

IYSSE holds meeting on “Race, Class, and the fight for Socialism” at New York University

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On Tuesday, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in New York hosted an important lecture on “Race, Class, and the Fight for Socialism” at New York University (NYU). The meeting was a part of a national series in the United States sponsored by the IYSSE and the Socialist Equality Party that exposes the historical falsification promoted by *the New York Times’* 1619 Project, which puts forward race as the overriding social force in American history

The meeting was addressed by *World Socialist Web Site* writer and socialist scholar Tom Mackaman and chaired by Socialist Equality Party Assistant National Secretary Lawrence Porter. Also on the podium were IYSSE NYU President Sam and IYSSE National Committee member Trévon Austin.

The meeting was attended by about 85 people, a mix of college students, university professors, youth and workers.

In the weeks leading up to the meeting, members of the IYSSE campaigned extensively at New York University and other campuses in the New York area. IYSSE and SEP members also spoke to classrooms of students and to scores of workers at their jobs, particularly UPS and Metropolitan Transit Authority workers, who were confronting the casualization of their jobs and steep cuts to wages and benefits.

As he opened the NYU meeting, Lawrence Porter stressed that this lecture series was being held in a period when the working class is coming into struggle around the world in a manner that is unprecedented in the lives of young people today. The number of workers in the United States who were part of a major strike action in 2018 was the highest number since the mid-1980s.

Porter then asked the audience, “What is the purpose of the ideological campaign being taken up by the 1619 Project?” He noted that the executive editor of the *New York Times*, Dean Baquet, had said that promoting the issue of race would be useful for the 2020 Elections. Porter said that Baquet had told his reporters to “write more deeply about the country, race and other divisions.”

Porter recounted that he had attended an event sponsored by NYU’s McSilver Institute the previous day at which Nikole Hannah-Jones, the principal author of the 1619 Project, was the featured speaker and was introduced by NYU President Andrew Hamilton. Porter observed that the meeting had apparently been hastily organized only after the IYSSE began campaigning for the Tuesday night meeting. When Porter attempted to ask Hannah-Jones questions on the 1619 Project from a socialist perspective, his mic was cut off.

Tom Mackaman began his lecture by focusing on the political relevance of the meeting series. “The purpose is to answer the *New York Times’* 1619 Project, which seeks to impose a new narrative of American history in which all is to be explained by white racism.”

The 1619 Project’s aim is “to falsify the past in order to prevent the emergence of a revolutionary threat in the present,” Mackaman said. “It is unsurprising therefore that it trains its historical fire on the greatest progressive events of American history—the American Revolution and the Civil War.”

Mackaman addressed the 1619 Project’s distortion of the facts of the American Revolution (1765-1783) and Hannah-Jones’s statement that, “Some might argue that this nation was founded not as a democracy but as a slavocracy,” by observing that chattel slavery was not unique to the United States and that the revolution provided a powerful impetus to the struggle for democratic rights, including abolition.

“The American Revolution was waged in the name of a particularly radical Enlightenment concept—that all men are created equal,” Mackaman said. “This discovery has reverberated throughout American and world history with terrible force, contributing quickly to the French Revolution, and later to the abolitionist movement, and later still the development of socialism.”

Mackaman then reviewed the great sectional conflict of the American Civil War (1861-1865) that resulted in the largest expropriation of property—the southern planters’ slaves—in world history before the Russian Revolution of 1917.

He noted that of the many distortions of Hannah-Jones, her “treatment of Lincoln is, to be blunt, maliciously dishonest. ... She might have chosen any number of examples of Lincoln’s soaring prose in condemning slavery, including the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural, or his many memorable quotes along the same lines, including his remark that ‘if slavery isn’t wrong, nothing is wrong.’”

Mackaman addressed another reactionary way in which the 1619 Project was advanced by both Hannah-Jones and sociologist Matthew Desmond: that the ideology of white supremacy benefited all whites, both before and after the Civil War.

“Wittingly or not, this simply echoes the ideology of the planter class. ‘Among us the poor white laborer does not belong to the menial class,’ said Georgia’s governor on the eve of secession. ‘The Negro is in no sense of the term his equal. He is part of the only true aristocracy, the race of white men.’”

After the Civil War, Mackaman continued, the Democratic Party played the leading role in defending social inequality by working to divide the poor whites from former slaves. The Democratic Party aided the Ku Klux Klan in the late 1880s in order to crush a growing movement of black and white poor farmers organizing by the millions in the Farmers Alliance and in the Populist Party.

Mackaman then explained that during the 1930s there were massive strike waves by industrial workers across the United States during the Great Depression. This period saw the formation of the Congress of Industrial Workers (CIO), a union movement that rejected the racism and conservatism of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and attracted black, white and immigrant workers.

This movement was ultimately subordinated to the Democratic Party through deals with the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt—in which the Stalinist Communist Party and the trade unions played a key role.

The civil rights movement was also addressed in detail. Mackaman pointed out that the figures of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. were not included in the 1619 Project because of their view that racism was not a permanent feature of American “whites,” but that it could be historically explained.

The lecture was followed by a lively question-and-answer session. One worker asked what the Socialist Equality Party’s relationship was with the “traditional trade union leadership.”

In response, Mackaman noted that the relationship between socialists and the labor syndicates that call themselves unions today was “mutually hostile” and explained how trade unions have become agents of cheap labor management.

World Socialist Web Site spoke to some of the attendees at the meeting.

Jim, a professor at a community college in New York City, said, “The meeting was very interesting, and challenging. The 1619 Project is seeking to divert attention away from the real issues facing working people and have them focus on race.”

Kamola, a student at LaGuardia Community College, told us, “This meeting actually helped me formulate a lot of my own thoughts. The issue of race and inequality are connected. Right now, we see this a lot with the issue of immigration, with the issue of immigrants. But we should recognize that humans all immigrated out of Africa. We need to just eliminate the idea of race.”

Joao, a restaurant worker, said, “This was a great meeting. It really validated a lot of the things that I have been thinking about for a long time and added a lot of historical information. It is like every day I want to just scream ‘the issues we face are about class,’ and everyone is putting forward that it is about race.

“I feel like in New York almost all the service industry is separated by race. You have certain groups that tend to work retail, and other groups in kitchens, but we are all facing a lot of the same issues. We are all getting paid the same and are friendly with each other.”

Harry, a student at NYU said, “The immensely powerful historical analysis of historical materialism, gives us the ability to explain where these [racial] divisions come from, and not only that, but to explain how to solve them, which is to unify the working class.”

Manoj, an Amazon worker who immigrated to the US from India three years ago, told us that both countries have large rifts between the rich and the poor. “Capitalism crushes the poor people. The exploited poor man cannot lift himself up.”



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