Taking Down White Supremacy

A Reader in Multi-Racial and Multi-national Unity: History, Theory and Practice

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Editors’ Introduction

Chief Problem of the 20th Century: The Color Line

‘In 1900, the great African-American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois predicted that the “problem of the twentieth century” would be the “problem of the color line,” the unequal relationship between the lighter vs. darker races of humankind.

‘Although Du Bois was primarily focused on the racial contradiction of the United States, he was fully aware that the processes of what we call “racialization” today—the construction of racially unequal social hierarchies characterized by dominant and subordinate social relations between groups—was an international and global problem. Du Bois’s color line included not just the racially segregated, Jim Crow South and the racial oppression of South Africa but also British, French, Belgian, and Portuguese colonial domination in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean among indigenous populations.

‘Building on Du Bois’s insights, we can therefore say that the problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of global apartheid: the racialized division and stratification of resources, wealth, and power that separates Europe, North America, and Japan from the billions of mostly black, brown, indigenous, undocumented immigrant and poor people across the planet.’

—Manning Marable (see his essay in Part 3).
Science in 21st Century Disproves Racist Theories

The purveyors of racist theories were dealt a fatal blow decades ago when modern science discovered through the Human Genome Project and DNA research that all human beings are 99.9% alike. T.

Differences in skin color, or body shape, or other surface differences are irrelevant with regard to the biological make-up of people of all races and nationalities. We are all biologically the same. We are all members of one race, the human race.

Those who promote scientifically disproved racist theories do so for one reason, and one reason only. To divide people by race in order to weaken the human race so those in positions of power can perpetuate and expand their power and privileges. In the era of capitalism, those in power are capitalists, the owners of the means of production. They seduce others to help strengthen them to carry out their program of private profit accumulation by using fairy tales of the unfitness of others. The results have been disastrous. Here is what Five centuries of capitalism and false racist theories have left the world in crisis. —Paul Krehbiel from a discussion with Jim Campbell.

Why This Reader Is Needed

Nearly two decades into the twenty-first century, primarily because of a capitalism in crisis, we experience growing consolidation of wealth, enormous poverty, perpetual wars, an increasing threat of nuclear annihilation, a dangerous deterioration of the planet earth, and pockets of rising neo-fascism which bring the possibilities of human survival into question. Racism, white supremacy and national oppression against Native peoples, Latinos, Asians, and others have been central tools for the maintenance of this decadent economic system.

One hundred years ago, workers, peasants, men and women, victims of colonialism, and indigenous peoples were inspired by the Russian Revolution. But as revolutionary ferment spread across the globe so did reaction against it. Now, in the new century, we are presented with the prospects of doom or real progress. As Charles Dickens put it: this is the worst of times and the best of times.

It is the best of times because political uprisings, reformist and revolutionary, have spread across the globe: from the Middle East, to Africa, Latin America, and even progressive demands for change in the heartland of capitalism in Europe, Japan, and North America. In the United States, since the candidacy and election of Donald Trump, the progressive majority has been revitalized demanding shifts from fossil fuels, the
guaranteeing of a livable wage for workers, single-payer health care, an end to voter suppression and police violence, real immigration reform and support for public institutions such as schools, libraries, transportation systems, and state banks.

Many of those campaigns and movements that have taken on a new life have correctly come to the view that real change can only occur if the twenty-first century new working class, the 99 percent, can figure out ways to advance unity—unity by class, race, gender, and nationality. Theorists, historians, and long-time activists have revisited our past and have come to the conclusion that demands for change are only successful when the movements that make the demands have prioritized multi-racial, multi-national unity. This reader is designed to continue the discussion of the centrality of solidarity in the struggle against capitalist exploitation recognizing the special oppression based on race and nationality.

What do we mean by multi-racial, multi-national unity? An answer should endorse two seeming contradictions. First, unity suggests that there are commonalities embedded in what it means to be human that transcend geography, ethnicity, language and culture. The great African American singer/actor and political activist Paul Robeson once wrote that he had studied folk music all across the globe and he had discovered that each particular music was based on a common pentagonal chord structure. Most of us are not musicologists but metaphorically we can see that Robeson was talking about what is common, what it means to be human. And during the era of the popular front and the fight against fascism in the 1930s, he believed, it was necessary to build movements around this commonality. There are lessons there for us today.

Second, theorists and activists have also learned through sometimes painful experiences that if unity does not recognize diversity, political
movements will fall short of their desired goals. Humanity shares a common experience but because of economics, politics, culture, and history that experience also is varied and almost as diverse as humanity itself. If political movements cannot understand differences as well as oneness they will fail. This means that our movements must be cognizant of the special oppressions based upon race, gender, nationality, and geographic space as well as generic exploitation that comes from capitalism itself.

So for humanity and the environment to survive, progressives need to figure out a way to build multi-racial, multi-national unity in the soil of celebrating the diversity of human experience. Reflecting on the historical period since the Russian Revolution a case can be made that building movements based on unity and diversity constitute the most fundamental challenge for the future.

This collection of essays brings together a variety of articles—theoretical, historical, and experiential—that address multi-racial, multi-national unity. The first section provides examples theoretically and historically, of efforts to build multi-racial unity in the twentieth century. They address the popular front of the 1930s, struggles to overcome racism in the labor movement, and the need for white southerners to understand their special obligations in the struggle.

Part Two describes contemporary campaigns, particularly inspired by the rise of the right in the United States and the election of Donald Trump. They describe campaigns for a Moral Mondays, a new Poor People’s Campaign, women’s rights, immigrant rights, indigenous peoples rights, labor struggles today, and efforts to curb police violence. Each of these describes some movement or campaign going on in the United States, and how it seeks to create unity out of division.

Part Three returns to the connection between theory and practice. It addresses the creation of whiteness and white supremacy, the role of slavery in constructing the entire history of the United States, and the globalization of “the color line” as W.E.B. DuBois labeled it. The section concludes with a synthesis of the materials presented and a call for understanding what has separated us and how we can overcome the historic divides.

The editors of this volume believe this collection represents just a small sampling of a burgeoning literature on building multi-racial, multi-national unity. The editors also recognize that there are literally thousands of campaigns around the United States and the world that are carrying on the same struggles. We do not wish to slight the numerous efforts to create a better world that for one or another reason get little visibility.
We also recognize that in many corners of the globe the vision of a new twenty-first century socialism is struggling to be born. We believe twenty-first century socialism needs to address the issues of class, race, gender, ethnicity, culture, and history to win the battle for a socialist future. Consequently, we hope this collection of essays can be used as part of the profound dialogues and debates going on now; in study groups, coalition meetings, in social media discussion. That is the ultimate goal of the Socialist Education Project of the Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism.

Join CCDS and become a part of this exciting movement.

January 2018
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Part 1: History and Theory

The Struggle for Multiracial Working Class Unity: Echoes and Lessons from History

By Mark Solomon

The writer Ta Nehesi Coates has written that white supremacy is not marginal to United States history or to its current wealth, but foundational to it. “America is literally unimaginable without plundered labor shackled to plundered land,” he writes, “without the organizing principle of whiteness as citizenship, without the culture crafted by the plundered, and without that culture itself being plundered.”

In his own way, Coates was echoing a long-led view of the Communist Party and the organizations and individuals within its orbit. For them, the issue of white supremacy was neither tactical nor sentimental; it involved the basic structure and character of United States society. The cornerstone of capitalism had been laid by slavery and fortified by racism. Therefore, the achievement of equality required the transformation of the nation’s economic and social foundations. It required wiping out the destructive, self-defeating white supremacy that had undermined white workers’ awareness of their real enemy, shackled them to the illusion of a shared stake with white rulers and blinded them to their essential interests in unity with African American workers and their allies.

A Millstone around Our Necks

The cost of white supremacy for all working people is staggering and incalculable. Whatever the manifest privilege of “whiteness,” white supremacy is destructive to labor’s interests and constitutes the greatest
existing barrier to progress and a better life for all. The super exploitation of Black labor, spawned by the residue of chattel slavery to this day negatively affects the wages and living standards of all who work for a living. The systemic denial to oppressed nationalities of decent and equal education, health care, housing and public services depresses the living conditions of all. It is no accident that the regions of the country with the heaviest legacies of racial and national oppression today have the lowest economic and social infrastructures.

The denial of voting rights through voter suppression to African Americans, Latinos and other oppressed ethnic and national groups has resulted in a reactionary stranglehold over politics. That stranglehold has throttled even moderate social legislation for generations, has under mined the labor movement, has enabled the political domination of the military-industrial complex, has assaulted the rights of women, has abet ted a global attack on all working class standards and has mocked the notion of a democratic polity.

Widespread police killing directed primarily at Black and Latino youth echoes the long history of lynching and violence against communities of color. Killing, brutality and mass incarceration aim to control and ultimately destroy the most resolute voices of protest and change, under cutting the inherently progressive potential of oppressed communities, depriving all sectors of the working population of their strongest allies in the struggle for equality and justice.

The sham embrace of white supremacy is embedded deeply in the country’s history and consciousness going back to early colonial times. The immense obstacles and challenges in excising white racism are manifest. Yet, there have been moments when the collective consciousness of exploited white workers and farmers merged with oppressive material circumstances to generate multiracial unity and struggle.

Resistance from within

Such was the case of Newton Knight and the Black and white people of Jones County, Mississippi (now portrayed in the film The Free State of Jones). In a region with a high component of non-slave-owning farmers, resistance to a “rich man’s war and a white man’s fight,” was widespread. That resistance deepened when yeoman farmers were forced to serve the slave system in the confederate army. When they learned that confederate troops were pillaging their farms and starving their families, mass desertions ensued under the leadership of steadfast anti-slavery farmer Newton Knight. The Jones County farmers joined with slaves to openly rebel against the Confederacy, suffering defeats but reemerging as a determined, indomitable fighting force. After the Civil War, Knight
and his Black and white allies continued the fight for justice and equality in the face of resurging racist reaction.

In the late 19th century, in the heartland Black and white farmers’ alliances together joined to fight usurious banks and profit-gouging railroads. Those alliances contributed mightily to building the Populist movement, eventuating in the formation of the Peoples’ Party that swept across the Great Plains. In ensuing years, opportunist politicians betrayed that Black-white unity, falsely blaming African Americans farmers confronted by violent attacks on their voting rights for Populist electoral defeats. That history confirms both the potential for multiracial unity and its fragility in the face of fearful capitalist institutions that are determined to destroy it.

The most sustained attempt to build multiracial working class unity took place in the Great Depression 1930s when the Communist Party elevated “the Negro Question” to theoretical and practical centrality. The Party theorized that Black majorities living in the arc from the Tidewater to East Texas constituted an oppressed “nation within a nation.” National oppression was a most brutal, multifaceted form of subjugation. That exceptional brutality both embodied and transcended class and race. From such oppression came powerful resistance. Thus, the nationally oppressed constituted an indispensable ally of white workers – on a global scale akin to the obligatory unity of dependent/colonialized populations and the workers of advanced industrial states.

Crucial lessons are rooted in that historic interface between Black and red. That experience demonstrated that there is an unbreakable link between winning whites to multiracial struggle and winning Black workers through uncompromising efforts by white labor to clear away the detritus of white supremacy.

Another important lesson of the thirties is that unity emerges and strengthens in concrete, shared struggles. A crucial element is the role of politically advanced and well-organized white workers and their allies in those struggles. Those workers articulated the need to win Black
The TUUL Battles in the South

In the late 1920s, the cornerstone of efforts to forge multiracial unity was laid by Communist-led unions of the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL). The mandatory principle of Black-white unity (and ultimately multiracial unity) based upon fierce resistance to white supremacy gradually died out to broader working class currents. With that outlook, the TUUL began to probe the South. In October 1929, its efforts to “talk union” at a spring manufacturing company in Norfolk, Virginia brought 150 Black and white workers to a meeting. Local police broke up the gathering and arrested the white organizer, charging him under an old Virginia statute of “conspiracy to incite the colored population to insurrection against the white population.” The organizer was run out of town; he was a Slavic immigrant whose cultural roots were vastly different from Norfolk. Yet he was able to gather Blacks and whites together and to cross a cultural chasm, planting the seeds of multiracial unionism in Norfolk.

Gastonia, North Carolina was the site of the most ambitious – and perilous – attempt to date by the TUUL’s new National Textile Workers Union to organize an interracial union at the Loray Mills that had absorbed dirt-poor white sharecroppers and tenant families, part of a growing rural exodus. At Loray machines were replacing human labor; surviving workers were beset by speed-up, long hours, pitiful wages for adults and worse wages for child workers. Ubiquitous fibers lodged in workers’ lungs. Company housing was miserable, sanitation was primitive, and education virtually nonexistent.

The white hill people at Loray gradually responded to the NTWU organizers and struck the mill in April 1929. The Mill bosses and authorities in Gaston County reacted to the strike with murderous hysteria. Strikers, including women and children were terrorized, beaten and evicted from company housing. An attack on a union encampment ended with the fatal wounding of the police chief. Cries of “bolshevism” and racist epithet-laden curses punctuated a trial of fifteen strikers that ended with convictions and long sentences while no one was indicted for the murder of 29-year-old Ella May Wiggins, mother of five children, killed by company thugs on her way to a union meeting.

In the midst of those events, union organizers responded to the Communist Party’s insistence on making Gastonia a testing ground for the solidarity of Black and white labor. The NTWU was determined to use the strike to advance a long-range goal of wiping out Jim Crow in southern
industry. Poor whites that lived on the consoling fiction of white superi- 
ority would learn that the bosses’ wrath made no distinction between the races. In October 1929, the TUUL and its NTWU held a founding con- 
ference in Charlotte, about twenty miles from Gastonia. White delegates sat among a half-dozen Black radical organizers in open defiance of Jim Crow. However, in the southern mills only about five percent of the workers were Black – mainly sweepers and porters. In Gastonia, there were no Black mill workers (onerous work in the mills became a spuri- 
ous manifestation of white privilege), but Blacks labored in a miserable waste mill attached to Loray. Under pressure from the Party, Gastonia organizers were able to recruit seventeen African American workers from that mill who were welcomed among the strikers in their tent colony.

Persistent efforts to establish biracial unionism met fierce resistance from mill bosses and local police. Yet, scores of quietly supportive Blacks met welcoming white workers on trial for the killing of the police chief at the courthouse. The International Labor Defense (the legal arm of Communist and left activism) organized a biracial “workers’ jury” to observe a second trial (held after a hung jury failed to convict some strikers in the first trial). The “workers’ jury” created a sensation when its white and Black members refused to be segregated, an unprecedented occurrence in that region, and observed the entire trial from the Jim Crow gallery.
Such advances did not take place without organizers’ discomfort and retreat in the face of deeply rooted social custom. One organizer publicly worried that mandated biracial organizing (along with having to confront the racist bugaboo about interracial marriage) was undermining union building.

The Party’s leaders refused to bend. They invoked the authoritative resolutions of the Communist International to insist that declarations without concrete interracial union building were empty gestures. There was little or no hope for advancing the interests of the working class as a whole without breaking the fatal grip of racial division and white supremacy.

Something happened on September 7 that augured hope for braking racism. Black Communist leader Otto Hall had been dispatched to Gastonia. On that night when police raided the strikers’ tent colony in the wake of the police chief killing, Hall was returning to Gastonia from a meeting in Bessemer City. Rank-and-file white strikers slipped through a police cordon, intercepted Hall’s car and spirited him to a railroad station forty miles from Gastonia. Hall noted that although racism was far from ended in Gastonia, the action of white strikers was “a major step” towards Black-white solidarity. A reporter for the Baltimore Afro-American was not so sure, but he conceded that for the first time among poor white mill workers “the necessity of open cooperation with colored workers had been brought home.”

Interracial solidarity was already a watchword in New Orleans where the TUUL’s nascent Marine Workers’ Industrial Union fought to organize that city’s thousands of dockworkers, especially targeting black workers who made as little as thirty cents an hour.

MWIU organizers persuaded many white longshore workers that the depressed wages of black workers constituted downward pressure on their own wages. Instead of the super exploitation of black dockworkers becoming a basis for deepening racial division, the opposite occurred. Under the prodding of union organizers, the New Orleans docks became a vessel of Black-white and multiracial unity based largely upon recognition of shared interests.

On September 8, 1928, 600 miners from rebel locals of the United Mine Workers Union, and insurgent “Save-the-Union” committees met in Pittsburgh to form the TUUL-inspired National Miners Union. Violence spilled over from the coalfields as mobs descended on the gathering with knives and blackjacks. When the convention got down to business, the predominantly white insurgent miners elected William Boyce, a Black miner from Indiana as national vice president. Boyce called upon the convention
late 1929, a strike under NMU leadership broke out in southern Illinois. The left wing organizers pressed relentlessly for Black-white solidarity with a barrage of resolutions and broadsides. In the face of a dying strike, James W. Ford, the leading Black Communist at the time, begged Black and white workers to hold on to their fragile hard-won unity.

However, that unity had to be fought for on new battlegrounds. In 1930, a major NMU strike erupted in the Pittsburgh area and West Virginia. Isaiah Hawkins, head of the TUUL-inspired Negro Miners’ Relief Committee, now head of the union’s “Negro Department” witnessed 6,000 striking Black miners among 35,000 striking mine workers. When a cluster of Black miners refused to strike, the NMU dispatched Richard B. Moore, among the Communist Party’s most eloquent representatives to address the miners at a hastily convened picnic. Moore underscored the sacred commitment of the union to fight discrimination and racism; he praised Black-white unity and linked the strike to the broader battle to consolidate cooperation between Black and white and to fight together against the ravages of Depression and for equality. The following day the Black miners joined the strike.

While the Pennsylvania strike dragged on, the NMU began an organizing drive in the Kentucky counties of Harlan and Bell, notorious mine-operator strongholds. While Black miners were few in number in the Kentucky mines, white miners nevertheless welcomed them to join in the bloody Harlan strike in February 1931. In the midst of operator violence, two Black miners were indicted on a murder charge – evoking strong defense by the union, insisting that the men were framed.

At the same time, some white strikers argued that the strike kitchen should be segregated to prevent a raid by operators on the pretext that Jim Crow ordinances were being violated. Union organizers, prodded by
the Communist Party, argued back for seven hours, finally convincing the strikers that any form of segregation ruptured the urgent need for interracial unity.

The objecting strikers finally relented and all strikers used the same kitchen.

*Needle and Garment worker on strike*

The African American observer Charles S. Johnson, writing in the National Urban League’s Opportunity claimed that the NMU had proved that no permanent obstacle existed to the unity of Black and white labor, especially at times of crisis when both races confronted similar economic pressures.

Another Opportunity writer, Arthur G. McDowell was moved by “a vivid portrayal of Black miners as they emerged from the coal pits arm in arm with white miners” to start the strike.

In 1928, the Communist organizers launched the Needle Trades Workers’ Industrial Union. Henry Rosemond, a Black furrier was vice president and executive board member of a union in an industry marked by ethnic insularity, close proximity between the boss and workers and a brutally exploitative subcontracting system.

Maude White, one of growing number of militant African American working women activists, became an organizer for the union in 1930 when it became a TUUL affiliate. She confronted a particularly complex reality in engaging with a union with a large ethnic component. Many ethnic workers on the left were rooted in both unions and community organizations where they often engaged in a contradictory process of shielding their ethnic culture through insulating their groups while at the same time yearning to “Americanize” through engagement in racist practices, a most “American” of endeavors.

White quickly took on problems facing Black workers in a trade that had been largely closed to them. The oppressive subcontracting of the labor of Black women by white pressers was a priority that required attention. White relentlessly fought to educate white needle trades’ workers about the special exploitation of Black women and the need for special mea-
sures to erase rank discrimination. She admitted that a special approach to Black grievances was a tough sell to white workers. They resented the entry of Blacks into the trade on any basis other than subcontracting, seeing Black participation as an encroachment on their turf. Even militant workers at times would vacillate. However, White pounded away, pointing out that discriminatory wage differentials created by subcontracting hurt all workers. She pressed the issue in the NTWIU over the next two years, whittling away at some of worst abuses of subcontracting, planting some interracial roots in the trade, and winning the acquiescence of growing numbers of white ethnic workers.

TUUL persistently agitated for Black-white unity in its small vulnerable unions in auto, steel, and textile industries. Declamatory statements in TUUL union constitutions about fighting racial discrimination were criticized by the Profintern (the labor arm of the Communist International) as not adequate to meet the solemn cause of Black-white unity. The international body demanded that TUUL unions promote Blacks to general leadership, thus educating white workers about the militancy, leadership capacity and transforming vision of African American labor. No TUUL union, no matter its vulnerability or pain of difficult strikes, was exempt from pressure for action on the needs and demands of black workers – while educating white workers to recognize their interests in advancing union with Black labor.

From 1929 through the early 1930s, the TUUL remained a mongrel force on the labor front – taking on the most dangerous and intractable strikes, often hobbled by a sectarian outlook and dogmatic tactics, harassed by the Profintern for its inadequacies and failures. However, the courage of its organizers and its vision of racial equality were inspired by concepts of revolutionary necessity and proletarian duty. TUUL experienced a mild resurgence in 1933 after the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt. When it was phased out in 1934, its antiracist consciousness flowed into the founding of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. It had planted the seeds of dynamic, widespread industrial unionization of Black and white workers under the banner of interracial and multiracial solidarity. The struggle to unite oppressed nationalities with white labor under conditions of intensified suffering seeped into communities beyond the organized union movement.

March 6, 1930 marked a turning point in breaking down the isolation from each other of African Americans and whites. The Communist Party, at that time a small organization of little more than 10,000 with a heavy foreign-born composition summoned masses of all races into the streets to demand “work or wages,” unemployment insurance or jobs. The response was dramatic and overwhelming – over 100,000 in New York, 60,000 in Detroit, thousands in other major cities, and hundreds
Taking Down White Supremacy

in cities and towns across the country. Baltimore and Washington, DC were scenes of large African American participation with whites in fervent demonstrations. The New York Times was mesmerized by the DC demonstration that was dispersed by tear gas, clubs and blackjacks: “Spectators were treated to the unusual spectacle of several white girls walking with colored men ...” Police attacks that singled out Black demonstrators in southern and near-southern cities (Chattanooga, Winston-Salem, Baltimore, Washington) were protested and resisted by white marchers.

The South on that day reflected unprecedented Black-white demonstrations. The trek to the City Hall in Winston-Salem North Carolina was marked by open fraternization between marchers of both races carrying placards demanding “full political, economic and social equality for Negro workers.”

The movement of the unemployed never again achieved the vast numbers assembled on March 6. Still, it spurred hundreds of smaller actions on local and national scales – culminating in 1931 and 1932 in national hunger marches to Washington that had become hallmarks of united Black-white participation. On July 1, 1930, scattered organizations of the unemployed converged to form the National Unemployed Councils on a biracial foundation. Bridgeheads were established all over the country, including the South. Birmingham was in the forefront when the unemployed group gathered an unusually large crowd of Blacks and whites to demand, among other things, equal distribution of cash relief. The inevitable police attack on the crowd resulted in assaults on Black and white women. In May 1932, Black Communist leader Hosea Hudson led an unprecedented three-mile march in Birmingham of Blacks and whites protesting abuse in work relief programs.

The unemployed movement in Greenville, South Carolina faced relentless pressure from the Ku Klux Klan. On April 9, 1931, the mayor of Greenville led an attack by 100 hooded men upon Unemployed Council headquarters, singling out Black members for physical attack, but the
assault did not stop interracial jobless protest. In Atlanta, Angelo Hern-
don, a Black member of the Young Communist League led a visibly inter-
racial demonstration to the City Hall demanding an end to hunger and called for an end to eviction of jobless families. Herndon was indicted for “insurrection” under an old pre-Civil War statute; his case ultimately became a national cause, evoking widespread protest based on defense of Herndon’s right to protest under the Constitution’s First Amendment. By mid-1931, in the worst Depression years, hunger marches led by the Unemployed Councils and left unions swept through Pennsylvania, Indiana and Ohio – marches praised by the Communist Party and various left groups as sterling examples of interracial solidarity. In St. Louis, an unemployed demonstration of fifty Black and white women waiting under a scorching sun for hours at the deliberately locked City Hall rushed the doors only to be victimized by gunshots that wounded four people.

Violence had become a staple of state repression, especially at the sight of Blacks and whites marching together to demand work, food, shelter and wages. On March 7, 1932, unemployed Ford workers gathered for a hunger march at River Rouge, Michigan. More than 3,000 showed up, among them nearly 400 Black workers mainly from Ford’s onerous foundry and steel mill. Skirmishes broke out at the Dearborn city limits, leaving four marchers dead. Curtis Williams, a Black former Ford worker died from his wounds months later. A symbolic “unity” had been forged in disaster.

By that time the frame up of nine Black youth at Scottsboro, Alabama was emerging as perhaps the most intense and relentless campaign to that point to end virtual genocidal violence against African Americans. The Communists and their allies pressed the case that the frame up of nine youth accused of raping two white women was symbolic of national oppression, a searing example of the subjugation of Blacks under conditions of unspeakable institutionalized racist violence. That violence undermined every vestige of Black economic, social and cultural life, threatening near slavery and undermining the interests of all working people. From that moment, protest of the Scottsboro convictions became a global cause of massive proportions and an integral part of the struggle of the unemployed for surcease from the ravages of Depression.

One of the most compelling activities of the Unemployed Councils and associated groups was the “flying squadrons” of jobless workers summoned to return the belongings (typically dumped by authorities on sidewalks – a particularly galling humiliation) of evicted families. From Detroit to Brooklyn to Norfolk, city life was punctuated by sullen ceremonies of unemployed workers returning possessions to the homes of the evicted. A parent calling to her kid to “go call the Reds” to return
furniture became part of the folklore of urban life. On August 3, 1931, the Southside Chicago Unemployed Council had already moved against three evictions, when it received word that 72-year-old Black woman had been evicted. Her furniture was being restored to her apartment when police arrived – summoned by an anxious landlord. Chaos and confusion ensued with nervous police firing into an angry crowd. Three Black men fell dead. At the coroners’ inquest, witnesses testified that the Black victims were neither armed nor resisting arrest.

A massive funeral cortege drew a crowd of over 40,000 multiracial onlookers who jammed the Southside streets to witness and follow three coffins of fallen Unemployed Council activists. The massive outpouring of grief and anger did not end evictions. After a brief moratorium, eviction papers began to be issued again. But the events of August 3 did inspire the growth of the left on the Southside, consolidating interracial alliances that lasted well beyond the Depression.

The growing sense of need for biracial and multiracial unity began to pervade movements not linked to the Communist orbit. The storied Bonus march began almost spontaneously when veterans of the Great War, shouldering the burdens of economic crisis starting marching to Washington, DC to demand payment of a deferred pay increase – a “bonus.” Picking up vets along the way, including scores of black ex-servicemen, more than 25,000 encamped in the nation’s capital vowing to remain there until the bonus was paid.

Concurrently, the Communist Party had formed The Workers Ex-Service-men’s League following the March 6 demonstrations as part of an improvised workers “defense corps.” WESL veterans from Chicago, Detroit and Cleveland made forays into the camps, contesting Jim Crow. When the Chicago group found the Camden, New Jersey contingent segregated, they shouted and argued until the group desegregated. Sol Harper, a Black Communist veteran challenged the Jim Crowing of two hundred Black veterans who were confined to the top floors of the much-publicized “Pennsylvania Avenue barracks.” After strenuous protest, the “barracks” was integrated without complaint from Deep South vets. Roy Wilkins, surveying the scene for the NAACP’s Crisis magazine, was struck by how there appeared to be no visible color line when “Southerners, Northern-
ers, blacks and whites, met in the Army of Despair." Whites welcomed the irony and humor that Blacks injected into the grimy camps, drawing sustenance from the clarity and moral authority of the African American ex-servicemen. A.B. Simmons, a Black vet from Houston, Texas reported that even on the march throughout the South, homes had been opened to Blacks and whites, who took meals, hiked and rode together. If the bonus marchers could unite across racial lines, Wilkins asked, why couldn’t the entire fabric of American life be desegregated?

Soon thereafter, the Bonus encampment was demolished by Herbert Hoover and army general Douglas MacArthur. Yet, the fragile seeds of multiracial unity were not destroyed. The Communists in that year had experienced another symbol of determined efforts to forge unity. James W. Ford, at that time the Party’s top African American leader, was nominated to stand for vice-president on a ticket with Party icon William Z. Foster. The convention was thrilled when a heavily accented southerner rose to give a ringing speech in support of Ford’s candidacy.

**Popular Front against Fascism**

Changing political conditions by the mid-thirties mandated the formation of broad multi-class “popular fronts” to combat the rising threat of fascism and war. Such change inspired the broadening of the struggle for racial justice and multiracial unity. In February 1936, hundreds of multiracial delegates, representing more than 100 organizations gathered in Chicago to form the National Negro Congress dedicated to a three-pronged program: advancing civil rights and racial justice, fighting fascism and building the multiracial industrial union movement. The NNC played a pivotal role in winning Black labor to the emerging Congress of Industrial Organizations and in advancing Black politics and culture to the benefit of all races. Under the impetus of the NNC, millions of Black workers joined the CIO – especially the auto, electrical, packinghouse, steel and other industrial unions.

The building of a progressive majority on the foundation of multiracial working class unity ushered in a hopeful period of progressive advance in the fight for economic, political and social equality. That progress was seriously stunted by the Cold War and a right wing offensive that continues to challenge the fight for equality and justice to this day.

We are left finally, with two images that symbolize the passionate beliefs that constitute the heart of this history. One is the image of an elderly woman, a veteran of the thirties who told of the moment in 1932 when a Communist leader warned that white radicals were only “treading water” without Black-white unity and must be ready to sacrifice their lives if necessary to build solidarity. The other is the story told by a Black
veteran of the hunger marches and the unionization drives who recalled legendary Black organizer Henry Johnson facing a hostile crowd of white packinghouse workers in Amarillo, Texas in the mid-thirties. Johnson pressed on, talking union. Over and over, the organizer intoned, food on the table for black babies and white babies, black babies and white babies. The veteran organizer uttered an admiring laugh, expressing his awe at Johnson’s skill and perhaps reflected on his own wonder about the multitude of struggles that had been fought on a long and continuing journey to liberation. The fight was not over and the craving for unity had not been extinguished.

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By Paul Krehbiel

I became active in the labor movement in 1968 as a union auto worker and continue to be active in the labor movement today. Over those years I have participated in and witnessed many examples of workers of different races and nationalities coming together to fight for common goals. My first-hand account of these struggles is just one small slice of many more workers struggles where multiracial unity also played an important role. From my experience, more often than not, the win rate was higher when workers were united than when one group went at it alone.

Great gains were made in especially in the 1930s and 1940s in building fighting unions and those gains were enhanced where multiracial unity was achieved. Those lessons were handed on to the next generation of workers, those of us that came of age in the 1960s and 1970s.

While I will focus on labor struggles from 1970 until today in 2017, it's important to broaden our understanding of how racism developed, how it was used by employers, and how it was fought historically. Its roots go back to the colonial period in North America.

One important struggle was Bacon's Rebellion, which took place in 1676 in Jamestown, Virginia. That event its aftermath is a key pillar upon which racism and white supremacy was constructed in what became the United States. Nathaniel Bacon was a settler and property owner who sought to seize the land of nearby Native Americans to expand his and other colonial settler's holdings. He asked the local planter class to fund a militia
to carry out the theft. They refused. Angered, Bacon inspired white and Black bond-holders, poor European-American indentured servants and African-American slaves to protest at the homes and businesses of the planters. Fires and property damage took place while they demanded an end to the servitude of all three groups. The planter class was alarmed. This kind of unity, if it spread, could overthrow the system of slavery, and threaten the unfettered development of capitalism. The British colonial rulers were alarmed too and helped put down the rebellion. Twenty-three freedom fighters were hung to terrorize others who might seek to emulate their united, multi-racial rebellion.

