

# THE BLACK ACTIVIST

ISSUE ONE / SUMMER 2013



## The Black Activist is the journal of the Black Left Unity Network

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**MASH US UP!** We believe in freedom and therefore we invite any and all readers worldwide to join this journal project by mashing it up—take it apart and put it back together in a new way. Add graphics, music, poetry, photographs, video. Design the next issue. Paint quotes on the wall. Quote the journal in term papers, union newsletters, and sermons on Sunday, Saturday, Wednesday night—whenever we gather to talk real talk. Just cite us as a source and send us a link to your creation. Let’s get out the box!

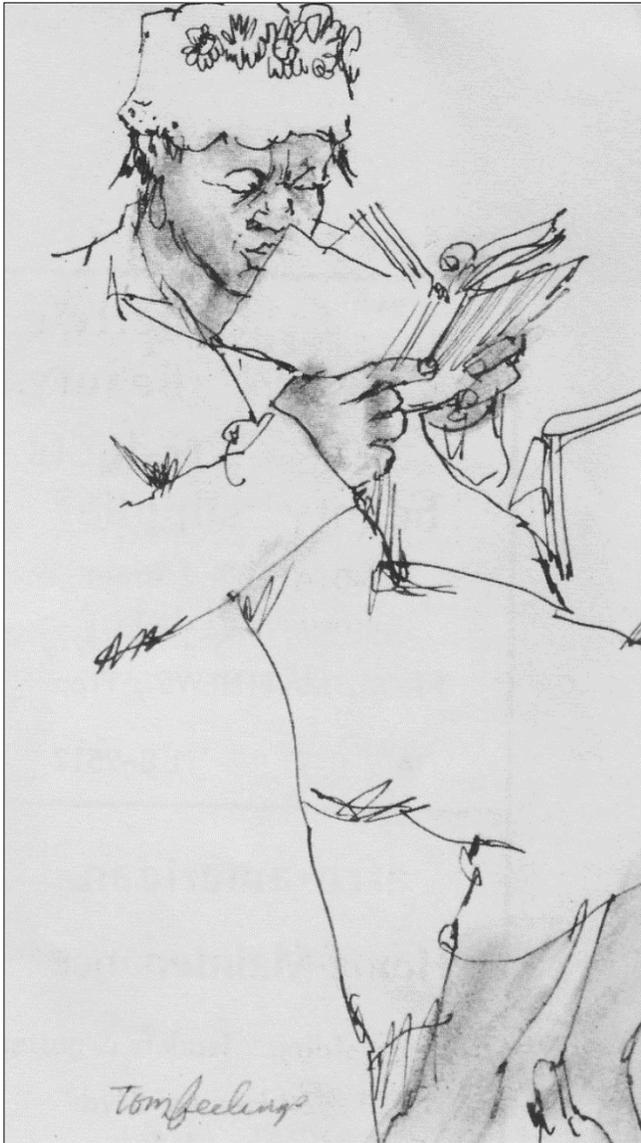
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# EDITORIAL

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Welcome to the first issue of the *Black Activist*!

Our two part editorial for this first issue explains what this journal is about. Let's find ways to bring together the practical struggle with theoretical reflections on that struggle. We are not armchair thinkers pretending to be in the movement, nor are we unthinking activists running from one issue to the next without connecting the dots.



Sketch by Tom Feelings, from *Liberator*, February 1965, page 27.

Cover art by John Jennings, <http://society6.com/BK3030..>

We plan our work, then work our plan. We sum up, and get back at it again.

If you are ready to get down for Black liberation and social transformation towards a more just society—contact us and get involved!

### Why this journal

The Black liberation movement needs a new beginning. We are still suffering from the impacts of COINTELPRO, sectarian errors and fragmentation. The capitalist road of the major socialist states and the states emerging from the anti-colonial struggles, have caused serious ideological confusion about an alternative to the capitalist system. The depth of the U.S. and global capitalist crisis has helped to lay bare the many economic, social and political ills of the capitalist system. The social safety-net that gave people a basic sense of security is being unapologetically chipped away at by the government to protect the interest of the capitalist and imperialist ruling-class.

The notions that electing Black people to political office will bring about greater

democracy and social progress without mechanisms of working-class Black and people's power, are losing ground among many since the election of Obama.

We believe that the capitalist system and its crisis, is waging a War on Black America, and has many battlefronts of resistance. Understanding the relationship of these battlefronts to each other, their impacts on the capitalist system, and the international context fostering them, is critical to developing revolutionary strategy and a political line of struggle for the Black liberation movement.

Getting on the same page is critical.

The Black left needs a forum that enables us to talk to each other, instead of at each other. There needs to be critical comradely examination of practice and the various ideas guiding our practice. The Black liberation movement has a history reflecting many ideological tendencies, forms of organization, tactics and contradictions that are often overlooked as providing critical theoretical lessons.

This is why we are starting this journal.

We are the Black Left Unity Network – a non-sectarian tendency to create a focal point for our energy on an anti-capitalist program for Black Liberation.

If you agree with these 5 points, join us – we need you!

1. Black people are exploited by capitalism, subjugated by a racist system of national oppression, and most want self-determination and socialism to replace it.
2. Self-organization of Black workers, women, students, community and LGBTQ activists is necessary to advance the inner-connected battles against capitalism, national oppression, patriarchy, heterosexism; and for human rights for all.
3. Black women face intertwined oppressions: national, class, gender/sexuality. Dismantling patriarchy and promoting the leadership of Black women must be at the core of struggles for Black liberation.
4. The struggle against U.S. imperialism, internationally and especially throughout Africa and the Americas, is part of an international struggle against the impacts of the racist and capitalist colonial past and present.
5. While carrying out local struggles, it is critical for our movement to share experiences and think together on a theoretical level to get on the same page to rebuild the national movement.

This journal is the bold step we need. We choose to speak for an anti-capitalist program for Black liberation. Join us!

## How to build the journal

The *Black Activist* is a national journal focused on consolidating local community circles that together will be the basis for the Black left to get on the same page and consolidate a Black left force that can rebuild both the national Black Liberation Movement and influence the direction of the left in general. This will have as its primary aim what the local activists are thinking and doing on the ground, while we network this on the regional, national, and international level.

Our goal is to publish two issues a year.

Our organizational plan is as follows:

1. local organizers for the *Black Activist*
2. regional meetings
3. national conference
4. international ties

1. The local *Black Activist* organizer: These are people who will be in agreement with the BLUN principles of unity, active in local struggle, and willing to make the *Black Activist* a priority in their work.

- a. Main task is to form a *Black Activist* community circle, people who come together to discuss the journal contents and to sum up the local struggles in light of what is in the journal.
- b. They will also be asked to make monthly reports that can be published in the journal about the specific struggles in the local area. These reports will be not more than 500 words.
- c. They will represent the journal at local events, including printed copies of the journal as well as flyers directing people to the journal website.
- d. Every organizational affiliate of the BLUN is asked to direct cadre time to this project.
- e. The local *Black Activist* organizers will be coordinated by the *Black Activist* editorial working group.

2. We will plan regional one day conferences around each issue of the journal

3. Our future goal is to hold a national conference to debate theoretical issues for Black liberation and socialist revolution. We will continue to build unity toward this end.

4. We are building international ties with progressive movements throughout the African Diaspora and the entire world, and will work toward the better representation of the thinking and actions of our movements for Black liberation and socialist revolution to the forces for social justice everywhere in the world.

# OUR VOICE

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At the heart of developing the political clarity of policies advanced by the BLUN is the stark reality of a fragmented Black left. During a period of profound economic and social crises, the core of BLUN policies is an effort to end this fragmentation and to build the Black left. This is not simply an act of bringing together a handful of organizations or individuals, although the Black Liberation Movement is rooted in the work of those committed to deep level struggle and social change. It is a recognition that whenever African peoples have engaged in efforts for radical social transformation, it is because the Black working class, laundry women and men, garbage collectors, students, educators and others have stood strong and resistive.

BLUN consists of Black activists, female, male, straight and gay and multi-tendency in terms of ideological groundings. Some belong to self-identified Black liberation organizations and collectives; some are members of multi-national organizations, some are members of social movement convergent networks, some are independent activists, and some are revolutionary intellectuals. All are committed to struggle for deep level social change.

Thus BLUN recognizes that in a period when the professed leadership of the Black World, in the United States and globally have moved increasingly to the center right, the masses of people are not being lulled to sleep by the symbolism of Black faces in high places. In high places, they, too, carry-out the death generating policies of imperialism, neoliberal capitalism, heteropatriarchy and white supremacy. Under these conditions political direction demands:

- Organizing the Black working class as the main base and leadership of the Black liberation movement
- Building a national Black united front toward ending the fragmentation of the left
- Struggling to free political prisoners as a conscious component and demand of the Black liberation movement
- Struggling against women's oppression and heteropatriarchy as essential in forging the unity of Black liberation organizations
- Building internationalism with a strong anti-imperialist perspective and support for struggles in Africa and the Caribbean
- Reparations as a national demand for Crimes Against Humanity and self-determination
- Centering culture as a political force in the Black liberation movement

Furthermore, the work of BLUN:

1. Articulates the core principles of unity, self-determination, equality, accountability, and social transformation.

2. Advances theory and practice which end the fragmentation of the Black Liberation Movement.
3. Generates political and popular education rooted in a commitment to educate and end the fragmentation of the Black Liberation Movement.
4. Recognizes that the crises confronting Black people are multiple requiring more than the spontaneity of the Black masses. Thus, the Black Liberation Movement must provide a national framework informed by the on the ground theory and practice of those in struggle on the ground.
5. Develops technological organizing with a keen eye on the democratic and open use of technology to propel the Black Liberation Movement.
6. Articulates internationalism and strategic organizing that seek to unite the thinking and actions of the many struggles on the ground around a program for revolutionary change.

These policies of BLUN have been expressed concretely as a statement of principles:

- We are Black people fighting for power and liberation.
- We fight to end the system of capitalist exploitation, patriarchy, homophobia and all other forms of oppression.
- We organize by connecting local battlefronts rooted in a working class perspective to build national unity of action and international solidarity with other struggling oppressed people.

These principles are advanced through multiple discussions, action papers and national dialogues to deepen clarity and understanding. What follows are examples of political direction embedded in commitments to internationalism and the Black Liberation Movement in the U.S.

## **01 Forging Unity of the Black Left: A Major Task of the Black Liberation Movement!**

The Black Liberation Movement must be more than the spontaneity of the Black masses. It must provide a national framework with an internationalist perspective and strategic organizing components that seek to unite the thinking and actions of the many struggles around a program for revolutionary change.

Thus the Black liberation movement must have conscious activists that work together to give the spontaneous struggles a conscious program and direction; an assessment of the balance of forces on the side of the oppressor and the oppressed; and provide a global context for understanding their struggles for a better world.

The fragmentation of the Black Liberation Movement resulting from the U.S. government attacks and the ideological errors during the late 1960s and 1970s, and further impacted by the demise of major zones of socialism as the main bases of support for the anti-imperialist struggles worldwide, has made it difficult to forge unity among enough Black left forces to effectively intervene in crucial struggles like the political disenfranchisement of Black people in Florida and Ohio that installed Bush Jr. as U.S. president in 2000 and 2004 and Katrina in 2005.

When the forces in the Black Liberation Movement who make big demands for redress on the system for its crimes against Black people, are unable to give direction to the Black people's spontaneous responses to such blatant acts of national oppression, it does not build confidence among the Black masses that a Black Liberation Movement can help to bring about the liberation of Black people. This also weakens the confidence of the national and international anti-imperialist forces in the Black Liberation Movement.

The forging of a unity of the Black left, must therefore be a conscious, continuing and serious effort of the Black Liberation Movement, if it is to become more than the sum total of the spontaneous local struggles, and the loose national networks that form to try and influence election campaigns and win basic reforms.

The Black Left Unity Network (BLUN), while far from the scope and depth of the unity that is needed, represents a conscious and active commitment and mechanism toward forging this unity. Through BLUN working groups like the Cuba Working Group, we seek to unite Black left forces in practical mass work and educational activities, as we try to figure out ways of widening and deepening a unity process.

The BLUN salutes the work of Black Workers For Justice!

Black Left Unity Network

## **02 We Condemn the U.S. Refusal to Participate in the Durban Review Conference: African Americans and People Of Color Speak for Ourselves!**

The election of Barack Obama as US president was an important development in the direction of democracy. It represented an ideological blow against the hold of racism and white supremacy on national political elections. Many Blacks and People of Color worldwide have great hopes that his election among other things, represents a leadership willing to take a strong stand against racist US and global policies, systems and governments.

The refusal of the Obama administration to participate in the Durban Review Conference on racism to be held in Geneva on April 20 – 24, 2009, without preconditions that restricts the conference from addressing the racist and genocidal nature of Israel's oppression of Palestine, is truly a big disappointment. It not only departs from one of the important meanings of the Obama election – unifying a political majority in opposition to racism; it represents an act of complicity with violations of human rights as stated in the United Nation's Charter.

While the United States and western governments boycott the Durban Review Conference, the impact of the international economic crisis continues to deepen the historic vestiges of centuries of racism, devastating poverty, and all forms of discrimination and injustice upon People of Color inside the US and throughout the world. It is a major cause of the ethnic cleansing which we have witnessed in parts of Africa, resulting in the deaths of millions.

Little attention has been given to the fact that in the U.S. alone, it was Black and Latino communities who were the targets of the unjust and discriminatory subprime loan schemes of Wall St. and the financial markets. These loans preyed upon the legitimate aspirations of millions of Black and Latino families for adequate housing and home ownership. Various analyses of the housing market crisis indicate that Black and Latino communities are disproportionately impacted and will "lose between \$164 billion and \$213 billion" as a result of predatory lending, thrusting thousands into economic crisis, homelessness, poverty, devastation.

The ILO reports that women will also be disproportionately impacted by the economic crisis, exacerbating the historic elements of gender based discrimination world-wide. Increases in unemployment world-wide will hit women workers the hardest. According to the ILO Bureau for Gender Equality, "women's lower employment rates, weaker control over property and resources, concentration in informal and vulnerable forms of employment with lower earnings, and less social protection, all place women in a weaker position than men to weather the crisis".

Increased racially motivated and gender based violence is being documented across the globe as the downturns from the economic crisis linger in developing as well as developed countries. Every continent has seen a rise in violence against women, gays, immigrants, and non majority nationalities. "Rising inequality can result in an increase in racial bias for scapegoating or advancing xenophobic and isolationist tendencies", reports say.

The world-wide struggle against the concrete manifestations of racism and discrimination were the central focus of the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in the first place. Without the US and other western governments correcting their egregious refusal to officially participate in WCAR and now the Durban Review process, the Obama Administration turns its back upon

hundreds of millions of the oppressed and disadvantaged around the world who continue to suffer at the hands of the greed and misconduct of the racist, misogynist, rich and powerful. This is the true cost of the defense of Israel at the expense of the Palestinian people and all the oppressed sectors and communities around the world.

We have submitted petitions and made appeals to the US government to participate in this important conference, without success. Its participation in a preparatory meeting, gives a false impression that the US government is really committed to ending racism inside the US and around the globe. We see in the US refusal to attend this conference, a continuation of the policies of the previous administrations, magnified by the Bush administration of refusing to be accountable to democratic standards and decisions arrive at by the UN and other international bodies.

We therefore call on the Durban Review Conference to recognize the voices of African American and People of Color delegations and coalitions from organizations and social movements throughout the US in this important deliberation, to arrive at a report that frames, mandates, informs, reviews and reinforces accountability to international conventions and standards on human rights.

Black Left Unity Network

## **03 Victory to the Ongoing Bolivarian Revolution: U.S. Imperialism Hands Off Venezuela!**

The Black Left Unity Network (BLUN) salutes the victory of Nicolas Maduro Moros as the new and democratically elected President of Venezuela.

We stand in revolutionary solidarity with the statement issued by the Afro-Venezuela movement that pledges its' continued support to the objectives of the revolutionary process in Venezuela and the election of President Maduro.

The struggles and voices of Afro-Venezuelans represent the deepest sentiments for democracy and social transformation and were critical to this victory and the ongoing Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela that was led by Comrade President Hugo Chavez.

