

Cedric J. Robinson: In Memoriam



Cedric J. Robinson (1940-2016) was a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Black Studies and the Department of Political Science. He received his B.A. from the University of California, Berkeley and his M.A. and Ph.D. from Stanford University. He has served as Chair of the Department of Black Studies as well as of Political Science and has also served as the Director of the Center for Black Studies at University of California at Santa Barbara. His fields of teaching and research were modern political thought, radical social theory in the African Diaspora, comparative politics, and media and politics.

Robinson is the author of *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, an ambitious work, first published in 1983, which demonstrates that efforts to understand Black people's history of resistance solely through the prism of Marxist theory are incomplete and inaccurate because Marxist analyses tend to presuppose European models of history and experience that downplay the significance of Black people and Black communities as agents of change and resistance to argue that Black radicalism must be linked to the traditions of Africa and the unique experiences of Black people, hence, any analyses of African American history need to acknowledge this. And to illustrate his argument, Robinson traces the emergence of Marxist ideology in Europe, the resistance by Black people in historically oppressive environments, and the influence of both of these traditions on such important twentieth-century Black radical thinkers as W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, and Richard Wright.

Second, he authored *Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership* and *Black Movements in America* originally published in 1980 and again in 2016 contends that perceptions of political order is an illusion, maintained in part by Western political and social theorists who depend on the idea of leadership as a basis for describing and prescribing social order. Thus, Robinson synthesizes elements of psychoanalysis, structuralism, Marxism, classical and neoclassical political philosophy, and cultural anthropology in order to argue that Western thought on leadership is mythological rather than rational. He then presents examples of historically developed "stateless" societies with social organizations that suggest conceptual alternatives to the ways political order has been conceived in the West which examines Western thought from the vantage point of a people only marginally integrated into Western institutions and intellectual traditions which he radically critiques the fundamental ideas of leadership and order.

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Robinson's recent work also included *The Anthropology of Marxism* (2001), a study in which he argues that while Marx and Marxism became the principal owners of socialism in the 19th and 20th century, it was not their invention. The socialist ideal was, he suggests, embedded in Western civilization and its cultures long before the opening of the modern era - and socialist thought did not begin with or depend on the existence of capitalism. The book proposes that the cultural, economic and social circumstances which spawned socialism are so diverse that the notion of socialism is best understood as a genetic phenomenon of resistance and should be treated in terms of "socialisms" rather than an enduring singular world-view. Focusing on the impact of social conflicts and political competitions, the book also interrogates the social, cultural, institutional and historical materials from which socialisms emerged. In doing so, it exposes the conceptual boundaries and restraints, and the definitive discursive structures, imposed on and by Engels and Marx in the process of giving a "destiny" to scientific socialism.

Robinson was also the author of numerous articles on U.S., African and Caribbean political thought; Western social theory, film and the press.

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