Lies and the Racial Bribe

But that wasn't enough. To prevent future united multi-racial rebellions the planter class developed baseless theories of white supremacy and Black inferiority to divide Blacks from whites, and then presented a racial bribe. They told poor white workers they could take and settle Native American land, and they assigned European indentured servants to police slaves through slave patrols and militias to protect their plantations and slavery - and divide Blacks and whites. It is important to note that this bribe was made to poor working class whites, to divide the emerging working class.

Michelle Alexander wrote in her best-selling book, The New Jim Crow, "These measures effectively eliminated the risk of future alliances between black slaves and poor whites. Poor whites suddenly had a direct, personal stake in the existence of a race-based system of slavery. Their own plight had not improved by much, but at least they were not slaves...." British colonialism and the emerging domestic capitalism in the American colonies united to protect an exploitative class-divided economic and political system.

Ms. Alexander continued: "By the mid-1770s, the system of bond labor had been thoroughly transformed into a racial caste system predicated on slavery. The degraded status of Africans was justified on the ground that Negros, like the Indians, were an uncivilized lesser race."

The false ideology of "white supremacy" was born. Truth was turned upside down. The white so-called "civilized" wealthy planters and capitalists committed genocide against Native Americans, forced captured Africans into the barbaric system of slavery, and ruthlessly exploited white indentured servants, and all workers of every race and nationality, killing millions of people while claiming that people of color were "uncivilized".

This ideology of white supremacy was promoted throughout the colonies and was carried into the revolution that overthrew British rule. It
permeated nearly all sectors and institutions of our country. The first unions were not immune to this sickness. Most unions accepted the racism, and sexism, peddled by our newly developing capitalist society. This was not unique to the United States. Marx famously wrote that "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas." Many unions barred people of color and women, or encouraging segregated, all-white unions. In response, Black workers formed their own unions. This split in the emerging working-class served the interests of capitalist employers, as they could easily pit whites against Blacks and other people of color, and men against women.

All Workers Lose, but Some Lose More

The driving force behind this sordid state of affairs is capitalism's inherent drive to maximize profits for the few at the expense of the many. Any ideology and action that divided workers was tried. Racism and sexism were time-tested strategies that worked.

Where racism was sharpest, suffering was sharpest. In our southern states, racism separated Black and white workers more deeply and for much longer than in the northern states. Southern workers, both Black and white, had lower wages, fewer benefits and a lower standard of living than both groups of workers in the north, mid-west and western states.

Financier and railroad robber baron Jay Gould said in the late 1800s: "I can hire one-half of the working class to kill the other half." Where racism against people of color and misogyny stood unchallenged robber barons of all era's could proclaim: 'I can hire and bribe or trick one-half of the working-class that is white to ignore the super-exploitation of workers of color and women, in order to divide and weaken all workers.' Even within races divisions were sown. The poorest white workers were exploited more intensely than other white workers, creating splits among all white workers. African slaves were more ruthlessly oppressed than free Black workers. But there are examples of resistance.

Important initiatives were undertaken to fight against the abuses of racism and the ideology of white supremacy. After the end of Reconstruction in 1877 many plantation owners carried out brutal efforts to return to the days of master-slave and de facto slavery. Some Black and white workers resisted and formed their own organizations and political movements to advance their common interests.

A good example was with the waterfront workers of New Orleans. Despite being separated in segregated unions, Black and white workers broke through that segregation and marched together in New Orleans in
1882 to mark the first anniversary of the formation of their multi-racial Central Trade and Labor Assembly. They demanded 50% of the waterfront jobs go to white workers and 50% to Black workers. The editor of a local Black newspaper wrote:

"To gaze upon these representatives of every trade, and of every shade of colors, following each other, each division sandwiched between the other... and marshaled by white and colored officers...without discrimination on account of race or previous condition, was very gratifying..." Eric Andersen wrote in his book, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans*, that cotton handlers, longshoremen, and other workers on the waterfront set a standard for multi-racial unity, and won gains for both groups beyond those of white and Black workers who tried to make improvements separately.

Where workers failed to build this unity, they often failed. Some years earlier white brick layers, who had banned Black bricklayers from joining their union, went on strike. They lost. Employers easily pitted Black bricklayers against whites, weakening both groups.

The example of the New Orleans waterfront workers influenced workers in other southern states, and the entire country, when they heard about the waterfront workers struggles. In addition to the Central Trade and Labor Assembly, the Black and white workers created bi-racial union federations such as the Cotton Men's Executive Council which shared jobs among Black and white workers. Additionally, Black and white union
delegates negotiated jointly with employers to win and maintain better and uniform work rules and rates. The employers and major political forces in Louisiana, especially the Democratic Party, which was then the ex-slaveholders party, worked hard to break up this unity. They urged employers to give "preference to white over black labor," as one of many tactics to divide and hold down both Black and white workers. The end of Reconstruction led to the return to power of former slave-holders and saw a steady increase in violence against Blacks with the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, lynchings, and vicious efforts to break up efforts to create Black white unity and to smash union organizing efforts.

Breakthrough for Labor in the 1930s

At the turn of the century and into the early years of the 1900s racism still was prevalent within most of the labor movement. The revolutionary International Workers of the World (IWW) opened its doors to workers of color and women in the early decades of the 20th century. A bigger change took place upon the formation of the Communist Party in 1921. Communist Party organizers made special efforts to reach out to the Black community and Black workers and bring them together with white workers and workers of other races in labor formations, like the Trade Union Educational League and the Trade Union Unity League. Work done by these leftist organizers in the 1920s laid the foundation of the mass upsurge of union organizing in the 1930s and 1940s spurred on by the Great Depression.

But the gains were uneven. The fierce anti-union beliefs and actions of employers in the south, coupled with a more intense racism and Jim Crow segregation, and sometimes inadequate organizing plans resulted in too many failed attempts to unionize the south. The employers were alarmed at the upsurge of unionization that brought 6-8 million new workers into unions in the 1930s and 1940s, many very progressive politically and some led by Communists and socialists. They were alarmed at the multiracial unity being built between white, Black, Latino and Asian workers in their unions and in their communities. They were alarmed at the growth of the Communist party to 100,000 members and other leftist movements, and the much wider criticism of capitalism and support for socialism embraced by millions of people. Employers and the political right joined forces and launched a fierce anti-communist campaign that lasted fifteen years against the progressive forces in the unions, and against the Communist Party and the entire left, causing great harm to both the union movement and the political left.

Internationally, the left had also been on the march, but an anti-communist campaign was launched against them too, often by US multinational corporations and their allies on the political right. They got
their politicians in the US government to send money or troops to crush leftist movements around the world. Many US unions had not made the necessary alliances with workers abroad, especially workers of color in the global south which may have helped workers here and abroad. This gave almost free reign to US capitalism to keep wages abroad extremely low. When infrastructure was built in poor overseas countries, US corporations closed shop in the US and moved overseas. The capitalist's costs of doing business went down, their profits went up, US workers lost their jobs, and foreign workers were heavily exploited.

In the 1970s the growing crisis of capitalism reached a new level, and employers intensified cuts in wages, jobs and social services throughout the US, driving down wages in both the north and the south. This was done under the false ideology of "neo-liberalism," which said that society should take regulations off businesses and they will blossom. Many did. For their owners. Workers wages and benefits fell... Neo-liberalism also has a racist edge as cuts in pay, jobs and social services hurt workers of color most. Low income white workers were also hard hit. But workers resisted and fought back. Building on the gains of the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, union activists in the 1960s and beyond incorporated those lessons into our organizing.

**Upsurge of left in labor in 1960s and 1970s**

In 1968 I began my working life as a union auto worker employed in the auto parts sector of the giant auto industry. I worked at Standard Mirror, in my hometown of Buffalo, New York, where we produced rear view mirrors for all Ford and Chrysler cars and trucks in the US. One of my earliest union experiences was being introduced to a work-to-rule slowdown campaign by our militant union steward to stop the implementation of a new and higher production quota on our line. We were working hard and steady and a higher quota would have placed a greater burden on all of us.

We won and were ecstatic. We learned that organized collective action on the job can stop harmful management policies, and that the seemingly all powerful corporation could be successfully challenged. In 1970 I was one of a 15 young workers employed in a variety of industries
and in different unions that started a rank-and-file workers newspaper in Buffalo. Our main goal was to strengthen our unions and win greater social justice on the job and in society. We had all been politicized by the social justice issues of the day and we supported the anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-war movements active in Buffalo and across our country. We had also become opponents of the capitalist system, with its inherent drive to maximize profits at any expense, and supported socialism.

The majority of our articles were about the struggles of workers and their unions in the major industries in Buffalo, the auto, steel, and chemical industries, and others including the service industry and the public sector. We also published articles about the struggles against racism and sexism, against the war in Vietnam, and in support of workers in other cities around the country, and in foreign countries. We named our newspaper New Age, after a socialist newspaper published in Buffalo by that name in the early 1900s. It came out monthly, we published 10,000 copies and distributed it at the major factories and other workplaces around Buffalo, especially those where workers were on strike or involved in other labor rights struggles. Two members of the local Communist Party helped organize this newspaper.

**Importance of study groups**

During this period I heard from one of them about a study group being organized by a worker at a major chemical company in Buffalo who was also the leader of the Buffalo Communist Party, Mike. The goal of the study group was to help young workers become more effective in strengthening the workers in our shops and unions, in the labor movement, and making the labor movement more politically progressive. When I told Mike about the slow down we had organized at Standard Mirror he told me that a couple of Communist workers employed there in the 1930s and 1940s had taught the workers those shop-floor strategies. He said he was happy to hear that the lessons from that period were being passed on to new generations of workers. So was I.

In the study group we learned about the importance of seeing workplace issues from a class-oriented perspective, and always acting in support of the working-class. We learned about the importance of fighting racism and all forms of discrimination, and that white workers had a special role to play to win over other white workers to this view. I was impressed with this insight, analysis and commitment. I began reading the Communist Party's newspaper, the *Daily World*, and saw concrete examples of how building multi-racial unity at work, in our unions, and in the larger society achieved important gains for people of color and for all workers. I read Marx, Engels, and Lenin, and contemporary Marxists, along with the *Communist Party Program* and other literature, and joined.
I had been laid off at Standard Mirror, which closed in 1977, worked a variety of other jobs, and wound up in Denver, Colorado in the early 1980s working in the trucking industry. I began as a furniture mover, tried unsuccessfully to organize my workplace into the Teamsters union, then got a job with a major freight company where all the workers were members of the Teamsters.

Coors Boycott

In 1984, William Coors of the Coors beer company told a meeting of minority business owners in Denver that “the greatest favor that anybody ever did you was to drag your ancestors over here in chains" for the privilege of living in such a great country. He went on to say that the reason that the Black community had lower wages and more poverty was because Blacks suffered from a "lack of intellectual capacity." A small article about the conference, with these remarks, was published in the back of the Rocky Mountain News, one of two major daily newspapers in Denver. There was an immediate uproar in the Black community.

I was among a number of members of our Communist Party club living in the Black community of Denver and we formed an ad hoc community boycott committee. We made a petition calling on the Black community to join labor’s seven year-long boycott of Coors beer. We went door to door collecting signatures. The response was electric. Practically every one signed, and a number agreed to join our effort. The labor movement also intensified its boycott activities, and collectively we did outreach to other unions, community organizations like the NAACP, and Black churches, Latino organizations and other groups, and together formed the Colorado Coors Boycott Coalition.

Since many members of the coalition were activists and leaders in a number of unions - Coors had broken the Brewery Workers union at its factory some years earlier, the Coors Boycott Coalition entered the September 1984 Labor Day Parade behind our own banner. This was an election year, and 95% of the labor movement was solidly against President Reagan’s re-election and his anti-labor and right-wing policies.
We printed over 400 signs that read "Dump Reagan, Boycott Coors" and handed them out to every union contingent in the parade. Some 90,000 people viewed the parade from sidewalks lining the parade route, and an article and a photo of our contingent, with our signs, appeared on the front page of the *Denver Post* the next morning. We also handed out leaflets at the parade exposing Coors as a right-wing, racist corporate power broker. In 1973 Joseph Coors helped found the anti-labor right-wing Heritage Foundation which played a major role in mapping a blueprint for Ronald Reagan to carry out an anti-labor, racist, pro-war, and anti-communist political agenda in the 1980s.

We also picketed and handed out these leaflets at other major events in Colorado, such as the Black celebration of freedom from slavery on June 19, called Juneteenth. At all of these events the Colorado Coors Boycott Coalition presented ourselves as a multi-racial organization, with Blacks, whites, and Latinos working together at every event.

The boycott spread across the country. It received a big boost when the NAACP in Los Angeles got 500 liquor stores in southern California and especially in south central LA, to join the boycott and refuse to sell Coors beer in their stores. Combined with labor's boycott, and a boycott in the Latino community to protest Coors for funding SWAT-type police helicopters to surveil and harass the Denver Latino community, Coors beer sales plummeted.

Coors sales dropped from number one in its home state of Colorado to number three, and from number three nationally to number five nationally. That took place just as the industry’s National Beer Institute issued a report that found that competition in the national beer market was so fierce that it would likely result in the survival of four major national brewers, with other smaller companies falling by the wayside. Coors immediately contacted the AFL-CIO, NAACP, Operation PUSH and several national Latino organizations involved in the boycott to negotiate a settlement to end it.

Coors backs down

Within weeks a settlement was reached. Coors agreed to allow any union the AFL-CIO choose to come into the Coors brewery and conduct a union organizing campaign among its workers without company interference. Coors also agreed to spend $325 million on economic development and jobs for the Black community and $300 million for the same goals in the Latino community. This was a big victory for labor, the Black and Latino communities, and much of the public that was educated about the right-wing, racist and anti-labor practices of a giant corporation. I helped write one boycott leaflet and wrote several articles about the campaign, and
emphasized the multi-racial character of the boycott campaign, a feature which I believed was essential in winning.

**Whites winning over other whites**

In early 1985 I went to work for the United Furniture Workers of America, AFL-CIO in the union's national office in Nashville, Tennessee. I was hired to be the managing editor of its national newspaper, the Furniture Workers Press, and I also did research for the union, assisted the International President and the General Executive Board, and helped on union organizing campaigns in the south. The union, one of the ten progressive unions attacked during the Cold War for having known or alleged Communist party members in its leadership, had moved its national office to the south in 1979 to organize the large concentration of furniture factories in the south.

I helped on a union organizing campaign at a furniture manufacturing plant in Meridian, Mississippi, Pilliod Furniture Company. The workforce of 400 workers was evenly divided between Blacks and whites. Both Blacks and whites were in the leadership of the campaign, but we had more support among Black workers and less among the white workers. The union campaign was organized under the direction of the dynamic African-American International Vice President for the South, Willie Rudd.

One of my first assignments was to call the few unions that existed in the Meridian area to ask for their support in our campaign. Willie Rudd gave me a list and went over the names. When he came to the Woodworkers Union, he smiled and said I would enjoy talking to them. I asked why. He said because the leaders of the local Woodworkers union had been leaders of the Ku Klux Klan in Meridian. I asked why he would want me to call them. Willie said the Woodworkers local had been on strike some years earlier and were getting beat badly. The community was afraid of the employer and did little to help the Woodworkers.

But members of the Furniture Workers Union from Willie's local in Memphis, overwhelmingly African-American workers, came down to Meridian and offered their support. The Woodworkers Union leaders were initially stunned, but accepted their help. After several weeks of picketing together and getting to know each other, members of both unions saw they had much in common. Willie told me that as a result of that act of union solidarity by the Furniture Workers the officers of the Woodworkers Union quit the Klan.

When I called the leader of the Woodworkers Union and told him I was calling on behalf of Willie Rudd, he told me in a thick southern drawl, "Whatever Willie Rudd wants he's got it from me." He did everything
we asked to help our campaign. As a white union leader well known in Meridian, the Woodworkers would be able to reach many of the white furniture workers we were trying to organize. That was our biggest job, and the road to victory.

Pilliod knew this and played the race card. White managers told white workers that if they voted for the Furniture Workers Union they would be taking orders from Black leaders, hoping the long and sordid history of racism that has been heaped on white southerners since slavery would pay off. My job, and the job of other white staff and workers, was to talk to other white furniture workers at this plant and convince them to join together with all the workers, Black and white, to bring in the union. I did house visits with some very poor white workers. Some lived in shacks or tiny beat up trailers out in desolate fields of scrub brush and rutted dirt roads and mud, and explained why everyone needed to pull together so everyone could make improvements. None expressed openly racist attitudes, but I could tell by the few comments some made that they were worried about being in an organization with Blacks. I explained that the union only had strength if everyone pulled together and if that didn't happen the company would continue to exploit and abuse all of us, both white and Black workers. We won over an increasing number of these white workers and had a majority of the total workforce going into the election.

The day before the election, a company inspired leaflet was passed out to the white workers with a large photo of Willie Rudd, shown speaking forcefully to a crowd, with a headline asking if they wanted to take orders from this man? It was enough to frighten a handful of white workers to switch their vote to "no" and we lost by less than five votes among the 400 workers. The company had promised the workers to "give us another chance" but after the election those promises weren't kept. The Furniture Workers Union went back and won the election the next year.

Racism could be defeated

The lesson was clear. Racism was still alive and well, but it could be defeated. First and foremost, the Black Furniture Workers Union mem-
bers made a heroic act of union solidarity under potentially very tough and dangerous circumstances. And white workers, from both unions, worked to convince other white workers to vote for a multi-racial union.

**UE Unites Black and Latino Workers**

In the late 1980s I was in Los Angeles as an organizer with the very progressive United Electrical Workers Union (UE). UE had been the first union singled out among 10 left-led CIO unions in the late 1940s anti-communist Cold War by more conservative CIO leaders, and left the CIO before it could be expelled. As one of the most progressive unions in the country from its founding, with Communists and socialists in various leadership positions, UE was attacked in the late 1940s by employers, the government, the mass media, right-wing and anti-communist organizations, and conservative unionists. A rival union was formed to raid UE's members. After ten relentless years of this assault, UE membership was greatly reduced.

Yet, UE never gave up its principles, one of which was to combat racism and build multiracial unity. UE continued to set an example for other unionists by carrying out a militant, rank-and-file oriented form of fighting unionism. A major goal for UE was to organize unorganized factories. These principles and UE's organizing strategy were important in these organizing campaigns.

I made contact with several workers at an electronics plant in Los Angeles, Olympic Plastics, who told me about poverty wages, terrible working conditions, and lack of benefits. They wanted a union. The workforce
was majority Latino, with a smaller number of Blacks and whites. The largest group were from El Salvador, followed by Mexican-Americans. During the campaign some misunderstandings and antagonisms developed between the Latino and Black workers. The white workers were skilled mechanics and were beholden to their supervisor for their jobs, and they stayed out of the campaign and the dispute.

The leaders of the campaign, which included both Latino's and Blacks, were concerned that if this dispute wasn't repaired it would split the workforce along racial lines and doom our union organizing campaign. At an organizing committee meeting I explained that UE had very strong anti-racist views, and sought at all times to build a united, multi-racial union and union organizing campaigns. I said we had to find a solution to this problem.

Workers described the nature of the problem, and we collectively developed a response to address it. UE also had an organizing strategy that led workers through a series of activities as if they already had the union at work. We determined that if we did that, and focused on a grievance that both Latino's and Blacks felt, we could bring them together to work on this common grievance. That activity would allow each group to get to know each other better, build relationships, and hopefully mutual respect. This would be coupled by leaflets that the union would put out to address the issue of racial antagonism and the need for multi-racial unity.

We put out one leaflet with a cartoon by the revered UE cartoonist, Fred Wright, that showed two workers of different races trapped at the bottom of a large hole in the ground. The first image showed them fighting each other to see who could get out of the hole first. They failed. Then the cartoon showed them helping each other and they both got out. The combination of one-on-one discussions at work, and the union leaflets turned the tide and the Black and Latino workers started working together.

**Unity gave us real muscle**

We won the union election by a large margin, and now were in a strong united position going into contract negotiations. We successfully negotiated a first contract and won many improvements in wages, benefits and working conditions. It wasn't just the negotiations. They were conducted very well. More importantly was the united, well organized workers on the job who were trained by UE to conduct united actions at work to address their grievances. This put real muscle behind the union's contract proposals. If we had not resolved the dispute between the Black and Latino workers we would have likely lost the election. Even if we had
won we would have gone into contract negotiations in a weakened position. The demand for multi-racial unity is not only just a good idea. It has real consequences in the real world. As Marx summed this up when he famously wrote, "theory itself becomes a material force when it is seized by the masses."

Nurse-to-Patient Ratio Campaign

In the later 1990s I was an organizer and union representative with Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Local 660 (now 721) in Los Angeles, which represented 50,000 Los Angeles County workers. In 1999, under the leadership of the California Nurses Association and help from SEIU and other unions, a bill (AB 394) was passed into law in the California State Legislature mandating nurse-to-patient ratios. A manageable workload was the number one issue revealed by Registered Nurses in union bargaining surveys, more important than wage and benefit improvements. One nurse routinely was assigned 10, 14, 18 and more patients for her or his shift, well over what was safe and adequate for the patient and the nurse. Nurses had advocated for safe patient care for years and the solution was a specific mandated lower patient-to-nurse ratio.

After AB 394 was passed, hearings were held to collect data to help lawmakers assign a proper number of patients per nurse. Final regulations were issued in the summer of 2003, with hospitals required to meet staffing ratios by January 1, 2004. The Los Angeles Department of Health Services operated five full service public hospitals, and scores of health centers and clinics throughout the county. Some 20,000 health care workers were employed by the department, of which over 5,000 were Registered Nurses (RN's).

Unfortunately, the County had not done nearly enough by the end of 2003 to meet the new ratios, which were 5 patients for one licensed nurse on most wards (to be lowered to 4 patients the next year and three the next) to meet the January 1, 2004 deadline. In fact, nurse-to-patient ratio's had hardly changed at all. The County then quietly negotiated with top leaders of SEIU to get the union to agree to a waiver for county hospitals to give the County more time to comply with the new law, yet no timeline was spelled out in the agreement. No one else knew about the secret waiver agreement, so the newspapers reported the upcoming implementation of the new lower ratios.

On January 1, 2004, Registered Nurses came into work in Los Angeles County public hospitals expecting the new ratio's to go into effect, only to find the same over-burdened patient assignments that they had had for years. They were outraged. They had not been told of the
When we started organizing on the wards to address this grievance the County health management called the top SEIU leaders, who then called me and told me to stop organizing, pointing to the waiver agreement. The secret negotiations behind the backs of the nurses only made them angrier. I was told by top SEIU leaders that if I continued organizing among the nurses over the ratio I would be severely disciplined. I took that to mean I would be fired. I explained that to the nurses, and they said they understood. We had worked closely together for years. I said I would try to help them very quietly behind the scenes. Continued activity by the nurses at work resulted in more calls from hospital management to SEIU, who in turn told the nurses to stop their agitation. This only weakened the union.

Contract negotiations were underway later that year, and going badly. SEIU wanted to arrive at some settlement, even for very little progress. SEIU leaders talked to me and another union representative about organizing a campaign to implement the ratios as a way to pressure the County to come up with some improvements so SEIU could conclude contract negotiations. SEIU told us not to worry about achieving the new ratio's because the union just wanted to pressure the county to give even a small raise in contract negotiations, enough they felt to sign a new contract.

That's all we needed to hear: start a campaign around the ratios. In discussions with the other union representative and the key nurse leaders,
including the nurse union stewards from the Stewards Council, we all agreed we would mount a campaign to win the new ratios. The ratio's campaign would help contract negotiations. But winning the new ratios was equally important. We saw a double win.

Registered Nurses Unite

The Registered Nurses were comprised of white, Black, Latino and Asian nurses. I knew we had to unite all of them to be successful. We began by going to each ward on every shift and telling the nurse stewards that we found and other nurses that we wanted to organize a campaign to bring the hospital into compliance with the ratio's, waiver or no waiver. We identified the strongest nurses on each ward on each shift. Many were stewards, but others stepped up too. By strongest we meant those nurses who were known to speak to management about problems on the job, the nurses that others went to when they had questions or grievances. I wanted to find nurse leaders among all the racial and national groups. We welcomed all those nurses who wanted to step forward, but if we were weak with a particular ethnic group we spoke to them specifically and invited them to join. We also wanted to find the wards where there were strong nurses on all three shifts. Then we ranked the wards in order with the strongest first. That was the ward where we would begin our campaign.

We wrote and printed leaflets with laws on the responsibility of nurses to advocate for their patients, and provide safe and appropriate care. We quoted the relevant passages from the law exactly and cited our source. Working collectively with nurse leaders we developed a strategy that they had input into and that they agreed with. Then we went to the strongest ward and talked to nurses on all three shifts and asked if they would launch the campaign. They agreed. This was important because we wanted our campaign to be successful on the first shift, and also on the second and third shifts of one ward. If one shift failed to carry out the plan, it would be easier for management to get the other shifts to back off. We needed to show a solid wall of strength from day one. We would then launch the campaign on another strong ward within one to three days, and keep expanding the campaign to other wards.

The daily plan was as follows: when nurses arrived to begin their shift, if they were presented with an assignment that gave them more than five patients, they were to tell the nurse manager that they felt they could not safely take care of that number of patients, and therefore would refuse to accept that assignment. Nursing laws in California give Registered Nurses the right to refuse an unsafe assignment based on their professional assessment that it is unsafe. If they received opposition from management, the nurse should show the nurse manager the law
that gives the nurse the right to refuse unsafe assignments. We wanted to just use the newly passed ratio law, since it was so simple and direct, but we didn't want to deal with the difficulties that we may encounter since County management would pull out the signed waiver agreement to try to stop our campaign.

Normally, nurses were afraid to refuse an unsafe assignment for fear of retaliation and possible discipline. We told the nurses that we would be at the hospital when they were about to begin their shift, and if they encountered problems with the nurse manager, to call us and we would immediately come up to the ward to support them. The union contracts we had with Los Angeles County allowed full-time designated union representatives access to work areas and members during working time to fulfill our duties.

On the day we launched the campaign the nurse leader called us right at the beginning of the shift to say her nurse manager was threatening her. We came up to the ward immediately and argued with the nurse manager. In many cases the nurse managers were stunned, and called the relief nurse pool to get the extra nurses needed. That solved the problem for that day. We needed to be ready to go back the next day. Early in the campaign one nurse manager ordered me to leave the premises, or she would call the police. I refused. When the police arrived, she said angrily, "I want him arrested," pointing to me. "I told him to leave the premises and he has refused. He is interfering with work here."

**Police enter the terrain**

I responded, "I'm the legally designated union representative and I'm here on union business. I want her arrested," I said pointing to the nurse manager, "for breaking the law that protects nurses from not accepting an unsafe assignment." I pointed to the exact legal language from the safe patient laws from my leaflet. I asked one of the nurse leaders working on that ward how many patients she was assigned that morning, and if, in her professional assessment, she considered that an unsafe assignment. She said "yes."

The police were in uncharted waters. They retreated into a back room to call their superiors. When they returned they did not arrest me, or the nurse manager, but instead asked us to try to fix the problem. I suggested to the nurse manager that she call the registry, which she did.

We discussed the RN's campaign at the Stewards Council meeting and got pledges of support from stewards in other classifications and some useful suggestions. It was important that workers in other classifications knew about the nurses fight, and that they would be willing to help.
After one-third of all the wards in the hospital successfully stood up for safe patient care and safe staffing, we put out a leaflet announcing this to all the nurses and all the other workers at the hospital, and patients and their families. We named the wards that were in compliance with the safe patient laws (and hence the ratio law), and praised the work of the heroic nurses on those wards, and urged every ward to join the campaign. We had been working with nurses on the other wards and they all joined the campaign. It was a huge victory.

Many RN's thanked us, some with tears in their eyes, as they told stories of going home after work for years and worrying about whether they had given enough attention to all the patients and duties they were assigned that day. Many worked under constant stress for years. Now, they said, for the first time, they could relax and give their undivided attention to their patients and the care that they needed for the best possible outcomes. We highlighted the RN's staffing victory in our next hospital-wide union newsletter with photos of 5 of the RN leaders, Black, white and Latino, and women and men.

**LVN's and NA's Targeted**

Management was upset. They felt they had lost some of their power. They had. Their response was to retaliate. But not against the Registered Nurses. The RN's proved to be too strong. So management retaliated against the Licensed Registered Nurses (LVN's) and Nursing Attendants (NA's) by adding more weekend work to their weekend work schedules.

We knew we had to come to the defense of LVN's and NA's immediately. Not only was it a union issue, but it was also racial justice issue. While many people believed that the white RN's predominated that classification of workers, the largest groups among the LVN's and NA's by far, comprising close to 100%, were Black and Latino workers, followed by Asian workers. There had been a historic rift between the RN's on the one hand, and the LVN's and NA's on the other. It had to do with the status of the job titles and the racial make-up of those classifications.

We met with the LVN's and NA's to learn about the extent of the problem and worked out a plan collectively with leaders of these groups. The first step was to make a petition demanding that the weekend work schedule revert to the old schedule. With LVN's and NA's in the lead, along with members of the Stewards Council of various classifications, and RN's of all races, hundreds of signatures were collected in a few days. The next step was to make copies of the petitions and organize delegations to deliver them to the Nursing Office, the Administration, and other key locations. The delegations were made up of LVN's, NA's, RN's, and ward clerks, all of whom worked together on the wards. It was important to
show that all classifications on the wards were supporting the LVN's and NA's. We asked the strongest LVN's and NA's to begin the presentation of the petitions, and then RN's and ward clerks to add their voices. It took some coaching and practice sessions to get people ready. We asked some of the strongest white RN's to speak up to show management that the historic divide between white RN's and Black and Latino LVN's and NA's was broken, and that they were united.

We were preparing to escalate our collective pressure when management announced that they would return to the old weekend work schedule for the LVN's and NA's. People were ecstatic. After the RN's surprised management, managers didn't want any more surprises. We highlighted the campaign of the LVN's and NA's in the next issue of our hospital-wide union newsletter, with photos of the key LVN and NA leaders and a description of how the campaign was won.

Today, in 2017, there are numerous examples of united, multi-racial actions across the land, at worksites in every corner of the country, and in protests against Trump and his racist and sexist policies and behaviors. The largest were the Women's Marches that took place January 21, 2017, where many workers from many unions participated. While primarily comprised of whites, there were significant numbers of women, and men, of color in a number of marches. Not long after, people of all races and nationalities converged on many of our country's airports to protest Trumps travel ban against Muslims. Union members were also present.

Sanctuary Unions

One of the biggest movements has been the defense of immigrants targeted by Trump for arrest and deportation. Cities and towns, universities and unions, and other organizations declared themselves supporters of sanctuary for targeted immigrants, many of whom were and are legal immigrants - including thousands of young Dreamers, or refugees seeking or in possession of asylum from war-torn home countries.

Here is one of many examples of sanctuary organizations springing up across the country. This one is from the labor movement where many unions are declaring themselves sanctuary unions. Teamster' Joint Council 16 in New York passed a resolution September 12, 2017 to become a sanctuary union. The resolution was passed after a 26 year member of Teamsters Local 813, Eber Vasquez, was deported despite the union's efforts circulating petitions, holding rallies and organizing calls and visits to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to leave Mr. Vasquez alone. The resolution pledged that the union would not cooperate with ICE officials, not collect any information on members that
could be used by ICE against them, hold "Know Your Rights" trainings and share legal services with immigrant members. The Teamsters will seek to bargain language in their contracts to increase protection for immigrant members.

George Miranda, President of Teamsters Joint Council 16, said, "Being a sanctuary union means we will do everything that is in our power to keep our immigrant members safe and keep their families together. The Teamsters have fought against racism since our first days as a union, and this is the next step." Joint Council represents 27 local Teamster unions representing 120,000 workers in New York City, Long Island, the Hudson Valley, and Puerto Rico, comprised of Blacks, whites, Latinos and persons of other races and nationalities.