We will never forget the immediate response by the Venezuelan people led by President Chavez to the tragedy triggered by Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf Coast and the offer of major aid to assist the survivors remaining in the disaster area and those dispersed to all corners of the U.S. The U.S. government's refusal of this aid and the aid offered by revolutionary Cuba, pointed out clearly how the U.S. government will sacrifice the lives of African descendants and

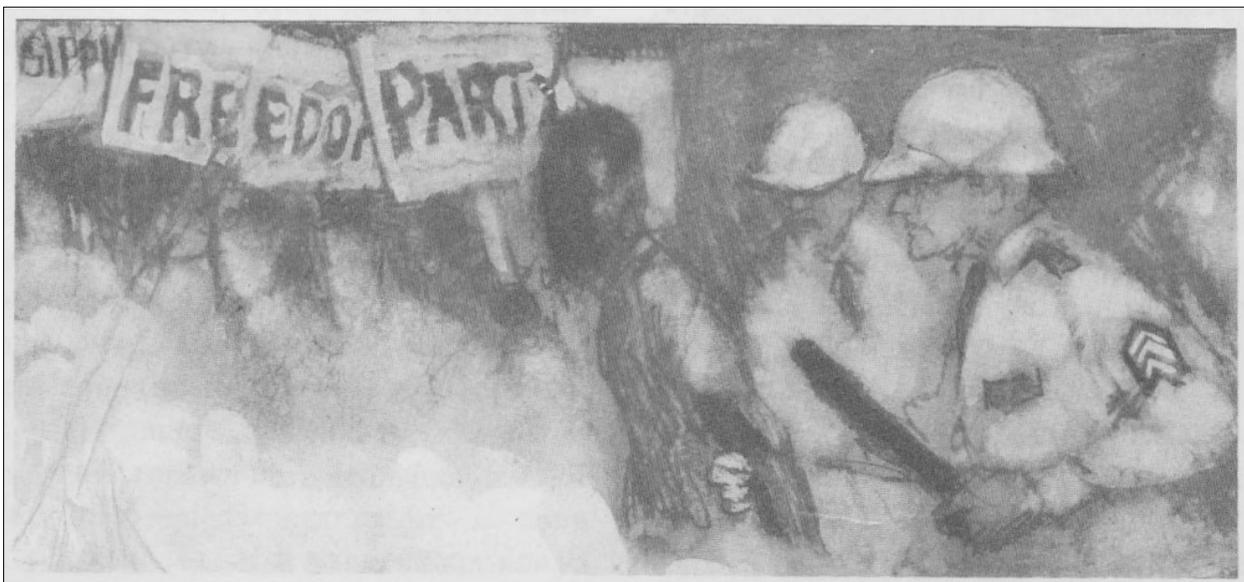
poor people, before it will recognize the good deeds of governments that are anti-imperialist, truly democratic and building a society that benefits the needs of the majority, not the capitalist elites.

Even with the major changes and improvements made by the Venezuelan revolutionary process, the forces of counter-revolution are still part of the economic and racist elite in Venezuelan society. Their ties to U.S. imperialism make them a major threat to the revolutionary process. Combating and defeating their maneuvers remains part of the ongoing revolutionary process until this class is defeated.

African descendants in the U.S. know firsthand how elections are manipulated by the capitalist elites. They use their control of major media to try and place doubt in the minds of the people, trying to suggest voter fraud as has been the case so many times for candidates supported by Black people in the U.S. But in Venezuela, where the elections are structured in ways that safeguard and protect the democratic will of the majority, the capitalist elites have been combated in this arena.

The revolutionary struggle in Venezuela is critical to the revolutionary direction of building and expanding socialism throughout the Americas in the 21st Century. The organization and struggles of the Afro-Venezuelans as an identifiable and integral part of the Venezuela revolutionary process represents the further advance for socialism.

Through our efforts to rebuild a revolutionary Black movement in the U.S. we will ensure that African descendants in this country understand the common historical and political ties that bound our peoples together. For us there is no question that African descendant's in the U.S.



Sketch by Tom Feelings, from *Liberator*, November 1966, page 5.

must be part of the defense of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, as U.S. imperialism assumes its historical role as a central force supporting and or initiating counter-revolution in Venezuela.

The BLUN commits to educate the Black working-class and to call on the activists and organizations in our network, to mobilize in defense of the Venezuelan Revolution as it is connected to the struggles of All African descendants against the impacts of the colonial, neo-colonial and imperialist past and present, and to further shaping the direction for a revolutionary social transformation throughout the Americas.

Victory to the ongoing Bolivarian Revolution!

Black Left Unity Network

## **04 Justice For Trayvon Martin: Wear Your Hoodie, Protest This Racist Murder and Rebuild the National Black Liberation Movement**

The senseless murder of 17 year old Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black youth in Sanford, Florida, who was shot by George Zimmerman, a white man driven by racism and protected by an unjust “Stand Your Ground” law, is a crime against humanity and violation of human rights.

The refusal of the Sanford police department to arrest Zimmerman, despite having evidence that he chased Trayvon after being told by the 911 operator not to do so, and his aired “fucking coon” comment showing that he wanted to kill this Black youth, along with the cover up actions by the heads of the Sanford police department, sends an age old racist message - that Black people have no rights that a white is bound to respect. The Sanford police did not drug test or do a criminal background check on killer Zimmerman, and allowed him to keep his gun permit enabling him to purchase and carry another instrument of death. Yet, they drug tested young Trayvon’s dead body, and did an extensive background check, trying to find reasons to justify this racist killing.

The economic crisis created by the capitalist system and its ruling 1%, that is protected by government policies and agencies, including major cuts in social programs in the billions to bailout the banks and corporations, has fostered a sharper racist political and social climate by scapegoating working class and poor Blacks and Latino’s and labor unions as the cause of the economic crisis.

The struggle against the racist aspects of the economic crisis that reflect the conditions of the most oppressed and exploited sectors of the 99%, must be brought forward by a more united Black left in alliance with other oppressed sectors, and a strategic campaign, that highlights the issues and demands and begins to mobilize a national resistance of working class Black and other oppressed peoples.

The immediate demands for the arrest of killer Zimmerman for a hate crime, the resignation of the Sanford police chief and the repeal of the “stand your ground” laws in all states throughout the U.S., must be linked to a struggle and movements to build mass based working class Black and oppressed people’s power.

The short lived struggle following the initial massive response to the racist jailing of the Jena six, in Jena, Louisiana in December 2006, shows that the immediate struggles that highlight the racist injustices of the system, must be linked to a long term struggle and organized national movement with a program of action that addresses the systemic causes of these injustices.

The coming forward of the demands and movements of the most oppressed sectors, is critical to a direction that begins to shape new power relations and a new consciousness toward uniting the larger U.S. working class to challenge the attacks.

The struggles to reform the capitalist system are not the answer. The reforms alone have not eliminated the conditions of human oppression and exploitation, despite what’s written in federal, state and local government constitutions and charters, or the forming of special commission and agencies.

The lack of mass based power by working class Black and other oppressed people has also allowed the reforms that have been won through struggles since the formation of the U.S., to be weakened and eliminated, to increase profits and power for the rich.

The history and depth of the oppression and exploitation of the Black masses, is part of the permanent structure of capitalism, sharpening during economic crises.

In addition to being a source of cheap labor that continuously allows the capitalists to lower the standard of living for all workers, the Black working class is a main sector of the larger working class of consumers, that the capitalist rely on to purchase the products made by oppressed and cheap labor mainly by workers of color in Africa, Asia and Latin America. This is a major reason for the Congress passing U.S. free trade agreements like NAFTA.

The struggles and movements of the Black, oppressed and working class masses must be to build mass based power and democracy over the economy, social institutions and all areas of government, as part of bringing about a revolutionary alternative to the capitalist system. An

alternative that uses the massive wealth and resource of this country to address the suffering, disease, unemployment, homelessness, deaths, and the divisions caused by the greed and wars of a system that places profits over human needs and rights.

The murder of Trayvon Martin highlights one of the ways this racist and exploitive system sees addressing the problems of the economic crises to further divide the people and to try and extend the life of capitalism and the dominance of the 1% capitalist ruling class.

While there will be many responses to the tragedy of Trayvon Martin, the proposed solutions that promote a direction beyond basic reforms, will require a more united and conscious role of the Black left among the Black masses to help link immediate issues to a long term movement building, program, strategy and struggle.

Black left unity grounded in work among the Black working class masses must become a main task!

Black Left Unity Network

## **05 Assata is Not a Terrorist: She is a Freedom Fighter like Harriet Tubman, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King**

The attack on Sister Assata Shakur is an attack on the right of the Black masses and the Black liberation movement to resist oppression. The U.S. government and all of its branches have always persecuted, jailed, exiled and murdered Black activists and revolutionaries no matter their philosophies or tactics-communism, Pan Africanism, separation, revolutionary nationalism, integration; nonviolence, armed self-defense, running for political office.

Assata, who was unarmed and shot 5 times with the intent to kill by the New Jersey state police, was part of the U.S. government COINTEL program, similar to its now so-called war on terrorism, to justify murderous attacks of Black activists and revolutionaries, that saw the assassinations of Malcolm X, Martin L. King, Black Panthers and the frame-ups, jailing and forced exile of many named and unnamed activists.

The labeling of Sister Assata as a “terrorist” is part of the U.S. strategy to further isolate Cuba as the most important political ally of the Black liberation movement over the past 50 years, and as a leading political and ideological force in the struggle against capitalism and U.S. imperialism throughout the Americas.

The jailing of the Cuban 5 as spies and the efforts to cast Cuba as a racist nation against Afro-Cubans are part of this strategy of isolation, seeking to foster internal strife and rebellion to set-back the growing anti-capitalist alignment and socialist direction of countries in this region. This is also why the U.S. is supporting the opposition in Venezuela trying to claim fraud in the recent election of Nicolas Maduro who is committed to continuing the Bolivarian Revolution led by Comrade Hugo Chavez.

The so-called war on terror has ushered in new military tactics and policies that try to justify invading the sovereign territories of other nations as was done with the invasion of Pakistan to kill Osama Ben Laden, and the use of drones to assassinate the two Americans labeled as terrorist in Yemen.

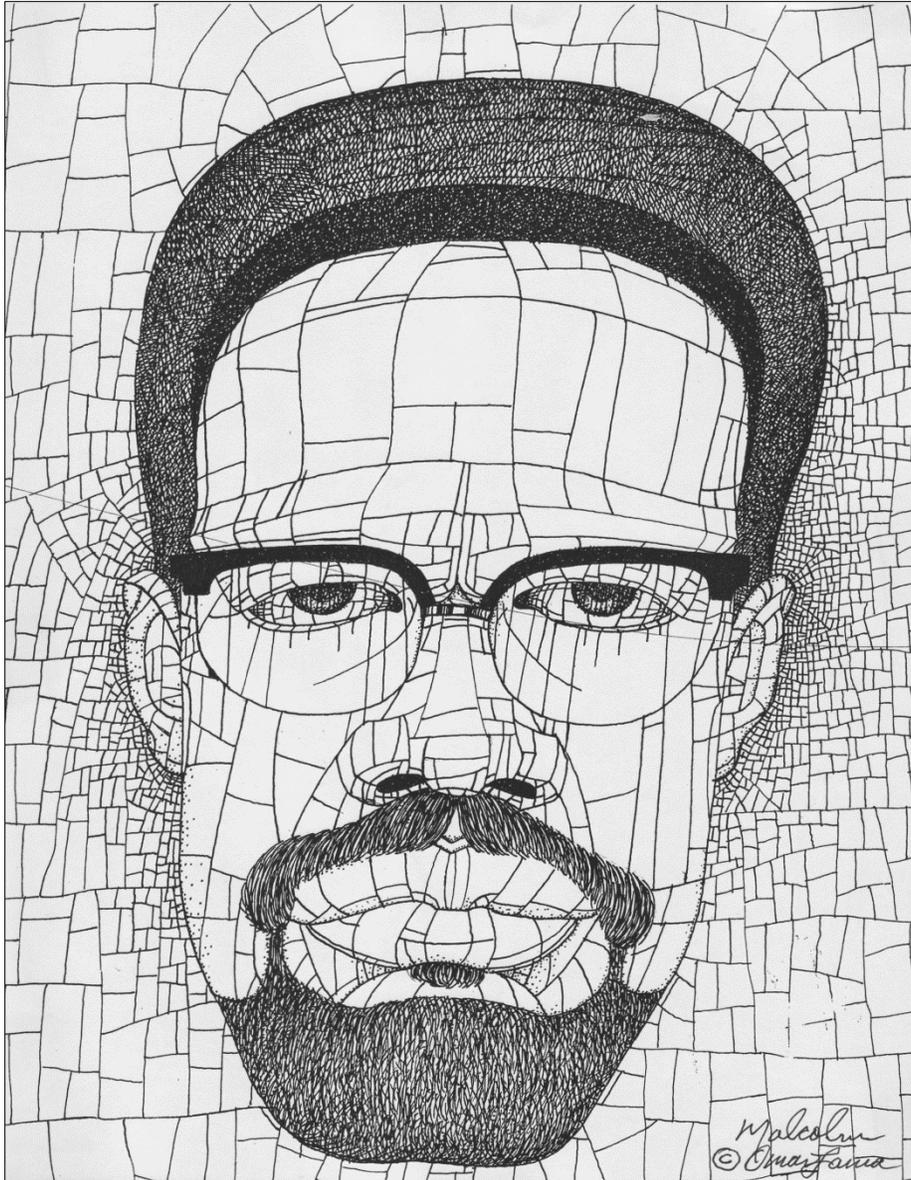
The political asylum granted by the U.S. to Luis Posada Carriles, a known terrorist involved in terrorist acts throughout the Americas, including the bombing of a Cuban airliner in 1976 that killed 173 people. The U.S. government refuses to send Carriles back to Cuba for trial, claiming that he faces the threat of torture. Yet, the torture of years and decades in solitary confinement of Black and other political prisoners like Assata Shakur inside of the U.S. jails is acceptable punishment for challenging oppression.

What the U.S. is projecting by this bounty on Sister Assata is a threat to countries throughout the world, that providing political asylum to anyone challenging the policies and laws of the U.S. government and the system of capitalism, will be labeled as harboring terrorists and placed on the hit list. This is an attack on internationalism, which must be a main feature of the struggle against capitalist globalization and imperialism. It is also a message to the revolutionary and social movement organizations in the U.S. that our struggles for change must be kept within the limits of bourgeois democracy.

The capitalists support for Obama as U.S. president was clearly different from why the Black masses voted for him. Obama's betrayal of the hopes of the Black masses further points out why the forces of the Black liberation movement must unite both to rebuild its national character, and to mobilize the Black masses against these attacks in order to expose and isolate the role of the Obama administration that has been used to disorient and hold back the resistance of the Black masses to the deep attacks on working-class Black and other oppressed peoples increased by the capitalist crisis. Let's form a national Black united front to defend Assata and to put the U.S. government on trial for its War on Black America!

We must not allow them to come for us one-by-one! Hands-off Sister Assata Shakur!

Black Left Unity Network



Malcolm by Omar Lama, from artist.

## 06 Stop The War on Black America!

The impacts of the corporate driven capitalist crisis represent a War on Black America and have created many battlefronts. They include

- The struggle for jobs
- The struggle against housing foreclosures, evictions and gentrification
- The struggle to defend, improve and for community control of public education

- The struggle for worker rights and to defend, democratize and expand organized labor as a leader and power base of a working class social movement
- The struggle against women's oppression and all forms of sexual oppression
- The struggle against police murders extrajudicial murders by police and racist vigilantes
- The struggle against mass incarceration, political prisoners and the prison industrial complex
- The struggle against environmental racism

These struggles must be connected by common slogans, a national program, and some coordinated actions in order to mobilize the breath and death of the power of the Black masses as a revolutionary social force.

The most glaring aspect of the War on Black America is the military assault and murders of unarmed Black and Brown young people across the country by the police.

The report issued by the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement showing that every 36 hours during the first 6 months of 2012, a Black person was killed by the police, has helped to capture the rapidly growing militarization of Black communities throughout the U.S.

The criminalization of Black working class young people has been a key part of the U.S. domestic strategy to develop a police state under the auspices of protecting society from its internal crime and social erosion. The so called war on terrorism launched after September 11, 2001, elevated this criminalization to the level of being an internal threat to U.S. national stability and security.

Stand your ground laws, and a right-wing led 2nd Amendment campaign to defend gun ownership, play to the racist and chauvinist fears of white America. These campaigns are part of the unfolding of a racist and fascist social movement led by corporate financed right-wing forces like the Tea Party.

If these murders were brought before an international criminal court free of influence by U.S. imperialism, the perpetrators would be labeled as "death squads" and the U.S. would be tried for committing crimes against humanity.

If police speak out against the police department's complicity with the brutality and murders of unarmed Black people, they are vilified, disciplined, often placed in dangerous situations without back-up and fired.

In cities across the U.S. Black people are holding meetings and forums, and forming coalitions to struggle against extrajudicial police brutality and killings of Black and Brown people. However, these important developments while reflecting the national scope of the U.S. police

state have not yet formed a national coalition and campaign with a common program of action to unite these battlefronts.

The Black Left Unity Network (BLUN) through our National Dialogue Calls engaging Black activists across the country discussing the various attacks and struggles along with reports on the BLUN listserv, are hearing the desire to build a national unified fight-back. However, initiating a process for forging the unity remains the challenge.

The BLUN is calling for the building of a national Stop the War on Black America Campaign as a movement building framework for uniting the many efforts throughout the country fighting against various aspects of the attack on lives, communities, social institutions, economic survival, environmental protection and democratic and human rights of Black people throughout the U.S. and in solidarity with opposing U.S. wars on oppressed peoples throughout the world.

A first step in this direction is for the various efforts to adopt the slogan Stop the War on Black America to be included in their literature and public statements that begin project a united national sentiment defining the political nature of these police murders and the police state.

After a period of shaping a national sentiment by promoting a common slogan and united activities in the various locales, and reporting on these efforts, the BLUN is proposing that a national meeting be held to bring together representatives of the various coalitions throughout the country to develop a national program of action and national Stop the War on Black America Coalition.

