father, a 65-year-old construction worker in the USA, is currently faced with a decision, all too familiar to the masses of poor Black and Brown citizens, to choose between life or livelihood, as if one can be chosen without the other. Unlike Venezuela, the US has made no blanket guarantees of sustained livelihoods amid the pandemic. The poor must choose to take their chances of contracting the virus despite wholly inadequate healthcare or protect themselves from the virus by staying home. Yet, staying home is not the simple decision it appears to be, staying home for most means forfeiting employment, which results in a lack of income and an inability to provide for oneself and one’s family. In a recently published op-ed, Lynell Thomas described the connections between the vulnerabilities of poor Black communities in the wake of Katrina and the eye of Corona. She argues:

because of entrenched income and wealth inequality, housing and food insecurity, substandard healthcare and education, increased environmental vulnerability, and staggering levels of poverty, African Americans were more vulnerable to and less capable of surviving and recovering from Hurricane Katrina [...] As was the case with Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans has shone a spotlight on the economic, social, and moral costs of deep-seated race, class, and gender inequities. It’s going to take more than a vaccine to cure that disease. (Thomas 2020)

The anti-Black logic undergirding media depictions of Black people as looters and white people as resourceful survivors in the immediate aftermath of Katrina have surfaced once again through the recent preoccupations with so-called ‘looting’ and the destruction of property in the aftermath of the killings of Amahad Aubery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks. Despite the astronomical number of Covid-19 related deaths, America’s poor, Black and Brown citizens found no relief from state violence during the lockdown. This chain of successive murders gave rise to the most widespread and sustained protests against racial violence the US has ever seen. On 12 June 2020, more than 1,600 demonstrations were reported in all 50 states and territories across the United States of America. In the wake of Katrina, Giroux theorized what he called the “new biopolitics of disposability,” which he explained as a logic that requires “the poor, especially people of color, not only have to fend for themselves but are supposed to do so without being seen by the dominant society” (Giroux 2006, 174). In many ways, the mass protests across the US must be read as a refusal of such invisibility. As poor Black and Brown bodies find themselves dying from Covid-19 at rates more than three times that of their white counterparts (Pilkington 2020) and being murdered by police at more than twice the rate of their white counterparts (Washington Post 2020), the so-called

'riots' must be understood fundamentally as a physical manifestation of a will to live, radical politics with revolutionary potential.

As the virus was first identified in the US, Bernie Sanders appeared to be a viable presidential candidate and, for the first time in US history, the word socialism found its way to the center of the national conversation about the direction the country should take in the coming years (KY Taylor 2020). At this point one can only wonder if the US would have handled the pandemic differently had Bernie Sanders remained in the race and continued to push a national dialogue that attempted to center US citizens rather than US capital. As November 2020 fast approaches it has become increasingly apparent that Trump will not concede a peaceful transition of power if he is not reelected (Crowley 2020). The potential fallout of Trump's refusal is of particular concern as the traditional flu season begins in the northern hemisphere and Covid infection rates are once again on the rise. However moderate, the popular support for Bernie Sanders campaign, however imperfect, represents a rebellion against the status quo in the US, so it should come as no surprise that the Democratic National Convention did everything within its power to ensure that Sanders would NOT become the Democratic Party's presidential nominee (Siders 2020). Despite the existing loyal opposition between the Democratic and Republican parties promoting only nominally distinct political agendas, hope lies in the quiet rebellion of the American people who envisioned (even if prematurely) an America that could 'lean in' to the radical potential of a budding socialism.