White people have a special responsibility in all these struggles. We white workers must talk to other white workers about why racism is wrong, and how it harms both people of color, and us, by dehumanizing and dividing us. If we remain silent in the face of white supremacy and male supremacy, we allow injustices to fester, we diminish ourselves in the process, and we weaken the power that a united multi-racial, and multi-gender working-class possesses.
Class and Race in the U.S. Labor Movement: The Case of the Packinghouse Workers

By Harry Targ

Racism and the Labor Movement

Historic connections between organized labor and African Americans have been problematic. During the period of modern labor history, that is, from the formation of the CIO in the 1930s, to its merger with the AFL in 1955, and into the present, labor's struggle against racism has been mixed. On the one hand, as Philip S. Foner describes it, the American labor movement throughout much of its history has practiced racism in its internal organizational policies, in its efforts to organize new workers under the banner of labor, and in regard to its advocacy of political positions. Writes Foner, "from the formation of the first trade unions in the 1790s to the mid-1930s, the policy and practice of organized labor so far as Black workers were concerned were largely those of outright exclusion or segregation."[1]

As a prominent institution in American life, perhaps it is no surprise that organized labor has reflected the currents of racism that run deep throughout American history. However, a close reading of labor history will also uncover significant exceptions to the rule. That is, various trade union confederations, such as the Knights of Labor in the 1880s, and the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) of the 1930s and 1940s, reflected through words, and sometimes in deeds, the position articulated by Robert Baker in 1902, that the organization of workers should encompass "the cause of all humanity, regardless of race, color, or sex." Said Baker: "The more organized labor champions the cause of all labor, unorganized as well as organized, Black as well as White, the greater will be the victories; the more lasting, the more permanent, the more beneficial and the more far-reaching will be its successes."[2]
One of the most striking successes in the struggle against racism in the modern labor movement is a little studied labor union, the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA), which formed as an organizing committee in 1937 and continued to represent packinghouse workers until its merger with the Amalgamated Meat Cutters in 1968. During its 30-years' existence UPWA struggled to organize and fairly represent workers in meat packing plants and collateral industries, fought to overcome racism within the union, and played a major role in building and supporting a burgeoning civil rights movement during the 1950s. In the words of Michael Goldfield: "The racial practices of the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) are especially inspiring."[3]

The UPWA story below is constructed largely from a set of 128 interviews with former members of the union, both from the rank and file and leadership, conducted by Halpern and Horowitz.[4] Three published books add to the literature on this progressive union, helping to create a history of a trade union led by a coalition of political leftists (many members of the Communist Party USA), liberals, and militant Black workers who stood for peace and social justice during difficult times in the United States, particularly after World War II.[5] In addition to the three new books and selections from the Halpern and Horwitz interviews, I will add a few insights gathered by my own interviews of three leaders of the UPWA.[6]

**On Labor History**

The industrial revolution in the period following the Civil War planted the seeds for a transformation of the workforce in the USA, shifting workers from farm to factory. With the emergence of modern manufacturing came increasing patterns of control and exploitation of workers. While many workers were initially skilled crafts persons who enjoyed autonomy and expertise, owners and managers of capital sought to increase control over the processes of work, especially in an effort to speed up production. Profits could be enhanced further by extending the length of work days as much as physical survival would allow. Of course, as capitalism grew and grew, profits also would be increased if wages were reduced as much as possible. Increasing managerial control of the work process, speeding up the pace of work, extending the work day, and cutting wages all stimulated the creation of labor movements to challenge capital's prerogatives.

In the 1880s a confederation of unions that embraced the skilled and unskilled, men and women, Black and White, organized as the Knights
of Labor. While its history was short-lived, it fought for the eight-hour day and introduced into USA labor history a principle of inclusiveness that would flower and grow in the 1930s and beyond. Also in the 1880s, a trade union confederation called the American Federation of Labor formed, bringing together unions representing primarily skilled workers. Under the leadership of its first president, Samuel Gompers, the AFL built an organization that, despite ups and downs, survives to this day. Whereas the Knights practiced inclusiveness, the AFL as it unfolded gave primary support to the organization of skilled workers, and over time tilted toward segregation among affiliated unions, so that Black workers would be represented in totally Black unions. The AFL also accepted unions into the federation that constitutionally prohibited Black workers from membership.

**IWW Rejected Racism Early On**

From 1905 until World War I, a militant union, the Industrial Workers of the World, or Wobblies, organized hard rock miners, textile workers, and others. The IWW rejected political action, championing a syndicalist vision of a new world order, organized around worker control of the economic life of the country. Since the IWW rejected electoral and other more conventional politics, it was not involved in struggles around desegregation and voting rights. However, the IWW championed the inclusiveness of all workers and rejected racism. Given their brand of revolutionary activity, Wobblies were hounded by the state and by vigilantes until, by the 1920s, they were virtually crushed.

After an interregnum of state repression, company unions, and company welfare schemes to keep workers from organizing, the 1930s saw a huge wave of political mobilization and labor organizing that led to the formation of the CIO. Some union leaders, led by John L. Lewis of the miners, withdrew from the AFL to form the CIO, because the former group refused to organize industrial, or so-called non-skilled, workers. Between 1935, at its founding, until 1940, the CIO unionized four million workers. Unions emerged in such industries as automobile manufacturing, electronics, steel, rubber, and meat packing. The great flurry of working-class mobilization was stimulated by the exigencies of the Great Depression, the exclusiveness of the AFL, and the groundbreaking work of communists and other leftists on the shop floors, who had worked for years to plant the seeds of the idea of industrial unionization. By 1955, over thirty percent of the American workforce was in unions. The AFL and CIO, the two major trade-union confederations, had over 100 member unions in them. Then the two confederations united, the legacy of which survives today as the AFL-CIO. This constituted the melding of the old craft unions founded before the 20th century with the newer industrial unions of the 1930s.
Taking Down White Supremacy

Meat Packing

The processing of meat was one of the earliest mass-production industries, developing a detailed division of labor that became a model for most subsequent manufacturing. The corralling, slaughtering, and dressing of meat products for shipment around the country became possible when the refrigerated railroad car was developed. By the turn of the century, meat was processed in huge centers in Chicago, Omaha, and Fort Worth, with smaller operations around Iowa and Minnesota. Meat packing plants were scattered throughout the South and Northeast as well. The meat processing center from the 1880s to the late 1950s was in Chicago. The stockyards, housing the "Big Four" packers (Armour, Cudahy, Swift, and Wilson), employed thousands of workers. Because the work was so dangerous and unpleasant, it was largely carried out by the most marginalized sectors of the working class. First, this included primarily immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. During the great migrations from the South, both before and after World War I, Black workers gravitated to the packing plants, leaving behind their lives as sharecroppers.

Packinghouse workers, experiencing horrible working conditions and insufficient wages, sought to secure union recognition as the Amalgamated Meat Cutters. Two long and bloody strikes (1904 and 1921) were defeated by the companies. During both strikes, many African-American
workers were temporarily employed to break the strikes. Since Black workers suffered from economic circumstances as desperate as those faced by the striking White workers, and since they were excluded generally from unions and consequently the benefits they would gain from unionization, these so-called "scab" workers felt no loyalty to the strikers or the union. In the aftermath of the two defeats, hostility towards Black workers rose, and Black resentment of Whites increased as well. For years, remembrances of racism and scabbing impaired any effort to create a common front against the packers.

The atmosphere and historical circumstances changed in the 1930s. First, the depression hit working people very hard. Twenty-five percent of the work force was unemployed by 1933. Industries were working at 40 percent of capacity. In big cities, vibrant radical movements began to surface. Communists organized Unemployment Councils whose task it was to protect debtors from being evicted from their apartments. Also the Councils organized mass rallies and marches against unemployment and poverty and, on occasion, marched with throngs to city welfare departments demanding relief. Communists and other radicals were particularly active in Black communities.

Scottsboro Boys campaign opened doors for unity

Also, the Communist Party mobilized mass campaigns to save the Scottsboro Boys who had been charged with raping two White women in Alabama, a charge that was clearly untrue. The mood of despair turned to militancy in cities and towns around the United States. Many Black citizens began to participate in the street militancy. These militants included those who were to work in the packinghouses. Inside the packing plants, Black workers had the most difficult and demeaning jobs and worked for lower wages. However, in terms of meat processing, Black workers were situated in strategic locations such as the killing floor. If they chose to stop working, the whole process of slaughtering and dressing meat would grind to a halt. Also in the major packing center, Chicago, the percentage of the work force that was Black was as much as 30 percent by the 1930s.

Both Black and White workers had come to the view that wages and working conditions would only improve when the work force became unionized. Also, Black and White workers both realized that successful unionization would not occur until and unless they combined to support unionization. This recognition, combined with the experience of working with radicals on community action, the clear role of communists in the effort to organize a packinghouse workers union, and the demonstrated work of the left in anti-racism campaigns nationally, all influenced the militant African Americans who assumed significant roles in
organizing the union. White workers, often former union members from the days before World War I, and cognizant of the pragmatic necessity for solidarity, joined the struggle as well.

The first independent local of packinghouse workers was formed in Austin, Minnesota, by some old Wobblies in 1933. In 1934 there were general strikes of workers in various industries in San Francisco, Minneapolis, and Toledo, Ohio. In 1935, John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers, walked out of the national convention of the AFL to form the CIO. Thus was launched the effort to organize unskilled industrial workers all across the industrial landscape. Also, in 1935, Congress passed the Wagner Act, which legalized the effort of workers to form unions. In this multidimensional context, Herb March, a communist organizer who had been working in Kansas City, arrived in Chicago to initiate the drive to organize the packing houses. In 1937, Black and White packinghouse workers with CIO approval formed the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC) to begin the union building process.

The "Big Four" meat-packing companies resisted the initial organizing efforts. Armour, the first target of the PWOC, resisted efforts to get a master agreement that would apply to all plants. Such a master agreement would institutionalize the union in the industry, an outcome that all the packing companies opposed. However, despite efforts of a discredited AFL union (the Amalgamated Meat Cutters) to counter PWOC presence in the Chicago Armour plant, and despite a pre-election visit to Chicago unions by the newly formed House Committee on Un-American Activities, the PWOC won majority support from workers for the new CIO union in 1939. Shortly thereafter, PWOC signed separate agreements for all Armour plants, a clear prelude to the master agreements the union sought. The initial accords, while not involving wage issues, did increase vacations, guaranteed at least 32 hours of work, and improved grievance procedures. Almost two years later, contract negotiations between Armour and the PWOC led to the signing of the industry's first master agreement in September, 1941. The accords included a ten-cent-an-hour wage increase. This was followed by agreements with Cudahy in November and Swift in April 1942. Finally, Wilson was forced to sign an agreement in March, 1943 by the National War Labor Board. Also in 1943, PWOC became the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA). CIO militancy, the tidal wave of organizing throughout American industry, the particular role of White left activists and Black militants, and the emerging production needs brought by the onset of World War II all together stimulated the successes of unionization efforts in the meat packing industry.

While a wage-freeze agreement in support of the war effort was accepted by government, the corporate sector, and the leadership of the labor
movement, PWOC was able to secure a variety of improvements in fringe benefits and working conditions during the war years. While labor, capital, and government all endorsed wage and price controls over the course of the war, government and capital did agree to not challenge the presence of unions in plants across the country (so-called "maintenance of membership" agreements). However, as the war drew to a close, many unions in the CIO made demands for increases in wages. They claimed that prices in fact had increased by 45 percent during the war, while real wage increases were capped at 15 percent. While workers at the home front saved money, both because of much overtime and limits on commodities to purchase, their wages fell further and further behind prices and company profits. When corporations resisted pay hikes right after the war, unions in auto, steel, electronics, railroads, and meatpacking went on strike. The 1946 strike wave was the largest in U.S. history, affecting 4.6 million workers or 14.5 percent of the work force.

The strike in packing began on January 16, 1946. The next day, the Amalgamated Meat Cutters offered to settle in those plants in which they had locals with a 15-cents-an-hour raise. The packers refused, but a government fact-finding board was established to investigate the claims of the competing sides. Further, the Secretary of Labor ordered the meat-packing plants seized under provisions of the War Labor Disputes Act. After UPWA threatened not to return to work under the order, Secretary of Agriculture Clinton Anderson assured the union that he would urge adoption of any recommendations of the fact-finding board that were accepted by the packing companies' unions. By March, a 16-cent hourly wage increase was recommended by the board and accepted by the packers and the unions. The Office of Price Administration granted the packers a raise in meat prices to compensate for the wage increases. Later in 1946, at its national convention, the UPWA elected Ralph Helstein as its new union president with the broad support of a "left-center" coalition in the union. Over the course of the next several years, the
UPWA leadership would tolerate Communist Party members and other radicals in the leadership and rank and file of the union, while walking a careful, straight line in support of mainstream CIO policies that became increasingly anti-communist.

The political stances of each of the ten UPWA districts varied, with radicals particularly popular in Chicago's District One; District Three covering Iowa, Nebraska, and Colorado; and District Six in the Northeast. As the cold war and anti-communism heightened, some districts would pass resolutions supporting Henry Wallace or opposing USA foreign policy, while other districts would refrain from such positions or overtly oppose them. As packer-union struggles deepened in 1947 and 1948; as the coalition of manufacturers, Republicans, and Southern Democrats moved more actively against labor; and as the AMC sought to gain control of locals in packing plants, conflict between the left-center coalition and right-wingers known as the "CIO Caucus" heated up dramatically in the UPWA. Many of the conflicts involved issues revolving around the cold war and anti-communism, and different conflicts emerged in the late 1940s around issues of racism in UPWA locals and how active UPWA should be in the struggle against racism in communities and the nation at large.

**Anti-Communism and Racism**

In 1948 UPWA again engaged in a general strike against the "Big Four" resistance to wage increases. Because the USA cold war policy was developing, along with anti-communist zeal and the opposition to the campaign of progressive presidential candidate Henry Wallace, the level of support to strikers was not as strong. After nine weeks in which the meat packers held firm, injunctions were issued, police hounded strikers in various locales, and nonunion labor replaced striking workers, the UPWA called off the strike and returned to work. Six weeks after the strike, the UPWA met for the most contentious convention during the entire life of the organization.

In an intensely fought election for union leadership, president Helstein was reelected after a challenge from the CIO Caucus. The Caucus warmly endorsed the Truman presidential candidacy and his cold war foreign policy, favored purging the left from the union leadership, and generally took an anti-communist stance. Helstein's reelection allowed for the continuation of a left-center coalition that would more or less remain intact until the union merged with the AMC in 1968. This left-center leadership would remain critical of USA foreign policy, would endorse trade union militancy, would encourage rank-and-file political activity in communities, and would take a pro-active stance against racism in the union and the nation. Subsequent to the 1948 convention, and through-
out the 1950s, UPWA would investigate racism in the union, establish Anti-Discrimination Committees at the national level of the union and in each local, would run workshops on racism in American life, and would fund and actively work for the burgeoning civil rights movement. UPWA would become a significant political force in those communities where it was strong (such as Chicago) and nationally.

To a considerable degree the transformation of the USA political economy was shaped by technological change. In the meatpacking industry, automation decreased the number of workers needed to produce the meat product and increased the possibility that production could be decentralized in hundreds of small-sized processing plants (where work forces are smaller, less organized, and more vulnerable). While UPWA was growing as a progressive political force in the USA in the 1950s, technological change was destroying the material base of the work force in the industry itself. Ultimately, with declining workers in the industry, declining UPWA membership, and continuing competition between UPWA and the old AMC, the leadership realized that it must consolidate to maintain any presence in the meatpacking industry. Consequently, in 1968 AMC and UPWA agreed to a merger. In 1978, the enlarged AMC merged with retail clerks into the current United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), a much larger union with a meat packing division.

**Why Study the UPWA?**

Even though the old UPWA no longer exists, its story is one of class struggle and a sustained struggle against racism. It is important to revisit this history to better understand the positive role of the labor movement in these struggles as well as the negatives and, perhaps, to learn lessons that might still have value to the role of a revitalized labor movement today.

Roger Horowitz writes that the UPWA was a union engaged in "social unionism". By this he means a union engaged in activities addressing the needs of members as workers, as citizens of local communities, and finally as part of the working class in general. Most trade unions in the 20th century have practiced "business unionism" engaging in bargaining and negotiation on behalf of workers' shop floor interests, but not engaging in broader political struggles. Concretely, this has meant that many trade unions have not engaged in the struggle against racism in their unions, communities, or society at large. As has been suggested above, the history of efforts to organize in meatpacking plants was fraught with defeat and bitter conflicts between White and Black workers. Strikes in 1904 and 1921 were lost because the "Big Four" packers were able to use racism to divide packinghouse workers. Armed with this knowledge, Black and White militants struggled to overcome racism as they built
the PWOC and later the UPWA. The 1943 constitution of the new union forbade racism in the union. Generally, from the outset of the CIO mass movement, the UPWA stood for racial equality in the union, but, as with many other unions, the UPWA did not actively engage in the fight against racism.

The failed 1948 strike against the “Big Four” packers threatened to destroy the union. Large numbers of members were forced out, because they were fired by the packers. Factionalism surfaced, and during the 1948 convention an anti-communist slate of candidates ran for the various union offices. While the challenge to the incumbent leadership was defeated, president Helstein used the weakened condition of the union to launch an active anti-discrimination program that included efforts to purge union locals of racism and to commit each and every packinghouse local to the struggle for racial justice.

From the late 1940s to the 1968 merger with the AMC, the UPWA distinguished itself in the struggle against racism and engaged in civil rights mass actions, even before the rise of the movement against segregation in Montgomery, Alabama. The movement in support of civil rights was driven by rank-and-file initiatives from militant Black and White workers in various locals of UPWA, and by the leadership of the international union itself. Not all members of the 100,000-member union embraced the civil rights agenda and, in fact, some workers from the South and Southwest particularly opposed the unions’ commitment to racial justice and integration of union and society. Over time, these elements were forced out of leadership positions in the union, leaving union members either civil rights activists or passive supporters of union efforts.

An early spark to the building of a commitment to the struggle against racism occurred when president Helstein hired sociologist John Hope to study race relations in the union. Hope found high levels of Black participation in union locals (for example Blacks were stewards in 83 percent of UPWA locals and 73 percent of locals had Blacks on executive
boards). However, there were significant reflections of racism among UPWA members (30 percent objected to working with Blacks and 90 percent of southern Whites favored segregated eating facilities). Also, Blacks had a presence in significantly fewer job categories than Whites. As a result of Hope's findings, the UPWA at its 1950 convention initiated a broad-based program to expunge racism from union locals. An anti-discrimination department was established in the union at large, and anti-discrimination committees were established in every union local in the organization. These were not just symbolic gestures, but rather structures by which racism would be eliminated from the life of the union.

Union contracts were to prohibit any discrimination by companies, not only for employees, but for job applicants as well. Anti-discrimination conferences were held in the union on a periodic basis, and networking also occurred through national conventions and conferences of union members working for the same employers. Then UPWA strongly encouraged members to be active in the struggle against racism in their communities. Horowitz summarizes the full range of UPWA activities, from shop floor to political arena. In addition to integrating "lily-White departments" on the shop floor and prohibiting discriminatory hiring practices, especially against Black women, "locals attacked discriminatory practices in their communities, primarily restrictions on Black access to bars, restaurants, and public facilities, as well as employment restrictions by local businesses. Finally, packinghouse workers consciously worked with and influenced community-based organizations, especially the NAACP."[7]

**Black, White Unite and Fight**

Several points can be made about the UPWA commitment to civil rights. First, as suggested above, the struggle to overcome the long history of racial strife in packinghouses was central to the organizing of the PWOC and UPWA since the 1930s. Second, Black militants and White radicals played a fundamental role in the creation of an integrated union. Third, a high percentage of the workforces in packing centers were Black workers, particularly in the industry's central facility in Chicago, where some 10,000 workers were employed. Fourth, UPWA constructed a union structure that gave real power to rank-and-file workers. Each department had at least one shop steward to represent the workers; and stewards, by virtue of their presence in the various job sites, were accountable to members. Also, many locals engaged in militant job actions when foremen tried to speedup production beyond what was called for in the contract, when particular workers experienced discrimination, or when other actions by management were seen as oppressive and discriminatory. Some locals were more militant than others, but the bottom-up structure of the union encouraged participation.
Fifth, president Helstein was fully committed to civil rights, as were most of the district directors representing regions around the country. Also, since the national leadership of the union refused to purge radicals from its ranks, UPWA had in its employ and as officers in union locals many radicals, including members of the Communist Party of the USA. Since they were among the strongest supporters of rank-and-file union militancy and civil rights, their presence reinforced other factors that stimulated UPWA's activism. Sixth, the most militant members of UPWA worked in plants in Chicago. Since Chicago alone had 10,000 UPWA members, and since a higher percentage of Blacks and leftists were in Chicago locals, that city's packinghouse workers set the tone for the organization.

**Fight for open housing**

As a result of these factors, therefore, the UPWA, or at least many locals, participated in active campaigns against racism in plants. They also fought for integrated neighborhoods. When Blacks moved into a public housing development in Trumball Park in the early 1950s, race riots occurred. UPWA members organized campaigns to force the city housing authority to open up public housing to Blacks and to protect them from racist responses. When hotels where UPWA meetings were to occur barred Blacks from housing, the union pulled out of the hotels in protest. When the Swift plant discriminated against hiring Black women, the Swift local and the Chicago district launched a public campaign and pressured government to end such practices.

Perhaps most importantly, UPWA was the first union to support the efforts of the newly formed Southern Christian Leadership Conference led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. UPWA sent a check for $11,000 to SCLC during the Montgomery bus boycott, and leaders of the union marched with Dr. King from Selma to Montgomery; in Jackson, Mississippi; and participated in other mass actions. When Dr. King brought SCLC to Chicago to campaign for fair housing, the leadership of UPWA joined in. Horowitz argues that "UPWA's antidiscrimination program represented a significant expansion of social unionism" or activism beyond the shop floor. "Its aggressive policies contrasted starkly with the laxity of mainstream CIO organizations and represented an "opportunity found and kept" by its Black members in a manner paralleled, to a far lesser extent, only by industrial unions expelled from the CIO."[8]

**Conclusion**

A reading of the volumes by Halpern and Horowitz, and the numerous interviews with former packinghouse workers that provide the data for
their work, suggests that there is much of historic and contemporary significance in the UPWA.

First, the UPWA, to a degree not achieved by many other unions in the CIO and AFL-CIO, created an integrated union in terms of leadership, policy making, shopfloor protection of workers, and political program.

Second, political radicals and Black militants provided impetus for the construction of an integrated, class-conscious trade union in the 1930s and 1940s.

Third, the UPWA engaged in civil rights activities in various communities in the North and South, several years before the formation of the SCLC. Taken in conjunction with the efforts of other leftwing unions, it is fair to say that progressive sectors of the labor movement served as a major stimulus, inspiration, and resource for the rise of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. While some sectors of the labor movement historically have impeded the path to racial justice, it is also important to point out that other sectors of the labor movement have played a critical role in whatever advances toward racial justice have been achieved.

Fourth, the history of class struggle and the struggle for racial justice in fact go hand in hand. The working class, by virtue of its role in providing labor power for the construction of society, and as the class that experiences the expropriation of the value that it produces, is a leading force in movements of social change. African-American or woman workers, who often belong to super exploited classes within the working class, constitute sectors that have the possibility of seeing most clearly the exploitative nature of society.

Fifth, UPWA was to a considerable degree a rank-and-file trade union. It practiced union democracy. Shop stewards, committees, job actions in the production process, and picketing for civil rights all are expressions of the will of the membership. All of these activities were institutionalized and encouraged in the life of the union.

Finally, the UPWA story is the story of the success of the old leftwing slogan that still is relevant today: "Black, White, Unite and Fight!"

Notes:


[8] Ibid., p. 108.
Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights and Labor Alliance

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Rev. Ralph Abernathy lead a march by sanitation workers in Memphis, March 28, 1968. Photo by Sam Melhorn / AP.

By Harry Targ

Dr. Martin Luther King arrived in Memphis on March 18, 1968 to support the sanitation workers of that city who had been on strike for five weeks. These workers had many grievances that forced them to protest.

Garbage workers had no access to bathroom or shower facilities. They were not issued any protective clothing for their job. There were no eating areas separate from garbage. Also sanitation workers had no pension or retirement program and no entitlement to workers compensation. Their wages were very low.
Shortly before the strike began two workers died on the job and the families of the deceased received only $500 in compensation from the city. Finally, after Black workers were sent home for the day because of bad weather and received only two hours pay they walked off the job.

On March 28, 10 days after King arrived, violence disrupted a march led by him. He left the city but returned on April 4 to lead a second march. On that fateful April day, King told Jerry Wurf, president of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees or AFSCME: "What is going on here in Memphis is important to every poor working man, black or white, in the South." That evening Martin Luther King was killed by a sniper's bullet.

It was logical for King to be in Memphis to support garbage workers. Despite a sometimes rocky relationship between the civil rights and labor movements, King knew that black and white workers' struggles for economic justice were indivisible; that civil rights could not be realized in a society where great differences in wealth and income existed, and where life expectancies, educational opportunities, and the quality of jobs varied by class, by race, and by gender.

The more progressive and far-sighted leaders and rank-and-file union members in the AFL-CIO knew it too. At the time of King's death working people were coming together to struggle for positive social change around the banner of the Poor People’s Campaign.

Dr. King's thinking on the need for an alliance between the civil rights and labor movements was expressed many times. As far back as 1957 at a convention of the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) he asserted that "organized labor can be one of the most powerful instruments in putting an end to discrimination and segregation."

During an organizing effort of the Hospital Workers Local 1199 in the fall of 1964, King was a featured speaker at a fundraising rally. He said of the 1199 struggle,

Your great organizing crusade to win union and human rights for New Jersey hospital workers is part and parcel of the struggle we are conducting in the Deep South. I want to congratulate your union for charting a road for all labor to follow-dedication to the cause of the underpaid and exploited workers in our nation.

Shortly after, Dr. King left a picket line of Newark hospital workers on strike to fly to Oslo, Norway, to receive the Nobel Prize.

Upon his return from Norway, King returned to the picket line; this time in support of Black women workers of the Chemical Workers union at the Scripto Pen Plant in Atlanta. He said there: "Along with the struggle to
desegregate, we must engage in the struggle for better jobs. The same system that exploits the Negro exploits the poor white...

At the Negro American Labor Council convention of June, 1965, King called for a new movement to achieve "a better distribution of wealth within this country for all of God's children." In February, 1966, King spoke to Chicago labor leaders during his crusade for the end to racism and poverty in that city. He called on the labor movement which had provided techniques and methods, and financial support crucial to civil rights victories to join in the war on poverty and slums in Chicago.

Such an effort in Chicago, he said, would show that a Black and labor alliance could be of relevance to solving nationwide problems of unemployment, poverty, and automation.

One year before his death, King spoke at another meeting of Hospital Workers 1199. He said a closer alliance was needed between labor and civil rights activists to achieve the "more difficult" task of economic equality. The civil rights movement and its allies were moving into a new phase to achieve economic justice, he announced. This would be a more formidable struggle since it was in his words "much more difficult to eradicate a slum than it is to integrate a bus."

In early 1968, Dr. King incorporated his opposition to the Vietnam War with his commitment to economic justice. He called for an end to the War and the utilization of societal resources to eliminate poverty. To those ends the Poor People's Campaign was launched. It demanded jobs, a guaranteed annual income for those who could not find work, the construction of 6 million new homes, support for employment in rural areas, new schools to train jobless youth for skilled work, and other measures to end poverty.

While preparing the Poor People's Campaign, King got a call to go to Memphis. Before leaving he sent a message to be read at the seventh annual convention of the Negro American Labor Council. He wrote that the Council represented "the embodiment of two great traditions in our nation's history: the best tradition of the organized labor movement and the finest tradition of the Negro Freedom Movement." He urged a black-labor alliance to unite the Black masses and organized labor in a campaign to help solve the "deteriorating economic and social conditions of the Negro community... heavily burdened with both unemployment and underemployment, flagrant job discrimination, and the injustice of unequal education opportunity."

Forty years later the social and economic injustices of which Dr. King spoke continue. But so does his vision of a working class movement
united in struggle to survive, a movement of Blacks, whites, and Latinos, men and women, young and old, and organized and unorganized workers.

The times have changed but the importance of Dr. King's political vision remains.

A version of this article was first published on January 13, 2009, at Diary of a Heartland Radical.

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A Letter to White Southern Women

By Anne Braden

I am writing to you, my white sisters throughout the South, to ask you to join with me and others in a campaign to free Thomas Wansley.

Thomas Wansley is a young man of 26. He is an inmate in the Virginia state prison. More than one-third of his life has been spent behind bars, since he was arrested at the age of 16. Thomas Wansley is Black. Whether we like it or not, he is in prison because of us.

He is a victim of the myth of white Southern womanhood. We didn't personally put him in prison—just as we did not create the myth. But by remaining silent as Black men died or went to prison because of it, we have helped to fasten its shackles on ourselves.

Rape and Southern Myth

For Wansley is imprisoned on a charge of rape. Rape—the cry that for the last 100 years in the South has undergirded the myths about women and made it impossible for us to fight for our own freedom. Rape-traditionally a crime in the South if the accused was Black and the alleged victim was white, but never a crime if the victim was black and the attacker was white, and scarcely noticed if both parties were white, or both Black.

Wansley was arrested in 1961 in Lynchburg, Va., at the height of the sit-in movement. Lynchburg was in turmoil as young black students, often accompanied by whites, sat at the lunch counters—demanding not just a cup of coffee, but dignity and freedom.
In the midst of this, a 57-year-old white woman said she was raped. Wansley was arrested after a massive manhunt in the black community. The woman was not able to identify him, but it didn't matter. He was convicted on two counts, and given two death sentences.

**Reconviction**

By 1964, a protest movement had been built around the Wansley case, and his convictions were reversed. But in a new trial he was convicted again and this time given life. Meantime the protests died down, the world forgot, and Wansley remained in prison. Now there is a new movement demanding his freedom. We, the white women of the South, belong in this fight.

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Reverend Barber and the Poor People's Campaign Visit Milwaukee

By Harry Targ

Reverend William Barber and his co-workers in the emerging Poor People's Campaign visited Milwaukee, Wisconsin on August 28, at the Saint Gabriel’s Church of God. After inspirational singing, introductory remarks by Rev. Liz Theoharis, head of the Kairos Center in New York City, and testimonials representing Black Lives Matter in Minneapolis, and the Fight for Fifteen, and Veterans for Peace in Milwaukee, Reverend Barber gave an uplifting speech announcing the forthcoming Poor People's Campaign.

Moral Mondays Campaigns

Reverend Barber was instrumental in working with North Carolinians for over a decade to build a multi-national, multi-generational, multi-issue movement to oppose racist, exploitative, and sexist policies that became law when reactionary forces gained control of the government of North Carolina in 2012. He and his co-workers also helped launch Moral Mondays movements, modeled after the North Carolina struggle, in several other states in the South, the Midwest, and the Southwest. In Indiana, that state's Moral Mondays movement adopted an agenda to advocate for policies endorsed in North Carolina. These included:

- Securing pro-labor, anti-poverty policies that insure economic sustainability;
- Providing well-funded, quality public education for all;
Standing up for the health of every Hoosier by promoting health care access and environmental justice across all the state's communities;

Addressing the continuing inequalities in the criminal justice system and ensuring equality under the law for every person, regardless of race, class, creed, documentation or sexual preference;

Protecting and expanding voting rights for people of color, women, immigrants, the elderly and students to safeguard fair democratic representation.