Let's take the first step Now and adopt Stop the War on Black America as a common slogan. The BLUN listserv can be used to report on the various struggles across the country, and the steps forces are taking to forge unity. The BLUN National Dialogue Call can be a connecting point to discuss moving forward toward building a national Stop the War on Black America Coalition and campaign.

Black Left Unity Network

# OUR MOVEMENT

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The section includes the basic documents of the four organizations that participated in the BLUN founding meeting, May 30-June 1, 2008 at the Stone Center in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. More organizations will be included in future issues.

Black Workers for Justice: <http://blackworkersforjustice.org/index.php>

People Organized for Progress: <http://njpop.org/wordpress/>

Malcolm X Grassroots Movement: <http://mxgm.org/>

Defenders for Freedom, Justice, and Equality: <http://www.defendersfje.org/>

While it is clear on a national level that we are not at a high point in our struggle, we continue to fight back everywhere we are, here in the US and throughout the world. On the other hand there are key battle fronts being waged that might yet become the spark of our next major awakening.

- BWFJ is currently helping to build the Moral Monday Movement in North Carolina to fight right wing control of the state legislature. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0S-P0z1bHO8>
- POP holds frequent demonstrations in Newark and other parts of New Jersey, and has been doing so for several years. The Chair of POP is Larry Hamm. Here he is speaking at the annual Martin Luther King Banquet held by the Black Workers for Justice. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdlcoxdTKOw>
- MXGM has projected the Jackson Plan in Mississippi, and built enough unity to elect their president Chokwe Lumumba Mayor of Jackson, Mississippi. See <http://mxgm.org/chokwe-lumumba-vote-mayor-of-jackson-ms-with-clear-mandate/>
- The Defenders publish a quarterly statewide newspaper: <http://www.defendersfje.org/id3.html>

This is a critical aspect of how the movement is being rebuilt - from the ground up, based on local leadership and initiative, mobilizing the power of poor and working people through self-organization and self-education

There are many aspects of re-building a unity network:

- a. knowledge of many organizational forms
- b. face to face familiarity with movement leaders and activists
- c. practical coordination of unity in action

d. common theoretical discourse

The *Black Activist* will help this process on local and national levels. We will continue to publish the basic documents of key organizations and movements, drawing us together like turning fingers into a mighty Black fist preparing to help deck the decadent capitalist system.

## **07 Black Workers For Justice**

### **Who Is Black Workers For Justice?**

The BWFJ is an organization of Black workers formed in 1981 out of a struggle led by Black women workers at a K-mart store in Rocky Mount, North Carolina against race and gender discrimination. After organizing a boycott of the local K-mart store and reaching out to workers at other workplaces and communities, Black workers and community activists from 10 counties met at the First Missionary Baptist Church in Fremont, NC in June 1982 to form BWFJ as a statewide organization.

### **What Do We Believe?**

BWFJ believes that racism is a fundamental part of the US system. It was established to bring about, reinforce and justify the super-exploitation and social, political, racial, gender and cultural oppression (national oppression) of Black workers and the African American people in order to create massive profits for the owners of the Southern plantations and the developing Northern industries and banks. The national oppression of African Americans sped up the development of the US capitalist economy to surpass the economies of other countries. US global economic expansion and domination of other countries and governments, including wars, is known as imperialism.

BWFJ believes that effective struggles by Black people against racism, national and gender oppression and worker exploitation must become conscious struggles for African American liberation and radical social change. They require more than a change in racist and sexist attitudes and the presence of more African Americans and women in government post (while important).

Radical structural changes are needed to empower African Americans, workers and women to restrict and eliminate institutionalized racist, patriarchal, exploitive and repressive policies and practices that strengthen the capitalist system and its various forms of oppression. This struggle takes place around political, economic, social, gender, sexuality, cultural, environmental and international issues to build working class and people's power and consciousness to transform society to improve conditions for all without privileges.

BWFJ believes that African American workers need self-organization to help empower ourselves at the workplace, in communities and throughout the whole of US society to organize, educate, mobilize and struggle for power, justice, self-determination and human rights for Black, oppressed nationalities, women and all working class people (employed and unemployed). The ability of workers to withhold their labor in an organized and collective way to seriously impact the daily operations of the economy and society, including the government, constitutes a major aspect of the power of Black workers to win progressive changes and to help radically transform society.

BWFJ believes that African American workers must take the lead in forming trade unions and community organizations that unite all workers around the struggles to improve and change the oppressive conditions we face in the workplace, communities and in the whole of US Society. Black workers must help to make the trade unions real rank-and-file democratic organizations with a radical vision of social justice.

BWFJ believes that Black faces in high places alone without accountability to the needs and interests of the African American and working class communities will not eliminate the racist US system. Black faces can be used to hide and do the dirty work of the employers and government. Struggles against injustice cannot make exceptions based on race or gender. We must expose, oppose and struggle to end injustice regardless of who's in charge.

The BWFJ believes that real Black power is represented by the organization and control by Black workers over the major economic, social and political institutions that impact our lives, including governmental power at all levels that establishes the conditions for African American self-determination. We believe that Black power must be aligned with the power of other oppressed people and workers in the US and globally in order to effectively challenge and defeat imperialism and systems of oppression, and to build truly democratic and humane societies.

BWFJ is opposed to the inequality and oppression of women; and is committed to the struggle for equality, power and leadership of women within the home, BWFJ, trade unions, community and political organizations and institutions, and in the government at all levels of society. The struggle against women's oppression must be present as an integral part of the struggle to transform social relations as a key aspect of transforming society's oppressive power relations.

BWFJ is opposed to the inequality and discrimination of Gay people; and is committed to the struggle against Gay oppression, and for equal rights as members within the BWFJ, social movements and the whole of US society.

BWFJ supports the right of immigrants to have full democracy and equality in society. As Latinos are becoming a major part of the working class in the US South, BWFJ is committed to the forming of an African American-Latino Alliance that unites the common struggles.

BWFJ is not anti-white people and welcomes the support of white workers and allies. However, we call on white workers and activists to struggle against racism and white supremacy, and to recognize that racism has created some level of privileges for whites, even among workers and progressives. This social privilege affects the class consciousness of white workers often causing them to view struggles against racism as being divisive for the working class and best dealt with by the courts; not by the unified struggles and power of workers.

Whites who work within the social movements struggling against various conditions and issues of national oppression and racial injustice must accept and support Black working class leadership within those social movements. Real working class unity must be based on a program that makes the struggle against racism and white supremacy a central part of the struggles of all workers.

BWFJ believes in international labor solidarity; and attempts to build ties with worker organizations around the world to support and wage a coordinated struggle against oppression and injustice. We will not side with US corporations or the government in their exploitation, oppression and unjust wars and acts of aggression against other countries.

BWFJ believes that Africans and peoples of African descent are entitled to reparations for slavery and the ongoing system of racist oppression that has stolen the wealth of Black labor, forced Black women to reproduce children to be sold and exploited, taking of Black land, terrorizing, maiming and killing Black people, assassinating Black leaders, unjust jail sentences, mis-education and Black political disenfranchisement.

BWFJ believes that African American workers must study our history and the history of struggles against oppression and injustice worldwide. BWFJ members must develop organizing and leadership skills and a political consciousness that enables us to provide effective leadership at the workplace, communities and at the international level. BWFJ builds and relates to institutions that help to develop the leadership of workers.

Active BWFJ members must pay annual dues and sell the Justice Speaks Newspaper, attend regular chapter meetings, be active in their workplace and/or community and plan and report on their work in one of the BWFJ working groups.

BWFJ must constantly recruit younger working class members to its ranks so that the Black workers movement continues and grows as a social force and leading base of the struggle for

African American national liberation, women's emancipation and workers power and internationalism.

## **Where We Stand**

Black Workers For Justice is an organization of Black workers organizing to build the African American workers' movement as a central force in the struggle for Black Liberation and Worker's Power.

We stand:

- For workers control of the wealth from their labor and for fighting, democratic unions of rank and file workers
- Against the exploitation of all workers
- For democratic rights and equality of all races, nationalities and sexes
- Against racism, white supremacy, homophobia and sexism
- For social programs for working people, youth, the elderly, physically challenged and poor
- Against wars and military spending to make the rich richer
- For jobs, income, training for the unemployed, affirmative action for Blacks, oppressed nationalities, women and physically challenged workers
- Against unemployment, plant closings, and "run away shops"
- For health and safety on the job and in the community
- Against dangerous conditions and "killer shops"
- For the political empowerment of all working people, and the freedom and national liberation of Blacks and oppressed nationalities
- Against the political powerlessness of all working people and against racist national oppression of Blacks and all oppressed nationalities

Source: <http://blackworkersforjustice.org>

## **08 Malcolm X Grassroots Movement**

### **About MXGM**

The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement is an organization of Afrikans in America/New Afrikans whose mission is to defend the human rights of our people and promote self-determination in our community. We understand that the collective institutions of white-supremacy, patriarchy and capitalism have been at the root of our people's oppression. We understand that without community control and without the power to determine our own lives, we will continue to fall

victim to genocide. Therefore, we seek to heighten our consciousness about self-determination as a human right and a solution to our colonization. While organizing around our principles of unity, we are building a network of Black/New Afrikan activists and organizers committed to the protracted struggle for the liberation of the New Afrikan Nation – By Any Means Necessary!

## **Our 6 Core Principles**

1. We actively support and struggle to defend the Human Rights of Afrikan people in the United States and around the world. We actively oppose those social, economic, political and cultural practices and structures that contribute to the violation of our people's human rights whether it is based on ethnicity, nationality, social status, class, gender or sexual orientation (including gay, lesbian, transgender, bi-sexual, or other sexuality).
2. We demand Reparations, or repayment for four hundred years of slavery, colonialism and oppression of our people in the United States of America.
3. We promote Self-Determination and must organize for the liberation of the Afrikan nation, held colonized in the United States.
4. We oppose Genocide or the acceptable and calculated killing of our people by individuals, institutions and organizations of the United States government, through lynching, disease, police terror and any other means.
5. We demand the release of activists who have been imprisoned because of their commitment in seeking human rights and liberation for our people. These brothers and sisters are Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War, and they should be recognized as such.
6. We actively struggle to End Sexist Oppression. We oppose any form of oppression that limits women from reaching their fullest potential, as manifested in our cultural, economic, political and social institutions, practices and beliefs. We actively oppose those beliefs, ideas, terms, etc. that limit the human worth of women and contribute to violations against women.

## **The MXGM Personality**

As members of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, we aspire to and focus on the discipline necessary to represent the following:

1. Always be humble when dealing with Afrikan people. You can be humble and firm at the same time
2. Respect the actions and customs of others.
3. Never engage in petty senseless arguments.
4. Do not go places looking for arguments (ideological or otherwise)

5. Always be on time for all activities, or have a legitimate reason.
6. Never be afraid to wage Ideological struggle, or ask questions if necessary to establish political clarity.
7. Never talk just to be seen or heard
8. Never discuss information with those who should not know, regardless of who they are.
9. Report all actions that threaten our people to our organization leadership.
10. Always be on the lookout for traitors, spies, and other enemies of our people
11. Always be engaged in some form of propaganda work.
12. Always be on the lookout for brothers and sisters who have deep love for Afrikan people for recruitment purposes.
13. Never be tricked by a person's word.
14. Know how to study and recognize the uniqueness of our struggle.
15. Know the enemy within.
16. Always keep yourself clean in mind, body, and collectively.
17. Develop the ability to work individually and collectively.
18. Combat selfishness.
19. Always guide and protect children.

## **Why We Say “New Afrikan”**

The term “New Afrika” designates us not just as a group or a collective but as a Nation. We claim nationhood and sovereignty at this time and in this place!

1. because we aspire to independence, self determination and self sufficiency
2. because our culture and interests are not just distinct but in opposition to that of the North American empire
3. to highlight the conditions of colonization in which we currently live
4. as a grounds on which to demand the recompenses – such as reparations – due to all nations whose international and inalienable human rights have been unjustly compromised
5. to affirm our connection to the landmass on which our ancestors toiled and bled; to affirm our connection to land from which all wealth and health flows.
6. because we recognize that people do not control their own affairs, who do not control the institutions by which they participate in public life are open to disenfranchisement, marginalization, and genocide
7. to be able to act as a resource, example. and sanctuary for oppressed people everywhere

The term “New Afrika” reflects our Pan African identity, our purpose, and our direction. Although we come from distinct ethno-linguistic groups in Africa and the African Diaspora, our

shared oppression and the interdependence of our liberation redefines our borders. We are New Afrikans and we are a Nation. We will be free. Toward that end, MXGM will work to honor the legacy of our ancestors, for our own progress and for future generations. Let us surface the New Afrikan Nation for ourselves, all Afrikans and all humanity by proudly calling ourselves.....New Afrikan!

## **Why We Say “Free The Land!”**

“Free the Land!” ... is the battle cry of the New Afrikan Independence Movement (NAIM).

The NAIM is part of the Black liberation Movement in North Amerikka that wants independent Black Nation on land in north amerikka. The land identified by the New Afrikan Independence Movement is primarily known as South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, as well as other areas of what is now called the Black-Belt South, where Afrikan people are in the majority or have a historical/economical/socio-cultural relationship to. When we say “Free the Land” this is the land we are talking about freeing. Malcolm X once stated: “Revolutions are fought to get control of land, to remove the absentee landlord, and gain control of the land and institutions that flow from the land. The Black [Nation] has been in a very low condition because [it] has no control whatsoever over the land.” He later stated: “A true Negro revolt might entail, for instance, fighting for separate Blacks states within this country...”

New Afrika- South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and other areas of the ‘Black-Belt South’- must be free. Afrika is the homeland of all Afrikan people, but We have no realistic plan to transport 40 million captive New Afrikans back to Afrika.

We recognize the claims of Native Americans to this land, and we will struggle side-by-side to help them regain their land. At the same time, since out captivity in the western hemisphere, progressive Native Americans have recognized that We have nothing in common to north amerikkka and the majority of us have no realistic way to get back to Afrika.

We say ‘Free the Land’ because We want independence so that we can ensure our Human Rights are protected and that our land will be a zone and base for all who seek liberation and freedom.

FREE THE LAND!

## **The MXGM Pledge**

We must build the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement for Self Respect, Self Defense and Self Determination!

The Black Nation Charges Genocide!

We must Free the Land!

Free the Land!

Free the Land – By Any Means Necessary!

Source: <http://mxgm.org/>

## 09 People's Organization For Progress

The People's Organization for Progress has been formed for the following purposes:

- To educate the people about relevant social, economic and political issues.
- To continuously organize and mobilize the grassroots community so that it can effectively solve its problems and fight for its needs.
- To improve the social and economic conditions in our community.
- To work for the total elimination of racism and sexism.
- To further develop and increase the political power of working and poor people.
- To strive for a more just and equitable distribution of wealth in our society.
- To serve as an advocate of human and civil rights.
- To support the struggles of people at home and abroad against oppression and exploitation.
- To promote world peace.
- To build unity with other organizations and individuals whose goals are similar to our own.

### Constitution

We, the members of the People's Organization for Progress, have founded this association of the society in which we live. It is our desire to build a more just social order. Our primary goal is nothing less than the complete elimination of poverty; all forms of social, racial and economic exploitation; oppression; degradation; human misery; suffering and injustice.

We shall unify and organize working, poor and progressive people and strive to foster cooperation, self-reliance, and a militant fighting spirit among them. We shall build our organization so that it may become a viable political vehicle for the oppressed and a significant force for progressive politics. We shall work to unite the greater progressive community, increase its ranks and build a broad mass movement at the local level which will be an integral part of the national worldwide struggle for social and economic justice.

Our concern is not only for society as a whole, but for the individual as well. We seek not only social transformation, but the transformation of the individual through involvement in the struggle for human liberation. We believe that in order for the struggle to transform society to succeed it must be carried out and supported by people imbued with revolutionary values. We want to make the individual socially aware and concerned, more responsible and compassionate, committed and active in the struggle for social change.

We support and involve ourselves in advocacy, self-help, and reform efforts to improve the conditions of the people; however, we believe that the major social, economic and political problems confronting working and poor people cannot be solved unless there is a radical redistribution of power and wealth in our society and a restructuring of our socioeconomic system that will result in the empowerment of the masses over all institutions that affect their lives

We vow to uphold the legacy of struggle which we have inherited and not to rest until justice, equality, dignity and peace are a reality for all.

Source: <http://nijpop.org/wordpress/>



Malcolm X and Fidel Castro, from <http://zingha.tumblr.com/post/12121297457/beautone-fidel-castro-and-malcolm-x-in-harlem>

## **10 Defenders for Freedom, Justice, & Equality**

The Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality is an organization of Virginia residents working for the survival of our communities through education and social justice projects. Founded in June 2002, many of us had relatives in the Richmond City Jail or state prisons and were concerned about the physical conditions of these institutions. As we worked around these issues, we learned more and more about the connections between jails, jobs, poverty, racism, sexism, class, war and political representation. We began to organize around these issues as well. We now have a quarterly, statewide newspaper; a weekly radio program; and a website. Our members meet monthly to discuss issues and plan actions. We are affiliated with the Virginia People's Assembly, the Virginia Immigrant Peoples Coalition and the United National Antiwar Coalition. If you agree with our principles and want to work to make these ideals a reality, we invite you to join us. Together, we can make a real difference in the lives of our communities.

