

Against Racism

Greg Albo

Theodore W. Allen was a working class intellectual, activist and author. He died on 19 January 2005 at the age of 85 in Brooklyn, N.Y. His books on the 'inventions of the white race' were some of the most important to examine American racism, and, in particular, the formation of 'whiteness' as a particular social division that was neither natural or inevitable, but rather foremost a political characteristic formed in the US as a result of the struggles over slavery. Allen's argument was that the 'white race' emerged as a ruling class strategy in response to labour unrest in the 17th and 18th century American colonies. 'Whiteness' held Euro-Americans together, and placed working class Euro-Americans against Afro-Americans, gaining

for 'whites' both structural societal and labour market advantages. This division became a defining feature of American political life, and a central barrier to developing working-class politics in the US. If this racial divide – the creation of 'whiteness' also being the formation of the so-called 'negro problem' – was not natural, neither was it merely 'socially-constructed' for Allen, to be dispensed with by an alternate discourse of identity. Modern racism formed alongside modern capitalism, and thus the social processes and structures of capitalism would also tend to reproduce the racial division. Anti-capitalist politics in the American case – for that was his central focus in writing and activism – would also have to be anti-racist.

Allen's two volume history *The Invention of the White Race* (1994; 1997) is one of the most important Marxian accounts of race in the US. Other important books on 'whiteness' are David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991) and his *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness* (1994); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish became White* (1995); and Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (2001). On American blacks from the other side of the divide, there are a huge number of important books. A few of these are: Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (1993); Max Shachtman, *Race and Revolution* (1933); Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (1981); and W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935). **R**

WSF Report Back

The V World Social Forum 2005, Porto Alegre, Brazil

Carolyn Watson and Carlos Torres

The fifth World Social Forum which took place once again in Porto Alegre, Brazil between 26 and 31 January 2005 demonstrated that, just as the challenges to neo-liberalism are able to adapt themselves according to need, so too is the best large scale alternative to the World Economic Forum. Unlike previous years, the event took place outdoors, along the city's waterfront. Tents, divided into eleven thematic sections labeled A to K, followed the shoreline of the Guaíba River for several kilometers (imagine tents stretching along the Toronto waterfront from the Humber River to Cherry Beach with a youth camp in High Park!). The Forum attracted over 150,000 people while 20,000 young people participated in the youth camp.

This year's Forum planners attempted to democratize the Forum's

activities, talks, and events by taking them out of the seclusion of the academy (where they had been in the past) and making them more publicly accessible. To achieve this goal, architects and planners from India flew to Porto Alegre and shared their knowledge of how to design a temporary community of tents (as they had done for the fourth World Social Forum held in Mumbai last year) with local Forum planners. The resultant atmosphere resembled a bazaar of information, activities and events that Forum participants could sample and experience. Participants in the Forum were free to attend events that had direct significance for them or they had the option of wandering into talks or workshops that caught their attention as they passed by. They could also view films, documentaries, and art events. Other changes that de-

mocratized the Forum included a lower registration fee for individuals, groups and organizations.

Of course, noble plans always have their weaknesses and the tent community was no exception. To ventilate the tents, plastic walls had to be removed, and once the walls were removed, unpleasant odors from a nearby creek wafted in. The scorching weather, the smell of sewage and the whirlwinds of dust from the unpaved roads mingled inside the tents with Forum participants.

Many events were organized as lecture panels of academic and political "stars"; they did not allow for effective interaction between presenters and audiences and resulted in discord when audiences could not be comfortably accommodated by each tent's seating capacity. One such event, in which