In his Saturday, September 20, 2014 speech to the 400 people rallying at the Indiana State House, Rev. Barber said he was told by his son, an environmental physicist, that if he ever got lost in mountainous territory he should walk to higher ground. This is necessary, Barber reported, because in the lowlands snakes congregate but if one climbs above the "snake line" snakes, being cold-blooded creatures, cannot live. Referring to the snake line metaphor Barber declared:

There are some snakes out here. There are some low-down policies out here. There's some poison out here. Going backwards on voting rights, that's below the snake line. Going backwards on civil rights, that's below the snake line. Hurting people just because they have a different sexuality, that's below the snake line. Stomping on poor people just because you've got power, that's below the snake line. Denying health care to the sick and keeping children from opportunity, that's below the snake line.

Rev. Barber urged the newly formed Indiana Moral Mondays coalition to "go to higher ground," where poverty is ended, everybody can vote, children can be educated, the sick can be healed, and everyone is respected. Moral Mondays campaigns in various states, including Indiana, achieved some successes. They mobilized multiple constituencies: white and black, gay and straight, men and women, young and old, religious and non-believers to fight back against emerging reactionary Tea Party/Koch Brothers policies and politicians. In his home state of North Carolina, Moral Mondays campaigners were able to oust the reactionary governor in the 2016 election. And Reverend Barber, himself, has gone on to become a national spokesperson for progressive policies.

Theory and Practice of Moral Mondays

Barber has grounded the Moral Mondays movement in history and theory. As to the former, Barber has talked about three reconstructions in United States history. The first, after the US Civil War, was based upon a vision and practice of Black/white unity and the struggle for democracy and equality in the nation. It was crushed by the resurgence of the white
supremacist planter class in the South, their political collaborators in
the North, and the institutionalization of racial segregation. The second
reconstruction began metaphorically with Brown vs. Board of Education
in 1954 and spanned the decade of successful struggle against segrega-
tion in the South in the 1960s. It too was sidetracked, this time by can-
didate and President Nixon's so-called "southern strategy" to bring white
supremacy back to the South and the nation. We are living through the
third reconstruction, Reverend Barber suggested, signified by the two
elections of Barack Obama president and the emergence of social move-
ments to finally create racial and economic justice in America.

Today, 2017, he said, the struggle has reached a pivotal stage, with an
ethical crisis so deep that a national moral campaign based on fusion
politics is needed. Fusion politics, the theoretical underpinning of Moral
Mondays, argues that all the issues and policies that have inspired ac-
tion against the exploitation of workers, institutionalized racism (Black,
Brown, Muslim, anti-Semitic, and anti-immigrant), patriarchy, homophobia,
environmental devastation, and war are interconnected. The struggle against
one is and has to include the struggle against all the others. Fusion is a con-
ceptual tool that requires thinking about the interconnection of issues and a
mobilizing tool that sees the interconnections of social movements.

The Twenty-First Century Poor People's Campaign

The twenty-first century Poor People's Campaign, around which Barber
and his co-workers are organizing, takes the Moral Mondays campaign
to another level. Moral Mondays was about state level issues. It concen-
trated on domestic policy. It awakened progressives to the critical idea
that most of the anti-people policies of the last decade supported by re-
actionary billionaires like the Koch Brothers, were instituted at the state
level. Therefore Moral Mondays began, appropriately, as a series of state
campaigns. Now, Barber suggests, there is a need to take the struggle
to the entire nation. Local, national, and international issues are con-
nected. Anti-racist, antisexist, anti-worker policies at the state level are
connected to similar developments at the national level. AND, all these
issues have global dimensions as well.

This new necessity led naturally to reflections on the last project initi-
ated by Dr. Martin Luther King in the spring of 1968, a Poor People's
Campaign. This was a national campaign organized by and for the poor
in America, today representing about 40 percent of the population. The
specific program was to organize a march/rally/occupation of Washing-
ton D.C. to demand an end to poverty in America. Dr. King, in his famous
speech at Riverside Church one year earlier articulated the fundamental
interconnections, the fusion, of three primary structural problems in
America: poverty, racism, and militarism.
Sixty years later, Reverend Barber is calling on progressives to join in a common struggle, led by the poor and oppressed, to challenge these three evils. Rev. Barber, therefore, has been traveling across the United States beginning a conversation about and training for a 2018 Poor People's Campaign. He is calling upon 1,000 people from each of 25 states and the District of Columbia to commit to train for and engage in civil disobedience to bring the triad of evils to the attention of the public. And he emphasizes repeatedly that the campaign is not just about changing attitudes but changing institutions and policies.

The optics of the rally at the Saint Gabriel's Church of God reflected the movement Reverend Barber is building. Attendees were Black and white, young and old, women and men, and religious and secular. As to the latter point Barber cited scripture for the religious and the better parts of the US constitution for the secularists.

Finally, Reverend Barber's speech on August 28 emphasized that there cannot be freedom without equality. There cannot be human rights without access to health care and education. And there cannot be economic justice at home while there is militarism overseas.

The twenty-first century Poor People's Campaign grounds today's struggles in history; links democracy to economic change; connects social and economic justice; and connects a humane future in the United States to an end to war and the preparation for war. As Barber has written:

The fights for racial and economic equality are as inseparable today as they were half a century ago. Make no mistake about it: We face a crisis in America. The twin forces of white supremacy and unchecked corporate greed have gained newfound power and influence, both in statehouses across this nation and at the highest levels of our federal government. Sixty-four million Americans make less than a living wage, while millions of children and adults continue to live without access to healthcare, even as extremist Republicans in Congress threaten to strip access away from millions more. As our social fabric is stretched thin by widening income inequality, politicians criminalize the poor, fan the flames of racism and xenophobia to divide the poor, and steal from the poor to give tax breaks to our richest neighbors and budget increases to a bloated military.

**Black/White Unity in Beaver County**

*By Tina Shannon*

From the beginning, our Progressive Democrats of America chapter in Western Pennsylvania’s 12th CD was determined to work with organized labor and the civil rights community. We started out small. We knew we didn’t have a lot of power on our own. So we turned to our ally who had the most obvious power and wherewithal, organized labor. The easiest and most sensible way to do that was to just consistently participate in labor’s GOTV work, rallies, and marches.

As we did that, we got to know the labor progressives. As we provided political support and people power for them, the labor progressives became more powerful within our labor council. As a result, the Labor Council’s Community Services Committee’s annual fund-raising banquet became more political, with an eye toward bringing message to the community. Other community leaders were invited in, including me representing PDA and also representation from the NAACP. We decided the most important message we could promote in Beaver County was Black/white unity.

Our first three speakers were William Lucy; a labor leader who was instrumental in protesting apartheid and developing the divestiture movement that ultimately helped to defeat it. He was followed by Representative John Conyers, author of HR 676, and finally Rev. William Barber, Pres. of the NC NAACP and leader of the Moral Monday Coalition.

It’s important part of our ongoing strategy was to draw as many people as possible, from labor locals and community activists groups, into the planning process for each banquet. That’s an important part of the way we spread our message and, importantly, the way we generate attendance. At each event we have seen 300 to 400 people in attendance.
Most union locals would buy one or more tables, the standard practice for labor sponsored banquets, and encourage officers and members to fill the seats. PDA members had to be organized with concentrated outreach and they had to pay for their seats.

**Barber’s Critical Role**

Rev. William Barber's appearance was a turning point for the Labor Council's Community Services Committee and the progressives supporting it. We wanted Barber to speak because we realized he had successfully built the same type of coalition we were aiming for. While exploring the possibility of Barber speaking at the Labor Council Human Rights Banquet, we organized a caravan of 7 labor/community activists to participate in Rev. Barber's Moral March at the NC Capitol in Raleigh. All of us who went were profoundly affected.

We came back to Beaver County ready to do the hard work of organizing the next Human Rights Banquet and of persuading Rev. Barber to be guest speaker. That Human Rights Banquet was the largest with over 400 people attending. Barber’s speech was both lyrical and profound. It moved the audience and it electrified the community.

Barber urged us to take up the Moral Monday campaign. So, we then realized that all along we have been forming a Moral Monday Coalition.

Since then, we've invited more progressive groups to join the coalition. We usually meet monthly, but meet weekly in the months before a public event.

After Trump’s election, the Moral Monday Coalition organized an Un-Inaugural Rally at the Beaver County Courthouse. It was the biggest rally at the Courthouse in many decades. After that success we decided to focus on single-payer healthcare. Moral Monday decided to sponsor training for door-to-door canvassing & legislative visits for our new Healthcare4AllPA group (which was incubated by our PDA chapter). We had attendance of 30-some folks and have gone on to canvas one of our Democratic river towns here in Beaver County.

The problem our Moral Monday chapter has is the same problem most left organizations have; a lack of infrastructure & institutional support causes the organization to rely too heavily on individual personalities. When those individuals become overloaded or falter due to personal situations, the organization suffers. Another related problem is a lack of organizing skills. We have far more activists than organizers. Organizing involves specific tasks and a particular orientation to the work that is different from personal action around an issue.
Another dynamic we have to be careful about, as we grow and invite more of organizations in, is to maintain the understanding that labor and the NAACP are central to the coalition. I like to imagine that we are connected to our actual local community with a rubber band. We can stretch that rubber band a bit, but if we go too far we'll snap it and be out there by ourselves.

It's an act of mindfulness to occupy the Moral Monday space and an honor to be called upon to do so.
"At a challenging moment in our history, let us remind ourselves that we the hundreds of thousands, the millions of women, trans-people, men and youth who are here at the Women’s March, we represent the powerful forces of change that are determined to prevent the dying cultures of racism, hetero-patriarchy from rising again.

"We recognize that we are collective agents of history and that history cannot be deleted like web pages. We know that we gather this afternoon on indigenous land and we follow the lead of the first peoples who despite massive genocidal violence have never relinquished the struggle for land, water, culture, their people. We especially salute today the Standing Rock Sioux.

"The freedom struggles of black people that have shaped the very nature of this country’s history cannot be deleted with the sweep of a hand. We cannot be made to forget that black lives do matter. This is a country
anchored in slavery and colonialism, which means for better or for worse the very history of the United States is a history of immigration and enslavement. Spreading xenophobia, hurling accusations of murder and rape and building walls will not erase history.

"No human being is illegal.

"The struggle to save the planet, to stop climate change, to guarantee the accessibility of water from the lands of the Standing Rock Sioux, to Flint, Michigan, to the West Bank and Gaza. The struggle to save our flora and fauna, to save the air-this is ground zero of the struggle for social justice.

"This is a women's march and this women's march represents the promise of feminism as against the pernicious powers of state violence. And inclusive and intersectional feminism that calls upon all of us to join the resistance to racism, to Islamophobia, to anti-Semitism, to misogyny, to capitalist exploitation.

"Yes, we salute the fight for 15. We dedicate ourselves to collective resistance. Resistance to the billionaire mortgage profiteers and gentrifiers. Resistance to the health care privateers. Resistance to the attacks on Muslims and on immigrants. Resistance to attacks on disabled people. Resistance to state violence perpetrated by the police and through the prison industrial complex. Resistance to institutional and intimate gender violence, especially against trans women of color.

"Women's rights are human rights all over the planet and that is why we say freedom and justice for Palestine. We celebrate the impending release of Chelsea Manning. And Oscar López Rivera. But we also say free Leonard Peltier. Free Mumia Abu-Jamal. Free Assata Shakur.

"Over the next months and years we will be called upon to intensify our demands for social justice to become more militant in our defense of vulnerable populations. Those who still defend the supremacy of white male hetero-patriarchy had better watch out. "The next 1,459 days of the Trump administration will be 1,459 days of resistance: Resistance on the ground, resistance in the classrooms, resistance on the job, resistance in our art and in our music.

"This is just the beginning and in the words of the inimitable Ella Baker, 'We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.' Thank you."
Standing Rock: Challenging Colonialism and Reclaiming the Future

By Judi Jennings, Sonja Farah-de Vries, and Jardana Peacock

In November 2016, three Louisville-based women of various ages and backgrounds, traveled to Standing Rock to support the water protectors at Camp Oceti Sakowin. Most white Americans still know little or nothing about the place or the people of Standing Rock. This is not an accident. It is the result of colonialism, hundreds of years of making Native American people, history, culture, and sovereign rights invisible, along with the human and environmental injustice done to them.

Colonialism is rooted in the unlawful taking of Native lands. As explained on the Standing Rock website, the Great Sioux Reservation bordered by the east bank of the Missouri River in what is now North Dakota was established by the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie. Twenty-one years later, the US Congress reduced Sioux lands and divided the great reservation...
into six separate ones. Standing Rock Reservation, bordered by the Cannonball River, is one.

Oceti Sakowin are the words designating Sioux people in their own language. As explained on the camp website, Oceti Sakowin is a unified encampment of Water Protectors dedicated to protecting our land and water against the Dakota Access Pipeline. We value assuring the welfare of all people by honoring human rights, treaties, agreements, and cultures. Our goal is to peacefully and prayerfully defend our rights, and rise up as one to sustain Mother Earth and her inhabitants. In the fall of 2016, the elders and young leaders of the camp began calling for people who care about justice and Mother Earth to stand with them and challenge colonialism.

Judi Jennings and Sonja Farah-de Vries joined a self-organized 18-person multi-racial, intergenerational national delegation to make the trip. Members of the delegation converged at the camp during the first week in November. As state-based violence against the water protectors escalated, the camp leaders made a special call for healers. Jardana Peacock, a spiritual activist, traveled to Standing Rock in late November with a caravan of healers.

Native peoples and Appalachians United

During Jennings and Farah-de Vries’ stay at the camp, the days were still warm. The tipis, tents, and yurts clustered near the Cannonball River were surrounded by the autumn beauty of the plains. The weekend they arrived hundreds and hundreds of people came to stand with the protectors. Chiefs and elders came on horseback. Young natives ran all the way from Arizona. Veterans of many racial identities, ages and backgrounds came to protect the Water Protectors.

Jennings is a native Kentuckian with deep roots in Appalachia. At Standing Rock, she saw the links between the colonization of Native people and Appalachians. There, a US corporation threatened Indian sacred land and water. In eastern Kentucky, US and British coal companies took mineral rights through exploitative “broad forms deeds.” The US government, service providers, educators and mainstream media devalue Native and Appalachian people and demean and disrupt their cultures. Like the Sioux, Appalachians resist by telling true stories and forming organizations like Appalshop, media arts and education center, in the coalfields of Kentucky.

Farah-de Vries is a photographer, poet, and social justice activist who has participated in delegations and actions in Palestine and Cuba. At Standing Rock, she connected to the consistent messages about the im-
portance of joining together against our nation’s brutal profit driven system. She also saw that the camp was about intentional ways of living together and practicing human values. Surrounded by natural beauty and connected through Sioux prayers and rituals, she discerned how “we have to be patient with ourselves and each other and be guided by love.”

Jennings and Farah-de Vries experienced how the resistance at Standing Rock is not only about stopping a pipeline but also about deeply-held values of human connection to each other and to the earth. Jennings observed that, unlike her previous experiences of resistance and protest, being at Standing Rock asked more of activists, not only to be for or against something, but to act differently, to live in the world differently. Farah-de Vries knows being guided by love is easier said than done, but saw it in practice at Standing Rock, not perfect but with full intentionality.

When Jardana Peacock arrived at Standing Rock in late November, winter was setting in. The sacred fire in the center of the camp was a source of both physical and spiritual warmth. Peacock felt a strong spirit of interconnectedness around the fire and learned how everything can be a prayer: silence, a dance, song or poem. She saw how, throughout the camp, prayer was central to every action, intention and thought. She recalls that the elders told us, “Prayer is for blessings to come.”

At Standing Rock, Peacock witnessed how prayers came before every action and often were embedded into the protests. She was struck by how little prayer as a tactic and foundation of the #NoDAPL protests was covered in the media. Because, in reality, prayers were keys to every action. In fact, prayer as practice meeting action is what sets apart this movement from so many others we have seen and participated in our lifetime.

All three of us know that the lands and waters at Standing Rock and across the globe need protecting now more than ever. Being at Camp Oceti Sakowin, we also know that intentional ways of how we live our lives, connect to each other, and protect the earth must be at the core of our activism. Farah-de Vries remembers, “Black Lives Matter, Standing Rock, and all the other brave, visionary grassroots movements leading the way, and all of us can do our part.” Jennings quotes the aspirational and inspiring US Department of Arts & Culture:

“The old ways of organizing won’t cut it anymore. Tradition, creativity, culture, and spirit must be braided into the ties that bind us in love and respect.”

Peacock sees that “Prayer and silence, these are practices that offer us the sustenance to show up for our work of changemaking. Without sus-
tenance, how will we be able to show up at all? Or rather, what version of me/us will show up?” She reminds us, “we have allowed indigenous people to be invisible. We must recognize that genocide and slavery are the basis of the systems we have now.”

And so, I/we...
Practice, to be able to show up for liberation.
Love, to connect deeper to a web of healing.
Rest, to revitalize.
Connect with the natural world,
so that we can listen to the sound of spirit.
Pray, for blessings to come.”

Judi Jennings is a lifelong Kentuckian who firmly believes we have better days ahead. She worked at Appalshop, served as founding director of the University of Louisville Women’s Center, and directed the Kentucky Foundation for Women from 1998 through 2014. Now semi-retired, she directs the Special Project, focusing on increasing supports for families affected by incarceration in Jefferson County, Kentucky.

Sonja Farah-de Vries is a Louisville Kentucky film maker, photographer, poet and activist. She is the daughter of the leftist activist Henry F. Wallace, and the sister of Carla Wallace, a co-founder of the national Standing Up for Social Justice, and of Naomi Wallace, a playwright. Sonja has participated in social justice delegations to Palestine and Cuba.

Jardana Peacock is a writer, spiritual activist, founder and educator at the Liberatory Leadership Project, which works to bring spiritual, mindful and holistic practice more centrally into justice movements. She is the author and curator of the “Practice Showing Up Guidebook.”
A Demand for Sanctuary

By Hilary Goodfriend

The word "sanctuary" has taken center stage in recent weeks for the first time in several decades. Across the country, churches, restaurants, campuses, and cities are declaring themselves sanctuary sites in the face of escalating threats from the Trump administration against undocumented immigrants and others vulnerable to deportation.

These actions harken back to the 1980s, when a religious-based Sanctuary Movement sought to shelter refugees fleeing the violence of US-backed wars against leftist insurgencies and governments in Central America.

In response to the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and the subsequent victory of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) against the US-backed Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua in 1979, the United States scaled up its support for anti-communist regimes in the region. Under the Carter and Reagan administrations, the United States sent military advisors and hundreds of millions of dollars in weapons and military aid to the right-wing dictatorships in Guatemala and El Salvador.

There, US-trained armies responded to leftist insurgencies with unspeakable campaigns of sustained violence against the civilian population in the form of massacres, death squads, torture, rape, and disappearance.

In Guatemala, the decades-long civil war would eventually claim 200,000 lives, with state forces responsible for 93 percent of the violence, according to a UN report; in El Salvador, 75,000 were killed, with state forces responsible of at least 85 percent of the crimes. The Reagan administration also covertly and illegally armed and supported paramili-
tary "contra" forces against the Sandinista government, financing this illicit venture through clandestine arms deals with Iran.

As these anti-communist proxy wars ravaged Central America, a massive grassroots response arose in the United States.

This movement, sometimes referred to as the Central America solidarity movement or the Central America peace movement, encompassed a vast and diverse amalgamation of organizations and tactics fighting to halt US support for the wars, defend the revolutionary projects of Central American popular movements, and protect Central American refugees seeking a safe haven in the United States.

As part of the movement, activists traveled to Sandinista Nicaragua under siege from the contras, indigenous communities facing genocidal violence in Guatemala, liberated guerilla territory in El Salvador, and Salvadoran refugee camps in Honduras to witness first-hand the collective organizing for social and economic justice so fiercely opposed by the "Free World" and to gather testimonies on the depredations of US foreign policy. In the United States, they engaged in collective acts of civil disobedience, put their lives on the line in courageous direct actions, waged national political campaigns, provided aid and services for victims of the violence, and organized mass mobilizations.

As an array of forces again raise the mantel of "sanctuary," it's important to remember that the sanctuary movement of the 1980s was but one component of a broad-based, cross-border, anti-imperialist liberation struggle. This is the radical heritage that our organized responses to mass deportations, refugee bans, and imperialist wars must claim today.

**Sanctuary**

Angela Sanbrano was a law student in Los Angeles in the late 1970s, when Central American refugees began flooding the city. She worked taking interviews for asylum applications and became increasingly involved in the emerging movement, eventually rising in the ranks of the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) to serve as the organization's first Executive Director. Sanbrano went on to direct the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN) in Los Angeles, where she now serves as Chair of the Board of Directors.

"The sanctuary movement and the solidarity movement were like sisters," she says. "One obviously was grounded in the inter-faith sector, and the solidarity [movement] was primarily students and the Left and progressives that had been involved in the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement and the peace movement."
The sanctuary movement built on a rich US tradition of religious communities engaging in principled civil disobedience out of a belief in a higher moral righteousness, from the Underground Railroad to the Civil Rights movement and opposition to the Vietnam War. The groundwork was laid in the 1960s, as US church-people traveled to Latin America as part of the Alliance for Progress, Kennedy’s reformist initiative to fight the perceived rise of communism in the region.

There, many were exposed to and radicalized by the growing Liberation Theology movement, which brought together Marxist and Christian doctrines to advance a "preferential option for the poor" in the face of devastating inequality and increasingly violent repression. These sympathies were strengthened as atrocities against religious leaders in Central America began to draw international attention, particularly in El Salvador in 1980 with the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero and the rape and murder of four North American churchwomen, and again in 1989 with massacre of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter at the Central American University.

The sanctuary movement emerged as a desperate response to the politicized inequities of US immigration law. Migrants fleeing violence and persecution were dying in the southwestern deserts, and congregants seeking to aid these refugees were horrified to learn that the US government's response to the survivors was deportation, not provision of shelter.

This was because granting asylum to refugees of the violence from US-backed anticommunist regimes would imply a recognition that those allies were indeed committing human rights abuses, thus endangering their US funding and support. As a result, asylum seekers escaping Sandinista Nicaragua were received with open arms, while the masses fleeing violence from right-wing military regimes in Guatemala and El Salvador were all but summarily denied.

As they became aware of the perils that refugees would risk in their home countries, many of them dissidents fleeing for their lives, religious communities began to open their doors.

The movement was formally launched in 1982, when several congregations across the country publically defied US immigration laws and declared themselves sanctuaries for refugees from Guatemala & El Salvador facing deportation. Initial leaders included James Corbett and the Tucson Ecumenical Council (TEC); subsequently the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America (CRTFCA), would emerge to coordinate
the growing movement. But unlike the more formal solidarity and anti-intervention networks, sanctuary remained a decentralized, localized initiative.

Early on, the movement was infiltrated by agents from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS, a predecessor to today's Immigration and Customs Enforcement). In 1985, fourteen religious sanctuary activists were indicted on charges of conspiracy and alien smuggling in Tuscon, Arizona; eight were convicted the next year. By then, nearly 400 churches and synagogues had emerged as sanctuary sites. Scores of cities and several states would follow. In addition to providing shelter and basic services, sanctuary activists were instrumental in the legal battles to shield refugees from deportation.

**Suing the government**

Following the indictments in Tucson, religious groups and churches joined Central American organizations providing immigration support services to sue the government for discriminating against Salvadoran and Guatemalan asylum seekers in the American Baptist Churches v. Thronburgh (ABC) class action law suit, which was finally settled in 1991 to allow new asylum hearings for certain applicants who had been rejected.
Sanctuary activists also helped push for the 1990 Immigration Act which created Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for certain migrants, in particular those from El Salvador, as well as the 1997 Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA), which allowed Salvadorans and Guatemalans included in the ABC suit to apply for a suspension of deportation and granted legal permanent residency to Nicaraguans (still, we should note, a vastly unequal resolution).

**Cross border relationships**

Sanctuary churches would often develop sister relationships with counterparts in Central America, organizing delegations to travel to Nicaragua, El Salvador, or Guatemala to witness the violence of US-backed forces and "accompany" the social justice work led by the Liberation Theology-inspired congregations. These experiences, together with refugee testimonies, strengthened the transnational bonds between communities and consolidated opinions against the wars.

Sanctuary was a faith-based, humanitarian initiative, but its political content was inescapable. In the face of refugee testimony of the horrors of the US-backed violence in Central America, religious communities broke US law in the name of a higher moral authority.

At the same time, the testimonies served to counter the US government's narrative of democratic Central American administrations fending off Soviet-sponsored terrorists. As part of the broader solidarity movement, refugee testimonies provided compelling evidence against the government's claims, thus bolstering anti-intervention efforts.

"I became aware of what was happening in El Salvador through the refugees," says Angela Sanbrano. "Many of them had been captured and tortured, or their friends or relatives had been tortured or disappeared."

Sanctuary churches were often involved in coalitions with solidarity organizations. Leslie Schuld joined CISPES as a university student in Ohio and went on to serve as the organization's National Program Director; Schuld now directs the Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad (CIS) language school in San Salvador, where she has lived since 1993. She remembers working with a local coalition on sanctuary as part of the Dayton Central America Solidarity Committee:

"It was more church-related, but solidarity was in there too. We were kind of the rabble-rousers," she laughs. Refugee stories from the sanctuary movement served a crucial politicizing role. [The testimony] woke people up, really. [We were able to] conscientize people from those families' testimonies about the war and why people were leaving. [...] It was a
platform to speak out about the plight of the refugees who were fleeing the violence that was perpetrated by US policy.

The role of Central American refugees in the movement was by no means limited to that of victims and witnesses.

"You can really see the influence of the refugees of Central Americans themselves, the role that they played in building both the solidarity movement and the sanctuary movement," Angela Sanbrano emphasizes. In Los Angeles, the refugees started to do marches and they were doing pickets and they were letting people know about the war. [...] I started going to the rallies. [...] They would see that I was interested so they started talking to me to help them get [access to] facilities at the school so they could have meetings. I got involved by them recruiting me.

In fact, the Central America solidarity movement was founded in large part by Central American exiles in the 1970s. Revolutionary Nicaraguans and Salvadorans, particularly, formed political groups and organized to denounce the escalating violence in their home countries. These activists drew US citizens to their cause, and helped facilitate connections between the emerging US movement and leftist insurgencies and social movements in Central America.

As the waves of migration increased in the 1980s, refugees also formed mutual aid organizations like CARECEN and El Rescate in Los Angeles that played key roles in the legal battles to protect asylum seekers from deportation.

Solidarity

While the entire movement was involved in anti-intervention work, opposing US aid to the Salvadoran and Guatemalan regimes and to the contras in Nicaragua, the more radical wing was involved in direct solidarity with leftist social movements and armed revolutionary forces like the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador resisting reactionary US-backed armies and attempting to build just, equitable societies.

These groups drew from a long legacy of US anti-imperialist international solidarity organizing, from the 1898 Anti-Imperialist League, solidarity with the original Sandinista in the 1920s, US-Chile solidarity in the wake of the 1973 US-backed coup, to the 1975 Puerto Rican Solidarity Committee.

They included the Nicaragua Solidarity Network, founded in 1979 following the Sandinista's overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship; CISPES, which was founded in 1980 at the dawn of what would be a twelve-year civil war
and became the largest and most formidable of the solidarity groups; the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA), formed in 1981; the SHARE Foundation, a faith-based, El Salvador-focused initiative, born in 1981; and Witness for Peace, also a faith-based group, established in 1983 to counter the Contra War in Nicaragua.

The direct relationships that the solidarity groups maintained with their revolutionary counterparts in Central America granted these organizations a powerful political engine for their organizing. They were not just fighting against US imperial violence, but for a radical political project.

Solidary vs. Non-Intervention

Leslie Schuld explains, "CISPES from the very beginning defined itself as a solidarity organization, which was very important: it wasn't just anti-intervention. [...] We were responding to an organized movement in El Salvador, and CISPES, we were seen as players, we were seen as part of the strategy rather than just humanitarian aid fundraisers or charity."

This solidarity organizing took many forms. The Nicaragua groups organized brigades to work in the Sandinistas' coffee harvests and provide human rights accompaniment in the face of Contra assaults. Witness for Peace brought over 10,000 people to Nicaragua over the course of the decade.

SHARE, for its part, organized delegations from the US to accompany organized Salvadoran refugees in their journeys from camps in Honduras to repopulate their abandoned communities in warzones. CISPES took delegations into FMLN-held territories and hosted speaking tours for FMLN and Salvadoran social movement leaders. NISGUA brought Rigoberta Menchú and other representatives on a six-month tour across the United States to denounce the US-sponsored violence against indigenous peoples in Guatemala.

These on-the-ground relationships with organized Central American movements created rapid international response networks to human rights crises.

"Lives were saved," remembers Schuld. "We would send telexes when people were captured. If there wasn't that international attention, people would be killed. They disappeared. So we responded numerous times to human rights violations and people were released because of that pressure."

Among the notable anti-intervention initiatives of the solidarity movement was the Pledge of Resistance campaign, which was born in 1983 after the US invasion of Granada sparked fears of a forthcoming US invasion of Nicaragua.
Initially a Nicaragua-focused campaign with significant support from Witness for Peace, Sojourners, and the American Friends Service Committee, the Pledge went on to expand to include opposition to broader US intervention in the region with support from secular groups like CISPES and the Nicaragua Solidarity Network. By late 1985, 80,000 people had signed the pledge to resist US-sponsored violence in Central America. These supporters mobilized in massive protests, direct actions, civil disobedience, and congressional pressure throughout the decade.

The direct actions organized by the solidarity movement were militant and dramatic. In 1987, Vietnam veterans staged a blockade at the Concord Naval Weapons Station in Northern California, a principal source of US arms shipped to El Salvador and beyond. One of the veterans, Brian Willson, initiated a hunger strike on the train tracks and lost both his legs and nearly his life after a train ran him over. This tragedy prompted an even greater, sustained mobilization against the arms shipments lasting another two years.

Other actions, like the 1988 mobilization to shut down the Pentagon, saw hundreds arrested. The solidarity movement's militancy and, in many cases, unapologetic allegiances to armed revolutionary movements, earned the ire of the Reagan administration, prompting several covert FBI investigations, surveillance, and harassment.

Sanctuary Today

As no one will be surprised to learn, the Central America solidarity movement did not end US intervention in the region. It can, however, claim a number of important victories.

Thousands helped to get legal status

Thousands of refugees found support and, eventually, legal status thanks to the tireless work of the sanctuary movement. Ferocious mass opposition to US support for death squads, paramilitaries, and fascistic regimes prevented the escalation of US military engagement, eventually helping pave the way for peace negotiations, and a generation of organizers was radicalized. Importantly, lasting relationships were built between Central American and US activists.

While the bulk of the solidarity organizations and networks dwindled and dissipated in the mid 1990s, some groups, like CISPES, continue to organize against US imperialism and accompany popular struggles in Central America today.

"The solidarity relationship was key," says Leslie Schuld, "because it didn't end when the war ended."
Sanctuary, which essentially ended in the 1990s as more avenues for residency were made available to refugees, has experienced a resurgence in recent years in response to the consolidating mass deportation regime as the New Sanctuary Movement.

On October 14, 2014, Eileen Purcell, who worked with the Archdiocese of San Francisco as a young sanctuary organizer in the 1980s, reflected on the movement at a gathering of the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant at Saint John’s Presbyterian Church in Berkeley, California: "Sanctuary's successes were many," she told the audience. "But we did not end the policies and legacies of war. Today we face the new violence born of so-called 'free trade,' the drug war, unjust immigration laws, globalization and a neoliberal project on steroids."

The contemporary call for sanctuary is more urgent now than ever. So far in FY 2017, 3,000 people have been deported from California and over 1,400 from New York alone. As a result of Trump's executive orders, millions more are vulnerable. Immigration raids have already begun. Many of those targeted face violence and poverty in their countries of birth; others are wrenched from their families and communities where they have built their lives and livelihoods.