### **What we believe**

We believe in Freedom – We believe that all people must be free to develop to their full potential as human beings. We must be free from hunger, from preventable diseases, from homelessness, from ignorance. We must be free to work and to provide for ourselves and our families. We must be free to pursue our education and to develop ourselves culturally and spiritually. We must be free from fear of the arbitrary use of police power and from the physical and cultural attacks of white-supremacist organizations. Women must be free from physical, cultural and emotional oppression. Children must be free from dangers like lead poisoning, asthma and sexual exploitation. Our youths must be free both from police harassment and the mindless violence of the streets. We must all be free from unjust wars fought in the interest of the wealthy few at the expense of the struggling many.

We believe in Justice – We believe that every human being has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And we believe that these rights are meaningless unless we also have the right to a job at a living wage, to decent housing, to adequate health care, to a meaningful education. We believe that all people have the right to stand equally before the law, to equal and fair treatment by the police, by the court system and in jails and prisons. And we believe that the death penalty is the ultimate exercise in injustice.

We believe in Equality – We live in the richest country in the world. But it's a country that owes its tremendous wealth to the barbaric oppression of Black lives on a historic scale, as well as the theft of American Indian and Mexican lands, the cruel exploitation of Asian labor and the labor of waves of poor European immigrants. This country does not belong to the wealthy few who

have claimed it for their own. As human beings, we all have an equal right to its resources. As descendants of those whose blood, sweat and tears paid cruelly for its development, we have a right to collective reparations. And as people who struggle every day with ongoing inequality, we have the right to affirmative action. We believe that for any one of us to be free, we must all be free. We believe that for any one of us to have justice, we must all have justice. We believe that equality for anyone is impossible without equality for everyone

As members of The Defenders, we pledge ourselves to defend our community, its men, its women and especially its children, from all forms of oppression. We pledge to fight for a world where all people can live in dignity, freedom and peace.

## **What we do**

**Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project** – Founded in 2004, this is an ongoing campaign to reclaim and properly memorialize Richmond's rich Black history. We helped lead a 10-year struggle that forced the removal of a commercial parking lot that for more than 30 years had desecrated Richmond's African Burial Ground, the city's earliest cemetery for free and enslaved Africans. We are currently fighting a third attempt to build a for-profit baseball stadium in Shockoe Bottom, once the site of the country's second-largest slave market. We have helped revive the memory of the great Virginia slave rebellion leader Gabriel, executed on Oct.10, 1800, at the site of the African Burial Ground.

**The Virginia Defender** – In 2005 we began publishing The Richmond Defender, a monthly community newspaper with a circulation of 10,000. Now called The Virginia Defender, the paper has expanded statewide with a quarterly press run of 15,000. Centered on the Black community, it also covers immigrant struggles, labor and international issues.

**DefendersLIVE Radio** – Also launched in 2005, our weekly radio program uses news, analysis and guest interviews to publicize issues and perspectives often neglected by the commercial media. (Mondays, noon - 12:30 pm on WRIR, 97.3 FM and via live stream at [www.wrir.org](http://www.wrir.org).)

**Police Abuse & Court Watch Project** – We have mobilized many times to pack Richmond courtrooms to defend the wrongfully accused or to demand justice against abusive police officers. Working with the Virginia State Conference NAACP and other organizations, we organized against a wave of fatal police shootings in the first decade of the 2000s. From our beginning, we have continued to work to expose and change abusive conditions in the Richmond City Jail and the Virginia Department of Corrections.

**Virginia Immigrant People's Coalition** – As a founding member of the VIP Coalition, we have supported struggles by immigrant communities to defend the rights of the undocumented in Prince William County, Charlottesville and Richmond. This included organizing security for a

march of 8,000 in Prince William during the height of right-wing attacks in that Northern Virginia county.

Virginia Alliance for Worker Justice – We were an active member of this labor/community/religious coalition which fought for a raise in the minimum wage and opposed legislative attacks on local living-wage ordinances and state unemployment benefits.

Other Community Issues – We worked with United Parents Against Lead to pressure the city administration to improve its program charged with preventing lead poisoning in the city's children. We carried out a successful campaign to prevent winter heating gas cut offs by the City against the working poor. And we have played supportive roles in struggles initiated by other organizations, such as the 2011-12 Occupy Richmond movement and the heroic fight for women's reproductive rights in 2012 at the Virginia State Capitol.

Antiwar Work – In 2005 we co-founded the Virginia Anti War Network (VAWN), which for five years promoted statewide antiwar campaigns, supported local organizing and mobilized Virginia participation in national actions. In 2007 we organized the five-person People's Peace Delegation to Iran, which became the basis for our book "In Defense of Iran: Notes from a U.S. Peace Delegation's Journey through the Islamic Republic." In 2010 we were a founding member of the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), the largest and most active antiwar coalition in the U.S., in which our members serve on both the Administrative and Coordinating committees.

Virginia People's Assembly – In 2009 we co-founded the VPA, an annual conference of progressive activists from across Virginia. Under the banner of "Jobs, Peace, Justice," this networking event helps build a multi-issue, multi-racial movement based in the working-class and committed to the right of oppressed peoples to self-determination, both here at home and in other countries. The VPA provides a space for all of us – young and old; women and men; Black, Latino, Indian, Asian and European; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and straight; immigrant and native-born; able and physically and mentally challenged; union and unorganized; veterans; homeless; cultural workers – all of us – to come together and build a movement that can fundamentally change this society for the better.

Source: <http://www.DefendersFJE.org>

# OUR TRADITION

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*It is our duty to fight for our freedom.*

*It is our duty to win.*

*We must love each other and support each other.*

*We have nothing to lose but our chains—*

*Assata Shakur, An Autobiography, 1987*

A critical aspect of building a black left unity network is learning from the historical processes that highlights similar initiatives. The emergence of a black left in the U.S. has to be viewed within the context of the various historical phases of the struggle against Black national oppression, capitalist exploitation and women's oppression, and their fusion into a revolutionary struggle for self-determination and socialism.

Throughout these historical phases of struggle, there have been struggles around the question of which way forward for Black liberation. Various organizations and tendencies were formed representing different perspectives and class forces. This development emerged particularly during and after the period of Black Reconstruction following the civil war.

The different periods of our past can offer lessons about the low and high tides of left engagement, particularly as we continue to struggle in the 21st Century. The Black Liberation Movement's struggle against racist and national oppression is an ongoing struggle. Capitalism and imperialist has not stood still, it too has learned from its past.

The *Black Activist* working group feels that it is vitally important that we examine some of the historical documents where initiatives were taken to forge unity among Black Left forces. The Sankofa saying states that "in order to go forward we must look back." It is important to study this history and learn the lessons of those who have come before us, although for veterans this can facilitate summation and self-criticism. While we must avoid recreating the past, it is essential to have detailed discussions to learn from this past experience.

The organizations featured in this first issue of the *Black Activist* have been some of the major initiatives in the last 50 years of struggle.

1. **The Black Workers Congress:** This organization was a unification of radical Black workers. Its main base was in Detroit because of the organizational development of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. This was the major initiative to radicalize the shop floor since the anti-labor McCarthy goon squads of the 1950's. The LRBW connected the struggle of the Black workers to the heart of the Black liberation

movement. This defines the social basis for a Black left, understanding and organizing the historical role of Black workers in the Black liberation movement with anti-capitalist politics.

2. **The African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC):** The armed struggles for anti-colonial African liberation spawned a movement of support for these movements. In the process, revolutionary thinking, especially Marxism-Leninism, became a central focus for progressive Black thought. This organization involved workers, students, community activists, and progressive middle class forces. In its time it was the radical center of the Black Liberation Movement, and linked radicals throughout the African Diaspora. We need to rebuild this kind of global coordination of struggle.
3. **Black Radical Congress:** This organization was the last great gathering of the Black left. More than 2,000 people gathered in Chicago to forge a Freedom Agenda as a banner under the Black left could unify and march.
4. **The Combahee River Collective:** An initiative founded in Boston of Black Feminist and Lesbians who worked on projects and issues in which they saw race, sex, and class as concurrent forms of oppression. This collective of radical Black women called for liberation and the solidarity of progressive forces to combat the destructive forces of capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy.

All of the four documents take up the need for Black left formations to commit to the intersection of theory, practice, and, organization. Their ideas of unity were fused in principles that upheld democratic values based on self-determination, liberation, equality, justice, and power to the oppressed.

These and other organizations that will be featured in future issues of the *Black Activist* should be part of the knowledge frame of reference for left activists in the Black liberation movement. They were in the main on point and making a critical contribution that we can learn from. Remember that we run a relay race through history, passing the movement baton off to the next generation to further advance the struggle until victory. If we don't study these organizations and movement history, and learn and apply the lessons of what to do and what not to do, what we pass on will be flawed.

## 11 Manifesto of the Black Workers Congress (1970)

### Introduction

The following draft proposal has been adopted by the founding convention of the International Black Workers Congress. We are withholding the date and place of the convention because of

the intense repression in the United States, but we are building our movement on a solid base, of mass support and believe that we must encourage constructive criticism of our ideas.

The International Black Workers Congress is an organization of Black workers and students who have joined together to further the revolutionary struggle in the United States and other parts of the world, to consolidate many existing organizations, and to build unity among the revolutionary Third World Forces.

A final draft of our Manifesto will be issued after the educational and planning meeting of the International Black Workers Congress to be held on August 21 and 22, 1971, in Detroit, Michigan.

We call upon all Third World people to devote their attention to the condition of workers in the United States and other parts of the world. We invite all those Third World people who accept our manifesto in principle to join the ranks of the International Black Workers Congress.

## **Manifesto of the International Black Workers Congress**

### I. Our objectives.

1. Workers' control of their places of work – the factories, mines, fields, offices, transportation services and communication facilities – so that the exploitation of labor will cease and no person or corporation will get rich off the labor of another person, but all people will work for the collective benefit of humanity.

2. An elimination of all forms of racism and the right of self-determination for African people, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Asians and Indians who live in the United States and Puerto Rico.

3. The elimination of all forms of oppression of women in all phases of society, on the job and in the home.

4. The right of all people to express and develop their cultural heritage throughout the United States.



Cartoon by Ollie Harrington, from <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ARTharrington.htm>

5. The right of all people to express and develop their cultural and religious views without fear of persecution.

6. A halt to the growing repression and increasing fascism of the United States, the militarization of the police, the arming of right wing forces and the repeal of all repressive

legislation that abolishes the right of people to assemble, to speak freely, to have privacy and to publish their political views.

7. The replacement of all class collaborators in the trade union movement with leadership that will fight for the international solidarity of all oppressed people, a leadership that will fight all manifestations of racism, white skin privilege, capitalism, and imperialism (the sending of money, armed forces and Christian missionaries from one country to another for the purpose of exploiting and oppressing its workers). This leadership must demand real equality for women in employment.

8. The creation in the labor movement of revolutionary Black caucuses, Chicano and Puerto Rican revolutionary caucuses, Third World labor alliances, independent revolutionary union movements and other forms of revolutionary labor association that will seek to break the stranglehold of the reactionary labor bureaucrats and the capitalistic class collaborators that help to prevent the working class people from understanding their historic role in controlling the means of production,

9. A twenty-hour work week where all the people of the United States will be employed and have the necessary funds for food, clothing shelter and the right to improve their standard of living and enjoy the benefits of an industrialized society.

10. Thirty days of paid vacation time each year for all workers including women in the home and the use of all resort areas and the creation of new ones for working class people and the elimination of special privileges at resort areas for any group of people.

11. An elimination of speed-up, compulsory overtime, unsafe working conditions, inadequate medical facilities on the job, brutality and terror in the mines, factories and industrial plants of the United States and Puerto Rico.

12. That all people in the United States engage in productive work for the benefit of all the people in the world. Parasitic capitalistic vultures must be eliminated and all people who are outside of the work force must have jobs so that there will be no need for prostitution, pimps, dope pushers and addicts, gamblers, hustlers, winos – all creatures of the capitalistic system.

13. An elimination of the trash and violence perpetuated on the mass media and the right of all people to use the radio and television networks to express and develop their cultural forms.

14. An end to the pollution of the atmosphere, forests, trees, rivers and living quarters of all the people by the giant corporations who have no regard for the people and whose owners can fly away to islands in the Caribbean to avoid pollution or jet-set to Latin America and Africa, parts of Asia and other areas.

15. Adequate free public health facilities in all communities; adequate free hospitals, free doctor's care and improved working conditions for nurses and hospital aides.
16. Sufficient free twenty-four-hour day care centers in all communities so that mothers and fathers will be able to engage in other work and activities and the care of children will be socialized and their education will train them to work for humanity and not for their selfish, individual aspirations.
17. Free education from pre-school through all levels of college and university training and control of the educational facilities by the people.
18. Safe, clean, uncrowded housing where there are no rats and roaches, crumbling walls, falling ceilings and garbage piled up from insufficient public garbage disposal.
19. Abolition of the brutal penal system of the United States and the establishment of people's reorientation centers for those who misunderstand the workers' society and commit crimes against the people.
20. The immediate release of all prisoners from the archaic jail system of the United States, many of whom are political prisoners in the traditional sense of the word, but all of whom are there because of the unjust historical development and practices of a capitalistic society.
21. A withdrawal of all United States troops from overseas countries and a total dismantling of the military force of the United States.
22. Elimination and smashing of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Counter-Insurgency forces and research activities that have terrorized the population of the United States and the people of the world.
23. A destruction of all the armed, vicious, brutal, militaristic police forces in the United States that kill people at random, terrorize the population, and the establishment of a people's militia. There will be no need for an armed police force and military personnel, FBI or CIA, with workers control of the means of production, transport services and communication facilities.
24. Reparations from the United States government and all white racist institutions in the United States. We further demand that the United States government pay reparations to the people of Africa, Latin America and Asia whom it has exploited for centuries.
25. The withdrawal of all United States investment in South Africa.
26. The immediate ending of the aggressive war in Indo-China.
27. The right of the Palestinian people to their homeland in the Middle East.

28. The ending of the exploitation of workers in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean by western powers such as the U.S., France, England, Portugal, Belgium, Israel.

29. The ending of the trade blockade of Cuba.

30. The admission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations and the control of Formosa by the Chinese government of the mainland.

31. The rational planning of a world economic system that will eliminate racism, wars, hunger, disease, lack of housing, oppression of women, class antagonisms and big nation chauvinism.

32. The creation of a genuine revolutionary workers' party in the United States under the leadership of third world workers, men and women, employed and unemployed, who will be guided by the accumulated wisdom of all revolutionary thinkers, and who will work untiringly to implement the objectives of the International Black Workers Congress.

We urge:

1. The systematic study of revolutionary theory and the experiences of revolutionary movements and socialist nations so that we might learn from them, but in our learning we must at all times remember that we must apply all theory to the concrete realities of the United States. We live in the most industrialized nation of the world, a country that oppresses the majority of the people of the world. Any revolutionary theory that we cannot apply, cannot adjust to our concrete realities, will not be of much value; but all revolutionary theory in some form can be modified, extended, applied, interpreted to fit the needs of the revolutionary forces in the United States.

2. Creative discussion in a non-antagonistic manner about the future of the world in which we want to live and the methods to achieve these objectives. People's leisure time should be spent in discussing, reading and working for the new world. Above all we must try to build the new world in order to learn how to build it.

3. A systematic attack on all the control mechanisms of United States society. Our efforts will never be successful if we do not engage in practical, day-to-day struggle against all the controls that the capitalists have erected to maintain their rule. The concept of citizenship in the United States, the educational system, the mass media, the dogma and practices of the Christian church, the welfare system, the courts and the administration of justice, the profit motive system and upward mobility, the love of life and fear of death, the lack of job security, inadequate payment of wages and consumer credit, the practices of the reactionary trade union leadership, the denial of adequate health and medical facilities, dope in our communities,

the downgrading and denial of the cultural heritage of third world people, the poverty program and other counter-insurgency forms, the thievery of the land of third world people.

All these and other forms of control must be systematically attacked and the greater the unity in the attack, the greater the results and the quickening of the revolutionary process, for only when there is conflict against the control mechanisms of society will there be change and only the movement for change can produce revolutionary ferment and results.

4. The uniting of all third world revolutionary forces. Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Black people. Indians and Asians have too long been divided from each other and the exploiters have benefited from our disunity. We have all lived under the yoke of racism and economic exploitation. We have all suffered at the hands of the white imperialist powers and we have seen our native lands devastated, raped and pillaged, our mothers and sisters brutalized, our fathers cringe from the white master's whip lash. The forces that oppress us are our major contradictions. Between us there are antagonisms, but these must be resolved through discussion and we must unite as one mighty force in this racist land called the United States of America and help to build a new world without racism, hunger, disease, exploitation in all forms, a world of sisters and brothers.

