

CNN Erupts: Capitalism Called White Supremacy



A CNN panel exploded into a shouting match after sports commentator Jemele Hill claimed capitalism itself is “effectively white supremacy,” and a fellow panelist tore the argument apart in real time.

Story Snapshot

- Jemele Hill argued on CNN NewsNight that American capitalism is tied to white supremacy because of slavery and the racial wealth gap.
- Podcast host Kmele Foster fired back, calling capitalism “the natural system of liberty” and the linkage to white supremacy “absurd and laughable.”

- Foster noted slavery existed for thousands of years before capitalism, undercutting the claim that the two are inherently connected.
- Hill later insisted online she never called capitalism itself racist, only that America practices “racialized capitalism.”
- The clash went viral, with conservative commentators and everyday users piling on to defend free markets.

Hill Ties America’s Wealth to Slavery

Jemele Hill, a writer for The Atlantic and former ESPN host, told CNN NewsNight host Abby Phillip that America’s rise as an economic power cannot be separated from slavery. She argued the buying and selling of human beings built the nation’s wealth, and because that system was based on race, it amounts to white supremacy baked into the American economy itself.

Foster Delivers a Blunt Rebuttal

Kmele Foster, a libertarian podcast host on the panel, rejected the framing outright. He said he prefers economist Adam Smith’s definition of capitalism as “the natural system of liberty,” built on private property, free exchange, and voluntary profit-seeking between people. Foster said

those ideas have created more wealth than any other system in human history, and none of that description has anything to do with race.

Foster's sharpest point may have been historical. He noted slavery is an institution "older than writing" that existed across cultures and continents long before capitalism was ever conceived. That fact alone, he argued, makes it impossible to claim capitalism and racial hierarchy are somehow permanently and intrinsically fused together. He called the idea "absurd and laughable" and said it barely deserved a serious response.

A Debate Conservatives Say Matters

This exchange lands at a moment when many Americans are exhausted by efforts to rebrand free enterprise as inherently oppressive. Capitalism is the system that lifted more people out of poverty worldwide than any government program ever has. Painting it as a tool of racial hierarchy tells hardworking families their success, or their struggle, is really about skin color rather than choices, effort, and opportunity.

Scholars on the left have long pushed the "racial capitalism" framework Hill leaned on, pointing to documented history like the racial wealth gap. One widely cited long-run study found the white-to-Black wealth ratio was near 60-to-1 at the end of slavery before narrowing sharply after emancipation. Researchers have also tied later gaps to segregation and

housing discrimination. Those are real historical facts, but they describe specific government policies and crimes, not proof that free markets themselves are racist.

Hill Walks Back the Wording, Not the Argument

Facing backlash, Hill posted on social media that she “never said capitalism was racist.” Instead, she said there is a “relationship” between capitalism and white supremacy “because of how it functions in America,” accusing critics of sticking to theory instead of looking at how the system actually operates. Critics said the distinction was a difference without much of one, since her original comments on air plainly linked capitalism to a race-based hierarchy.

Online reaction was swift and largely unforgiving. Commentators and everyday users mocked the idea that a multimillionaire media personality, who has profited handsomely from the very system she criticized, was lecturing ordinary Americans about the evils of free markets. Several pointed out that private property rights and voluntary trade, not racial hierarchy, are the actual building blocks of capitalism as economists have defined it for centuries.

Why This Fight Isn't Going Away

Debates like this one keep resurfacing because activists on the left increasingly frame every economic disparity as evidence of systemic racism baked into America's founding institutions. Conservatives argue that approach ignores individual responsibility, family structure, and policy choices, and instead teaches Americans to see each other through the lens of race rather than shared citizenship. Foster's rebuttal, grounded in basic economic history, offered a clear and confident answer many viewers say was long overdue on a major cable network.