In order to truly challenge the racist, profit-driven mass deportation system, sanctuary cannot be restricted to those we consider refugees. Our new sanctuary movement must defend all migrants, regardless of their legal status, motives for migrating, or criminal history (with an exception, perhaps, for war criminals). This is the radical truth recognized by groups like the #Not1More deportation campaign and other migrant justice advocates.

To do so, we must also fight the US-pushed border militarization that has sought to outsource the deportation of Central American migrants to Mexico. And we have to oppose the economic and military policies that have contributed to the causes of forced migration - not just in Central America and Mexico, but across the Middle East and North Africa, where US drone strikes and special operations raids are terrorizing civilians and creating new generations of refugees.

The movement of the 1980s taught us that sanctuary is not just about designating sites of humanitarian refuge. It's about solidarity. Those activists upheld sanctuary as a practice in defiance not just of US domestic immigration policy, but the destructive foreign policy that forces migration and subverts popular revolutionary movements.

That's the radical sanctuary we need today: a grassroots movement uniting struggles in defense of immigrants and refugees across borders.
Sermon for Yom Kippur 5778:  
Another World is Possible – A Jewish View on Police/Prison Abolition  

By Rabbi Brant Rosen  
October 1, 2017

In 1902, Clarence Darrow delivered a speech to a group of inmates at the Cook County Jail. Never known for mincing his words, he made the following point:

There should be no jails. They do not accomplish what they pretend to accomplish. If you would wipe them out, there would be no more criminals than now....They are a blot upon civilization, and a jail is an evidence of the lack of charity of the people on the outside who make the jails and fill them with the victims of their greed.

There’s no record of what the prison administration thought of his remarks, but I think it’s fair to assume they weren’t happy.

Another anecdote, this one more recent: Two years ago, after the killings of Alton Sterling, Philando Castile and several Dallas police officers, Fox News hosted a panel discussion on police violence. One of panelists was a young African American activist and rapper named Jessica Disu. The discussion inevitably started to get heated. Disu didn’t mix in for the most part, but when someone accused Black Lives Matter activists of calling for the death of cops, Disu finally spoke up.

Speaking over the din, she said, “This is the reason our young people are hopeless in America.” Then she added, “Here’s a solution, we need to abolish the police.” The panel quickly descended into pandemonium. Disu later commented that she had never previously considered herself
to be a police abolitionist. But since that evening, she said, abolition has come to be the only way forward that makes sense to her. “It’s more than a repair, she said. “We need something new.”

It’s safe to say that liberal white Americans are starting to struggle with the deep legacy of institutional racism in our country. There seems to be something of an awakening to the ways that racism so painfully intersects with policing and the prison industrial complex. Of course this is an awakening to a reality that marginalized peoples have long known: that the problems of racism and violence are systemic to American society and always have been.

But while increasing numbers of liberal Americans understand this larger system of oppression, we’re nowhere near consensus on what to do about it. However, I think it’s fairly safe to say that most would not call themselves abolitionists – to say that the prison industrial complex is so incorrigibly violent, it needs to be completely dismantled. Most would likely believe such thoughts to be the product of naive, utopian minds.

This Yom Kippur, I’d like to explore the contemporary movement for police and prison abolition more deeply. I don’t believe that the contemporary abolitionist movement is anywhere near as simplistic as its critics
make it out to be. At the very least, I think there’s a need for real debate on this issue. Should we be seeking incremental or fundamental change? Which approach will ultimately be the most effective? What theories of change have historically yielded results? Whether we agree with them or not, abolitionist arguments have an important place in this debate.

I think it is altogether appropriate to explore these questions on Yom Kippur: the day in which we look out across the year to come and vow that a better world is possible; a world free of injustice, oppression and violence. This is the day that we stand together and swear that we are indeed better than this. This is the day we imagine collectively what it will take to set the world right.

I’m sure many people struggle with the very word “abolition.” When most hear the term they’re likely to think of the 18th-19th century movement to abolish the American slave trade. The end of slavery however, did not signal the end of racist institutions that oppress black and brown people in our country – on the contrary, they have morphed into different more “socially acceptable” systems of oppression. Michelle Alexander put it very well in her book *The New Jim Crow*:

“Since the nation’s founding, African Americans repeatedly have been controlled through institutions such as slavery and Jim Crow, which appear to die, but then are reborn in new form, tailored to the needs and constraints of the time. (p. 21)”

As William Faulkner famously said, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” It’s much too easy to assume that since we’ve abolished slavery and dismantled Jim Crow, institutional racism is now a thing of the past. Indeed, the statistics show otherwise: 1 out of every 4 African American males born this decade can expect to go to prison in his lifetime; black women are incarcerated at a rate nearly 3 times higher than white women; someone who is black and unarmed is 3.5 times more likely to be shot by police than someone who is white and unarmed; in the federal system black people receive sentences that are 10% longer than white people for the same crimes. The litany of course, goes on and on.

The contemporary abolitionist movement began in the early 1970s and gained steam in the late 1990s, when the activist/scholar Angela Davis co-founded Critical Resistance, an organization that coined the term “prison industrial complex.” According to its mission:

“Abolition is a political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment.”
From where we are now, sometimes we can’t really imagine what abolition is going to look like. Abolition isn’t just about getting rid of buildings full of cages ... An abolitionist vision means that we must build models today that can represent how we want to live in the future. It means developing practical strategies for taking small steps that move us toward making our dreams real and that lead us all to believe that things really could be different. It means living this vision in our daily lives. Abolition is both a practical organizing tool and a long-term goal. Many may be surprised to learn that number of prominent national organizations are avowedly abolitionist. Two years ago, for instance, the National Lawyers Guild adopted a resolution calling for “the dismantling and abolition of all prisons and of all aspects of systems and institutions that support, condone, create, fill, or protect prisons.” Last year, the Movement for Black Lives released a platform that stated, among other things:

“Until we achieve a world where cages are no longer used against our people we demand an immediate change in conditions and an end to all jails, detention centers, youth facilities and prisons as we know them.”

**Chicago as a hub for abolition**

Over the past decade, Chicago has become an important hub for abolitionist organizing. This is due in no small way to the efforts of organizer/activist Mariame Kaba, who lived and worked in Chicago for 20 years before recently moving back to New York. During her years here, Kaba influenced a generation of young organizers who now lead some of the most important local organizations that protest police brutality and have created new models for community safety and restorative justice. In an interview two years ago, this is how Mariame Kaba defined abolition:

“(W)hen I talk about abolition, it’s not mainly a project of dismantling, though that’s critically important. It’s actually a project of building. It’s a positive project that is intended to show what we believe justice really looks like...For me, abolition involves how we are going to organize ourselves to be safe. And right now we devolve the authority for keeping us safe to the state. If you were to begin a conversation around abolition, the question is, ‘How would we, as communities, as autonomous spaces, decide what we would do when harm occurs?’ We would have to think those things through together. That’s a collective project.”

One of the primary goals of the new abolitionist movement is to shine a light on the vast amounts of wealth we spend on policing, prisons and surveillance – and to advocate for a greater investment in our communities. Currently, the United States spends more than $80 billion annually
on our criminal justice system. Here in Chicago, we spend $1.5 billion on police every year—that’s $4 million every single day. Nearly 40% of our city budget is allotted to the Chicago Police Department (compared to around 1% for Chicago Public Schools).

But it’s not just a numbers game. Examining how we use public funds goes to the heart of the question of what actually creates safety. Is it more police or more community investment? Benji Hart, a Chicago abolitionist activist/educator wrote about this powerfully in one of my favorite blog posts on the subject, “You are Already an Abolitionist:”

Last summer, while working as a camp counselor during the week that Alton Sterling and Philando Castle were both shot by law enforcement, I ended up sitting down with a group of almost entirely wealthy, white elementary-aged kids to talk about the police. One of the questions we asked ourselves was why there was so much violence in certain parts of our city, namely on the South and West sides, and not in others. One student suggested that maybe it was because there weren’t enough police to protect those neighborhoods.

We sat on the floor of an arts studio in Lincoln Square, a majority white and very wealthy neighborhood on the North side, in which many of the students lived. I asked them how often, when walking to camp, they had seen police cars patrolling the neighborhood, or stopping people on the street. Almost none of them had. I admitted that I hadn’t, either.

“If there are so few police in this neighborhood,” I asked, “why do we feel safe here?”

It took a moment for the young people to think it through, but they got there on their own: Resources. There was low crime in Lincoln Square because most people there had places to live and good food to eat. There were lots of stores and restaurants, and people could afford to shop and dine there. There were quality schools, libraries, parks and after-school programs, many of them within walking distance from one another. It was access to the basic things people needed, not the presence of police, that made its residents feel secure.

Last week, Tzedek Chicago held an action for the 2nd day of Rosh Hashanah outside of Rahm Emanuel’s office in City Hall in support of the #NoCopAcademy campaign. This new initiative is protesting the Mayor’s recently unveiled plan to spend $95 million to build a Police and Fire training center in West Garfield Park – a neighborhood that recently closed six schools. The campaign is demanding a redirecting of this $95 million into Chicago’s most marginalized communities. As the campaign’s statement puts it:
“Real community safety comes from fully-funded schools and mental health centers, robust after-school and job training programs, and social and economic justice. We want investment in our communities, not expanded resources for police.”

While it’s certainly a daunting prospect to organize against a project this massive, it’s important to note that abolitionist organizations have played key roles in some notable political victories over the past several years. We Charge Genocide and Project NIA were integral to the coalition that won a $5.5 million reparations settlement for victims of torture by the Chicago Police Department. Here’s another example: many states across the country use cash bail systems that force poor defendants to remain in jail while awaiting trial – sometimes for months – because they cannot afford to pay their bail.

This past summer, Cook County Chief Judge Tim Evans signed an order which will strengthen the directive to judges to set bonds that defendants are actually able to pay. This victory was due in no small part to the organizing efforts of the Chicago Community Bond Fund – a local organization that raises money for people who cannot afford to pay their own bail. The CCBF and other advocates for the abolition of monetary bond continue to monitor courtrooms to ensure judges are complying with the new law.

Critics of abolition invariably say it’s unrealistic and naive to advocate for something so radical – something we know can never and will never happen. To my mind, however, this claim misses the essential point of this movement. Contemporary abolitionists begin by asking the questions: What is the world we wish to see? How would this world promote real collective safety – through armed policing or community investment? How would it handle transgressive behavior – through restorative or retributive justice? After these questions have been fully explored, local community initiatives are created to demonstrate such a world in action. I’m sure many of you are familiar with some of these organizations here in Chicago: the Chicago Childcare Collective, Curt’s Cafe, Circles and Ciphers, the People’s Response Team, the Let Us Breathe Collective and Mothers Against Senseless Killing are just a few examples.

In addition to local initiatives, abolitionist organizations also develop strategies for organizing toward policy change on a wider scale. If you visit the website of the Movement for Black Lives, you will see a plethora of extensive policy recommendations on community control, economic justice, ending the war on black people and more. In the words of the platform: “We recognize that not all of our collective needs and visions can be translated into policy, but we understand that policy change is one of many tactics necessary to move us towards the world we envision.”
Abolitionist thinking thus focuses on the world we are trying to create, not merely the individual problems we are trying to solve. For abolitionists, a vision of the world as it should be is always the starting point. And when you think about it, why not? Why not aim for the world that we want rather than the world that we are willing to settle for? If our starting point is “the ideal is not possible” aren’t we automatically rendering it impossible? At this current moment there are forces in our country who have no compunction about abolishing wholesale the institutions that actually protect the public good. If we ever hope to stand them down we’re going to have to be at least as visionary as they are.

Now I realize that there may be some here who aren’t able or ready to go to this place – who feel the concept is just too extreme. And I’m not standing here making a pitch for us to formally become an abolitionist congregation. But I do think these ideas are at the heart of an immensely important debate. And if there is a congregation anywhere in the country that can have this conversation, I believe it’s Tzedek Chicago.

After all, this isn’t only a political issue – it’s a religious one as well. Jewish tradition, like all religions has a great deal to say about “creating the world we all want to see.” Indeed, one of the most important functions of religion is to assert that another world, a better world is possible – and to help us live our lives in such a way that we may ultimately bring it about.

The Jewish Tradition

I would suggest that there is a significant tradition of abolitionist thinking in Judaism. The sabbatical and Jubilee years are perhaps the most prime examples, both of which are commandments that come directly from the Torah. The Sabbatical (or “Shemitah”) year is commanded to be observed every seven years, when all debts are to be forgiven, agricultural lands to lie fallow, private land holdings are open to the commons and basic staples such as food storage and perennial harvests are freely redistributed and made accessible to all. On the Jubilee (the “Yovel”) year, which comes every fiftieth year, all Israelites who had been enslaved during the previous forty nine years are granted their freedom and any properties purchased during that time are returned to their original owners.

There’s been a great deal of rabbinical commentary over the centuries that attempt to explain how something so economically and socially radical could possibly be have been observed. Whether or not this ever was the case, it’s important to note that these commandments are still read, studied and debated in our tradition’s most sacred text. Moreover, they continue to have political impact centuries after they were written.
The Liberty Bell, which became the central symbol of the original American abolitionist movement contains the Biblical commandment for the Jubilee year: “Proclaim liberty throughout the land to all the inhabitants thereof.” The Jubilee also inspired the debt forgiveness initiative known as Jubilee 2000, which sought to cancel the crippling debts that plague the poorest nations in our world.

I would claim that Shabbat is at heart an abolitionist concept as well. When you think about it, the notion to cease from creative work every seventh day is an exceedingly radical concept. Shabbat essentially commands us to take one day every week to leave the world as we know it and experience the world as it should be. According to traditional liturgy, Shabbat is a day in which there is no “tzarah, ve’yagon, va’anacha” – “distress, pain or mourning.” On the seventh day, the sages teach us, we get to experience a taste of “Olam Ha’ba” – the “world to come.”

Abolition and the Sabbath

In other words, Shabbat is not merely a day of personal rest and replenishment. It’s a day in which we pause from our efforts to change the world so that we may dwell in the world we are praying and working and struggling for: the world as it should be. And when Shabbat ends hopefully we are that much more inspired to make that world a reality.

Just as Shabbat is much more than a long litany of prohibitions, abolitionism is so much more than dismantling of oppressive institutions. In the words of Mariame Kaba, “You can’t just focus on what you don’t want, you have to focus also on what you do want. The world you want to live in is also a positive project of creating new things.”

I’d like to end now with my new version of Psalm 92 – the Song for the Day of Shabbat – to give you a sense of how we might understand these values in spiritual context. We’ve already used this Psalm several times at Tzedek Chicago Shabbat services. I offer it to you now in honor of this Shabbat Yom Kippur 5778:

Tonight we raise the cup,
tomorrow we’ll breathe deeply
and dwell in a world
without borders, without limit
in space or in time,
a world beyond wealth or scarcity,
a world where there is nothing
for us to do but to be.
They said this day would never come,
yet here we are:
the surging waters have receded,
there is no oppressor, no oppressed,
no power but the one
coursing through every living
breathing satiated soul.
Memories of past battles fading
like dry grass in the warm sun,
no more talk of enemies and strategies,
no more illusions, no more dreams, only
this eternal moment of victory
to celebrate and savor the world
as we always knew it could be.
See how the justice we planted in the deep
dark soil now soars impossibly skyward,
rising up like a palm tree,
like a cedar, flourishing forever
ever swaying, ever bending
but never breaking.
So tonight we raise the cup;
tomorrow we'll breathe deeply
to savor a world recreated,
and when sun sets once again
we continue the struggle.

May this be a new year in which we find the strength to affirm that another world is possible. May that vision keep us going – and may it inspire us to do what we must to make it so.
Amen.

September 23, 2017 by Rabbi Brant Rosen
Black/Left Leadership and the Chicago Alliance Against Racism and Political Repression

By Frank Chapman

It occurred to me this past Saturday at our 44th annual Charlene Mitchell Human Rights Awards Dinner that a lot of new people are coming into our organization. They are mostly young but some are out of their youth. They come mostly from the South side, east and west, and the North side. They are Black, Latina, Arabic, Filipino and white and mostly working class. The majority of our members are Black because we are a Black/Left led organization that is multi-racial, multi-national and multi-cultural.

What do we mean by Black/Left led? This is how we defined ourselves at our Founding Convention in 1973 here in Chicago. We defined ourselves in this manner because we were in fact founded by Black revolutionaries such as Charlene Mitchell, Angela Davis, Josephine Wyatt, Ishmal Flory, Sylvia Woods and a host of others. So we were not thinking of ourselves as Black and white left led but as radical Black leadership being the initiators and leaders of our Alliance. Yet it is also a shared leadership that is executed through our steering committee, which consist of all our elected members and our affiliated member organizations.

The Alliance grew out of the need to have a mass defense organization for the Black liberation movement and all other strands of the progressive peoples' movement under attack and victimized by racist and political repression. We defend the inalienable democratic right of the racially and nationally oppressed to rebel against their oppression and to organize to empower the people to alter or overturn their conditions of oppression. We are anti-imperialist and stand in unconditional solidarity with all oppressed nations fighting for national liberation.
Our current struggles to get Civilian Police Accountability Council (CPAC) enacted, to free all torture victims and to get Jason Van Dyke convicted for first degree murder is consistent with our program of defending and extending the democratic rights of the people.

Our solidarity with the Palestinian people and the mass work we did in to support the just demands of the Rasmea Odeh Defense Committee is also an essential component in defending the democratic rights of the people. Standing in unconditional solidarity with the Palestinians and our work with the International League of Struggle of the Filipino people links our struggles locally to the anti-imperialist movement internationally.

Given who we are and what we are fighting for we have before us a bright and beautiful future of struggle.

Frank Chapman is the Field Organizer and Educational Director, CAARPR
California Prisoners Break With Racial Divisions and Conduct Multi-Racial Hunger Strike

By Alex Krehbiel

Black and Latino youth, and all poor young people in the working-class, grow up in a society that is permeated by racism. It is sometimes blatant and brutal, like the killing of Michael Brown, shot in the back in Ferguson by a white police officer, and so many others like him.

Sometimes it’s more subtle, like Black and Latino workers who are the last hired and first fired, or white middle class people locking their car doors when a young person of color walks by. Or poor schools in Black and Brown and poor white neighborhoods that don’t prepare students for jobs in the wider world.

It also includes the worst food at inner city groceries, and higher prices. Add on stereotypes of Blacks and Latino’s as criminals and thugs on the nightly news, and in popular culture on TV and the movies. Then watch as Black and Latino youth stopped by police, harassed, arrested, convicted and sentenced to long prison terms way out of proportion to what happens to white young people under the same circumstances.

The message is the same. Blacks and Latinos’ are undeserving and need to be monitored, separated from the rest of society, ignored (unless they commit a crime - then it’s all over the news), and can be routinely treated with disrespect. Racial divisions are so ingrained in young working-class kids of all races that when young people are sent to prison the prison mirror’s much of the outside world, and the prisoners accept it. The watchword is division based on race: divide and conquer. That is until a crisis comes to a head. Then all bets are off.
The California prison system mirrors the larger society. Prisoners are segregated by race, in their cells and most everywhere else in the prison. But all that changed on July 8, 2013. Over 29,000 California prisoners engaged in a statewide hunger strike, sparked by inhumane conditions in solidarity confinement.

What was noteworthy was that prisoners of all races participated, Black, White, Latino and Asian. They have been separated by many decades of racial separation, but united in this hunger strike.

The result of this moment of multi-racial unity was profound. First, it was the biggest hunger strike in California penal history. The strike was so noteworthy that it attracted coverage in the Los Angeles Times, CNN, The New York Times, Mother Jones, NPR and the Guardian of the United Kingdom, among other mass media. It even earned its own entry in Wikipedia. Here's what Wikipedia said:

"The 2013 California Prisoner Hunger Strike started on July 8, 2013 involving over 29,000 inmates in protest of the states use of solitary confinement practices and ended on September 5, 2013. The hunger strike was organized by inmates in long-term solitary confinement in the security housing unit (SHU) at Pelican Bay State Prison in protest of inmates housed there that were in solitary confinement indefinitely for having ties to gangs.

"Another hunger strike that added to the movement started the week before at High Desert State Prison where the focus of their hunger
strike was to demand cleaner facilities, better food, and better access to the library."

I was a prisoner at High Desert State Prison then and participated in that strike too. Wikipedia continued:

"Triggered by the two month hunger strike, law makers agreed to hold public hearings on the conditions of California's maximum security prisons where this prolonged solitary confinement has taken place." In a section headed, "Human rights concerns and solitary confinement,"

"Solitary confinement in United States Prisons is the practice of detaining prisoners in a single cell for between 22 and 24 hours a day." Wikipedia wrote that human rights groups, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have decried the practice."

Then Wikipedia continued: "Human Rights Watch also found that prolonged use of solidarity confinement can violate the 8th amendment, and in some cases be considered torture." I had been in solitary confinement earlier and knew exactly what it was like.

**We won some reforms**

The hunger strike won important reforms. We won a phase-out program for inmates in solitary confinement, meaning there is a path for them to get out of solitary where there was none before. The prison authorities opened up more programs for prisoners, such as educational programs, including offering college courses. At High Desert authorities took steps to improve our food, made it easier to access the library, and brought in more rehabilitative programs.

While all this is important, it still does not address the basic reality of mass incarceration in the United States. Most semi-informed realists today would acknowledge the inordinate expense imposed on society through the punitive application of mass incarceration. Mass incarceration costs more than providing education and job training, affordable housing in the outside world, and other social services needed to live a decent life and be a productive citizen.

However, it is likewise true that a comprehensive understanding of the objective socio-economic factors which cause this social ailment is largely lacking. First, the normal functioning of capitalism requires that unwanted elements in society (unwanted because Black and Brown youth are among the most mistreated people in society and are among the most critical of the system). The economic exploitation and oppression of capitalism can be maximized by using racial prejudices to extract extra profits.
Such a system today has criminalized the most historically marginalized ethnic groups within any nation's working-class. The fundamental socio-economic oppression of the entire working-class cultivates mythical and superficial divisions between individuals within the system. This is an example of a major weapon of capitalism, divide and conquer. This helps the capitalist class to perpetuate its rule. This explains why certain historically oppressed ethnicities and national groups bear the brunt of a criminal stigma that further separates them from society and the working-class which they are a part of.

Because capitalist exploitation is at the root of the entire working-class's varying degrees of exploitation and oppression, it logically follows that multi-racial unity within the class as a whole is an absolutely necessary condition of working-class emancipation. Not any one group can go it alone. The 2013 California's prisoners hunger strike is an example of that multi-racial unity, and proof that only such unity can bring about significant social change.

Alex Krehbiel was a prisoner in the California Prison system and was the founder of the CCDS Prisoner's chapter. He was recently released from prison and is working among a multi-racial group of progressive young people. He is also a member of the National Coordinating Committee of CCDS.
Theodore W. Allen's 'The Invention of the White Race'

By Jeffrey B. Perry

The independent, anti-white supremacist, working class intellectual Theodore W. Allen (1919-2005) pioneered his class struggle-based "white skin privilege" analysis in the mid-1960s, and for the remainder of his life continued to write on the centrality of the struggle against white supremacy to radical social change efforts in the United States.

His seminal two-volume *The Invention of the White Race* (Verso Books, 1994, 1997: new expanded edition 2012) with its focus on racial oppression and social control is one of the twentieth-century's major contributions to historical understanding. It presents a full-scale challenge to what he refers to as "The Great White Assumption" - the unquestioning acceptance of the "white race" and "white" identity as skin color-based and natural attributes rather than as social and political constructions. Its thesis on the origin and nature of the so-called "white race" and its understanding of Anglo-American plantations as capitalist and enslaved Black laborers as proletarians contains the root of a radical new approach to U.S. Labor History. With its equalitarian motif and emphasis on the class struggle dimension of history its influence will continue to grow in the twenty-first century.

On the back cover of the 1994 edition of Volume I, subtitled *Racial Oppression and Social Control*, Allen boldly asserted "When the first Africans arrived in Virginia in 1619, there were no 'white' people there; nor, according to the colonial records, would there be for another sixty years." That statement, based on 20-plus years of primary research in Virginia's colonial records, reflected the fact that he found no instance of the official use of the word "white" as a token of social status prior to its appearance in a Virginia law passed in 1691. As he later explained,
"Others living in the colony at that time were English; they had been English when they left England, and naturally they and their Virginia-born children were English, they were not 'white.' White identity had to be carefully taught, and it would be only after the passage of some six crucial decades" that the word "would appear as a synonym for European-American."

Allen was not merely speaking of word usage, however. His probing research led him to conclude that - based on the commonality of experience, the demonstrated solidarity between African-American and European-American laboring people, and the indeterminate status of African Americans - the "white race" was not, and could not have been, functioning in early Virginia.

In this context he offers his major thesis -- that the "white race" was invented as a ruling class social control formation in response to labor solidarity as manifested in the later (civil war) stages of Bacon's Rebellion (1676-77). To this he adds two important corollaries: 1) the ruling elite deliberately instituted a system of racial privileges to define and maintain the "white race" and to implement a system of racial oppression, and 2) the consequence was not only ruinous to the interests of African Americans, it was also disastrous for European-American workers.

In *Volume I* Allen offers a critical examination of the two main lines of historiography on the slavery and racism debate: the psycho-cultural approach, which he strongly criticizes; and the socio-economic approach, which he seeks to free from certain apparent weaknesses. He then proceeds to develop a definition of racial oppression paying particular attention to social control and the nature of the oppression, a definition not based on "phenotype," or classification by complexion. In the process, he offers compelling analogies between the oppression of the Irish in Ireland (under Anglo-Norman rule and under "Protestant Ascendancy") and white supremacist oppression of African Americans and Indians.

**Difference between national and racial oppression**

Allen emphasizes that maximizing profit and maintaining social control are two priority tasks of the ruling class. He describes how racial oppression is one form of ruling class response to the problem of social control and national oppression is another. The difference centers on whether the key component of the intermediate social control stratum are members of the oppressor group (racial oppression) or the oppressed group (national oppression).

With stunning international and domestic examples he shows how racial oppression (particularly in the form of religio-racial oppression) was
developed and maintained by the phenotypically-similar British against the Irish Catholics in Ireland; how a phenotypically-similar Anglo bourgeoisie established national oppression in the Anglo-Caribbean and racial oppression in the continental Anglo-American plantation colonies; how racial oppression was transformed into national oppression due to ruling class social control needs in Ireland (while racial oppression was maintained in Ulster); how the same people who were victims of racial oppression in Ireland became "white American" defenders of racial oppression in the United States; and how in America racial oppression took the form of racial slavery, yet when racial slavery ended racial oppression remained and was re-constituted in a new form.

In Volume II, on The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America, Allen tells the story of the invention of the "white race" and the development of the system of racial oppression in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Anglo-American plantation colonies. His primary focus is on the pattern-setting Virginia colony, and he discusses in detail the reduction of tenants and wage-laborers in the majority English labor force to chattel bond-servants beginning in the 1620s. In so doing, he emphasizes that this was a qualitative break from the condition of laborers in England and from long established English labor law, that it was not a feudal carryover, that it was imposed under capitalism, and that it was an essential precondition of the emergence of the lifetime hereditary chattel bond-servitude imposed upon African-American laborers under the system of racial slavery.
Allen describes how, throughout much of the seventeenth century, the status of African Americans was indeterminate (because it was still being fought out) and he details the similarity of conditions for African-American and European-American chattel bond-laborers up through Bacon's Rebellion. He points out that of the 92,000 European immigrants brought to Virginia and Maryland between 1607 and 1682, more than three-fourths were chattel bond-laborers, the great majority of them English. He also discusses the coercive nature of most transcontinental labor recruitment and that few immigrants were whole-hearted volunteers, arriving with written contracts for their services. Many were kidnapped by a combination of deception and brute force, some were ordinary convicts, and still others were English, Irish, and Scots prisoners taken in rebellion and exiled, under pain of death.

Allen also documents many significant instances of labor solidarity and unrest, especially during the 1660s and 1670s. Of great importance is his analysis of the civil war stage of Bacon's Rebellion when thousands of laboring people took up arms against the ruling plantation elite, the capital (Jamestown) was burned to the ground, rebels controlled 6/7 of the Virginia colony, and Afro- and Euro-American bond-servants fought side-by-side demanding an end to their bondage.

It was in the period after Bacon's Rebellion that the "white race" was invented as a ruling-class social control formation. Allen describes systematic ruling-class policies, which conferred "white race" privileges on European Americans while imposing harsher disabilities on African Americans resulting in a system of racial slavery, a form of racial oppression that also imposed severe racial proscriptions on free African Americans.

**Birth of the ‘white-skin privilege’**

He explains how a new social status was contrived "that would be a birthright of . . . every Euro-American," a "white" identity designed to set them "at a distance" from the African-American bond-laborers and to "enlist European-Americans of every class as active, or at least passive, supporters of capitalist agriculture based on chattel bond-labor." Key to this process was the re-issuing of "long-established common law rights, 'incident to every free man,' but in the form of 'white' privileges."

Allen emphasizes that when free African Americans were deprived of their long-held right to vote in Virginia and Governor William Gooch explained in 1735 that the Virginia Assembly had decided upon this curtailment of the franchise in order "to fix a perpetual Brand upon Free Negros & Mulattos," it was not an "unthinking decision." Rather, it was a deliberate act by the plantation bourgeoisie and was a conscious deci-
sion in the process of establishing a system of racial oppression, even though it entailed repealing an electoral principle that had existed in Virginia for more than a century.

Key to understanding the virulent racial oppression that was developed in Virginia, Allen argues, is the formation of the intermediate social control buffer stratum, which serves the interests of the ruling class. In Virginia, any persons of discernible non-European ancestry after Bacon's Rebellion were denied a role in the social control buffer group, the bulk of which was made up of laboring-class "whites." In the Anglo-Caribbean, by contrast, under a similar Anglo-ruling elite, "mulattos" were included in the social control stratum and were promoted into middle-class status. This difference was rooted in a number of social control-related factors, one of the most important of which was that in the Anglo-Caribbean there were "too few" poor and laboring-class Europeans to embody an adequate petit bourgeoisie, while in the continental colonies there were "too many" to be accommodated in the ranks of that class.

**Refuting the ‘master class’ narratives**

The references to an "unthinking decision" and "too few" poor and laboring class Europeans are consistent with Allen's repeated efforts to challenge what he considered to be the two main arguments that undermine and disarm the struggle against white supremacy in the working class: (1) the argument that "racism" is innate (and it is therefore useless to challenge it), and (2) the argument that European-American workers "benefit" from "white race" privileges and white supremacy (and it is therefore not in their interest to oppose them). These two arguments, opposed by Allen, are related to two master historical narratives rooted in writings on the colonial period.

The first argument is associated with the "unthinking decision" explanation for the development of racial slavery offered by historian Winthrop D. Jordan in his influential, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. The second argument is associated with historian Edmund S. Morgan’s similarly influential, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, which maintains that, as racial slavery developed in Virginia in the eighteenth century, "there were too few free poor [European Americans] on hand to matter."

Allen’s work directly challenges both the "unthinking decision" contention of Jordan and the "too few free poor" contention of Morgan (Allen offers research and statistics showing that was not the case in Virginia). Allen convincingly argues that the "white race" privileges conferred by the ruling class on European Americans were not only ruinous to the
interests of African Americans; they were also against the class interest of European-American workers.

Allen goes on to describe how "the white supremacist system that had originally been designed in around 1700 by the plantation bourgeoisie to protect the base, the chattel bond labor relation of production" also served "as a part of the 'legal and political' superstructure of the United States government that, until the Civil War, was dominated by the slaveholders with the complicity of the majority of the European-American workers." Then, after emancipation, "the industrial and financial bourgeoisie found that it could be serviceable to their program of social control, anachronistic as it was, and incorporated it into their own 'legal and political' superstructure."