We pledge:

1. To keep our revolutionary commitment under all the harsh forms that repression and mounting fascism will take in the United States.
2. To work untiringly to fulfill our objectives.
3. To help create a world where all people will call each other sisters and brothers out of genuine love of each other.

## II. 1971 Program Objectives

A. To increase the political consciousness of workers and students.

Every effort must be made to teach workers and students the meaning of surplus value, dialectical and historical materialism. With a firm understanding of these three concepts, workers and students will have a foundation for interpreting the workings of a capitalistic system. Without this theoretical framework, people will continue to flounder, and the rebellious spirit which exists among workers will not receive the political direction necessary to force that spirit of rebellion into an effective fighting force against racism, capitalism, and imperialism.

All those who begin to learn some of the interrelationships and scientific proofs of these concepts must teach others.

B. To build more and more cadres for the Congress.

(1) Workers and students in the Congress must not only teach, but also must urge and direct the teaching of workers on the job. Those who begin to learn the truth of surplus value, dialectical and historical materialism, must engage other people in discussion and study on the job and in the community. Constant discussion among workers and students is necessary and the objectives of the Congress must be discussed in study groups, newspapers, leaflets, and through mass agitation and propaganda.

A conscious recruiting plan must be made to get more workers into organizations that are part of the Congress and the constant political education of these workers must intensify. Meetings in the homes of workers are much better than those at offices; the grueling task of working in production consumes so much energy that workers do not have the physical energy to attend long meetings during the week. They are resting for the next day of deadly work. Whenever possible, hold public political education classes on Saturdays and Sundays, but do not neglect constant political education at the homes of workers and on the jobs where workers are socialized.

(2) Teach with a purpose. We are trying to build cadres for the Congress and its affiliated organizations in order to implement our political objectives. This means that workers must be organized and recruited. This will never happen if the workers do not have trust in the recruiter. Building trust on sound political grounds is a must for the Congress organizer and we must translate that trust and our teaching into active recruiting programs. We cannot become sectarian, but must reach out for all workers, especially production workers, those directly engaged in producing surplus value.

C. To constantly expand the base of the organization.

(1) Build the Black United Front and Third World Alliances. Black workers must never isolate themselves. It is imperative to work with other organizations but never giving up our principles. We must strive to get them to understand the correctness of our position, but this will not come just through debates. Our words, our practice, our activities, our image in the community will ultimately determine whether people accept the correctness of our political positions. We must work with people in order to change them. We cannot accomplish our objectives living alone in our homes with our families. We must go among the masses and work hard, trying to build political and moral support for the revolution. Only in this way can we implement a mass line and only in this way will we be able to accomplish our objectives.

We must know the history and practices of all groups in the community and work with those who are genuinely interested in the people. In some instances, we must seek to transform organizations. At all times we must constantly seek unity and to further educate people about our objectives and program. We need help to deal with the United States government and its repressive forces.

Third world people are divided. Much of this is due to incorrect leadership and a failure to understand the experiences of those who have made revolutions. The United Front is a good instrument and Third World people will respect this concept, but until, recently, those striving for United Fronts did not have the revolutionary objectives that we have.

(2) Establish a community newspaper that will serve the plant, the factory, and the world situation. This must be a well written paper, but a paper that is regular in circulation and that addresses itself to the needs of the workers in a particular area, but it must print a great deal of international news and political educational material. Building international solidarity requires information about the international pictures.

By the end of 1971, the Congress hopes to establish at least twenty newspapers throughout the country speaking directly to the needs of Third World Workers. This approach of local newspapers, we believe, is much better than just the distribution of a national newspaper. However, a national paper will be published and will reflect the political line of the Congress.

Those who publish newspapers should strive to involve students in the production and distribution. This is important, for students must learn to work with workers, and workers have a responsibility to educate students to the political realities and to working class conditions. Those students who are unwilling to distribute and help prepare the newspaper are not good candidates for the organization. But many students will respond to the calls of the workers. Try. Educate. Try again. But always relate the student workers to the realities of other workers. Encourage them to go to work in the plants and organize and learn what production is all about.

(3) Organize according to the natural division of the city. Establish workers' committees in the various wards of a city that will implement programs, politicize, distribute newspapers, and raise funds. We must build a parallel political structure if we are to be successful in our organizing work.

Decentralization of activities and work must be our main thrust in program implementation. Centralized direction flows from the structure of the organization, but decentralized implementation will help us at all times to constantly expand our base and get more and more roots deep into our communities. The deeper our roots into the community, the harder will it be for the government and the capitalistic bosses to wipe out our organization.

We can never accomplish our objectives until the masses of our people observe and participate in shaping correct political objectives and help to achieve these objectives. Building an infrastructure, or a structure for implementing programs and distributing information, is one of the best ways to begin organizing support bases in a community.

(4) Establish book stores. This is a priority which must be accomplished immediately. Ultimately, we should strive to open book stores in various sections of cities, but even if we have to open a book store in the corner of our offices, we should do it. If we are to educate workers, they must buy and read books. We can get books from publishers at a greater discount than from bookstores, if we get a discount at all. Then too, we can earn some money to help support a worker who might need a job, by letting him be responsible for that.

(5) Establish printing concerns. This too is a priority, for no revolutionary movement can succeed if it does not have its own printing operation. We must try and devise all types of methods to get printing operations going in our cities. This must be stressed over and over again. A printing operation controlled by workers puts the struggle on a new plane.

Every worker should try to learn the art of printing, composing, and editing a newspaper. Those with these skills must teach others.

(6) Establish consumer cooperatives, housing projects, gasoline stations, etc. At a later date we will prepare a more detailed plan for cooperative economic programs, but as a rule we should try to establish service outlets for workers. Workers must live; all people must live and we all spend money for food, clothing, and shelter. We should try to utilize all the various mechanisms in a city, state, and country to build these service units for workers all under a cooperative program. This has been started in some cities, but experiences must be codified and expanded. It is not just enough to politically educate. We must seek to provide as many services for workers as possible. In all communities we will find third world people who are willing to help us implement programs for cooperative economic development.

(7) Establish clinics, schools, and institutions to help raise the reading, writing, and speaking ability of all workers. The International Black Workers Congress is interested in preparing strong working-class leadership that will grow stronger each year, and until we raise the reading, writing, and speaking ability of workers, we cannot accomplish this objective with efficiency.

Urge all workers to obtain and constantly use a dictionary as they read.

Utilize the services of third world teachers to start remedial and advanced reading schools for workers.

Teach the skill of writing the English language and encourage workers to write for plant and community publications.

Prepare forms and urge workers to answer these questions about any important event in their community or place of work: What happened, who was involved, where did it happen, when did it happen, how did it occur, and the evaluation and significance of the action.

Always encourage workers to speak in public and at meetings, following the rules for basic public speaking.

- a. State clearly basic points you wish to make.
- b. Give supporting statements, illustrations, and comparisons.
- c. Conclude, urging listeners to support your basic points and proposals, while urging them to act against other incorrect proposals.

(8) Engage in mass fund raising. Workers must financially support their struggle. Without money we cannot accomplish many of our objectives. Money is the nerve of warfare. We must constantly stress that workers must pay for the cost of the war we are waging. No revolutionary can work without money and no people will liberate themselves if they are not willing to pay to help with their liberation struggle.

The following suggested ideas must be improved upon and each worker in our organization must understand the political importance of raising money and cannot evade his responsibility to the organization. We cannot tolerate the liberal attitude that raising money is the function of someone else. True, we must have a division of labor and we plan to establish cadres who will specialize in raising money, but from the very beginning, every worker must clearly understand that he has a responsibility which we will not allow him to forget or to evade – a responsibility to help provide funds, food, housing and other forms of material support to the workers' revolution. At the point of repetition, we stress again that without money we will not be able to accomplish our objectives and no forms of evading the responsibility to help raise money will be tolerated.

#### Suggested Ideas

- a. A voluntary tax upon each worker in a plant or a work situation. Exact honesty on the part of all cadres and members is absolutely essential and he or she who would steal one penny from the organization is violating trust and must be eliminated from our ranks and punished for his crime against the people.

b. A voluntary tax upon each household in the community. People will support our efforts if they understand our objectives and see us working to implement those objectives. We are truly the servants of the people. We are a part of the people and we must never remove ourselves from the people, for the masses will not support us financially if they see us violating trust and confidence. Certainly they will never support us financially nor should we expect them to if we become a gang of opportunists who abuse the people, terrorize them, speak harshly to them, ignore their problems and strive to be elitist in our behavior and attitude.

c. Fund raising parties, dances, paid cultural events, etc.

d. Solicitations with cans on the streets or places where people gather. Not only should we try to raise money at these points but we must strive at all times to give people a copy of our objectives. Raising money is a political act. The revolutionary forces will grow stronger to the extent that they are educating about our objectives, discussing them and joining the ranks of workers who are working for the total society.

e. Sell posters, bumper stickers, buttons, artifacts, etc. Mass fund raising is possible and the best method by which revolutionary forces can gather resources to help carry out programs. No worker can assume the attitude that he is above selling any item that will help bring revenue to the organization. Elitism in all its forms must be combated at all times and any person who refuses to sell items for the organization is expressing an elitist attitude.

f. Establish and organize units of the United Black Appeal and the International Black Appeal. Details on this program are contained in a separate memorandum.

g. Collect food and gasoline stamps. Many people buy food and gasoline at places where stamps are issued and do not bother with collecting or redeeming them.

h. Utilize the welfare system and food stamp programs. While this is not a direct fund raising proposal, some workers might feel too proud to take advantage of existing laws that will help to improve their economic situation. This is a manifestation of liberalism. The money that the government spends is our money and one day we will control the finances of this country, but in striving to accomplish our objectives we must utilize all available methods that will provide us with food, clothing and shelter.

i. Cooperative buying of food at wholesale houses. This is another indirect method of fund raising. It is absurd for workers to raise money to spend at neighborhood food stores whose prices are often sky high. By organizing collective food buying programs and going to the city or farmers' market, we often save money and get better food products. Collectivism must extend to buying and cooking foods.

The above are suggestions for raising money; the following is our fund raising policy which must be adhered to at all times.

### Fund Raising Policy

Our policy is to accept funds from anyone who wishes to support our objectives and programs and who understands that policy is made by our organization, not by those who give money. We cannot afford to allow anyone to dictate our policies. At the same time we cannot turn down help from anyone, regardless of their skin color. It is the duty of whites in this country to support liberation efforts of blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Asians and Indians.

We must fight against those reactionary forces in our communities who say that we should not accept money from whites. When you check it out concretely, many of the most anti-white forces in the black community are accepting foundation grants and white church grants for reformist programs, yet these vultures criticize third world people who accept money from whites for political purposes. Not only are they dishonest, but they are retarding the revolutionary process with their criticism of blacks who are studying the science of making a revolution, and one of the principles of making a revolution is to have the financial resources to wage warfare. We stress that our policies are made by our organization but we welcome help from all progressive forces in the United States and around the world. Self-reliance does not negate financial and material support from anyone who wants to help us accomplish our objectives and programs.

(1) Build the International and national conferences. The International Black Workers Congress is planning a two-day international education and planning conference on August 21-22, 1971 in Detroit, Michigan. These dates have been selected because of their historic importance. On August 21, 1831 Nat Turner led a slave rebellion in the United States and on August 22, 1791 Toussaint L'Overture led a Haitian slave rebellion against French planters. We plan to hold many workshops, local and regional planning meetings to culminate in the national conference. We want to build a base for our organization prior to any national meeting and utilize the national conference to further build the base of the organization. Details of this objective are contained in a separate memorandum.

(2) Prepare for a Third World Labor Strike on August 8, 1972, to end the Indo-China War, the restoration of the Palestinian people to their homeland, the withdrawal of United States investments from South Africa.

To implement this objective we must begin to educate workers about the Indo-China war, the Palestinian armed struggle and the role of United States investment in South Africa. Constant propaganda around these issues must be accentuated. Further details for building the strike are contained in a separate memorandum.

(3) Organize personal and community self-defense units. Training in the martial arts should increase and other forms of personal and community self-defense techniques.

(4) Beware of leeches, opportunists, and those who would latch onto our movement for their purposes. Remember we are trying to lay the foundations for a genuine revolutionary party among third world people. Some people in the traditional white left in this country have historically tried to jump on the bandwagon of black movements and just as often have jumped off when these movements took positions that offended the white leadership of these traditional organizations. Usually these organizations have sent their black members into black organizations and they have often worked very hard, but when directives were given that they should pull out, they pulled out for the most part. There are those who will say we are anti-communist for this position, but we know this is not true. We must build our own revolutionary movement. We too can read all the revolutionary thinkers and apply their thoughts to our concrete realities. Only when we read and apply for ourselves will we make progress in advancing the cause of world socialism, an explicit definition of the sum total of our objectives.

(5) Beware of police infiltration. The recent trials of the Black Panther Party and the revelation that Gene Roberts, a bodyguard of Malcolm X – a man who tried to breathe in Malcolm's mouth and revive him – is a police informer certainly indicates the extent of police infiltration in this country. At the same time we cannot stop motion and organizing because of the increasing number of black people who are turning into police spies. Certainly one of the reasons the pigs revealed Gene Roberts as a police informer inside the Panthers was to frighten other black people from getting together and working on programs collectively. If the United States government can frighten black people away from mass collective action, then it will have retarded the revolutionary process. Only through the mass action of third world people will we be able to generate ferment among our people and this mass action does not always have to take the form of demonstrations.

### III. Statement of Principles That Govern Our Revolutionary Work

We are issuing this statement as a part of our manifesto so that the people will have a further guide by which to judge our behavior. We encourage all the people to critically examine our standards for work and study and to examine other groups and organizations by the standards which guide us.

Why do we study?

1. To equip ourselves with the knowledge of the science and art of making a revolution so that we may apply scientific principles and historically proven techniques to the art of making a socialist revolution in the United States. If you want to build a skyscraper, you study the principles of architecture. If you want to be a good farmer, you study agriculture. Hence, if you

really want to change conditions and to fulfill the objectives of the International Black Workers Congress, then you must study the science and art of making a revolution.

2. To build revolutionary strength, initiative, and imagination.

3. To hold firm to a consistent working class attitude.



Sculpture by Elizabeth Catlett, from [http://flickrriver.com/photos/david lewis baker arts/5655806234/](http://flickrriver.com/photos/david_lewis_baker_arts/5655806234/)

4. To fight petty-bourgeois or middle-class tendencies such as individualism, selfishness, greed, ultra-democracy, liberalism, petty bickering, elitism, anti-intellectualism, know-it-all attitude, dislike for detail work, egotism, male chauvinism and reactionary nationalism.

5. To build iron discipline and a firm commitment to a life of struggle for world socialism and the ending of all exploitation.

6. To weed out corrosive elements by observing how people study and implement what they learn.

7. To build a spirit of international solidarity.
8. To train cadres who will further organize the party and revolutionary organizations of the working class, the only class capable of giving correct political direction, to revolutionary forces.

#### Methods of Carrying Out Revolutionary Work

1. We believe it is necessary to have stated objectives that will give direction and educate the masses. Stated objectives are the basis for recruiting and imaging the ideological struggle.
2. We believe that all revolutionary organizations must practice democratic centralism. This means: a) Centralized administration and collective authority, b) Decentralized methods of implementation of work that promote initiative, democratic discussion and a channel to initiate policy resolutions, c) Subordination of minority opinions to majority decisions, lower bodies to higher bodies and the supremacy of the central collective, d) Constant criticism and self-criticism, study and practice as the best methods to insure the vigor and vitality of the part or revolutionary organization and the promotion of growth of revolutionary theory and practice. We believe that any organization that does not promote criticism and self-criticism will mislead the masses and cause its own decay.
3. We believe that liberalism in all its political manifestations must be combated consistently, for in the United States the influence of middle class and capitalistic ideology is rooted deep in all people including workers. Liberalism is dangerous to a revolutionary organization for it retards growth, causes a diversion of energies, a turning inward on sisters and brothers and a failure to understand that imperialism is the major enemy. (By nature imperialism is capitalistic and racist.)
4. We believe leadership must be carefully selected, for an organization is judged by its leadership and leadership creates a dynamic of its own which must constantly be evaluated by the organization. Therefore we believe that all revolutionary organizations must have leadership that is working class and revolutionary in outlook. The past history, activities, and commitment of leadership must be examined before it is selected and the strength and weakness of each person in a leadership position must be collectively discussed at all times.
5. We believe that anyone wishing to make a socialist revolution in the United States or who wishes to be known as a genuine revolutionary must struggle to master the science and art of making a revolution and learn how to apply those teachings to the concrete realities of the United States. We do not believe that formulas will work everywhere but that we must study revolutionary theory to learn how to apply it. Theory which we cannot apply is interesting reading but not relevant to our concrete realities. A broad knowledge of revolutionary theory will increase our ability to wage revolutionary warfare in the United States.

6. We believe that we must build the United Front, realizing that all united fronts are 'the unity of opposites which includes various classes in league with each other on the basis of a definite common program of struggle.' (Le Duan, VIETNAMESE REVOLUTION: FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS 'ESSENTIAL TASKS' HANOI, 1970.) Within the United Front the International Black Workers Congress will maintain its right to recruit and to accomplish its objectives, waging principled and non-antagonistic struggle with all other members of the Front, trying to get them to realize the correctness of our objectives and how they are in the best interest of all the people of the world.