In 1866, just after the passage of the Civil Rights and Freedmen's Bureau Bills, Frederick Douglass penned a piece on Reconstruction for *the Atlantic*. "The thing worse than rebellion is the thing that causes rebellion. What that thing is, we have been taught to our cost. It remains now to be seen whether we have the needed courage to have that cause entirely removed from the Republic" (Douglass 1866). With these words, Douglass goes on to characterize rebellion as "invaluable" and "highly instructive" (Douglass 1866). Douglass maintained that we should even be thankful for rebellion because it is "an impressive teacher, though a stern and terrible one" (Douglass 1866). He went on to say that rebellion is "an instructor never a day before its time, for it comes only when all other means of enlightenment have failed" (Douglass 1866). Here Douglass challenges our readings of rebellions (i.e. riots) as spontaneous uprisings, seeing them as the last available means to draw attention to a pressing issue when all other tactics have failed. The global protests that have proliferated in the wake of these killings are no different. The imposition of physical lockdowns in an attempt to 'flatten the curve' of the virus may have provided the undivided attention needed to understand the pervasive and insidious nature of racial capitalism and its various manifestations. It cannot be a coincidence that the largest coordinated global demonstrations against racial capitalism occurred as countries began to lift lockdown measures. As the waves of hurricane corona ebb, poor Black and Brown people all over the world are flowing out of their homes, and into the streets determined to fight for their lives and their livelihood. What remains to be seen is

whether the strength of the rebellions will be able to weather the storm of the next wave.

### **Another world is possible**

In the immediate aftermath of the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro and his cabinet, based on the logic informing socialist beliefs that everyone has an equal right to life and dignity, poured significant amounts of government resources into universal healthcare and educational systems. Revolutionary Cuban internationalism is a product of their desire to counter the prevailing McCarthyian logic of the day and spread revolutionary socialist ideals to Africa, Latin America, and to the rest of the world. For more than six decades Cuban internationalism has been seen at play all over the world. The country is perhaps best known for its “medical diplomacy” programs, sending doctors all over the world, mostly to so-called “developing nations.” In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Cuba and Venezuela were among the first countries to offer assistance, even before the national, state, or local Louisiana governments. The US state department rejected these offers of assistance (Lake 2005). When, in 2010, Haiti was devastated by a massive earthquake and subsequent tremors, the US State Department, once again, attempted to block much-needed aid from Venezuela as well as other foreign aid while opting to send more than 6000 US troops to effectively enact a military occupation. Then Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro reported that aid shipments to Haiti were being diverted via the neighbouring Dominican Republic to avoid restrictions imposed by the US at the Port-au-Prince airport. “Doctors Without Borders has also criticised the US’s prioritisation of military logistics over food and medical aid saying planes carrying urgently needed surgical equipment and drugs have been turned away five times, even though the agency received prior authorisation to land” (Janicke 2010). During that same period, thanks to Venezuelan owned CITGO Oil’s heating oil subsidy, thousands of American citizens received heating services for several brutal north-eastern winters (McDonald 2011). Whether Venezuela is attempting to drum up political support by offering aid is certainly a claim worth further exploration, the politically humane choice to offer such aid in the face of their own socio-economic and political uncertainty on the global oil market, without the imposition of a military occupation, evidences a socialist preservationist logic that is clearly not at play in USAID.

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented a unique and almost unprecedented opportunity for Cuba to enact its medical diplomacy all over the world, even in so-called ‘developed nations’ that have attempted to condemn the country to the status of a perpetual political pariah. In mid-March 2020 the British cruise ship Braemar had a least five individuals on board who tested positive for the novel Coronavirus. An additional twenty-two guests and twenty-one crew members were in isolation because they were experiencing “influenza-like symptoms” (Carrega and Raida 2020). After weeks of being stranded at sea because many Caribbean countries refused to allow them to dock for fear of spreading the virus, Cuba, out of humanitarian concern allowed the ship to dock at their Mariel Port. As part of what they understood to

be their responsibility in a global “shared effort to confront and stop the spread of the pandemic,” the Cuban government allowed the ship with approximately six hundred British nationals on board, to dock and begin the repatriation process (Carrega and Raida 2020). Later that same month, more than fifty Cuban doctors arrived in Italy’s worst affected region, Lombardy, to help fight the virus (teleSUR 2020). In late April more than two hundred Cuban doctors arrived in South Africa to help fight the virus (Magome 2020). Similar delegations were sent to Venezuela, Nicaragua, Jamaica, Suriname, and Grenada, to name a few. Despite the decades-long embargo imposed on Cuba by the United States and its neocolonial allies, Covid-19 has provided an opportunity for the Cuban government to demonstrate the moral imperative driving its support to life across the globe, even as the racial capitalist interests of the US attempt to starve the nation.