He describes how the "all-pervasive system of racial privileges was conferred on laboring-class European-Americans, rural and urban, exploited and insecure though they themselves were" and how "its threads, woven into the fabric of every aspect of daily life, of family, church, and state, have constituted the main historical guarantee of the rule of the 'Titans,' damping down anti-capitalist pressures, by making 'race, and not class, the distinction in social life.'" That, "more than any other factor," he argues, "has shaped the contours of American history - from the Constitutional Convention of 1787 to the Civil War, to the overthrow of Reconstruction, to the Populist Revolt of the 1890s, to the Great Depression, to the civil rights struggle and 'white backlash' of our own day."

**Overcoming the paralysis**

When he completed *Volume II*, the 78-years-old Allen, in words that resonate today, ended by describing "unmistakable signs of maturing social conflict" between "the common people" and "the Titans." He suggested that "Perhaps, in the impending . . . struggle," influenced by the "indelible stamp of the African-American civil rights struggle of the 1960s," the "white-skin privileges may finally come to be seen and rejected by laboring-class European-Americans as the incubus that for three centuries has paralyzed their will in defense of their class interests vis-à-vis those of the ruling class." It was with that prospect in mind, with its profound implications for radical social change, that Theodore W. Allen concluded *The Invention of the White Race*.

Those interested in learning more about the work of Theodore W. Allen can see: 1) writings, audios, and videos by and about Theodore W. Allen; 2) comments from scholars and activists and Table of Contents for *The Invention of the White Race Vol. I: Racial Oppression and Social Control*; 3) comments from scholars and activists and Table of Contents for *The Invention of the White Race Vol. II: The Origin of Racial Oppression*.
Taking Down White Supremacy

in Anglo-America; and "The Developing Conjuncture and Some Insights from Hubert Harrison and Theodore W. Allen on the Centrality of the Fight Against White Supremacy."

Jeffrey B. Perry is an independent, working class scholar. He was a long-time rank-and-file activist, union officer, and editor with the National Postal Mail Handlers Union. Dr. Perry preserved and inventoried the Hubert H. Harrison Papers (now at Columbia University), is preserving and inventorying the Theodore W. Allen Papers, and has written extensively on Harrison, Allen, labor issues, and the struggle against white supremacy. His works include *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918* (Columbia University Press, 2008) and new front and back matter for Theodore W. Allen's *The Invention of the White Race*, 2 vols. (Verso Books, 2012).
Book Reviews: Black Subjugation in America

By Kim Scipes

Books Reviewed in this Essay:


On a recent visit to Ho Chi Minh City's (Vietnam) War Remnants Museum—focusing on The 'American War'—I was reminded how Americans have never, as a country, come to grips with our invasion and war on Vietnam, neither our war on its people or its very physical being. Yet, while we haven't come to grips with our war on Vietnam, Americans as a whole have never come to grips with our own history, specifically how Europeans stole this land from Native Peoples, and then built this country on the Blacks of African slaves, while institutionalizing white supremacy. Accordingly, issues of slavery, race, racism, etc., have been relegated to the margins of American experience, confined overwhelmingly to "The South." And with anything so marginalized, it can be ignored—if not forgotten.

Three recent books, however, when combined, have challenged this marginalization; in fact, together, I argue that they call for the (re)placement of the issues of slavery, racism and white supremacy at the very center of American historiography and popular understanding. They also support African American calls for reparations. The late Theodore W. Allen's two volume work, *The Invention of the White Race*—published
originally in 1997, but republished in 2012—takes a 'round-about' route to the issue, powerful when completed but a long way to keep readers' attentions. Allen's first volume, "Racial Oppression and Social Control," examines the way the Protestant British controlled Catholic Ireland after colonization, and focuses on the system of "Protestant Supremacy," whereby the lowest, no-account Protestant was deemed superior to the most accomplished Catholic. In other words, Allen focused on how the English—mainly through importing Protestant Scots to rule—maintained control over Catholic Irish in Ireland. Interestingly, he wrote it to understand how social control was developed in the British colonies in North America, and most notably in Virginia.

However, it is Allen's second volume that demands attention. Titled "The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America," Allen—who spent 20 years working in the Colonial Virginia archives—argues that for the first 60 years of Virginia, there were no white people in the colony! He points out that people referred to each other by their national origin—as Englishmen, Dutchmen, (Protestant) Irishmen, Germans and later Scandinavians—and that references to "whites" did not occur until the 1680s. What was going on?

Key to understanding this is to recognize that about three-quarters of all Europeans who entered Virginia in the first sixty years were indentured servants, people who had agreed to subordinate themselves to the control of anyone who would pay their passage to the colony for a set period of time (usually seven years). Oftentimes, this has been presented as similar to an apprenticeship, where one works for little in exchange for learning a trade, a bed and clothing, and receiving some tools and/or some land after the term is completed. Allen, however, argues that this indentured servitude was, in fact, much closer to actual slavery, albeit limited to a set period of time. The control was all-but-total. For example, miscreants were not just admonished or even jailed, but many were whipped. (Allen claims that the whipping of white people made it much easier for them to accept whipping of Blacks later on.) Allen also points out that it was illegal for male and female "servants" to have sex; and if the woman got pregnant, her servitude was legally extended by two years!

Interestingly, however, Allen points out that most Africans entered the colony the same way; not as chattel slaves, but as indentured servants—only about 25 percent came as chattel slaves in the early years. Importantly, what this meant was that the conditions between white and Black servants were very similar and relations were generally affable. When the colonial elites used servants to try to extend landholdings by stealing even more land from Native tribes for their precious tobacco—which sucked up nutrients from the land, requiring new acreage about every
three years—African and European servants ultimately banded together in 1676-77 in what became known as the civil-war stage of Bacon's Rebellion, and turned on the elites. They burned Jamestown to the ground, and seriously threatened the existence of the colonial government. Once the rebellion was suppressed and colonial order restored, the elites faced the problem of how to prevent such events from happening again. They consciously decided they had to prevent possible unity between poor whites and poor Blacks from ever re-emerging.

Their solution solved their problem. They chose not to elevate poor whites over poor Blacks, thus improving the situation for whites, but rather lowered Blacks below the already poor whites. This they did by passing a series of laws that worsened the situation of most Blacks and, most notably, changed black indentured servitude to black chattel slavery for life. They also allowed for the selling of individual slaves to different slave masters, attacking the very existence of black families. Free Blacks were not ignored, either, as their rights were systematically taken away from them, and by 1735, they could no longer vote, a right they had enjoyed in Virginia for over 100 years.

At the same time, the elites began a massive propaganda campaign directed toward the poor whites, convincing them that they were in all ways superior to Blacks, that whites were human while Blacks were "animals" (i.e., sub-human), and that Blacks deserved to be enslaved permanently. The changing laws and the propaganda—done often through church Sunday Schools, as this was the only education poor whites in the South received prior to Reconstruction—were joined by material incentives for poor whites serving in the slave patrols and especially for capturing runaway slaves. And, of course, there was the not-always-implicit threat that if the poor whites did not support the white-based, elite-dominated social order, that they could be enslaved as well. And ultimately, most poor whites accepted the (re) established social order, and incorporated their sense of white supremacy into the very essence of their beings, consciously or unconsciously passing this on to children and other family members, and insisting on its acceptance by later European immigrants.

Allen's work shows the process by which the colonial elites made sure their rule would not again be contested: they lowered Blacks into chattel slavery, and inculcated a belief of white supremacy among the poor whites. In effect, they incorporated poor whites into the white ruling elite over the Blacks, albeit in a very subordinate position vis-à-vis the economic and political elites. It was this process, argues Allen, that enabled the existence and expansion of Black chattel slavery. In other words, slavery and racism were not "normal," based on biological differences, but were socially constructed by the elites to maintain social
control over both whites and Blacks. And with that social control (re)e-
established, the stage was set for the development of a Black slave-based,
but capitalist, cotton industry that ultimately shaped the development
of the modern world. Edward Baptist explicates what happened to black
slaves, showing "how slavery changed and moved and grew over time":

**Slavery vastly and rapidly expands**

In the span of a single lifetime after the 1780s, the South grew from a
narrow coastal strip of worn-out plantations to a sub-continent empire.
Entrepreneurial enslavers moved more than 1 million enslaved people,
by force, from the communities that survivors of the slave trade from
Africa had built in the South and in the West to vast territories that
were seized—also by force—from their Native American inhabitants.
From 1783 at the end of the American Revolution to 1861, the number
of slaves in the United States increased five times over, and all of this
expansion produced a powerful nation. For white enslavers were able
to force enslaved African American migrants to pick cotton faster and
more efficiently than free people. Their practices rapidly transformed
the southern states into the dominant force in the global cotton market,
and cotton was the world's most widely traded commodity at the time,
as it was the key raw material during the first century of the industrial
revolution. The returns from cotton monopoly powered the moderniza-
tion of the rest of the American economy, and by the time of the Civil
War, the United States had become the second nation to undergo large-
scale industrialization. In fact, slavery's expansion shaped every crucial
aspect of the economy and politics of the new nation—not only increasing
its power and size, but also, eventually, dividing US politics, differentiat-
ing regional identities and interests, and helping to make civil war pos-
sible (p. xxi).

Where Baptist writes about forcing "African American migrants to pick
cotton faster and more efficiently," he details the use of brute torture of
individual slaves through the lash; a process so ubiquitous that Baptist
refers to it throughout the book as "the whipping machine."

It is this story—how slavery was absolutely central to the development of
the United States—based on accounts from the slaves themselves, that
Bishop tells so powerfully. Key to this was seeing the development of
slavery as a process—"Things happened because of what had been done
before them—and what people would do in response" (xxiii)—but that the
center point at all times "was the experience of enslaved African Ameri-
cans themselves" (xxiv). And as he points out, "by the 1840s the North
had built a complex, industrialized economy on the backs of enslaved
people and their highly profitable cotton labor" (xxvi). Through explicat-
ing the process of slavery's expansion, Baptist illuminates the growth of
the US economy. He argues that slavery was not a pre-capitalist forma-
tion, but a capitalist one that was based on the exploitation and oppres-
sion of African Americans and their ability to work. The profits made
were plowed back into more land and slaves in the South, while in the
North, they were invested in emerging industries.

What Baptist also makes clear is how slavery was not limited to the
South, although most of its production was based there. The fact is that,
through torture, slaves produced more cotton than could be consumed
in the United States—"Many enslaved cotton pickers in the late 1850s had
peaked at well over 200 pounds a day" (470)—and thus, this had to be
exported and sold to realize profits. That means that boats, trains and
wagons had to be located and hired to transport cotton from individual
plantations to the (international) ports on the coasts, space on ships had
to be procured, insurance had to be paid, and "factors" engaged interna-
tionally to solicit buyers for the produced cotton. None of this happened
"automatically." And though he doesn't belabor the point, these "service
providers" were often located in the far southern cities of New York,
Boston and Philadelphia.

Yet even the production of cotton was not limited to just southerners.
Investors—not only rich people from across the country, but interna-
tional banks such as Baring Brothers of England as well as banks in
the US North such as Brown Brothers—provided credit for the purchase
of slaves, often mortgaging individual slaves; in other words, if a loan
could not be repaid, the banks would gain title to the individual slave,
which they could then sell for more profit. In all, a tremendously brutal,
et productive and profitable system of oppression and exploitatio.
Baptist explains:

In the hands of cotton entrepreneurs, slavery was a highly efficient
way to produce economic growth, both for white southerners and for
others outside the region. In the 1850s, southern production of cotton
doubled from 2 million to 4 million bales, with no sign of either slow-
ing down or of quenching the industrial West's thirst for raw materials.
The world's consumption of raw cotton grew from 1.5 billion to 2.5
billion pounds, and at the end of the decade, the hands of US fields
were still picking two-thirds of it, and almost all of that which went to
Western Europe's factories. By 1860, the eight wealthiest states in the
United States, ranked by wealth per white person, were South Caro-
lina, Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, Connecticut, Alabama, Florida,
and Texas-seven states created by cotton's march west and south,
plus one that, as the most industrialized state in the Union, profited
disproportionately from the gearing of northern factory equipment to
the southwestern whipping-machine (350).
Yet, while Baptist argues here and there that US cotton production was part of a global system of production, it remains for Sven Beckert to properly place it in the history of the global cotton industry. He does this by starting in the Global South, where the cotton industry emerged—notably in India—seeing it develop into global networks centered in the northwestern English city of Manchester-dependent though it was on cotton from the US South, and then ultimately returning to the Global South in the late 20th Century. What is especially interesting in Beckert's account is his foregrounding the role of violence in the emergence of capitalism. Permit an extended quotation:

Such a thorough and rapid re-creation of the world was possible only because of the emergence of new ways of organizing production, trade and consumption. Slavery, the expropriation of indigenous peoples, imperial expansion, armed trade, and the assertion of sovereignty over people and land by entrepreneurs were at its core. I call this system war capitalism.

We usually think of capitalism, at least the globalized, mass-production type that we recognize today, as emerging around 1780 with the Industrial Revolution. But war capitalism, which began to develop in the sixteenth century, came long before machines and factories. War capitalism flourished not in the factory but in the field; it was not mechanized but land- and labor-intensive, resting on the violent expropriation of land and labor in Africa and the Americas. From these expropriations came great wealth and new knowledge, and these in turn strengthened European institutions and states-all crucial preconditions for Europe's extraordinary economic development by the nineteenth century and beyond.

Many historians have called this the age of 'merchant' or 'mercantile' capitalism, but 'war capitalism' better expresses its rawness and violence as well as its intimate connection to European imperial expansion.

When we think of capitalism, we think of wage workers, yet this prior phase of capitalism was based not on free labor but on slavery. We associate industrial capitalism with contracts and markets, but early capitalism was based as often as not on violence and bodily coercion. Modern capitalism privileges property rights, but this earlier moment was characterized just as much by massive expropriations as by secure ownership. Latter-day capitalism rests upon the rule of law and powerful institutions backed by the state, but capitalism's early phase, although ultimately requiring state power to create world-spanning empires, was frequently based on the unrestrained actions of private individuals—the domination of masters over slaves and of frontier capi-
talists over indigenous inhabitants. The cumulative result of this highly aggressive, outwardly oriented capitalism was that the Europeans came to dominate the centuries-old worlds of cotton, merge them into a single empire centered in Manchester, and invent the global economy we take for granted today.

War capitalism, then, was the foundation from which evolved the more familiar industrial capitalism ... (xv-xvi).

And what makes Beckert's account so powerful is the effective combination of both historical depth and global sweep. He covers approximately 5,000 years of human history, from the cotton fields in Mexico to those in Egypt, India, China and the United States, all eventually linked together through the imagination and the cotton mills of Manchester's capitalists, and distributed to markets around the world. He differentiated it from other crops, noting that it was based both in slavery and wage labor, and argues, "Cotton provides the key to understanding the modern world, the great inequalities that characterize it, the long history of globalization, and the ever-changing political economy of capitalism" (xvii). Echoing Baptist, Beckert emphasizes the centrality of violence to slavery and to the overall global network. Beckert writes,

This expansion of European trade networks into Asia, Africa and the Americas did not rest primarily on offering superior goods at good prices, but on the military subjugation of competitors and a coercive European mercantile presence in many parts of the world. Once Europeans became involved in production, they fastened their economic fortunes to slavery. These three moves-imperial expansion, expropriation, and slavery-became central to the forging of a new global economic order and eventually the emergence of capitalism (37).

Beckert asserts that slavery was central to the new system: "The deportation of many millions of Africans to the Americas intensified connections to India because it increased pressure to secure more cotton cloth. It was that trade that established a more significant European mercantile presence in Africa. And it was that trade that made it possible to give economic value to the vast territories captured in the Americas...." Ultimately, this qualitatively changed the world from what it had been previously.

War capitalism depended on the capacity of rich and powerful Europeans to divide the world into an 'inside' and 'outside'. The 'inside' encompassed the laws, institutions and customs of the mother country where state-enforced order ruled. The 'outside', by contrast, was characterized by imperial domination, the expropriations of vast territories, decimation of indigenous peoples, theft of their resources, enslavement and
the domination of vast tracts of land by private capitalists with little effective oversight by distant European states. In these imperial dependencies, the rules of the inside did not apply. There, masters trumped states, violence defied the law, and bold physical coercion by private actors remade markets (38).

In a chapter titled "Slavery Takes Command," Beckert specifically discusses the role of cotton production in the United States to the global empire. He notes the unique situation that prevailed here: "What distinguishes the United States from virtually every other cotton-growing area in the world was planters' command of nearly unlimited supplies of land, labor and capital, and their unparalleled political power" (104). He notes that the expansion of cotton production was based on the removal of native inhabitants of the land. And he ties things together: "The coercion and violence required to mobilize slave labor was matched only by the demands of an expansionist war against indigenous peoples" (108).

In parallel to Baptist, Beckert emphasizes the role of the large plantation in this production system: "Indeed, 85 percent of all cotton picked in the South in 1860 was grown on units larger than a hundred acres, and the planters who owned these farms owned 91.2 percent of all slaves." He commented, laconically, "The larger the farm, the better the planter was able to take advantage of the economies of scale inherent in slave-based cotton production" (110). Again, the violence.

Cotton demanded quite literally a hunt for labor and perpetual struggle for its control. Slave traders, slave pens, slave auctions, and the attendant physical and psychological violence of holding millions in bondage were of central importance to the expansion of cotton production to the United States and of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain.

Better than anyone else, slaves understood the violent foundations of cotton's success. [This is what Baptist detailed so well-KS.]

The expansion of cotton manufacturing in Great Britain depended on violence across the Atlantic.

Beckert discusses the political power of the slave owners, noting the lack of competing elites within the slave states. Of course, the inclusion of the "three-fifths" clause into the US Constitution by slaveholders and their politicians signified their political power nationally. The violence, the expropriation of the land, and the political power to both enable and protect these features had astounding economic consequences. By 1859, in the Mississippi Delta alone, "as many as sixty thousand Delta slaves produced a staggering 66 million pounds of cotton," which was over ten times as much as that exported by slaves in Saint-Dominique to
France at its highpoint in the early 1790s. The Delta was so fertile that Beckert claims it was basically the Saudi Arabia of the early nineteenth century. By 1840, in the Delta's Washington County, there were more than ten slaves for every white inhabitant. By 1850, in the same county, "each and every white family in the country held on average more than eighty slaves." He notes

The largest Delta planter, Stephen Duncan, owned 1,036 slaves and the value of his property by the late 1850s was estimated at $1.3 million. While not typical cotton farms, plantations in the Delta were highly capitalized businesses, indeed among the very largest in North America, and the investments necessary would have been beyond the reach of nearly every northern industrialist (113).

This combination of books establishes a reality that can no longer be ignored, avoided or rationalized away. The fact is that slavery was at the heart of the "American" economy prior to the Civil War; this slavery was based on extreme violence—physical and psychological—that was liberally employed; and it was protected (and expanded) by white southern elites who had dominated national political power. The slave-based economy was not confined to the South: it was integral to both the (US) national and global economy. It was a capitalist production system that spanned the globe, although its key workers (slaves in the plantation South before the Civil War) were definitely not free; nonetheless, the clear goal was profit maximization, and the accumulation of political power as a result to ensure the maintenance and expansion of the plantation system.

The slave-based economy generated the profits that allowed the US to industrialize, and also enabled these processes to happen much quicker and much more extensively than could have been done without slavery. The factories and industrial-related employment provided allowed the US to absorb the millions of people immigrating from especially Europe in the late 1800s-early 1900s. Without this capability, emigration from Europe would have been much more limited, and had they been forced to stay on a generally limited land-base; it seems certainly worthwhile to speculate if Russia would have been the only European country to have a successful revolution in the early twentieth century? To say the industrialization of the US had far-reaching global implications seems terribly inadequate.

While both Baptist's and Beckert's work are both crucially important and straight-forward, the addition of Allen's work adds a level of detail often overlooked. He incorporates 'white' people into the discussion, and not just as proponents and perpetrators of slavery. He shows how most poor and working class whites acquiesced if not accepted the lifetime
enslavement of African Americans (and some facilitated it), and by so doing, moved into the ruling elite, helping to control people of color, albeit at a terribly subordinate level to the white economic and political elites. By doing this, and by accepting the dominance of the white elites, these whites perpetuated their own subordination by rejecting alliances with people of color. Considering that general social advances for working and poor people in this country have happened only when whites and African Americans have allied—during Reconstruction, during the industrial union movement of the 1930s and 1940s, and during the mass mobilizations of the 1960s-early '70s—one can quickly realize the impact of this collective white decision to accept black subjugation, on whites as well as Blacks. And why the ruling elites have worked so hard to ensure these alliances rarely ensue, and when they do, to limit them as much as possible.

The Black Lives Matters movement is again putting inter-racial unity on this country's public agenda for the betterment of most Americans. It is telling white Americans that our liberation is incumbent upon black liberation. But with its "in-your-face" style, its message demands whites respond affirmatively, and with much more effort than verbally expressing "support." It is not enough to condemn police killings of young African American men: yes, we have to do this, but we have to also address the use of white supremacy and racism in social control; we have to force our leaders to actively confront the poverty that is devastating both our inner cities and our rural countryside; and we have to reject the lies and obfuscation that have been used to ignore or marginalize the role of slavery in the development of this country. We whites have to make people of color full citizens of this country, both in reality and in our hearts and minds. If we are going to address the economic inequality and resulting by-products that are literally tearing apart our country, only a full understanding of how white supremacy has worked against the large majority of us must be placed at the center of the table, and we cannot avert our eyes.

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Challenging White Supremacy is Critical to Efforts for Transformative Change

By Meta Van Sickle, Carla F Wallace and Janet Tucker

There is a battle going on for the hearts, minds, bodies and votes of white people in this country and both direct and indirect appeals to racism are part of an old strategy with new legs.

Trump’s message of hate, Islamophobia, racism and division, his calls for outright violence against protestors in his rallies and his strategies of wall-building and deportation are gaining more traction than most people, who care deeply about these issues, ever thought it would. All over the country white people are flocking to hear Trump, lining up for hours in big and small towns around the country to get into his rallies. Many of these people are poor and working class white people. Union leaders are warning that his targeting of white working people is working and the demographic studies of Trump supporters bear them out.

While too many white leftists and too many white progressives hesitate to take on our responsibility for organizing white people for racial justice, corporate America is taking the race based class divisions all the way to the bank and creating a country in which people of color are seen as ever more expendable.

A recent New York Times article documents the demographic breakdown of Trump supporters. The strongest indicator is a white person who
has not finished high school, has no work, and has given up looking for it (Neil and Katz, 2016).

According to liberals, many progressives, and the mainstream media, you would think that we have a phenomena of poor and working class white people as hopeless bigots. You would think that racism was invented by poor and working class white people and that this is who is sustaining systemic racism and white supremacy throughout our country and influencing this country’s relationships with other countries. Over and over we hear, “It’s those uneducated rednecks,” as we wash our hands of the responsibility to do more than blame from the sidelines as Muslims, Black and Brown people, and immigrants bear the brunt of the dangerous winds of racialized hate blowing across our land.

In his important article, "Donald Trump is Dangerous", The Nation’s John Nichols points out that Trump is speaking to working class anxiety more effectively and powerfully than mainstream democrats. “This country is dying,” says Trump. “And our workers are losing their jobs.” Trump goes on to decry trade pacts and threatens to tax corporations if they continue to move jobs out of the country. Nichols quotes AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka, who tells him that his workers are talking to him about Trump, and Service Employees International Union president Mary Kay Henry, who cautions that the Trump message is so on target for white workers that he
could win enough union votes, and even the presidency, with an over-all program that will hurt white workers, and all workers.

**Shredding the safety net**

Instead of addressing the concerns of poor and working families, front and center, Washington talks about the economic “recovery”, “revitalized” manufacturing and “progress” on clean energy. Meanwhile, there continues to be urban centers where unemployment runs close to 50 percent among young Black men, and rural poverty, which promises to keep several generations from providing enough for families to get by. What has been left of the safety net is being shredded further everywhere you look. A recent example under the Republican governor of Kentucky, is the choice between canceling Family Court or Drug Court because budget cuts do not allow for keeping both.

There is a reason that the Trump rhetoric resonates and it is not only because it caters to racism and blames people of color. Trump is playing to the deep seated insecurity and material hardships that white working class and low income people are experiencing due to the failure of this economic system. And yes, he is wrapping this in attacks on people of color. His message is racist and it only leads to a working class further divided along racial lines and unable to grow the people power needed for real change that benefits all of us.

This racist agenda and this divided working class is taking a toll on white workers in many ways. A recent study shows that the only demographic whose mortality rate is rising is white workers. The causes of death are disproportionately from alcohol, drug addiction, and suicide. Despite the rhetoric about an economic recovery, and despite the “buffer” of race afforded white workers, working people are facing the direct impact of capitalism in decline and are literally dying from it. While institutional racism ensures that people of color, in particular Black people, bear the brunt of the oppression, white workers as well, have lost the hope that they can provide a better future for their children. Unlike people of color, many of whom, as Audre Lorde wrote, knew they were “never meant to survive,” poor and working class whites thought that they were meant to survive.

A snapshot of parts of the South is particularly helpful in this regard. While people of color are bearing the overwhelming impact of the continuing recession, working class people of all colors are facing cutbacks in basic services, loss of jobs, and lowering or stagnant wages. New industries may be moving to South Carolina for example, but their reasons for doing so have nothing to do with improving the economic health of the area. Quite the opposite. These industries are moving there because
they are paying little or no state or local taxes and wages far lower than in their sister plants in other locations in the country, according to the Charleston Central Labor Council, Personal Communication. Corporate welfare and low wages limit the public sector’s ability to deliver in several ways, from the underfunding and defunding of public education, to the poorly maintained infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, to a lack of access to affordable health care and so on.

If we are to counter the use of bigotry to divert people from the failures of capitalism or to seduce white people falling out of the economy into the lure of having their own strongman, those of us who are white need to step up to our responsibility to do the work with other white people around racial justice. We need to be connecting with other working class and poor white people, our families, our neighbors and our co-workers, who need a system that works for the many, not just the few. In this moment, we must move from blaming and shaming poor and working class white people or, in other words, avoid the urgency of challenging white supremacy, and take up the work of lifting up the mutual interest we have in an America that provides for the basic human needs of all people AND is anchored in an unapologetic commitment to racial justice.

**Learn from positive examples**

Part of our work must be to shine a light on those examples of white working class people joining with people of color for a mutual interest agenda that benefits all. Robin Kelley’s brilliant book, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression*, notes stories in the 1930s of cross race, class conscious worker struggles against barriers to voting rights for poor people in rural areas. There are many examples of cross race class solidarity from the coal mines in Appalachia. In July of 1891 over 1,500 miners freed prisoners in the shadow of Tennessee Coal and Iron Company. The Chattanooga Federation of Trades reported that “whites and Negroes are standing shoulder to shoulder” and armed with 840 rifles. Black and white workers joined together in the Paint Creek Cabin strike of 1913-14 and in many battles against King Coal in the decades to follow.

More recently, outside the Louisville Convention Center in Kentucky on March 1, 2016 thousands of white people, many of them working class, lined up to hear Donald Trump deride big government and its elite corporate allies. Promising to “make America great again” his increasingly popular message is wrapped in blaming the nation’s woes on immigrants, “freeloaders” and other barely coded language for people of color. But also there, were members of Louisville Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), part of a national network dedicated to organizing white people in effective, accountable relationships with people of color led
struggles engaged not only in disrupting the Trump gathering on the inside, but also engaging on the outside. This included connecting with some in the Trump crowd around our mutual interest in an economy that works for all of us and the idea that we can win if white and people of color join together. In one conversation, a white worker at the Trump rally said that he thought one of the problems with so many Black people being put in prison is that so many of the judges are rich and white. In that brief exchange is the possibility of shifting the blame from people of color to the elites on both sides of the political aisle, who have failed to address the growing economic divide between rich and poor and the increasing impoverishment of the US poor and working class. Rather than blaming white workers for their fear and anxiety, SURJ frames racial justice as being in the mutual interest of ALL workers and urges unity across racial lines as the only way to win the jobs, housing, health care, clean environment and dignity we all want and need.

Too often, rural people, many of whom are working class whites, are broad brushed as being the breeding ground of right wing militia. However, the leaders of much of this activity are far better off economically than those they seek to engage. In rural Oregon, over 350 mostly rural people came together outside Burns to say no to the militias holed up in the federal wildlife sanctuary. Supported by efforts of the Rural Organizing Project, the gathering exposed the lie that big city dwellers often have about low income rural white people going along with, or worse, instigating right wing, racist militia mobilizations.

Charleston Area Justice Ministries (CAJM) is an example of the work that is possible when we focus on the stake that both whites and people of color have in racial justice. In work on the intersections between racism, gun violence prevention and police preemptive stop reduction activities, the group has exposed the disproportionate targeting of people of color communities by police. CAJM has researched the number of “pretext” police stops across the police departments in the state. The North Charleston police department made over 130,000 such stops last year. Seventy percent of the stops were of African American drivers though the African American population is only forty two percent.

The CAJM group is now in the process of inviting the two cities’ mayors and police chiefs into a conversation about these police procedures in the presence of hundreds of concerned community members. The group is calling for a commitment to reduce the number of pretext stops, an outside auditor to review the stops and better community policing practices. A mutual interest narrative can address the reality of police oppression in Black communities and inspire the development of the changes that will make ALL communities safer.
The central point of right wing populism is white supremacy and the use of racism to blame people of color for the woes of white working people. Linda Alcoff, in her book, The Future of Whiteness, explains that white liberals “remain uncomfortable in broaching the topic (of race), while white conservatives generally try to disguise their racial references, though the disguise is often so ineffective as to be a joke” (p. SSS).

Too many efforts among white liberals and some white leftists have either fallen into the mistake of avoiding the issue of race as divisive to class unity or speaking of a “white privilege” few struggling white workers can identify with. The first approach maintains the fertile ground for appeals to racism, the second erases the class differences in how white people of wealth and white workers experience their whiteness. Both continue the strategic errors in our efforts to build working class unity on a basis of shared needs, hopes, and a commitment to racial justice.

Lee Atwater, in his book Bad Boy, aptly describes how the right wing politicians are using “wedge” issues to divide and conquer the voting population. One such current wedge is the narrow and inaccurate portrayal of the Democratic Party as being anti-police. While those of us engaged in challenging police abuse see this suggestion as laughable, white voters who have already bought into the idea that police terror in Black communities and the killings of Black people is reasonable and appropriate, are shunning Democratic candidates as anti-police. In North Charleston, SC the police shooting of Walter Scott was greeted by at least three popular responses, some of which were only voiced in cloistered spaces: 1) outrage at the police violence, 2) outrage that there was outrage at the shooting (Scott deserved it and the person who made the video should have been shot too), and 3) indifference.

A mutual interest framework, that focuses on the stake that both working class white people and people of color have in accountable policing, jobs, housing, healthcare and other basic necessities, and the humanity that anchors us to one another can grow the unity to challenge Trumpism, Wall Street, crazy Cruz Republicans, and the divisions that keep us from the transformative changes we all need.

We must be willing to talk about how race is being used to divide working people and who benefits when we are divided. But most importantly, we must move beyond talking about this with one another and take a mutual interest narrative that centers racial justice in the neighborhoods, workplaces and families in which we live, work and love. In particular, white people on the left who are serious about challenging capitalism must heed the call made over a half century ago by our sisters and brothers of color in SNCC, and our comrades in the Black Panther Party, for
white people to “organize our own”. In the words of SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael, “One of the most disturbing things about almost all the white supporters of the movement has been that they are afraid to go into their own communities—which is where the racism exists—and work to get rid of it.” Those of us who are white must learn how to speak about white supremacy and how it is hurting all of us in white communities.

Seeking liberation for all through racial justice

Inspired by the movement for Black lives, Black youth taking to the streets at great risk to challenge police abuse, undocumented Latino youth calling for immigration reform, the largely people of color base of the Fight for $15, and indigenous leadership in the anti-pipeline environmental struggle, more and more white people are asking what they can do about racism. They are struggling to understand what racial justice has to do with their own liberation. This development provides an opening for white progressives and the left to take up our responsibility to organize white people for racial justice as part of an ever growing multi-racial movement for transformative change.