Individuals and organizations that wish to become a part of the International Black Workers Congress must accept in principle our manifesto. It is our job to educate about our principle, objectives and method of work and to test people in their daily work to see if they are furthering the goals which they have accepted in principle.

We urge all those who want to support the International Black Workers Congress to duplicate this draft proposal, mimeograph copies, reprint it in newspapers, distribute it in plants, in factories, in any work situation, in communities. Hold discussion groups and try to implement the objectives.

We are especially interested in this document receiving wide publicity and criticism in the international community. We welcome books, periodicals, working drafts; documents, suggestions, and ideas by progressive and revolutionary forces anywhere in the world that will help us to further develop our revolutionary consciousness and accomplish our objectives.

Source: <http://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1/bwc-manifesto.htm>. Transcription, editing and markup by Paul Saba. Copyright: Creative Commons Common Deed.

## **12 African Liberation Support Committee Statement of Principles (1972)**

### **WORLD VIEW**

"If there is no struggle, there can be no progress..."

Black people throughout the world are realizing that our freedom will only be won through a protracted struggle against two forces - racism and imperialism the world imperialist system festers in Africa and Asia and engulfs the Western Hemisphere as well. In the United States we know it as monopoly capitalism, in Africa it is imperialism in its colonial or neo-colonial form. Wherever it appears, its corner stone is the white ruling class of the United States of America.

Imperialism is neither invincible nor invulnerable. As the blows against it increase, the crisis of imperialism heightens and leads to new levels of exploitation of Black People in the Western Hemisphere, Africa and the rest of the world.

## **AFRICA**

In Africa, the remains of classical European colonialism is held together by Portugal (in Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique). The United States government has been a constant supporter and ally of Portuguese oppression through direct aid (such as the \$430 million Azores agreement) and gifts of planes, arms, and military training (at Fort Bragg, North Carolina) through NATO. White settler rule is based in police state South Africa, and extends to Namibia (South-West Africa) and Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) as well. There is hardly a single major U.S. or multinational Corporation, or bank that does not have investments in Southern Africa. Chase Manhattan Bank, Firestone Rubber and tires, Gulf Oil, Holiday Inn, General Motors and some 300 other firms have investments totaling over 1 billion dollars. Several major problems face the people of Southern Africa and Guinea-Bissau as a result of the present crisis:

- I. Resettlement schemes to absorb unemployed European workers as new colonists in Africa; they will be expected to fight against liberation forces. An example is the Cabora Bassa Dam project in the Tete province of Mozambique, where over 1,000,000 European workers are expected to settle.
2. Increased levels of exploitation caused by the relocation of factories from advanced capitalist countries - "runaway shops." The conditions that generally accompany this new investment are no-strike laws, forced labor, slave-wages, no right-to-Organize laws, and neo-fascist policies of political repression against all dissent.
3. Militaristic and aggressive expansionist policies of South •Africa and Israel to recolonize "independent" Africa using capital invested by multinational corporations based in the U.S., Europe and Japan.

## **WESTERN HEMISPHERE (U.S., Canada and the Caribbean)**

Black people in the Western Hemisphere equally caught in the racist imperialist net, also face major problems in the present state of our struggle:

- I. Problems on the job-unemployment, low wages, job insecurity, racism by management and union leadership, discrimination in hiring and promotions (especially in skilled crafts), and super-exploitation in the shops (speed-up compulsory overtime, etc.) '

2. Continued neglect, and indeed cutbacks in the area of social services • public welfare, transportation, housing sanitation, health facilities, and education, etc.

3. Political-police-military repression with fascist-type hit squads (like the STRESS squad was in Detroit), increased use of electronic surveillance and informers, a rising rate of Black Youth in prisons, and systematic introduction of heroin (or heroin substitutes) in to the Black Communities.

4. Continued onslaughts on efforts to preserve and develop revolutionary culture among Black people, including the use of distorted fragments of Black history and the accomplishments of "distinguished Black Americans." These onslaughts are in fact cultural aggression. Cultural aggression, like all other forms of racism, seeks to impose the way of life, values and institutions of one culture on another culture. Culture here defined as a way of life, values, and those institutions set up to maintain and develop that way of life and its values.

## **FINALLY GOT THE NEWS**

Black people throughout the world have finally got the news - the news that racism and Imperialism the two headed monster - are our enemies. The major historical trends of the moment in Southern Africa can be summed up as:

1. The heightened struggle and increasing success of the liberation movements, which win new victories every day. Their struggle has been aided by the support of the Socialist countries, and by other anti-imperialist forces, especially the increasing support of progressive Black people in the United States.

2. The increasing support for the liberation movements by independent African countries, even conservative ones, through the .OAU Liberation Committee and by direct aid.

3. The rising desperation of the Portuguese governments in the face of liberation groups marching towards total victories in the "colonies". This desperation is reflected by the cowardly assassination of Amilcar Cabral, Secretary-General of the PAIGC, on the the streets of Conakry by Portuguese agents.

4. Increased co-operation between colonial and imperialist governments especially Rhodesia, South Africa, Portugal, Israel, and the United States in these areas; first, collective military arrangements; second, the wooing of governments of certain African countries in an attempt to seduce them into "dialogue" with South Africa or otherwise breach the anti-colonial unity of Africa; third, the development of schemes to hand the Portuguese colonies over the phony "independent" Black governments - in reality puppets for the Portuguese.

5. The increasing awareness of Black workers in Southern Africa who are mounting demonstrations and strikes to prove that the system of internal oppression under which they suffer can be overthrown.

The major historical trends at the present time in the United States may be summed up as follows:

1. The international crisis of capitalism has produced effects - rising market price of gold, falling value of the dollar - that have put the U.S. economy on very shaky ground; unemployment, high food prices, run away shops are a few indications of the instability of the domestic market.
2. The increasing manifestations of frustrations and anger of people in the US, especially Black people-battered back and forth by forces which they do not understand.
3. The exposure of corruption in government from Nixon and Haldeman to Mayors Daly and Addonizio, down to the cop on the corner. People increasingly realize that this corruption is linked to control of government by large corporations and the rich in their own interests.
4. The increasing attempts by the white ruling class of the USA and their apologists, to blame many social problems on Black People: (high taxes, welfare, unemployment for white workers; inflation) .

We can clearly see that the imperialist monster has two heads in the Western Hemisphere and elsewhere in the world. We here have the same duty as all progressive Black people - to fight imperialism in all its manifestations. To do this we must build an anti-racist, anti-imperialist United Front among Black people.

## **TOWARDS A UNITED FRONT**

"If we do not formulate plans for unity and take active steps to form political union, we will soon be fighting and warring among ourselves with imperialists and colonialists standing behind the screen and pulling vicious wires, to make us cut each other's throats for the sake of their diabolical purposes ....

Kwame Nkrumah

Black people throughout the world face a future of struggle to put together a movement with the theoretical and organizational tools and the practical experience necessary to defeat enemies and build a new world.

Theory

We must learn from the experience of other movements and other struggles experience which teaches that "there can be no revolutionary movement without revolutionary theory." We have learned rich lessons from struggles with no theory at all. Those lessons teach us two important things about unity and theory:

1. We cannot be dogmatic. Once we have rooted ourselves in certain principles, we must direct our struggle according to the concrete, changing conditions around us.
2. Real unity will come about not by ignoring differences but by airing those differences and struggling to resolve them. It is through the interplay of ideas and the testing of those ideas in practice that a correct position will be hammered out.

### Organization

We must struggle to improve our organization work. Building unity means finding ways of utilizing the abilities and skills of everyone who is serious about struggling.

### Practice

The real test of our united front work is, of course, in practice. We must engage in principled work both inside and outside of the anti-imperialist front; in addition we must develop our ability to carry the fight against racism and imperialism to different groups of people around different issues, yet maintain our course.

The principle task of our movement at this time has two aspects.. We must merge the Black liberation struggles in the U.S. -with the National liberation struggles in Africa, because a victory anywhere in the fight against U.S. imperialism is a victory everywhere. We must coordinate the Black Liberation struggles in the Western Hemisphere with the overall struggle of People of Color to change the fundamental nature of this society, because we have a responsibility to the world to fight exploitation and oppression in this very stronghold.

The time is ripe to develop a United Black people's struggle, a struggle to merge the Black liberation movement with the process of World Revolution. The question is: HOW?

## **OPERATIONAL UNITY**

*The whole argument about whether unity is achieved through a step by step process. or through a political decision is in fact a futile one. Ultimately political decision is necessary, without it unity cannot be achieved. But in the meantime, do we merely wait and hope for a miracle, leaving our development and independence forever in jeopardy, or do we make what progress we can?—Julius K. Nyerere*

The struggle we are engaged in must be a broad one -it must be capable of encompassing a diversity of ideological positions, class formation, and social groups, And it must be operational. It cannot be so broad that it cannot function.

But unity cannot be ordered or willed into being, it must be built as the conditions develop. We do not expect Black nationalists, elected Black public officials, Black socialists, Black ministers, and Black union leaders to unite around a common program merely by their attendance at a meeting, no matter how spectacular. In fact, we feel that this is an incorrect approach at the present time. "Great" men and women do not make history -the people make history. There are some who say that all of "the leaders" should come together so that Black people can come together. We believe that, to the contrary, it is the struggles of everyday Black people - it is their emerging unity that will make the "leaders" come together, and not the other way around. Those who are serious about struggle against racism and imperialism must involve themselves in the struggle of Black people, only such a cause will bring about the unity we all desire so much . "

The development of a lasting Black anti-imperialist united front requires a struggle for unity on two levels; internal and external.

#### Internal

*Dust will accumulate in a room if not cleared regularly—Mao Tse Tung*

In order for the Black Liberation Struggle to advance there must be a dynamic and direct struggle to unite forces, and develop correct views. This unity in struggle will develop militants with experience, committed to correct views and unified with other individuals and organizations proven in the fight against imperialism. Active criticism and ideological struggle are the weapons and the way of ensuring that Brothers and Sisters within the ALSC build strong organizational unity. Non-antagonistic contradictions within the committee only be resolved through active ideological and political struggle based on principle. The basis of such struggle will ensure us a higher unity. Such a unity based on unity-struggle-unity, will cement organizational unity and correct our political direction. If errors are left by themselves, organizational unity, strength and direction will not be achieved.

#### External

Our unity with other political tendencies in the Black Community must be based on a commitment to eliminate racism and defeat monopoly capitalism in the Western Hemisphere and imperialism throughout the rest of the world. For example, our view is that African people must control Southern Africa and Guinea-Bissau and the only way to really do this is by armed revolutionary struggle. Recognizing the present condition, we also support the struggles for

democratic rights; for instance the right of Black workers to organize in Durham, N.C., South Africa or Detroit, Michigan. In this way we must begin to involve people of various ideological positions -ministers, elected officials, civil rights groups, etc., around the program of ALSC, not on their terms but on commonly agreed terms - on terms of the front which we can all support. This process will not happen immediately, it will have to be done step by step. Part of its success or failure will be in our ability to scientifically identify different classes and social groupings in the Black Community so that we can deal with them all effectively .The success of "unite the many to oppose the few" in any society involves knowing exactly who composes "the many" and determining what they can be united around.

## **Focus for Mobilization**

Our antiracist, anti-imperialist, Black united front must attempt to unite all social groups and class formations within the Black community in a common struggle. Thus our struggle must mobilize the masses but this can only be done when the specific character of this exploitation is clearly understood.

Most Black adults work in production or service jobs. It is this sector of the Black community that has the most to gain by the victory of our struggles and yet they have been the most 'ignored by the movement. We also consider unemployed workers, most brothers and sisters incarcerated in prisons and welfare recipients as displaced workers. We must give the highest priority to mobilizing Black workers because they have demonstrated the power to do many things, such as stopping illegal chrome shipments from Rhodesia, expose repressive use of Polaroid identification systems and stop production of cars, not only in solidarity with the liberation movements, but also as a part of the fight against their own oppression. Therefore we encourage Black workers to take the lead. It is in this area that the ALSC - the anti-racist, anti-imperialist Black United Front, must meet the challenge of showing the interrelationship of the oppression of the people of Southern Africa and the exploitation of the Black people in the Western Hemisphere.

The post-World War II rise of Blacks in clerical and professional jobs provided the basis for leadership, organizational skills, and ideology during the Civil Rights Era. In turn, this struggle opened up new opportunities in government work, business opportunities, educational institutions, etc. As the crisis of imperialism causes the society to contract and cut back, the Black middle strata will be cut back. This is especially true of those jobs created by the poverty program and similar agencies in the past nine years. In addition to the radicalization of these people, occupants of traditional middle strata "professional" jobs are increasingly feeling the squeeze of monopoly capital. Teachers, social workers, and government workers, to name a few can and must be shown the true nature of the society of the Western Hemisphere. Their

struggle will ultimately not be that of saving their professional status, but rather in joining with the masses of people to defeat racism and imperialism decisively and finally.

Short life expectancy and high birth rates result in the Black community being young. Youth is also a time of struggle. We must gather together Black Youth from the plants, from the campuses, the streets, penal institutions, military reservations, and wherever else they are, to create a mass mobilization of these youth in the anti-racist, anti-imperialist struggle.

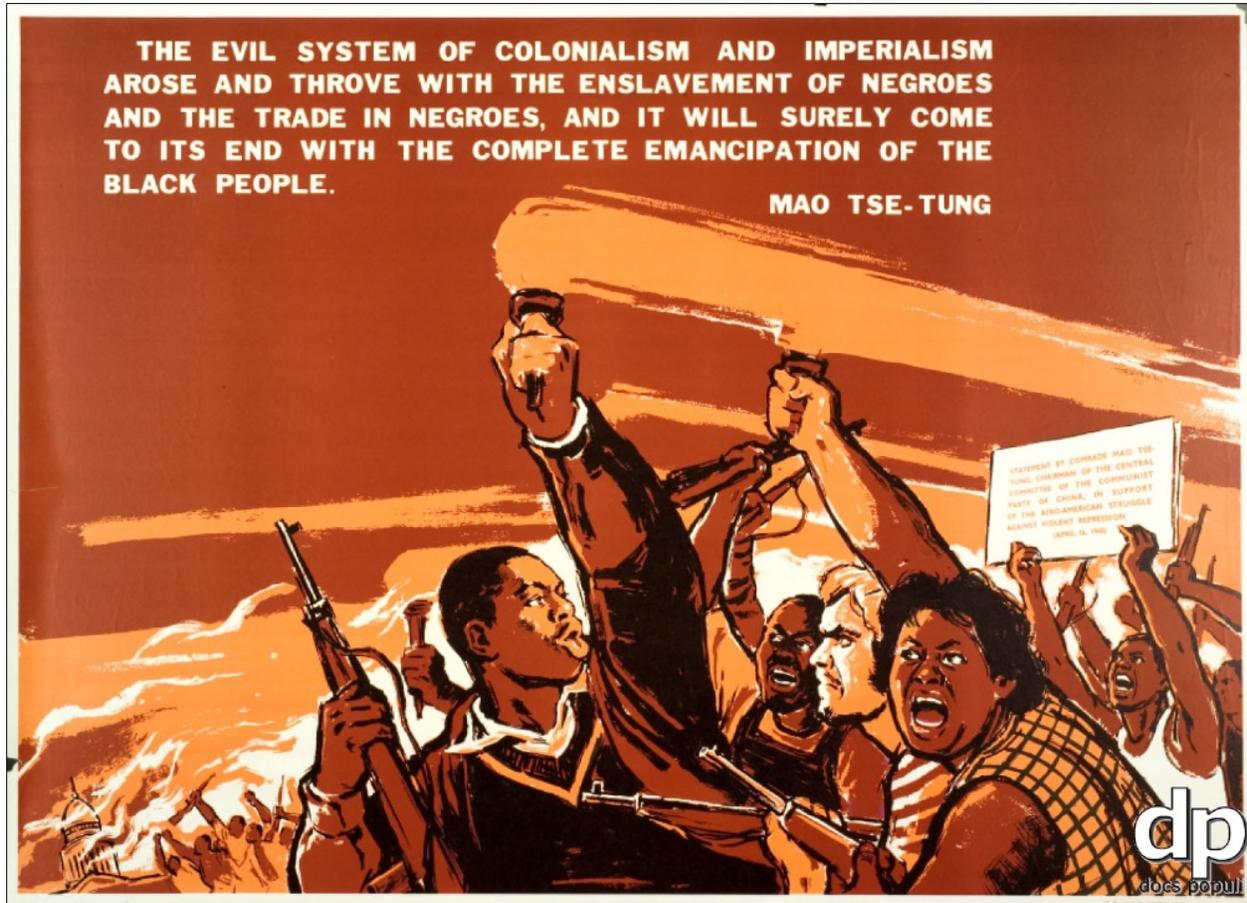
## **Summation**

In summary we have presented three major points:

1. The new unity of the Black Liberation struggle must be anti-racist, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist in character.
2. The struggle to unify Black anti-racist, anti-imperialist forces is our source of strength in building an ideologically advanced movement.
3. Our unity must involve all Black social groups and class formations, and we propose that Black workers take the lead,

Basic Program for African Liberation Support Committee

1. Raise money for liberation groups in Southern Africa and Guinea-Bissau through the United African Appeal.
2. Conduct educational seminars and programs on racism, feudalism, imperialism colonialism and neo-colonialism and its effect on the continent of Africa, especially South Africa and Guinea-Bissau.
3. Develop and distribute literature, films, and other educational material on racism, feudalism, imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism and its effect on the continent of Africa, especially South Africa and Guinea-Bissau.
4. Participate in and aid Black community and Black workers in the struggles against oppression in the U.S., Canada, and the Caribbean.
5. Engage in efforts to influence and transform U.S. policy as regards to its imperialist role in the world.
6. Engage in mass actions against governments, products and companies that are involved in or are supportive of racist, illegitimate regimes in Southern Africa and Guinea-Bissau.
7. Support and spearhead annual ALD demonstrations, in conjunction with the International African Solidarity Day.



