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Theory of Understanding – Critical Social Theory Related to Inequity

I believe that it is important to preface my theory of social inequality with a couple of disclaimers. Firstly, my view of inequality involves some global systems and context, but is focused on the nature of inequality, power, and privilege in the United States. Additionally, I focus mostly on systems of racial and class oppression and the resulting inequality. In doing this, I am not trying to reduce inequality to only inequality based on two aspects of identity, as that would ignore the intersectional nature of oppression. I believe that race and class oppression in the United States is the primary or initial source of inequality, and that the hierarchies and systems established to create this inequality set the stage for the justification and enforcement of all types of oppression.

My theory of social inequality starts with the development of our current system of White Supremacy Capitalism. White Supremacy Capitalism is a socioeconomic and political system wherein White Supremacy enforces and justifies the harm and exploitation of capitalism, with both being inherently intertwined and reinforcing one another, leading to the oppression, suffering, and premature death of poor people and people of color. Touching very briefly on the history of racism, racism has always been used to preserve and concentrate power, placing people into a hierarchy and justifying this hierarchization through different means. All oppression uses some justification to hierarchize people, and the justification for racism started religiously, changing to 'natural' and pseudoscientific. Early forms of racism were distinct from the kind of White Supremacy we know today, and what bridged the gap between

the two was industrialization and the development of a global capitalist system. Colonialism and the establishment of our global capitalist system were entirely dependent on slavery, the ultimate form of dehumanization and exploitation, the effects of which are still felt in our system of White Supremacy Capitalism. European White Supremacy is so deeply entrenched in the logics of colonialism and capitalism, that it is impossible to exist in the global capitalist economy independent of these systems of oppression and drivers of inequality. White Supremacy has been built into our public and private institutions and systems, with people being socialized through United States culture and education since birth to uphold these artificial hierarchies. This focus on structural and systemic oppression is not meant to dismiss the reality of interpersonal oppression, however I believe that structural and systemic oppression are the real drivers of inequality.

The extent to which White Supremacy Capitalism is built into our society, and how it serves as the key driver of inequality can be seen clearly in the development of our housing system. The right to own property was a key right at the inception of the United States, with enslaved people being considered property and forbidden from owning their own. Since the Civil War and emancipation, investing in land has been the way for those at the top or middle of the hierarchy to build equity and wealth. Many generational fortunes have been built through land speculation, a process that was in practice open only to White men at the top of the social hierarchy. The government, at first explicitly and later implicitly, moved to segregate housing based on race through a series of policies and practices such as redlining and blockbusting, denying Black people across the country the opportunity to live where they pleased and build generational wealth. Black people were forced into specific neighborhoods and subpar living

conditions, largely prevented from getting mortgages, being forced to rent. This oppression was came in many forms and was extremely widespread, with Black people facing violence, being cheated out of leases, and barred directly through racially restrictive covenants. This systemic and institutional residential segregation severely deepened the wealth gap in America between Black and White people with every generation that passed.

Residential segregation served to do more than deny Black people economic opportunity and generate wealth for White people. Racial segregation, and the wealth gap it created, started to create both a monetary and social association between class and race. Additionally, implicit segregation facilitates other forms of implicit oppression and further denying of economic opportunity. It allows the state to justify oppressive policies that generate inequality as being purely geographically motivated, shifting focus away from the people that constitute the geographies. In a capitalist society, economic opportunity is an important type of freedom, and presented as something everyone has access to, and housing is the gateway to economic opportunity. Housing is so significant not just as an extremely significant way to build wealth, but also as a basic human right, and a key determinant of health outcomes. When attempting to address needs, housing must come first as it is a base for securing all other needs, surviving, and ultimately thriving. The same is true when attempting to address inequalities, as until there is equality in housing access for all, and housing is truly integrated and diverse in race, class, and all identities, then housing will continue to generate inequality and prevent other inequalities from being effectively addressed.