This moment is ripe with opportunities to do this work, and burdened with dangers if we do not. One example of a broad based effort organizing white working people for racial justice is the national SURJ network. Moving with a mutual interest framework (that what we all need to live in dignity and have our needs met is bound up in the struggle for racial justice and that appeals to racism only benefit those in power) SURJ has a focus on the critical role of the south and on white working class and poor people, including rural, youth, LGBTQ and disabled people.

Black Lives Matter founder Alicia Garza says that white people need to break white silence, challenge white supremacy and create a pole to which other white people can gravitate. Providing a response to the call from the movement for Black lives to mobilize hundreds of thousands of white people in effective, accountable action with people of color led struggles, chapters of SURJ have organized all over the country (140 and more each month in cities big and small and rural areas). People wanting to set up a SURJ Chapter get help from the national network with resources and organizing training.

If we are to counter the hate and divisive messages that are directed at the fears and real life struggles of white working class and poor people, white progressives and those on the left need to get out of our “comfort zones” and use our voices and bodies to say no to white supremacy. We must organize white people to stand with people of color or communities that work for all of us.
Rather than wringing our hands over what is to be done, Louisville SURJ goes door to door in white working class neighborhoods talking about how police are targeting Black communities and why the divisions between white and Black workers keep all of us from winning the change we need to provide for our families. In a recent afternoon of conversations with over 120 white families, over 60 agreed to put a Black Lives Matter yard sign in their yard.

As white southern civil rights activist Anne Braden told us years ago, “The battle is and always has been a battle for the hearts and minds of white people in this country. The fight against racism is our issue. It’s not something that we’re called on to help people of color with. We need to become involved with it as if our lives depended on it because really, in truth, they do.”

As Alcoff notes, “…pessimism breeds the fatalism that excuses inaction and complicity.” Whether it is organizing with SURJ, working with existing campaigns and organizations like the Sanders campaign, working with a local union drive or engaging in other efforts, we can be part of a movement to bring hundreds of thousands of white working people into motion for an agenda that challenges corporate greed, undermines patriarchy, ends war and demands racial justice. Both the today and the tomorrow of every one of us demands no less.

References


Interviewing Dr. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz:

‘The Great Revolutionary Movements in The US Have Largely Been Powered by African-American, Mexican-American, And Native-American Resistance’

Interview realized by Mohsen Abdelmoumen of the American Herald-Tribune

Mohsen Abdelmoumen: In your book An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States, you show that there has been settlement, plundering of native lands, massacres, etc. Why, do you think, the current American never evokes the words colonialism and genocide about Native peoples? Is this history underestimated by the average American either is it deliberately denied?

Dr. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz: United States founders were explicit in spelling out their intention to occupy and colonize the continent from ocean to ocean and even had plans to colonize the Caribbean and Central America. In popular and political jargon, they called their colonialist and imperialist practices "manifest destiny," that is, they were ordained as Euroamericans to have dominion over the continent. However, in the late nineteenth century, with the continental territory that exists today
realized, Euroamerican historians and intellectuals as well as politicians began creating a new origin story that told of a tiny sliver of British colonies breaking free of the mammoth British empire to become the first constitutional republic, the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world, a beacon to the world to revere and try to emulate, developing a foreign policy rhetoric of "spreading democracy." This remains the US nationalist narrative.

Why doesn't the American who celebrates his revolution against the English and his independence mention the extermination of the Indigenous peoples and colonization? Can we say that the victors write History and that the indigenous peoples are forgotten of it? Did the Native American identity survive the time and the massacre of memory?

In order to support the narrative of the US as founded in liberty, erasure of the Indigenous peoples is necessary, arguing a phasing out of a pre-human population by a stronger one. However, resistance by the Indigenous nations and communities has never ceased and in the past half-century, along with oppressed African-Americans, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans, have made themselves visible. Indigenous Peoples remain under US colonization laws, but seek self-determination and have established their presence in the international institutional framework of the United Nations. They certainly remember and document genocidal policy and expropriation, but also their persistent resistance to US colonialism.

American patriotism seems to concern only white Americans. In your opinion, do Blacks and Native Americans have their place in this exclusively white America?

Essentially US patriotism/nationalism IS white nationalism, as are the laws and institutions of governance. Indigenous Peoples and Africans-Americans assert self-determination and human rights and forced considerable reforms in the 1970s and 1980s, but since that time, a massive, white nationalist backlash has come to dominate national politics as well as many local and state politics, especially in the South and Intermountain West. Donald Trump represents the success of these reactionary moves. The liberal party, the Democrats, have always maintained the national narrative of the founding, but sought to make society more inclusive; while the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s were strong, the Democrats could be pushed to make deeper reforms, but they have lost credibility. The one matter that both parties agree on is the right of the US to dominate the world economically and militarily.

How do you explain the return of the white supremacist movements, as we saw in Charlottesville? Isn't America sick of its memory? The
US being not cured of their ills, aren't the genocide of the Native peoples as well as the slavery a story which still remains to be written?

The white supremacist movements have been given a mainstream platform politically by the Trump campaign and administration, but there has always been an extreme element of white supremacy in the US that serves to allow mainstream white supremacy seem rationale and more desirable. But, the public display of Nazi and other foreign fascist gestures and symbols has little popular appeal to a very insular US white populace.

You are one of the few historians who have written and advocated for the cause of Native Americans and I find your career remarkable, like some of my speakers. Why, do you think, the US left was not really interested in the cause of the Indigenous peoples?

There are many more Native American historians and scholars in related fields now than when I was in graduate school in the mid-1960s, and they are receiving more attention. Most of the arguments and material in my book, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, are based in their research and studies.

But, yes, the US left has the weakness that any left within a colonial power has, but is much more pronounced in a settler-colonial society like the US. Only in the 1870s, did the US aggressively recruit non-Anglo or Germanic immigrants to work in the burgeoning industrial manufacturing and mineral and fossil fuel mining and exploitation, mainly Southern and Eastern Europeans, speaking many languages, with cultural practices alien to Anglo-Americans. They were also darker people generally and considered inferior.

The way the children and grandchildren of these millions of immigrants found to be considered "Americans," was to embrace the US origin story, but also, the virulent anti-Black and Indian/Mexican-hating racism of Anglo Americans. What many of those European workers brought with them though was militant trade unionism and revolutionary socialist and anarcho-syndicalist ideas. From the beginning, trade unions that were formed were exclusively Euro-American, although African-Americans and Mexicans organized their own trade unions.

The theories of organizing and revolution developed by the US left had little relationship with US history or institutions and have never entirely been able to comprehend that history. The great revolutionary movements in the US have largely been powered by African-American, Mexican-American, and Native-American resistance, which for a time attracted large number of white youth in the US, at the height of those movements in the 1960s and 1970s.
Taking Down White Supremacy

Your book "All the Real Indians Died Off": And 20 Other Myths About Native Americans" reveals the lies on which are built the United States. Can we say that lies are both fundamental and structural in the US? Doesn't colonialism need to create myths to expand its domination?

Yes, although they are myths they are woven into the body politic, into institutions at every level, and especially into the educational system and public media.

Who is Dr. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz?

Dr. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz is a historian, writer, teacher, memoirist, speaker and social activist. She is Professor Emerita of Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies at California State University, East Bay. She grew up in rural Oklahoma, the daughter of a tenant farmer and part-Indian mother. She has been active in the international indigenous movement for more than four decades, and she is known for her lifelong commitment to national and international social justice issues. After receiving her Ph.D. in history at the University of California, Los Angeles, she taught in the newly established Native American Studies Program at California State University, Hayward, and helped found the Departments of Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies.

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz was an anti-war and anti-racist activist and organizer throughout the 1960s and early 1970s and a public speaker on issues of patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism, and racism. She worked in Cuba with the Venceremos Brigade and worked with other revolutionaries across the spectrum of radical politics, including the Civil Rights Movement, Students for a Democratic Society, the Revolutionary Union, the African National Congress, and the American Indian Movement.

Dr. Dunbar-Ortiz was asked to visit Sandinista Nicaragua to appraise the land tenure situation of the Miskito Indians in the northeastern region of the country. Her two trips there that year coincided with the beginning of United States government's sponsorship of a proxy war to overthrow the Sandinistas, with the northeastern region on the border with Honduras becoming a war zone and the basis for extensive propaganda carried out by the Reagan administration against the Sandinistas. In over a hundred trips to Nicaragua and Honduras from 1981 to 1989, she monitored what was called the Contra War.

Roxanne Dunbar founded Cell 16 in 1968, a militant feminist organization in the United States known for its program of celibacy, separation from men and self-defense training.
Taking Down White Supremacy

Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South: An Interview with Historian Keri Leigh Merritt

By Robin Lindley

Robin Lindley is a Seattle-based writer and attorney, and the features editor of the History News Network (hnn.us). His articles have appeared in HNN, Crosscut, Salon, Real Change, Documentary, Writer’s Chronicle, Billmoyers.com, Huffington Post, AlterNet, and others. He has a special interest in the history of conflict and human rights. His email: robinlindley@gmail.com.

The lords of the lash are not only absolute masters of the Blacks, but they are also the oracle and arbiters of non-slaveholding whites, whose freedom is merely nominal, and whose unparalleled illiteracy and degradation is purposely and fiendishly perpetuated. —Hinton Helper, The Impending Crisis of the South (1857)

While the Southern abolitionist Hinton Helper abhorred the cruel institution of slavery, he was also appalled by the condition of poor whites in the South of the 1850s who he saw as suffering a “second degree of slavery” under the dominance of the slaveholding ruling class. Wealthy slaveholders brutally enforced the enslavement of Blacks while repressing and degrading poor whites who they saw as disaffected pariahs that could upend the rigid hierarchy of the rich white slave-owning class.

Historian Keri Leigh Merritt presents a comprehensive study of this malignant and overlooked aspect of slavery in her new book Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South (Cambridge University Press). She offers a groundbreaking interdisciplinary perspective that
explores economics, law, class, labor, race, social relations, the court system, and vigilante violence, among other issues, to reveal the world of poor whites in the South during the decades preceding the Civil War.

Dr. Merritt details how an underclass of white people grew in the Deep South. By the 1840s and 1850s, the global demand for cotton had skyrocketed, and slaveholders from the Upper South had sold over 800,000 African Americans to Lower South states. This influx of slaves reduced the need for white laborers, whose ranks also grew due to white immigration, particularly from Ireland. As she vividly describes, these whites were landless, jobless or underemployed, and illiterate, and faced involuntary servitude, a hostile legal system, illness, starvation, harassment, and the constant threat of violence—the result of the policies designed to expand the wealth and power of the white slaveholding master class while preserving slavery at all costs in a de facto police state.

Dr. Merritt also dispels myths about this time, including the idea that virtually all whites in the South supported slavery and secession. She concludes by chronicling how poor whites benefited from the end of slavery by gaining the ability to compete in a free economy while, ironically, free Black people were excluded from the economic system and became subject to “slavery by another name” with the persistence of white supremacy and a racist justice system.

Because of the illiteracy of most poor white people in the prewar South, they left few written documents. To address this problem, Dr. Merritt conducted extensive original research to uncover their story by studying sources from county court records, jail and penitentiary records, newspapers, and coroners’ reports to slave narratives, accounts from slaveholders and abolitionists and veterans, petitions from laborers, and much more.

Dr. Merritt works as an independent scholar in Atlanta, Georgia. She earned a doctorate in history from The University of Georgia. In addition to Masterless Men, Dr. Merritt is also co-editor with Matthew Hild of Reconsidering Southern Labor History: Race, Class, and Power (University Press of Florida, 2018). She is currently researching books on radical Black resistance during Reconstruction, and on the role of sheriffs and police in the nineteenth century South. She has earned numerous honors for her writing and research on inequality and poverty, and she frequently contributes articles to the non-academic press that place current events in historical perspective.

Dr. Merritt generously talked about her book and her work as a historian during a visit to Seattle.
Robin Lindley: Before getting to your new book Dr. Merritt, I wanted to ask how you decided to study history and then specialize in the issues of slavery, labor, race, and economics in the American South of the nineteenth century.

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: I’ve always been attracted to history. I’ve read history books since I was a young teenager. Growing up in the South and seeing the racism there drew me in even more.

I started studying poor whites and the nineteenth century South as an undergraduate and realized their story was largely untold. They were nearly always left out of history simply due to the fact that they were illiterate. I knew I wanted to go onto graduate school and study this topic, because I believe it adds a lot of nuance to how race and class interact – and how racism is perpetuated in America.

Robin Lindley: And you’ve brought in legal, social and economic history and other aspects of the story beyond the focus of many histories of the period.

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: Yes. I think we miss a lot as historians by just staying within our discipline. For example, what economists have come up on the price of slaves in the last few years that changes the whole dynamics of how we think about the South and slavery. By using interdisciplinary methods and relying on other subjects, we inch closer to the reality of the situation.

Robin Lindley: You’ve done pioneering research on an overlooked aspect of race and slavery in the antebellum South. How would you briefly describe your new book *Masterless Men* to readers?

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: *Masterless Men* examines how Black slavery - and subsequently, Black freedom – affected poor whites in the Deep South. Basically, with the influx of slaves from the Upper to the Lower South in the mid-1800s, poor whites increasingly found themselves unemployed and underemployed, and became cyclically impoverished. While poor whites certainly never experienced anything close to the horrific brutality of slavery, they did suffer socio-economically because of the peculiar institution.

I document the ways in which poorer whites traded and socially interacted with the enslaved, and how the slaveholders were constantly trying to figure out how to achieve segregation between the groups.

I show how poor whites were exploited by slave owners, who used myriad ways, from keeping them ignorant and illiterate to policing and ter-
rorizing them, to maintain an effective system of slavery. Conversely, I also argue that Black emancipation “freed” poor whites in certain, very important ways, often at the expense of African Americans.

Robin Lindley: Was there an incident or a reading that sparked your research on poor whites?

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: I come from impoverished whites myself on my mother’s side. She grew up in an old mill village. My grandmother was only barely literate – she had to drop out of school in the seventh grade to work.

I still remember visiting my grandmother during the summers and seeing not only the poverty of the area but how it affected both whites and Blacks in her area of town. All the rest of the town – the upper middle class and upper-class sections - was segregated. But the really poor area was completely integrated. That didn’t mean that the poor whites weren’t racist, but they still lived with Black people. They worked with Black people. They had an underground economy. It was a story you don’t see told in history—and an interaction of poor people that we don’t talk about.

I was always drawn to the nineteenth century because growing up in the Deep South there are vestiges of slavery wherever you go, especially in the rural areas as in the Mississippi Delta, for example. You feel like you’re back in plantation times. I realized early on that all types of disparity, from wealth to education to income, were dependent on the fact that, once slavery ended, a whole class of people was freed with zero wealth. I focus on this period as the genesis of so many of today’s problems.
Robin Lindley: I appreciate the original research you did for Masterless Men. As you write, most poor whites in the antebellum South were illiterate so they didn’t leave behind documentary evidence. What source material did you rely on in your research?

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: Any time we try to study illiterate people, it poses so many more challenges than people realize, so scholars of illiterate people must be more creative and find multiple different ways to figure out the lives of those people.

For me, luckily, I had all the WPA [Works Progress Administration] slave narratives to rely upon. A lot of the questions to these former slaves centered on class and what they thought about poor whites. So there was a lot of information there.

I also used the Tennessee Civil War Veterans questionnaires. While they were given to Tennesseans from 1914-1922, and there were many different southerners who lived in Tennessee then. They talked about the Deep South and slavery and the class issues.

I relied heavily on government records such as county court records and coroners’ reports. How people die tells you a lot about a society. And I also utilized newspapers, petitions to governors for pardons and petitions about labor unions or “associations,” as they were called then. Census records were essential in studying family structures and the mobility of people.

In short, I used any kind of document I could get my hands on to try to uncover the lives of these people.

Robin Lindley: A major theme of your book is that the slave-owning white aristocracy used racism to extend their wealth and power, and both slaves and poor whites were oppressed. Do you have a sense of the percentage of whites who were slave owners?

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: Yes. In the Deep South, the percentages are concentrated, with more slave owners in the Deep South than in the Upper South. The Deep South states I studied are South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. I don’t include Louisiana because it’s too different from a racial perspective and a legal perspective.

In these Deep South states in 1860, you have about one-third of white people who own slaves or live in families who own slaves. About one-third of white people could classify as middling class status – yeomen who owned land and not slaves, or the up-and-coming middle class of merchants, lawyers, and bankers, and then men who were overseers
and hadn’t come into their inheritances yet. And the last third are poor whites.

Robin Lindley: I don’t think many people understand how expensive slaves were. What did you learn about the price of slaves then and what this means now?

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: The economists Samuel Williamson and Louis Cain came out with a paper called “Measuring Slavery.” They looked at the prices of slaves not just in terms of cash value but in terms of what kind of power and status it took to have this kind of cash, to make this kind of purchase. You weren’t just getting lines of credit anywhere.

So, just to have the power to purchase something (or someone) so expensive means that the buyer has to be incredibly wealthy. Williamson and Cain came up with a figure that purchasing a slave would cost something like $130,000 today. That’s a totally different figure than the cliometrician scholars were using in the 1970s to estimate slave prices.

Slavery held down ‘free’ poor whites, as well as the enslaved

Robin Lindley: Poor whites obviously could never own a slave. You stress that poor whites didn’t have steady incomes and didn’t have land and were illiterate, and the slave owning aristocracy kept them illiterate and impoverished. That may surprise some readers. Why did the slaveholders desire this result?

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: Most slaveholders looked at poor whites as nuisances—as impediments to slavery itself. Not masters, not slaves, they were essentially “masterless men and women” in a hierarchical world. But poor whites were also interacting on a social and economic level with the enslaved and had an underground economy in which they traded together. Primarily, slaves appropriated foodstuffs from plantations and often traded with poor whites for liquor and other goods – it was America’s original “Black market.”

Slaveholders knew they had to control and manage poor whites to keep slavery viable and profitable, and to keep these sizable underclasses from banding together and doing anything about it.

By 1860, there were poor white labor associations (or unions) throughout the Deep South and the workers were protesting having to compete with slave labor. They went so far as to threaten to withdraw their support for slavery if something was not done to raise their wages. They literally could not compete with slavery and earn a living wage.
So what did planters do? Well, they used both the legal system and vigilante violence to control this potentially explosive population.

Robin Lindley: Why did the Southern elites feel so threatened by poor whites who seemed so powerless and degraded in this slave society?

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: Like I said, they’ve always been a nuisance. They’ve been trading with slaves and disrupting slavery in that way.

But they also interacted with the enslaved socially. Interracial relationships between the two groups were far from rare. In fact, poor white women had the power to create a race of free Blacks because a child’s status was based on the race of the mother. So, if a poor white woman had a child with a Black man, that child would be entitled to legal freedom, adding to the free Black population. So they had the ability to disrupt the racial hierarchy as well.

And then you had the Irish famine in the 1840s and all of these poor white immigrants began pouring in, all over the Deep South, especially in port cities. In cities like Charleston, Savannah, New Orleans, and even Mobile, the rates of white immigrants were exploding in the 1850s. So, you have a militant white labor force that was growing – and that was bucking against the system.

It’s no surprise that the push for secession started in Charleston because, while a sizable percentage of South Carolina’s enslaved laborers were being sold to western states like Mississippi and Texas, Charleston experienced a rapid increase in defiant white immigrant laborers. Poor white laborers’ ranks were growing – as was their militancy about not having to compete with unfree, brutalized labor.

Robin Lindley: How do you see the treatment of poor whites in this Southern caste system compared with the treatment of enslaved Blacks?

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: There’s no comparison. Slaves were treated horribly. The extent of the violent abuse and rape they endured has still not been fully revealed – and may never be. It’s starting to be told by people like Ed Baptist and a new generation of historians who have published books in the last ten or fifteen years.

Certainly, some poor whites were forced laborers and bound laborers – legally their children could be taken from them and forced to work for other people. These unfree laborers seemingly frequently suffered abuse at the hands of their “masters,” but there was always an end date
to their terms of bound labor. Never would I compare their plight to slavery.

Robin Lindley: You dispel the myth that virtually all poor whites in the antebellum South supported slavery.

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: Obviously, all of the slave owning class did and, I’d argue, the vast majority of the middling classes supported slavery unconditionally.

I think there was more dissent in the poor white classes. I’m sure most of them were racist, but they saw that slavery was detrimental to them on a socioeconomic level. They recognized that they couldn’t get a decent wage and couldn’t get jobs as slavery increasingly pushed them out of agriculture.

As the possibility of disunion became a reality, poor whites were not the ones pushing for secession. Some were Unionists, but in the Deep South most were anti-Confederates – they just wanted to be left alone. They didn’t want to fight for slaveholders and slaveholder profits. But I argue that they were basically forced to fight in many instances. Even before the Conscription Act of 1862, there are vigilante groups all throughout the region that literally forced poor white men – with the threat of death – to join the Confederate army.

Robin Lindley: So, the Civil War may be seen as a war sparked by the white southern aristocracy against democracy to assure the survival of slavery—and preserve its wealth and power.

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: Right. Scholars such as Manisha Sinha have written about how the leaders of the secession movement were oligarchs. They were aristocrats. I show evidence of this too – they simply didn’t believe in democracy. They didn’t want poor people voting regardless of color. They didn’t think impoverished people should be involved on a political level at all. In the 1840s and 50s, slaveholders were increasingly attempting to remove civil liberties from poor whites. Furthermore, if you look at the laws passed by the Confederacy, you see more evidence of distain for both poor whites and democracy itself.

Robin Lindley: And, as the war approached, secessionists were preaching against abolition and raising fears of race war and other horrors if slavery ended.

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: Absolutely - as the Civil War approached, there was an explosion of propaganda in Southern newspapers. And even though most poor whites were illiterate, they still heard newspapers being read
in town squares and at other gathering places, so they had some access to news. But this propaganda was not only directed at them – it was also a warning to middling classes as well. The richer whites predicted an impending racial war, saying that slaves would slaughter whites by the thousands, and that slaveholders were rich enough to move out of the region but poorer whites would be left to suffer at the hands of the enslaved. They said that Black people would take over the South and rule the government; that poor whites would be the slaves of Blacks; that African American men would marry and rape their wives and daughters. It was just completely incendiary and vile, vicious racist language. I argue that you can see clearly here the beginnings of the vitriol of the Jim Crow era.

Robin Lindley: These poor whites, for the most part, were illiterate and otherwise uneducated. What was the state of public education in the South in the years before the Civil War?

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: There was essentially no public education in the Deep South. None of the states had anything close to public education. Of course, some of the problem was poverty: only the upper-middling and elite classes didn’t need the labor of their children. And many poorer whites lived on the very margins of society, far from towns and schoolhouses.

I argue that elite whites didn’t want poor whites to learn how to read for several reasons – not only to prevent them from seeing what life was like outside of slave states or to read about workers’ rights, but they also didn’t want poor whites to be able to teach slaves to read. With the underground economy between the races, why couldn’t poor whites trade reading or writing lessons for a pound of corn or meat from the enslaved?

And there was also a zealous policing of any kind of information that entered the South. There was a huge culture of censorship, where slaveholders and their allies literally go through all the mail and any book that entered the region.

Interestingly, I did find that, after 1850, when a lot of politicians realized that secession or war was a possibility, they started talking about how to “educate” poor whites to become soldiers for the South. Their big idea was to indoctrinate the teachers, who were to be hand-picked southern-born men. Then slaveholders would send the teachers to Southern schools to indoctrinate them in Southern institutions – centered, of course, on the right to own slaves. These teachers would subsequently return home to teach the masses just enough to be decent soldiers.
Robin Lindley: I think people will be surprised by this lack of education combined with massive censorship. Who was doing the censoring?

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: It’s carried on at both the state and the local levels. It’s important to remember that all local offices were held by people connected to slaveholding, if they were not slaveholders themselves. A lot of the censoring occurred in post offices. But elite white Southerners also formed violent vigilante groups to hunt out “unauthorized” ideas and reading materials, and viciously punish anyone who dared to read something they didn’t approve of.

Robin Lindley: And I was surprised by the total lack of public education.

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: And that’s one of the ways I argue that Black emancipation actually freed poor whites. After the Thirteenth Amendment, and due mainly to the Freedman’s Bureau, there were finally actual public schools in the Deep South.

Robin Lindley: You also write about poor whites forming unions but they are challenged by the criminal justice system and violent vigilance committees. Did you find that worker advocates were lynched by these agents of the slave owning class?

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: I haven’t uncovered anything specific on the lynching of labor leaders. But definitely anybody who threatened the system in any way was liable to be lynched. And I should clarify: when I use “lynched,” I mean that in the antebellum sense, which was not always murder, but included torture, tarring and feathering, shaving someone’s head, riding them on a rail. It was meant to embarrass, degrade, and humiliate the person, who was often then banished from his or her community.

Robin Lindley: You detail some gruesome atrocities.

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: It was an incredibly violent society because slavery is predicated on violence.

Robin Lindley: I was also struck by many of your findings such as the high suicide rate of white women who were mothers of mixed race children.

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: Using court reports and coroner’s inquests, I was able to uncover a good bit about the daily lives of some of these poor white women. Unquestionably, antebellum Southern suicide would be
a great book topic, as would be the levels of infanticide. Both rates are seemingly very high. From the limited research I’ve done, the levels of infanticide by the formerly enslaved in the post-bellum era were seemingly common as well. That would be a fascinating study: Why were these women killing their babies?

Robin Lindley: What is your sense of this high rate of infanticide?

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: For a white woman in the antebellum period, I think it was self-interest, quite frankly. Once they were found out, they were completely socially ostracized and banished from society. They could be met with violence and even death. Their children would have had horrible lives trying to live as free Blacks outside of cities such as Charleston and New Orleans. There were actually very few free Blacks in rural areas of the Deep South, especially as secession neared. My guess is that these women were trying to survive themselves. Furthermore, a mixed-race child could be legally taken away from a mother in this society and bound out to another person for the child’s labor. That’s not slavery, of course, but it’s a form of short-term bondage. Binding out children was not exclusive to mixed-race children, though – any child of impoverished white people was at risk.

Robin Lindley: Could these mixed-race children also be enslaved?

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: I didn’t find any case of that, but in the late 1850s, there was a movement in the Deep South where the states were trying to re-enslave free Blacks. They were forced to move out of these states or choose a master. There were fewer and fewer rights for free Blacks as the era approached the Civil War.

Robin Lindley: You stress that the conditions of poor whites in the South improved markedly with the end of slavery, but emancipation was imperfect for those once enslaved. What are a few things that happened after the Civil War with poor white people and freed Blacks?

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: With the emancipation of African Americans, poor whites were finally incorporated into the system of white privilege, even though it was at the bottom. The Southern elite understood that this was a way to buy their political allegiance and to forestall a political alliance between poor whites and former slaves, whose economic interests often aligned.

Poor whites quickly gained certain legal, political and social advantages solely based upon race, and this inclusion in white privilege allowed
the former slaveholders to recapture control of Southern states after Reconstruction. Many times, though, these new freedoms came at the expense of African Americans, who now occupied the lowest rung of “free” society.

Most importantly, poor whites were finally able to compete in a free labor society. But they also were no longer the targets of the criminal justice system – African Americans suddenly took their place. And I argue that some poor whites were able to benefit from the Homestead Acts, gaining land and thus, wealth. And of course, after the war the Deep South finally started implementing a system of public education, however rudimentary. So, both Blacks and poor whites were better off after emancipation, but both were still constrained by the vestiges of poverty and slavery.

Robin Lindley: You’ve also written recently about the resonance of this history in the issues of race and white supremacy we face now as the current president encourages racial division. You found echoes of the history you share in the Nazi and white supremacist violence in Charlottesville in August.

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: Obviously, the racial rhetoric has amped up over the last two years, from the time that the presidential campaign started. Trump was gaining supporters using the same manipulation of racial and xenophobic fears. He utilized chosen media outlets to create as much fear and worry as he could about “other” people taking over America. There was abject violence at campaign rallies and literally nothing was done about it. They even tried to silence the media, experts, and intellectuals.

I can’t say that I predicted Trump would become president, but I was definitely worried because I fully realized he was directing people’s anger and fears at other Americans – divided solely along the lines of race and ethnicity. And when people are downtrodden, when they are angry at the system, their anger is easily channeled by designing politicians.

Robin Lindley: In Charlottesville armed white supremacists congregated to defend the statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, and their violence led to the death of a young woman and serious injuries to more than a dozen counter-demonstrators. And the police stood by as Nazis and their ilk attacked those who responded to their message of hate and racism. Your book details similar incidents in the antebellum South.

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: There’s a long and sordid history of violence in the South – from slavery and unfree labor practices to the criminal justice system.

The police are employed by the state and they know to whom they are
answerable, to whom they serve. There’s also been a long history of po-
lice attracting a class of people who feel rejected by society and feel that
they have something to prove – through a little bit of power that some of
them truly exploit. And recent policies – not just under Trump, but un-
der Obama as well – have heavily militarized them. It’s going to get very
scary in the future with this grossly militarized police force, especially
under the racist demagogue we currently have as President.

Robin Lindley: That ties in with mass incarceration of African Ameri-
cans, a problem that has been evident since Reconstruction.

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: Yes. When you look at rates of incarceration be-
fore the Civil War, it was mostly poor whites in jails and prisons – and
that makes sense, because slaveholders generally “disciplined” – really,
tortured – the enslaved right there on the plantation. They wanted to be
able to use them as laborers immediately after punishment. Right after
slavery ended, however, the vast majority of people arrested were Black.
This type of heavy policing served not only as a form of labor control,
but also as a form of social control.

Robin Lindley: Your book deals with how the upper classes used rac-
ism to hold power. That seems to be part of the equation when you
look at America today.

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: Yes - we see that systemically in most of our insti-
tutions and in our government. In most of the South – and increasingly,
the nation – poor and working-class whites are still reeling from the toll
of poverty. Their anger is ripe and easily channeled by demagogues and
politicians. Controlling education, the media and politics, elite whites –
including Trump – continue inciting fears of immigrants, hatred of
African Americans and an intense distrust of government and experts.

Robin Lindley: So, as you see it, the rich maintain their control and
wealth by dividing people by race.

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: Absolutely. We definitely see this in the labor
movement. Southern businesses have always used – and encouraged
and incited – racism to divide the laboring classes. It’s the primary rea-
son the South still has very few unions.

But the elite also maintain their control by disenfranchising as many
working-class and poor people as possible, and through gerrymander-
ing. They also control education and the media. They discredit experts
and journalists with whom they disagree. We’ve only seen the beginning
of it, but I believe in a matter of a few months we’ll see more and more
attacks on academics and intellectuals.
Robin Lindley: There’s a sense that Trump was elected because of poor or working-class whites. However, you’ve stressed that the white middle and upper class, including white women, also assured a victory for Trump.

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: Right. There’s a lot of racist anger throughout the entire white community that is finally coming to light with the election. I think Trump brought to the surface things that have always been there, but have until recently been talked about in a gentile or coded language. But Trump’s giving it to us straight, and white supremacists are emboldened enough to think they can come out of their basements and out of their online worlds and make their hatred public. He has emboldened them to do that.

Robin Lindley: Given this current volatile environment, what do you think should be done about Confederate memorials and monuments?

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: I’m definitely radical here – I think the best option is that they should all be destroyed. They were put up for one reason: to maintain white supremacy. They weren’t put up right after the Civil War to honor the dead. Most of them were erected in the first decades of the 1900s by white supremacist groups like the United Daughters of the Confederacy, who were all trying to maintain Jim Crow. They were meant to indoctrinate children and discourage Black men from registering or attempting to vote. In Atlanta, where I live, many of them were dedicated in response to the bloody race riot in which angry, racist whites murdered scores of African Americans, and also destroyed and trashed Black-owned businesses.