Poster from <http://bermudaradical.wordpress.com/2011/12/06/black-like-mao-red-china-black-revolution/>

## 13 Combahee River Collective Statement (1977)

We are a collective of Black feminists who have been meeting together since 1974. [1] During that time we have been involved in the process of defining and clarifying our politics, while at the same time doing political work within our own group and in coalition with other progressive organizations and movements. The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.

We will discuss four major topics in the paper that follows: (1) the genesis of contemporary Black feminism; (2) what we believe, i.e., the specific province of our politics; (3) the problems

in organizing Black feminists, including a brief herstory of our collective; and (4) Black feminist issues and practice.

## **1. The genesis of Contemporary Black Feminism**

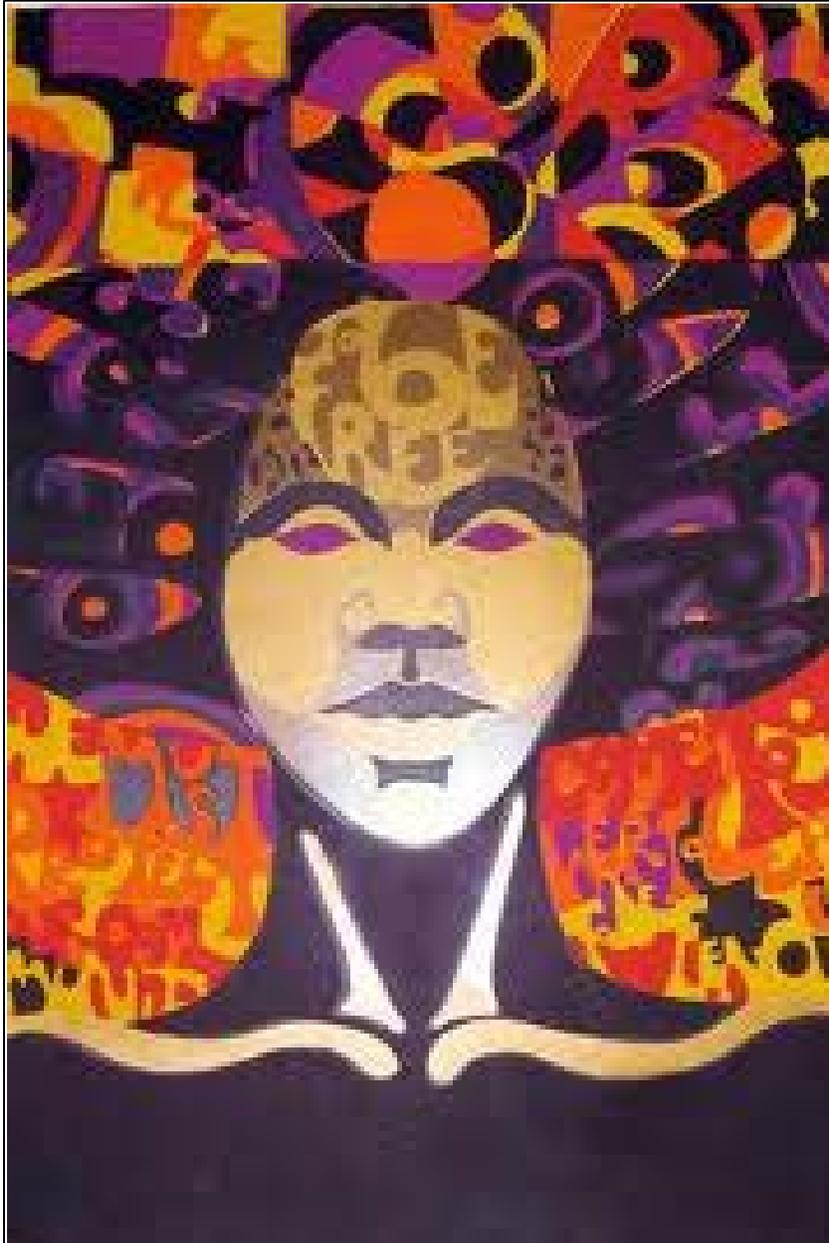
Before looking at the recent development of Black feminism we would like to affirm that we find our origins in the historical reality of Afro-American women's continuous life-and-death struggle for survival and liberation. Black women's extremely negative relationship to the American political system (a system of white male rule) has always been determined by our membership in two oppressed racial and sexual castes. As Angela Davis points out in "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," Black women have always embodied, if only in their physical manifestation, an adversary stance to white male rule and have actively resisted its inroads upon them and their communities in both dramatic and subtle ways. There have always been Black women activists—some known, like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frances E. W. Harper, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell, and thousands upon thousands unknown—who have had a shared awareness of how their sexual identity combined with their racial identity to make their whole life situation and the focus of their political struggles unique. Contemporary Black feminism is the outgrowth of countless generations of personal sacrifice, militancy, and work by our mothers and sisters.

A Black feminist presence has evolved most obviously in connection with the second wave of the American women's movement beginning in the late 1960s. Black, other Third World, and working women have been involved in the feminist movement from its start, but both outside reactionary forces and racism and elitism within the movement itself have served to obscure our participation. In 1973, Black feminists, primarily located in New York, felt the necessity of forming a separate Black feminist group. This became the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO).

Black feminist politics also have an obvious connection to movements for Black liberation, particularly those of the 1960s and 1970s. Many of us were active in those movements (Civil Rights, Black nationalism, the Black Panthers), and all of our lives were greatly affected and changed by their ideologies, their goals, and the tactics used to achieve their goals. It was our experience and disillusionment within these liberation movements, as well as experience on the periphery of the white male left, that led to the need to develop a politics that was anti-racist, unlike those of white women, and anti-sexist, unlike those of Black and white men.

There is also undeniably a personal genesis for Black Feminism, that is, the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual Black women's lives. Black feminists and many more Black women who do not define themselves as feminists have all experienced sexual oppression as a constant factor in our day-to-day existence. As children we

realized that we were different from boys and that we were treated differently. For example, we were told in the same breath to be quiet both for the sake of being "ladylike" and to make us less objectionable in the eyes of white people. As we grew older we became aware of the threat of physical and sexual abuse by men. However, we had no way of conceptualizing what was so apparent to us, what we knew was really happening.



Painting "To Be Free" by Barbara Jones-Hogu, from <http://blackcontemporaryart.tumblr.com/post/15335064587/chante-michele-to-be-free-barbara-jones-hogu>

Black feminists often talk about their feelings of craziness before becoming conscious of the concepts of sexual politics, patriarchal rule, and most importantly, feminism, the political

analysis and practice that we women use to struggle against our oppression. The fact that racial politics and indeed racism are pervasive factors in our lives did not allow us, and still does not allow most Black women, to look more deeply into our own experiences and, from that sharing and growing consciousness, to build a politics that will change our lives and inevitably end our oppression. Our development must also be tied to the contemporary economic and political position of Black people. The post-World War II generation of Black youth was the first to be able to minimally partake of certain educational and employment options, previously closed completely to Black people. Although our economic position is still at the very bottom of the American capitalistic economy, a handful of us have been able to gain certain tools as a result of tokenism in education and employment which potentially enable us to more effectively fight our oppression.

A combined anti-racist and anti-sexist position drew us together initially, and as we developed politically we addressed ourselves to heterosexism and economic oppression under capitalism.

## **2. What We Believe**

Above all else, our politics initially sprang from the shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's may because of our need as human persons for autonomy. This may seem so obvious as to sound simplistic, but it is apparent that no other ostensibly progressive movement has ever considered our specific oppression as a priority or worked seriously for the ending of that oppression. Merely naming the pejorative stereotypes attributed to Black women (e.g. mammy, matriarch, Sapphire, whore, bulldagger), let alone cataloguing the cruel, often murderous, treatment we receive, indicates how little value has been placed upon our lives during four centuries of bondage in the Western hemisphere. We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work.

This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression. In the case of Black women this is a particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves. We reject pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten paces behind. To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough.

We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex

oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously. We know that there is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual, e.g., the history of rape of Black women by white men as a weapon of political repression.

Although we are feminists and Lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism.

We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe that work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of the bosses. Material resources must be equally distributed among those who create these resources. We are not convinced, however, that a socialist revolution that is not also a feminist and anti-racist revolution will guarantee our liberation. We have arrived at the necessity for developing an understanding of class relationships that takes into account the specific class position of Black women who are generally marginal in the labor force, while at this particular time some of us are temporarily viewed as doubly desirable tokens at white-collar and professional levels. We need to articulate the real class situation of persons who are not merely raceless, sexless workers, but for whom racial and sexual oppression are significant determinants in their working/economic lives. Although we are in essential agreement with Marx's theory as it applied to the very specific economic relationships he analyzed, we know that his analysis must be extended further in order for us to understand our specific economic situation as Black women.

A political contribution which we feel we have already made is the expansion of the feminist principle that the personal is political. In our consciousness-raising sessions, for example, we have in many ways gone beyond white women's revelations because we are dealing with the implications of race and class as well as sex. Even our Black women's style of talking/testifying in Black language about what we have experienced has a resonance that is both cultural and political. We have spent a great deal of energy delving into the cultural and experiential nature of our oppression out of necessity because none of these matters has ever been looked at before. No one before has ever examined the multilayered texture of Black women's lives. An example of this kind of revelation/conceptualization occurred at a meeting as we discussed the ways in which our early intellectual interests had been attacked by our peers, particularly Black males. We discovered that all of us, because we were "smart" had also been considered "ugly," i.e., "smart-ugly." "Smart-ugly" crystallized the way in which most of us had been forced to

develop our intellects at great cost to our "social" lives. The sanctions in the Black and white communities against Black women thinkers is comparatively much higher than for white women, particularly ones from the educated middle and upper classes.

As we have already stated, we reject the stance of Lesbian separatism because it is not a viable political analysis or strategy for us. It leaves out far too much and far too many people, particularly Black men, women, and children. We have a great deal of criticism and loathing for what men have been socialized to be in this society: what they support, how they act, and how they oppress. But we do not have the misguided notion that it is their maleness, per se—i.e., their biological maleness—that makes them what they are. As Black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic. We must also question whether Lesbian separatism is an adequate and progressive political analysis and strategy, even for those who practice it, since it so completely denies any but the sexual sources of women's oppression, negating the facts of class and race.

### **3. Problems in Organizing Black Feminists**

During our years together as a Black feminist collective we have experienced success and defeat, joy and pain, victory and failure. We have found that it is very difficult to organize around Black feminist issues, difficult even to announce in certain contexts that we are Black feminists. We have tried to think about the reasons for our difficulties, particularly since the white women's movement continues to be strong and to grow in many directions. In this section we will discuss some of the general reasons for the organizing problems we face and also talk specifically about the stages in organizing our own collective.

The major source of difficulty in our political work is that we are not just trying to fight oppression on one front or even two, but instead to address a whole range of oppressions. We do not have racial, sexual, heterosexual, or class privilege to rely upon, nor do we have even the minimal access to resources and power that groups who possess any one of these types of privilege have.

The psychological toll of being a Black woman and the difficulties this presents in reaching political consciousness and doing political work can never be underestimated. There is a very low value placed upon Black women's psyches in this society, which is both racist and sexist. As an early group member once said, "We are all damaged people merely by virtue of being Black women." We are dispossessed psychologically and on every other level, and yet we feel the necessity to struggle to change the condition of all Black women. In "A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood," Michele Wallace arrives at this conclusion:

We exists as women who are Black who are feminists, each stranded for the moment, working independently because there is not yet an environment in this society remotely congenial to our struggle—because, being on the bottom, we would have to do what no one else has done: we would have to fight the world. [2]

Wallace is pessimistic but realistic in her assessment of Black feminists' position, particularly in her allusion to the nearly classic isolation most of us face. We might use our position at the bottom, however, to make a clear leap into revolutionary action. If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.

Feminism is, nevertheless, very threatening to the majority of Black people because it calls into question some of the most basic assumptions about our existence, i.e., that sex should be a determinant of power relationships. Here is the way male and female roles were defined in a Black nationalist pamphlet from the early 1970s:

We understand that it is and has been traditional that the man is the head of the house. He is the leader of the house/nation because his knowledge of the world is broader, his awareness is greater, his understanding is fuller and his application of this information is wiser... After all, it is only reasonable that the man be the head of the house because he is able to defend and protect the development of his home... Women cannot do the same things as men—they are made by nature to function differently. Equality of men and women is something that cannot happen even in the abstract world. Men are not equal to other men, i.e. ability, experience or even understanding. The value of men and women can be seen as in the value of gold and silver—they are not equal but both have great value. We must realize that men and women are a complement to each other because there is no house/family without a man and his wife. Both are essential to the development of any life. [3]

The material conditions of most Black women would hardly lead them to upset both economic and sexual arrangements that seem to represent some stability in their lives. Many Black women have a good understanding of both sexism and racism, but because of the everyday constrictions of their lives, cannot risk struggling against them both.

The reaction of Black men to feminism has been notoriously negative. They are, of course, even more threatened than Black women by the possibility that Black feminists might organize around our own needs. They realize that they might not only lose valuable and hardworking allies in their struggles but that they might also be forced to change their habitually sexist ways of interacting with and oppressing Black women. Accusations that Black feminism divides the Black struggle are powerful deterrents to the growth of an autonomous Black women's movement.

Still, hundreds of women have been active at different times during the three-year existence of our group. And every Black woman who came, came out of a strongly-felt need for some level of possibility that did not previously exist in her life.

When we first started meeting early in 1974 after the NBFO first eastern regional conference, we did not have a strategy for organizing, or even a focus. We just wanted to see what we had. After a period of months of not meeting, we began to meet again late in the year and started doing an intense variety of consciousness-raising. The overwhelming feeling that we had is that after years and years we had finally found each other. Although we were not doing political work as a group, individuals continued their involvement in Lesbian politics, sterilization abuse and abortion rights work, Third World Women's International Women's Day activities, and support activity for the trials of Dr. Kenneth Edelin, Joan Little, and Inéz García. During our first summer when membership had dropped off considerably, those of us remaining devoted serious discussion to the possibility of opening a refuge for battered women in a Black community. (There was no refuge in Boston at that time.) We also decided around that time to become an independent collective since we had serious disagreements with NBFO's bourgeois-feminist stance and their lack of a clear political focus.

We also were contacted at that time by socialist feminists, with whom we had worked on abortion rights activities, who wanted to encourage us to attend the National Socialist Feminist Conference in Yellow Springs. One of our members did attend and despite the narrowness of the ideology that was promoted at that particular conference, we became more aware of the need for us to understand our own economic situation and to make our own economic analysis.

In the fall, when some members returned, we experienced several months of comparative inactivity and internal disagreements which were first conceptualized as a Lesbian-straight split but which were also the result of class and political differences. During the summer those of us who were still meeting had determined the need to do political work and to move beyond consciousness-raising and serving exclusively as an emotional support group. At the beginning of 1976, when some of the women who had not wanted to do political work and who also had voiced disagreements stopped attending of their own accord, we again looked for a focus. We decided at that time, with the addition of new members, to become a study group. We had always shared our reading with each other, and some of us had written papers on Black feminism for group discussion a few months before this decision was made. We began functioning as a study group and also began discussing the possibility of starting a Black feminist publication. We had a retreat in the late spring which provided a time for both political discussion and working out interpersonal issues. Currently we are planning to gather together a collection of Black feminist writing. We feel that it is absolutely essential to demonstrate the reality of our politics to other Black women and believe that we can do this through writing and

distributing our work. The fact that individual Black feminists are living in isolation all over the country, that our own numbers are small, and that we have some skills in writing, printing, and publishing makes us want to carry out these kinds of projects as a means of organizing Black feminists as we continue to do political work in coalition with other groups.

#### **4. Black Feminist Issues and Projects**

During our time together we have identified and worked on many issues of particular relevance to Black women. The inclusiveness of our politics makes us concerned with any situation that impinges upon the lives of women, Third World and working people. We are of course particularly committed to working on those struggles in which race, sex, and class are simultaneous factors in oppression. We might, for example, become involved in workplace organizing at a factory that employs Third World women or picket a hospital that is cutting back on already inadequate health care to a Third World community, or set up a rape crisis center in a Black neighborhood. Organizing around welfare and daycare concerns might also be a focus. The work to be done and the countless issues that this work represents merely reflect the pervasiveness of our oppression.