In neighboring Venezuela, after successive failed attempts to falsely impose Juan Guaidó as the (US declared) president of Venezuela since January 2019, the US, during a global pandemic, with the highest unemployment rates since the Great Depression era, and an epidemic of racialized state-sanctioned violence, issued a fifteen-million dollar reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro – who the US drug enforcement agency charged with narco-terrorism, corruption, and drug trafficking, among other criminal charges – and an additional thirty-five million for information on other top Venezuelan officials (United States Drug Enforcement Agency 2020). The funneling of money into efforts to destabilize the Venezuelan government while at the same time refusing to provide the necessary financial and sanitary assistance to its most vulnerable citizens back home clearly demonstrates the United States’ great lack of care and concern for human life. Despite the US’s unrelenting obsession and a severely damaged economy, Venezuela has attempted to manage the virus in a way that grants its citizens the most dignity possible. In June 2020, President Maduro participated in an online forum with the Education Minister and Vice President of Social and Territorial development in Venezuela, Aristóbulo Istúriz, and Roraima Gutiérrez, Secretary-General of the International Anti-Imperialist Cumbe of African and Afro-descendants, formed in November 2019. The forum featured a discussion about Afro-descendant responses to racism in the context of Covid-19. Maduro characterized the meeting as a “continuation of initiatives that we have undertaken to coordinate the fight of social movements for justice and against racism, colonialism, and oppression,” and he went on to express his solidarity with the victims of police brutality in the US and the family of George Floyd in particular (Torres 2020). He concluded by asserting that “the Venezuelan people have a lot of strength and conscience. They cannot keep us down. Our people are standing up. Venezuela shows its solidarity with the fight for equality, for a better and new society” (Torres 2020). Concerning Covid-19 more specifically, Maduro contrasted the situation in the United States and Brazil, where racism and economic interests take precedence over human lives, by calling attention to the fact that in Venezuela

nothing is charged to anyone. Tests have no charge. Nothing is charged to anyone from testing until they are discharged [...] more than 1.7 million tests have been done with an average of 35,781 tests per 1 million population [...] we have made huge efforts to detect coronavirus and provide our people with treatment (Torres 2020).

Gutiérrez declared:

united, we are a force, and the system knows it. We are not only united by racism as a problem taking place in the U.S., Europe, and many other parts of the world. You can see how the people of the Dominican Republic were recently repressed for protesting against racism. Starting from these reflections, we need to move forward to defend our right and the fundamental *right to life* (Torres 2020).<sup>1</sup>

While far from utopias, Venezuela's and Cuba's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, as I have attempted to demonstrate, exhibit a combination of strategies, policies, and perhaps most importantly worldviews that promote the preservation of life over the accumulation of profit. Despite its self-conception as a world leader, the US has demonstrated everything but leadership amid this pandemic. It is my hope that this essay inspires a closer look at the projects underway in these two countries without the shroud of racial capitalist consumerist logic promoted by world powers like the US and its crony countries. The fundamental right to life is what is at stake in determining what the post-Covid-19 global order looks like. We can choose to continue with business as usual or we can choose to believe that another world is indeed possible.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Here Gutiérrez is referring to the arbitrary detention of Afro-Dominican activists Ana María Belique, Maribel Nuñez, and Fernando Corona in association with the 9 June 2020 George Floyd/Black Lives Matter demonstrations they led at Independence Park in the capital city of Santo Domingo.

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Layla Brown-Vincent is Assistant Professor of Africana Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, where she teaches courses on Blackness in Latin America, Black/Africana Feminisms, Global Left Social Movements, and the African Diaspora more broadly. Currently, she is a Visiting Research Fellow at the Johannesburg Institute for Advanced Study, where she is completing her first book manuscript provisionally titled *Return to the Source: The Dialectics of 21st Century Pan-African Liberation*. Layla Brown-Vincent was trained as a cultural anthropologist but practices an interdisciplinary Pan-African feminist scholarship and activism. Her interest lies in producing scholarship committed to life, liberation, and dignity for all peoples, most especially for formerly colonized/enslaved peoples of African descent.