In short, the monuments are disgusting. They’re painful. I think we show a fundamental lack of empathy as a country to not understand how horrific these monuments are for African Americans who have to look at them every day.

As I recently said in response to removing Decatur, Georgia’s Confederate Monument, why do we need a visual reminder of slavery and white supremacy? The vestiges of slavery and white supremacy are still apparent every day in this country.

Robin Lindley: And some Confederate monuments were put up during the Civil Rights Movement.

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: That’s right, no matter what time frame, though, there’s one constant—they were put up for one reason: to remind African Americans to stay in their “place.”
A healing way to deal with this is to figure out what to put up in their places. The South has a long history of biracial alliances against all odds. Or put up a monument to the enslaved themselves—the people who created this country, created the infrastructure, created so much of the wealth. Put up monuments to great Black people.

To me it’s absurd that we’re even arguing about this. We should be focused on what is right and just and good.

There’s a growing number of younger scholars who consider themselves activist historians – who want to use the lessons of history to create a better, more equitable, more just future, and who think we should use our knowledge and expertise to affect public policy and racial policy and labor issues—all sorts of things—and turn what we know into something good for the future.

**Using history in the struggle today**

Robin Lindley: How do you think readers might take the history you present in *Masterless Men*, for example, and use the lessons you share to address our current concerns about issues such as race, labor, and economic inequality?

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: The biggest lesson should be that there hasn’t always been a separation of the races in American history. There have been amazing, promising moments when people from different races lived together and worked together. That’s the hopeful aspect of it.

I think that it also shows the fallacy of all of the pro- and Neo-Confederate arguments. Many of the people waving Confederate flags and arguing for the monuments to remain are actually the descendants of Southern white Unionists or Southern white anti-Confederates who didn’t want to fight a war to preserve slavery.
I think also that, by showing the ways in which poor whites were freed by emancipation, and then what subsequently happened to freedmen and women – that should give us pause in thinking about reparations.

Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt: I believe we are at a vital crossroads in our country. Non-elite people of this country can either come together and begin fighting for their rights, or we can continue down this toxic road of racism and hatred. I'm understandably worried, but I do remain hopeful.

Robin Lindley: Thanks so much for sharing your thoughtful insights and congratulations on your new book Dr. Merritt.
The Russian Revolution and the Fight against Racism and Chauvinism

By Rafael Pizarro

Over 170 ethnic, racial and national groups lived under the 300-year rule of the feudal Russian monarchy and all suffered widespread discrimination and repression. Some of the groups were treated worse than others, but all were subservient to the majority Russians. These national groups included Ukrainians, Belorussians, indigenous peoples, Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Turkics, Tartars, Uzbeks, Yakuts, Aleuts, Eskimos, Jews, Germans, Poles and many more. Many were deprived of their land, language, customs, religion, and wealth. Many lived in constant fear of terror and, indeed, murder.

In the years leading up to the 1917 Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks worked with and organized among many national groups. They laid out theoretical and practical policies to abolish racial and national discrimination, and respect the unique history of all national and racial groups. Lenin in 1913 wrote in his "Thesis on the National Question," that many national groups had been terribly oppressed by the Tsarist monarchy. He wrote that socialists must fight for the right of national groups to have self-determination, either in their own independent nation, or in other geographic and political formations that protect their unique history, culture and way of life. But he also argued that the road to liberation was to unite all oppressed nations and all workers and to establish socialism, a cooperative system that opposed racism and all forms of discrimination, and organized production and distribution to meet the needs of all the people.

After the revolution, the new Soviet government established a national government called the Supreme Soviet, comprised of two houses, the Soviet of the Union, and the Soviet of Nationalities. The Soviet of the
Union was comprised of representatives elected by universal suffrage from geographic areas across the country, similar to our House of Representatives. The Soviet of Nationalities was comprised of representatives elected from every national group. For example, the Russian Republic, with a population of 147 million people, and Estonia with 1.5 million both elected 32 deputies each to the Soviet of Nationalities. The goal was to give extra representation to small oppressed national groups to help them defend and enhance their interests within the socialist system. Fifteen of the largest national groups had their own geographic Republic, 20 others were organized in Autonomous Republics, and 18 more in Autonomous Regions. These political formations provided a governmental body to discuss and advocate for their particular interests.

Terry Dean Martin, in his book *The Affirmative Action Empire*, detailed the efforts of the Bolsheviks to not only stop discrimination against and among national minority groups, but also to empower them. While we don't agree with Martin's characterization of the Soviet Union as an "Empire," he does show that the Soviet socialist government created the world's first mass affirmative action programs and institutions. Martin explained how the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet government worked to create tens of thousands of national territories, train new national leaders, establish national languages and finance the building of productive enterprises in national areas, and support the expansion of national languages and native culture.

There were centuries-long tensions and conflicts between various national groups, but the Bolsheviks worked hard to reduce and eliminate the tension generated by extreme nationalism, and build comradely support and solidarity between all nationalities. The Soviet leaders also worked to build this same multi-national, multi-racial comradeship and unity with people and nations all over the world. While not all forms of nationalism and discrimination had been eliminated in the Soviet Union, and problems and mistakes occurred, overall great progress was made.

The following article by Vern Smith contains comments from Paul Robeson, the famous US African American singer, actor, and peace and social justice activist from the 1920s - 1960s about his observations when visiting the Soviet Union.

*I Am at Home,* Says Robeson at Reception in Soviet Union

Moscow, USSR-"This is Paul Robeson, the greatest American singer!" declared the famous film director, Eisenstein, introducing Robeson to a reception in his honor, attended by nearly all the celebrities in Moscow's theatre and art world. The reception was given in the "House of the Kino" palatial club house of the workers of the movie industry.
I repeat the words of Eisenstein, master of ceremonies at the reception, not by way of informing the public as to who Robeson is, for that is well enough known, but to show the tone of the feeling of the workers and the artists of the Soviet Union towards this visiting Negro singer, son of a slave in the United States -- to show the wholehearted appreciation of these Russian sons of serfs who now are freed by their own efforts.

The reception was long and brilliant and lasted until about 2 a.m. But somehow in the course of it, Robeson found time to answer a few questions from the Daily Worker correspondent.

I began with the obvious: "Have you noticed a race question in the Soviet Union?"

An undercurrent of laughter rumbled under Robeson's big mellow voice as he answered: "Only that it seems to work to my advantage!"

And then he explained. He has been studying the Soviet Union for two years, studying the Russian language also for that length of time, has been a regular reader of Pravda and Isvestia for months, and knows something about the solution of the race question here. He knows that the Soviet theory is that all races are equal -- really equal, socially equal, too, as well as economically and politically. He expressed delight but no surprise when I informed him of the election to the Moscow Soviet of the American Negro, Robinson, working in the First State Ball Bearing Plant here.

But what he admitted he had not been expecting was the simple, wholehearted, affectionate welcome that lay in store for him. Robeson declares that he knows he has made a sufficient place for himself by his singing and acting, that even in the capitalist world some of the bitterest aspects of Jim-Crowism and white chauvinism are not applied to him. But it is just this feeling that a condescending exception has been made of him that is missing here. Here there is just the enthusiastic joy of Russian workers and artists, they or their fathers also once slaves of capitalist and landlord, who now welcome in addition a man they feel is a brother artist from abroad, coming with a real desire to honestly know and understand the new life they have made for themselves.

"I was not prepared for the happiness I see on every face in Moscow," said Robeson. "I was aware that there was no starvation here, but I was not prepared for the bounding life; the feeling of safety and abundance and freedom that I find here, wherever I turn. I was not prepared for the endless friendliness, which surrounded me from the moment I crossed the border. I had a technically irregular passport, but all this was brushed aside by the eager helpfulness of the border authorities. ...And this joy
and happiness and friendliness, this utter absence of any embarrass-
ment over a 'race question' is all the more keenly felt by me because of
the day I spent in Berlin on the way here, and that was a day of horror in
an atmosphere of hatred, fear and suspicion."

Robeson commented on the absence of slums, on the huge building of
workers' apartments in the factory districts -- such districts are invari-
ably slums in capitalist cities. He declared that he will make an extensive
study of the club life of the Soviet worker, especially as the clubs are
centers of instrumental and vocal musical training, and of dramatic art.

*Interview by Vern Smith, Daily Worker, January 15, 1935*
Globalization And Racialization

By Manning Marable

[This essay is part of the ZNet Classics series. Three times a week we will re-post an article that we think is of timeless importance. This one was first published August 13, 2004.]

In 1900, the great African-American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois, predicted that the "problem of the twentieth century" would be the "problem of the color line," the unequal relationship between the lighter vs. darker races of humankind. Although Du Bois was primarily focused on the racial contradiction of the United States, he was fully aware that the processes of what we call "racialization" today – the construction of racially unequal social hierarchies characterized by dominant and subordinate social relations between groups – was an international and global problem. Du Bois's color line included not just the racially segregated, Jim Crow South and the racial oppression of South Africa; but also included British, French, Belgian, and Portuguese colonial domination in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean among indigenous populations.

Building on Du Bois's insights, we can therefore say that the problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of global apartheid: the racialized division and stratification of resources, wealth, and power that separates Europe, North America, and Japan from the billions of mostly black, brown, indigenous, undocumented immigrant and poor people across the planet. The term apartheid, as most of you know, comes from the former white minority regime of South Africa. It is an Afrikaans word meaning "apartness" or "separation." Apartheid was based on the concept of "herrenvolk," a "master race," who was destined to rule non-Europeans. Under global apartheid today, the racist logic of herrenvolk, the
master race, still exists, embedded in the patterns of unequal economic exchange that penalizes African, south Asian, Caribbean, and poor nations by predatory policies of structural adjustment and loan payments to multinational banks.

The ‘New Racial Domain’

Inside the United States, the processes of global apartheid are best represented by what I call the New Racial Domain or the NRD. This New Racial Domain is different from other earlier forms of racial domination, such as slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and ghettoization, or strict residential segregation, in several critical respects. These earlier racial formations or domains were grounded or based primarily, if not exclusively, in the political economy of U.S. capitalism. Anti-racist or oppositional movements that blacks, other people of color and white anti-racists built were largely predicated upon the confines or realities of domestic markets and the policies of the U.S. nation-state. Meaningful social reforms such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were debated almost entirely within the context of America’s expanding, domestic economy, and a background of Keynesian, welfare state public policies.

The political economy of the ‘New Racial Domain,’ by contrast, is driven and largely determined by the forces of transnational capitalism, and the public policies of state neoliberalism. From the vantagepoint of the most oppressed U.S. populations, the New Racial Domain rests on an unholy trinity, or deadly triad, of structural barriers to a decent life. These oppressive structures are mass unemployment, mass incarceration, and mass disfranchisement. Each factor directly feeds and accelerates the others, creating an ever-widening circle of social disadvantage, poverty, and civil death, touching the lives of tens of millions of U.S. people.

The process begins at the point of production. For decades, U.S. corporations have been outsourcing millions of better-paying jobs outside the country. The class warfare against unions has led to a steep decline in the percentage of U.S. workers.

Within whole U.S. urban neighborhoods losing virtually their entire economic manufacturing and industrial employment, and with neoliberal social policies in place cutting job training programs, welfare, and public housing, millions of Americans now exist in conditions that exceed the devastation of the Great Depression of the 1930s. In 2004, in New York’s Central Harlem community, 50 percent of all black male adults were currently unemployed. When one considers that this figure does not count those black males who are in the military, or inside prisons, its truly amazing and depressing.
This July, labor researchers at Harvard University found that one-quarter (25 percent) of the nation’s entire population of black male adults were jobless for the entire year during 2002. What these nightmarish statistics mean, is that for most low- to middle-income African Americans, joblessness and underemployment (e.g., working part-time, or sporadically) is now the norm; having a real job with benefits is now the exception. Who belongs to unions, dropping from 30 percent in the 1960s down to barely 13 percent today. With the onset of global capitalism, the new jobs being generated for the most part lack the health benefits, pensions, and wages that manufacturing and industrial employment once offered.

Neoliberal social policies, adopted and implemented by Democrats and Republicans alike, have compounded the problem. After the 1996 welfare act, the social safety net was largely pulled apart. As the Bush administration took power in 2001, chronic joblessness spread to African-American workers, especially in the manufacturing sector. By early 2004, in cities such as New York, fully one-half of all black male adults were outside of the paid labor force. As of January 2004, the number of families on public assistance had fallen to 2 million, down from five million families on welfare in 1995. New regulations and restrictions intimidate thousands of poor people from requesting public assistance.

Jails, Not Jobs

Mass unemployment inevitably feeds mass incarceration. About one-third of all prisoners were unemployed at the time of their arrests, and others averaged less than $20,000 annual incomes in the year prior to their incarceration. When the Attica prison insurrection occurred in upstate New York in 1971, there were only 12,500 prisoners in New York State’s correctional facilities, and about 300,000 prisoners nationwide. By 2001, New York State held over 71,000 women and men in its prisons; nationally, 2.1 million were imprisoned. Today about five to six million Americans are arrested annually, and roughly one in five Americans possess a criminal record.

Mandatory-minimum sentencing laws adopted in the 1980s and 1990s in many states stripped judges of their discretionary powers in sentencing, imposing draconian terms on first-time and non-violent offenders. Parole has been made more restrictive as well, and in 1995 Pell grant subsidies supporting educational programs for prisoners were ended. For those fortunate enough to successfully navigate the criminal justice bureaucracy and emerge from incarceration, they discover that both the federal law and state governments explicitly prohibit the employment of convicted ex-felons in hundreds of vocations. The cycle of unemployment frequently starts again.
The greatest victims of these racialized processes of unequal justice, of course, are African-American and Latino young people. In April 2000, utilizing national and state data compiled by the FBI, the Justice Department and six leading foundations issued a comprehensive study that documented vast racial disparities at every level of the juvenile justice process. African Americans under age eighteen constitute 15 percent of their national age group, yet they currently represent 26 percent of all those who are arrested. After entering the criminal-justice system, white and black juveniles with the same records are treated in radically different ways. According to the Justice Department’s study, among white youth offenders, 66 percent are referred to juvenile courts, while only 31 percent of the African-American youth are taken there. Blacks make up 44 percent of those detained in juvenile jails, 46 percent of all those tried in adult criminal courts, as well as 58 percent of all juveniles who are warehoused in prisons.

Mass incarceration, of course, breeds mass political disfranchisement. Nearly 5 million Americans cannot vote. In seven states, former prisoners convicted of a felony lose their voting rights for life. In the majority of states, individuals on parole and probation cannot vote. About 15 percent of all African-American males nationally are either permanently or currently disfranchised. In Mississippi, one-third of all black men are unable to vote for the remainder of their lives. In Florida, 818,000 residents cannot vote for life.

Even temporary disfranchisement fosters a disruption of civic engagement and involvement in public affairs. This can lead to "civil death," the destruction of the capacity for collective agency and resistance. This process of depolitization undermines even grassroots, non-electoral-oriented organizing. The deadly triangle of the New Racial Domain constantly and continuously grows unchecked.

Not too far in the distance lies the social consequence of these policies: an unequal, two-tiered, uncivil society, characterized by a governing hierarchy of middle- to upper-class "citizens" who own nearly all private property and financial assets, and a vast subaltern of quasi- or subcitizens encumbered beneath the cruel weight of permanent unemployment, discriminatory courts and sentencing procedures, dehumanized prisons, voting disfranchisement, residential segregation, and the elimination of most public services for the poor. The later group is virtually excluded from any influence in a national public policy. Institutions that once provided space for upward mobility and resistance for working people such as unions have been largely dismantled. Integral to all of this is racism, sometimes openly vicious and unambiguous, but much more frequently presented in race neutral, color-blind language. This is the NRD of globalization.
The anti-globalization struggle must confront this New Racial Domain with something more substantial than tired ruminations about "black and white, unite and fight." The seismic shifts have created new continents of social inequality, transcending nation-states and the traditional boundaries of race and ethnicity. What is necessary is an original and creative approach that breaks with comfortable dogmas of all types, while advancing openly a politics of civic advocacy and democratic empowerment for those most brutally oppressed and exploited. I am not suggesting here that the anti-globalization movement play a "vanguard" role for global social change. In the tradition of C.L.R. James, I am convinced that the oppressed, on their own terms, ultimately will create new approaches and organizations to fight for justice that we now can scarcely imagine. Rather, it is our political and moral obligation to provide the critical support necessary for social struggles and resistance that is already being waged on the ground today. Examples of that resistance are in every city and most communities across the country.

**Militarized Police**

The New Racial Domain’s reliance on extreme force and the continued expansion of the prison system reshapes how law enforcement is being carried out even in small- to medium-sized towns and cities all over America. The terrible dynamic unleashed against prisoners of social control has expanded into the normal apparatuses and uses of policing itself. There are now, for example, approximately 600,000 police officers and 1.5 million private security guards in the United States. Increasingly, however, black and poor communities are being "policed" by special paramilitary units, often called SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) teams. The U.S. has more than 30,000 such heavily armed, military trained police units. SWAT-team mobilizations, or "call outs," increased 400 percent between 1980 and 1995. These trends reveal the makings of what may constitute a "National Security State" – the exercising of state power without democratic controls, checks and balances, a state where policing is employed to carry out the disfranchisement of its own citizens.
The trend toward a National Security State has been pushed actively by the Bush regime, which is aggressively pressuring universities to suppress dissent and to curtail traditional academic freedoms. In early March 2004, the U.S. Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control stopped 70 American scientists and physicians from traveling to Cuba to attend an international symposium on "coma and death." Some of the scholars received warning letters from the Treasury Department, promising severe criminal or civil penalties if they violated the embargo against Cuba. In late 2003, the Treasury Department issued a warning to U.S. publishers that they would have to obtain "special licenses to edit papers" written by scholars and scientific researchers currently living in Cuba, Libya, Iran, or Sudan. All violators, even including the editors and officers of professional associations sponsoring scholarly journals, potentially may be subjected to fines up to $500,000 and prison sentences up to ten years. After widespread criticism, the Treasury Department was forced to moderate its policy.

In February 2004, U.S. army officials visited the University of Texas at Austin, demanding the names of "Middle Eastern-looking" individuals attending an academic conference on the treatment of women under traditional Islamic law. Subsequently it was learned that two U.S. army attorneys working with the army’s Intelligence and Security Commission had actually attended the conference without identifying themselves.

The Possibilities of Resistance

How do we build resistance to the New Racial Domain, in the age of globalized capitalism? It should surprise no one that the resistance is already occurring, on the ground, in thousands of venues. In local neighborhoods, people fighting against police brutality, mandatory-minimum sentencing laws, and for prisoners’ rights; in the fight for a living wage, to expand unionization and workers’ rights; in the struggles of working women for day care for their children, health care, public transportation, and decent housing. These practical struggles of daily life are really the care of what constitutes day-to-day resistance. Building capacities of hope and resistance on the ground develops our ability to challenge the system in more fundamental, direct ways.

The recently successful "Immigrant Worker Freedom Ride," highlighting the plight of undocumented workers who enter the U.S., represents an excellent model that links the oppressive situation of new immigrants with the historic struggles of the Civil Rights Movement forty-five years ago to overthrow Jim Crow. Many sincere, white anti-globalization activists need to learn more about the historic Black Freedom Movement, and the successful models of resistance – from selective buying campaigns or economic boycotts, to rent strikes, to civil disobedience – which that
Taking Down White Supremacy

movement established. You are not inventing models of social justice activism and resistance: others have come before you. The task is to learn from the strengths and weaknesses of those models, incorporating their anti-racist vision into the heart of what we do to resist global capitalism and the nation-security state.

The anti-globalization movement must be, first and foremost, a worldwide, pluralistic anti-racist movement, with its absolutely central goal of destroying global apartheid and the reactionary residue of white supremacy and ethnic chauvinism. But to build such a dynamic movement, the social composition of the anti-globalization forces must change, especially here in the United States. The anti-globalization forces are still overwhelmingly upper, middle-class, college-educated elites, who may politically sympathize with the plight of the poor and oppressed, but who do not share their lives or experiences. In the Third World, the anti-globalization movement has been more successful in achieving a broader, more balanced social class composition, with millions of workers getting actively involved.

There are, however, two broad ideological tendencies within this largely non-European, anti-globalization movement: a liberal, democratic, and populist tendency, and a radical, egalitarian tendency. Both tendencies were present throughout the 2001 Durban Conference Against Racism, and made their presence felt in the deliberations of the non-governmental organization panels and in the final conference report. They reflect two very different political strategies and tactical approaches in the global struggle against the institutional processes of racialization.

The liberal democratic tendency focuses on a discourse of rights, calling for greater civic participation, political enfranchisement, capacity building of community-based institutions, for the purposes of civic empowerment and multicultural diversity. The liberal democratic impulse seeks the reduction of societal conflict through the sponsoring of public conversations, reconciliation and multicultural civic dialogues. It seeks not a complete rejection of neoliberal economic globalization, but its constructive reform and engagement, with the goal of building democratic political cultures of human rights within market-based societies.

The radical egalitarian tendency of global anti-racists speaks a discourse about inequality and power. It seeks the abolition of poverty, the realization of universal housing, health care and educational guarantees across the non-Western world. It is less concerned about abstract rights, and more concerned about concrete results. It seeks not political assimilation in an old world order, but the construction of a new world from the bottom up. It has spoken a political language more so in the tradition of national liberation than of the nation-state.
Both of these tendencies exist in the United States, as well as throughout the world, in varying degrees, now define the ideological spectrum within the global anti-apartheid struggle. Scholars and activists alike must contribute to the construction of a broad front bringing together both the multicultural liberal democratic and radical egalitarian currents representing globalization from below. New innovations in social protest movements will also require the development of new social theory and new ways of thinking about the relationship between structural racism and state power. Global apartheid is the great political and moral challenge of our time. It can be destroyed, but only through a collective, transnational struggle.

*Manning Marable (May 13, 1950 – April 1, 2011), among many other achievements and attributes, was a founding co-chair of CCDS.*
Understanding Racialized Capitalism: The Key to the Unity of the Working Class and All the Oppressed

By Carl Davidson

The socialist left in the United States is currently in a phrase of expansion, which is excellent. It is doing so, however, with manifest separations between organizations that are largely of the young white precariat, on one hand, and those of similar class and strata among the left of the oppressed, especially African Americans and other people of color, on the other.

This is neither new nor a secret. It’s been with us, in varying degrees, for at least the last 50 years, within the lifeworlds of most of us active today, from the 1968 generation to the Millennials in the Next Left.

It doesn’t have to continue this way. None of us want to keep it that way, and we all confess an urgency to change it. I’m convinced that it can be done. But I’m also convinced that it will first require some deep reflection on who we are as a people, and what we have been and have become as a country. And that task requires us to restart at the beginning, to go to the root of the problem.

‘Going to the root’ has always been the core meaning of ‘radical.’ And what is demanded of us is indeed radical, a ‘radical rupture’ with the way many of us have understood ourselves up to now. Making this break requires a mental shift from many, if not all of us. It may seem minor and easy, but it’s not. It’s difficult and protracted.

To put it briefly, we have to change the core viewpoint in how we understand and unfold our national narrative, and our understanding of our place and role within it. Most of us are shaped by the narrative taught in our schools. It’s one that’s told from the viewpoint of the European explorer and settler. And whether told from those in high rank or low
among explorers and settlers, the narrative unfolds from behind their eyes. From the viewpoint of Columbus or his crew, we see exotic peoples we call ‘Indians’ and search for their hidden treasures or ponder how we might make them work for us. If not Columbus, it’s Cortez, or Pizarro, or Ponce de Leon. Lest we forget, we are reminded of them all the time by holidays, street names and monuments—if not impoverished ‘reservations’ in remote places.

To get to the settler eyes behind our eyes, we start with the Pilgrims and Puritans, or the military adventurers, gentlemen and servants of Jamestown colony. Or Dutch traders, landlords and servants in New Amsterdam and the Hudson Valley. Or Quaker shopkeepers and German farmers. Or Maryland’s ‘Calvaliers’. Or Scots-Irish ‘Pioneers’ into the Ohio Valley, Kentucky or the Upland Carolinas. We see Daniel Boone and Davey Crockett as heroes. We may find our own family histories among these, or others that came later, driven here by famine or war. In all of these, we will find risk, failure, suffering, success, slaughter, exploitation and persistence in trying to find a means to survive and thrive in a strange New World. But even with these eyes, we would still get it wrong, and often profoundly wrong.

So what change do we have to make, what shift in our viewpoint do we need, in order to set these narratives aside, to place them on a shelf in the background? To put it simply, we have to shift our initial viewpoint to that of the expropriated, the native peoples and the enslaved. We will soon also add the viewpoint of the exploited. The difference between the two is important, but we have to begin here. (Thanks to Nancy Fraser, the Marxist philosopher at the New School for Social Research, for this insight and many more--CD)

Why? Because that’s how our capitalism begins. Capitalism never develops ‘in general,’ even though we make regular use of abstracted generalizations to explain and understand its inner workings. Capitalisms always develop somewhere, in some place, at some time, and in some given circumstances, and these can vary widely. In England and Wales, for example, capitalism begins with the enclosures, where most of the tenant farmers of a manor were driven off by the lord’s expropriation ‘the commons’ on his estate, in order to make for larger, open fields for the grazing of sheep and cattle. The increase in wool allowed for the growth of supply for demanding woolen textile mills. At the same time, the expulsion of larger numbers of former tenants created a propertyless mass of rural beggars headed to the towns, seeking work in the mills, selling the only thing they had, their labor power. In this case expropriation of land from tenant farmers and the exploitation of a newly created industrial wage-earning proletariat was created with nearly the same stroke of violent class robbery.
Our capitalism in British North America, however, started differently. It began as ‘war capitalism’, best described in Sven Berkart’s ‘Empire of Cotton.’ It was done at the point of a gun, not a ‘free market.’ First, the explorer’s militias simply expropriated the lands occupied by the Native Peoples. When they found it difficult to make slaves of them—the captured could easily survive by escaping into their own homelands—the explorers declared them subhuman devils for extermination by sword, guns or disease. The initial explorer-colonists then tried to import labor from the prisons or landless paupers from Europe, bringing them in as indentured servants. This worked a bit, but not on a large enough scale. So they turned to the wholesale expropriation of unfree labor from Africa, working them as prisoners without wages or allotments paid out after fixed terms. The enslavers with their prison camps euphemistically called plantations were capitalists. Despite the lack of a wage, unfree labor produced commodities—tobacco, rice, sugar and finally, cotton—for sale and thus were also exploited for profit in the world markets. The profits, in turn, were used to seize and clear more land and seized more unfree African laborers, in upwardly spiraling cycles of more misery, more death, more exploitation and more profit.

The key early problem of the master ‘planter’ class was putting down the common rebellions of toilers—free, indentured or enslaved. They solved it by drawing a ‘color line’ of social control between those expropriated, enslaved and exploited—drawing it nearly always between those with darker skins—and those simply exploited, imported from Europe. The
former, marked by color, would *nearly always be subjects*, while the latter, deemed ‘white,’ if they were lucky enough to survive their conditions or terms of indenture, could be on a drawn-out *path to citizenship*, if not immediately citizens at once.

This two-tiered status of advantage and disadvantage was not done with one stroke. It took dozens of legislative and court decisions to create the full constructed package over decades. But by 1705, an African slave, and all the children of an African slave, were bonded to their master ‘in perpetuity.’ Thus both the ‘white race’ and the ‘Black race’ were invented, as a means to keep all laborers, free or unfree, under the rule of our early capitalism’s master class.

Our capitalism thus, from day one, has always been a racialized capitalism. That means white supremacy is both its main prop and its Achilles heel. The African American struggle for full freedom is at the center of the class struggle, and the full freedom of all toilers proceeds through it. Karl Marx made the lesson clear: Labor in the white skin can never be free so long as it’s branded in the black.

Nor was slavery a minor byway in a broader antebellum American economy. At its height, slavery was a $3 billion-plus industry and a major engine of the growth of US capitalism:

“The economy of slavery wasn’t relegated to the South: it crossed state lines, and even states with low slaveholding populations were profiting from the labor of the enslaved. From tobacco cultivation in Virginia to shipbuilding in Rhode Island, industries throughout the states both supported, and were supported by, slavery. By 1850, 80% of American exports were the product of slave labor. The estimated value of enslaved people increased 500% between 1790 and 1860, from $200 million to around $3.059 billion. Slavery’s profitability far outweighed the moral outrage it engendered... The American South before the Civil War was the low-wage—actually, the no-wage—anchor of the first global production chain.” –The Montpelier Website

Our task then, to get the clearest understanding of ourselves as Americans, in all our diversity, is to develop a new national narrative seen primarily from the bottom up, through the eyes of the enslaved and the exterminated, and soon after that if not along with it, through the eyes of all the exploited. This required looking anew not only at the colonial period, but also the Revolution, the Civil War, the Gilded Age and so on, up to today.

For example, take the period of FDR and the New Deal. If we view it through the eyes, say, of a trade union, we’ll mainly see partial conces-
sions won through hard struggle, concessions offering a hand up to many alongside us. But if we look at the same New Deal through the eyes of African American toilers in the Deep South, we’ll mainly see barriers designed to keep us out of the main benefits, and only a few lesser concessions to ease our lot. The first draft of the Wagner Act, for instance, applied to all labor. But at the insistence of both the Southern oligarchy and the AFL, nearly all Black labor in the South was excluded until much later. Here is W.E.B. DuBois writing at the time in *Black Reconstruction*:

“Here is the real modern labor problem. Here is the kernel of the problem of Religion and Democracy, of Humanity. Words and futile gestures avail nothing. Out of the exploitation of the dark proletariat comes the Surplus Value filched from human beasts which, in cultured lands, the Machine and harnessed Power veil and conceal. The emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor and the emancipation of labor is the freeing of that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown and black.”

**Revolutionary Education: Resources for Study Groups**

Fortunately today we have a lot more new resources to complement DuBois’s seminal and groundbreaking works to assist our shift in consciousness. I’ve picked out three that stand out—*The Half Has Never Been Told*, by Edward Baptist; *Slavery by Another Name* by Douglas A. Blackmun; and *The New Jim Crow*, by Michelle Alexander. The first book covers slavery and capitalism from the 1700s through the Civil War. The second starts with the close of the Civil War, through Reconstruction, up to the 1950s. The last starts in the 1960s and ends with the present day.

These three books then, taken together, offer us the full range of U.S. history and how capitalism and all its subaltern classes developed and changed in different phases. In each one, we learn to see through the eyes of the enslaved, the convict laborer, the debt peon, and the ‘felon’, the excluded and the incarcerated. And through their eyes, we also see the white worker and the labor movement, both as ally and adversary, and middle class and upper class reformers as well. In short, we get to look at ourselves as a people, in all our complexity, but with severe restrictions on, if not the elimination of, the ‘White Blindspot.’

With the help of worker-activist study classes on these books at our public library here in Aliquippa, Western PA, we’ve created three sets of PowerPoint multimedia slideshows to go with each book, chapter by chapter. They have proven very effective, and can be used with each book on its own, or taken together as a complete series. They are posted for downloading at the Study Guides section of the Online University of the Left, http://ouleft.org.
The ‘White Blindspot,’ a phrase coined by both W.E.B. DuBois and Ted Allen, author of *The Invention of the White Race* discussed earlier in this collection by Jeff Perry and Kim Scipes, is perhaps the primary subjective obstacle in our country to the development of a revolutionary class consciousness, and hence multinational and multiracial unity, out of the conflicted consciousness of our everyday ‘common sense.’ Changing our thinking on the matter, however, is only one step. We must take a second step, common action in struggle, however minor or small, and use this change in thinking to reflect back on our actions in a new way. The more clarity we gain in knowing who we are, the more we can see how to make a new order doing away with exploitation and oppression altogether.

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