Issues and projects that collective members have actually worked on are sterilization abuse, abortion rights, battered women, rape and health care. We have also done many workshops and educational on Black feminism on college campuses, at women's conferences, and most recently for high school women.

One issue that is of major concern to us and that we have begun to publicly address is racism in the white women's movement. As Black feminists we are made constantly and painfully aware of how little effort white women have made to understand and combat their racism, which requires among other things that they have a more than superficial comprehension of race, color, and Black history and culture. Eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do, but we will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue.

In the practice of our politics we do not believe that the end always justifies the means. Many reactionary and destructive acts have been done in the name of achieving "correct" political goals. As feminists we do not want to mess over people in the name of politics. We believe in collective process and a nonhierarchical distribution of power within our own group and in our vision of a revolutionary society. We are committed to a continual examination of our politics as they develop through criticism and self-criticism as an essential aspect of our practice. In her introduction to *Sisterhood is Powerful* Robin Morgan writes:

I haven't the faintest notion what possible revolutionary role white heterosexual men could fulfill, since they are the very embodiment of reactionary-vested-interest-power.

As Black feminists and Lesbians we know that we have a very definite revolutionary task to perform and we are ready for the lifetime of work and struggle before us.

[1] This statement is dated April 1977.

[2] Wallace, Michele. "A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood," *The Village Voice*, 28 July 1975, pp. 6-7.

[3] Mumininas of Committee for Unified Newark, Mwanamke Mwananchi (*The Nationalist Woman*), Newark, N.J., ©1971, pp. 4-5.

Source: <http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html>

## 14 Black Radical Congress (1998)

Black Radical Congress Mission Statement Adopted by the National Council (NC) of the BRC, East St. Louis, Illinois—September 26, 1999

The purpose of the Black Radical Congress (BRC) is to promote dialogue among African American activists and scholars on the left; to discuss critical issues on the national and international scene that pertain to the Black community; to explore new strategies and directions for progressive political, social and cultural movements; and to renew the Black radical movement through increased unified action.

The economic, political and social problems facing the country and the world demand radical and democratic solutions. This assessment resonates with a particularly strong echo among people of African descent. Yet, the political forces which have advocated such transformation for Black people have found themselves marginalized and isolated from each other. However, there is a critical mass of African American activists and scholars able and willing to engage in a serious discussion of the motion of Black politics, the issues of the day and the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies for advancement that hold sway in the Black community and in the broader progressive movements. Fresh thinking and creative approaches are required to overcome class exploitation, racism, sexism, homophobia, to protect the environment and to build a humane and just society in a peaceful world. We are challenged to preserve and utilize the best elements of revolutionary nationalist, radical feminist, new Afrikan, socialist and Marxist revolutionary traditions while opening ourselves to new analyses and perspectives in order to redefine our role and vision in a new historical epoch as we enter the 21st century.

The BRC sponsors conferences, seminars and forums, produces publications and takes on various projects that engage black progressives from a wide variety of social and political experiences. Our main emphasis is on finding concrete mechanisms to build dialogue and alliances; bringing diverse radical traditions to bear on contemporary realities; dealing seriously with political, social, cultural and theoretical issues in an accessible way and recognizing the centrality of anti-racist politics and the movements of people of color to the process of social change in the United States. BRC projects will include producing publications including periodical policy papers, sponsoring and co-sponsoring forums and conferences, holding small discussion groups and developing means for information sharing and networking among progressive black activists nationally and locally, and engaging in collective action on political, social, economic and cultural issues that pertain to the Black community locally, nationally and globally.

The Freedom Agenda (FA) of the Black Radical Congress (BRC). Ratified by the BRC National Council (NC), April 17, 1999, Baltimore, Maryland.

## **PREAMBLE**

During the last 500 years, humanity has displayed on a colossal scale its capacity for creative genius and ruthless destruction, for brutal oppression and indomitable survival, for rigid tradition and rapid change. The Americas evolved to their present state of development at great cost to their original, indigenous peoples, and at great cost to those whose labor enabled modernization under the yoke of that protracted crime against humanity, slavery. Even so, a good idea is implicit in the Declaration of Independence of the United States: that all people are "endowed with certain inalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." That the idea of a just society, contained in those words, remains unrealized is what compels this declaration.

Not only has the idea not been realized, but we are moving further away from its realization by the hour. Global capitalism, both the cause and effect of neo-liberal and Reaganist policies, has facilitated the transfer of enormous wealth from the bottom to the top of society in recent years, concentrating the control of abundant resources in ever fewer hands. As a result, the working people who constitute the vast majority of people have confronted a steady decline in their prospects for earning a decent living and controlling their lives. In the U.S., the threat of sudden unemployment hangs over most households. We pay unfair taxes and receive fewer services, while multibillion-dollar fortunes accumulate in the private sector. Prisons proliferate as budgets are slashed for public schools, day care, healthcare and welfare. The grip of big money on the two-party electoral process has robbed us of control over the political institutions that are mandated to serve us. We are losing ground, and democracy is more and more elusive.

As for people of African descent, most of whose ancestors were among the shackled millions who helped build the edifices and culture of the Americas, we carry an enormously disproportionate burden. In the U.S., the living legacy of slavery, and the pervasiveness of institutional white supremacy, have placed us on all-too-familiar terms with poverty, urban and rural; exploitative conditions of employment; disproportionately high rates of unemployment and underemployment; inferior health care; substandard education; the corrosive drug trade, with its accompanying gun violence; police brutality and its partner, excessive incarceration; hate-inspired terrorism; a biased legal system, and discrimination of every kind -- persistent even after the end of legal segregation.

Resistance is in our marrow as Black people, given our history in this place. From the Haitian revolution, to the U.S. abolitionist movement against slavery, to the 20th Century movement for civil rights and empowerment, we have struggled and died for justice. We believe that struggle must continue, and with renewed vigor. Our historical experiences suggest to us, by negative example, what a truly just and democratic society should look like: It should be democratic, not just in myth but in practice, a society in which all people -- regardless of color, ethnicity, religion, nationality, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, family structure, or mental or physical capability -- enjoy full human rights, the fruits of their labor, and the freedom to realize their full human potential. If you agree, and if you are committed to helping achieve justice and democracy in the 21st Century, please sign your name and/or the name of your organization to this 15-point Freedom Agenda.

## **THE FREEDOM AGENDA**

I. We will fight for the human rights of Black people and all people.

We will struggle for a society and world in which every individual enjoys full human rights, full protection of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and in the United States equal protection of the Constitution and of all the laws. We seek a society in which every individual--regardless of color, nationality, national origin, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, family structure, or mental or physical capability-- is free to experience "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." We affirm that all people are entitled to:

- a. a safe and secure home;
- b. employment at a living wage -- that is, compensation for the full value of their labor;
- c. free, quality health care, including full reproductive freedom with the right to choose when or whether to bear children, and free, quality child care;
- d. free, quality public education.

We oppose the Human Genome Project in its current form and with its current leadership, and we oppose all sociobiological or genetic experiments that are spurred by, and help perpetuate, scientific racism.

We will fight for a society and world in which every individual and all social groups can live secure, dignified lives.

II. We will fight for political democracy.

We will struggle to expand political democracy to ensure the people's greater participation in decision-making. In the U.S., we will work to replace the current two-party, winner-take-all electoral system with a more democratic multiparty system based on proportional representation, and we will fight to abolish all registration procedures that restrict the number of eligible voters. We oppose private financing of electoral campaigns, especially corporate contributions; we will work to replace the present corrupt system with public financing.

III. We will fight to advance beyond capitalism, which has demonstrated its structural incapacity to address basic human needs worldwide and, in particular, the needs of Black people.

Guided by our belief that people should come before profits, we will fight to maximize economic democracy and economic justice:

- a. We seek full employment at livable wages, public control of private sector financial operations, worker control of production decisions, and a guaranteed annual income for the needy;
- b. we will fight to end racial discrimination by capitalist enterprises, especially banks, insurance companies and other financial institutions;
- c. we seek a society in which working people enjoy safe working conditions and flexible hours to accommodate family responsibilities, leisure and vacations;
- d. we seek laws mandating public ownership of utilities, and mandating federal and local budgetary emphases on programs for the general welfare-- health care, education, public transportation, recreation and infrastructure;
- e. we will struggle for laws that regulate private sector business practices, especially regarding prices, fees, plant shutdowns and job relocations -- where shutdowns are permitted, adequate compensation to workers shall be required;
- f. we support the historical mission of trade unions to represent workers' interests and to negotiate on their behalf;
- g. we seek a fair, equitable, highly progressive tax system that places the heaviest taxes on the wealthiest sector, and we seek expansion of the earned income tax credit.

IV. We will fight to end the super-exploitation of Southern workers.

More than 50 percent of people of African descent residing in the U.S. live in the South, where workers' earnings and general welfare are besieged by corporate practices, and where "right to work" laws undermine union organizing. Thus, we seek relief for Southern workers from corporate oppression, and we will struggle to repeal anti-union laws. We will also fight for aid to Black farmers, and for the restoration of farm land seized from them by agribusiness, speculators and real estate developers.

V. We will struggle to ensure that all people in society receive free public education.

We affirm that all are entitled to free, quality public education throughout their lifetime. Free education should include adult education and retraining for occupational and career changes. We will fight to ensure that curricula in U.S. schools, colleges and universities are anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-homophobic, and for curricula that adequately accommodate students' needs to express and develop their artistic, musical or other creative potential.

VI. We will struggle against state terrorism.

We will fight for a society in which every person and every community is free from state repression, including freedom from state-sponsored surveillance. We seek amnesty for, and the release of, all political prisoners. We will struggle to repeal all legislation that expands the police power of the state and undermines the U.S. Constitution's First and Fourth Amendments. We will fight to eliminate the deliberate trafficking in drugs and weapons in our communities by organized crime, and by institutions of the state such as the Central Intelligence Agency.

VII. We will struggle for a clean and healthy environment.

We will fight for a society in which the welfare of people and the natural environment takes precedence over commercial profits and political expediency. We will work to protect, preserve and enhance society's and the planet's natural heritage -- forests, lakes, rivers, oceans, mountain ranges, animal life, flora and fauna. In the U.S., we will struggle against environmental racism by fighting for laws that strictly regulate the disposal of hazardous industrial waste, and that forbid both the discriminatory targeting of poor and non-white communities for dumping and despoilment of the natural environment.

VIII. We will fight to abolish police brutality, unwarranted incarceration and the death penalty.

We are determined to end police brutality and murder:

- a. We will fight for strong civilian oversight of police work by elected civilian review boards that are empowered to discipline police misconduct and enforce residency requirements for police officers;

- b. we seek fundamental changes in police training and education to emphasize public service over social control as the context in which law enforcement occurs, and to stress respect for the histories and cultures of the U.S.-born and immigrant communities served.
- c. we seek to limit incarceration to the most violent criminals, only those who have clearly demonstrated their danger to the lives and limbs of others;
- d. regarding non-violent offenders, we demand that they be released and provided with appropriate medical, rehabilitative and educative assistance without incarceration.
- e. we will struggle for abolition of the death penalty, which has been abolished in the majority of developed nations. In the U.S., the history of the death penalty's application is inextricable from the nation's origins as a slave state. Since Emancipation, it has been a white supremacist tool intended to maintain control over a population perceived as an alien, ongoing threat to the social order. Application of the death penalty, which is highly discriminatory on the basis of color and class, violates international human rights law and must be eliminated.

IX. We will fight for gender equality, for women's liberation, and for women's rights to be recognized as human rights in all areas of personal, social, economic and political life.

We will work to create a society and world in which women of African descent, along with their sisters of other colors, nationalities and backgrounds, shall enjoy non-discriminatory access to the education, training and occupations of their choice. We will struggle to ensure that all women enjoy equal access to quality health care and full reproductive rights, including the right to determine when or whether they will bear children and the right to a safe, legal abortion. We will fight to end domestic abuse and sexual harassment in the workplace.

X. We recognize lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people as full and equal members of society, and of our communities.

We affirm the right of all people to love whom they choose, to openly express their sexuality, and to live in the family units that meet their needs. We will fight against homophobia, and we support anti-homophobic instruction in public schools. We will fight for effective legal protections for the civil rights and civil liberties of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, and we demand that violence and murder committed against such people be prosecuted as hate crimes. We will also fight to end discrimination against this sector in employment, health care, social welfare and other areas.

XI. We support affirmative action.

We will fight to retain and expand affirmative action policies in education, employment, the awarding of government contracts and all other areas affected by historical and contemporary

injustices. Affirmative action, with goals and timetables, is indispensable for achieving equal opportunity, justice and fairness for the members of all historically oppressed groups.

#### XII. We will fight for reparations.

Reparations is a well-established principle of international law that should be applied in the U.S. Historically, the U.S. has been both the recipient and disburser of reparations. As the descendants of enslaved Africans, we have the legal and moral right to receive just compensation for the oppression, systematic brutality and economic exploitation Black people have suffered historically and continue to experience today. Thus, we seek reparations from the U.S. for

- a. its illegal assault on African peoples during the slave trade;
- b. its exploitation of Black labor during slavery, and
- c. its systematic and totalitarian physical, economic and cultural violence against people of African descent over the last four centuries.

#### XIII. We will struggle to build multicultural solidarity and alliances among all people of color.

We will fight against white supremacist tactics aimed at dividing people of color. We seek alliances with other people of color to develop unified strategies for achieving multicultural democracy, and for overcoming the divisions that exist around such issues as immigration, bilingual education, political representation and allocation of resources.

#### XIV. We will uphold the right of the African American people to self-determination.

The formation of the Black Radical Congress in June 1998 was an act of African American self-determination, a principle which is codified in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The African American people are entitled to define the direction, priorities, allies and goals of our struggle against national and racial oppression. Building the power to exercise these prerogatives is central to our struggle against all the systems of oppression confronting our people. Therefore, we will fight for both a national program of liberation and for a mass base of power in the social sectors, institutions, all levels of government, communities and territories of society that affect the lives of our people.

#### XV. We support the liberation struggles of all oppressed people.

We affirm our solidarity with peoples of African descent throughout the African diaspora. We support their struggles against imperialism and neo-colonialism from without, as well as against governmental corruption, exploitation and human rights abuses from within. We especially support struggles against transnational corporations, whose global market practices gravely exploit all workers, abuse workers' rights and threaten all workers' welfare. We affirm our

solidarity with all oppressed people around the world, whatever their color, nation or religion -- none of us is free unless all are free. We believe that all people everywhere should enjoy the right to self-determination and the right to pursue their dreams, unfettered by exploitation and discrimination.

[End of Freedom Agenda - Ratified April 17, 1999]

## **Principles of Unity**

The Black Radical Congress convened to establish a "center without walls" for transformative politics that focuses on the conditions of Black working and poor people.

Recognizing contributions from diverse tendencies within Black Radicalism--including socialism, revolutionary nationalism and feminism--we are united in opposition to all forms of oppression, including class exploitation, racism, patriarchy, homophobia, anti-immigration prejudice and imperialism.

We began with a gathering on June 19-21, 1998. From there we are identifying proposals for action and establishing paths forward.

The Black Radical Congress does not intend to replace or displace existing organizations, parties or campaigns but will contribute to mobilizing unaffiliated individuals, as well as organizations, around common concerns.

1. We recognize the diverse historical tendencies in the Black radical tradition including revolutionary nationalism, feminism and socialism.
2. The technological revolution and capitalist globalization have changed the economy, labor force and class formations that need to inform our analysis and strategies. The increased class polarization created by these developments demands that we, as Black radicals, ally ourselves with the most oppressed sectors of our communities and society.
3. Gender and sexuality can no longer be viewed solely as personal issues but must be a basic part of our analyses, politics and struggles.
4. We reject racial and biological determinism, Black patriarchy and Black capitalism as solutions to problems facing Black people.
5. We must see the struggle in global terms.
6. We need to meet people where they are, taking seriously identity politics and single issue reform groups, at the same time that we push for a larger vision that links these struggles.
7. We must be democratic and inclusive in our dealings with one another, making room for constructive criticism and honest dissent within our ranks. There must be open venues for civil and comradely debates to occur.

8. Our discussions should be informed not only by a critique of what now exists, but by serious efforts to forge a creative vision of a new society.
9. We cannot limit ourselves to electoral politics--we must identify multiple sites of struggles.
10. We must overcome divisions within the Black radical forces, such as those of generation, region, and occupation. We must forge a common language that is accessible and relevant.
11. Black radicals must build a national congress of radical forces in the Black community to strengthen radicalism as the legitimate voice of Black working and poor people, and to build organized resistance.

Source: <http://eblackstudies.org/brc/index.html>; see also <http://www.blackradicalcongress.org/>

# OUR COMRADES

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As the Black Left Unity Network we want to link to the far reaches of the Black Liberation Movement and all tendencies of the anti-capitalist forces in the US and throughout the world. We embrace this task to hold firm to our anti-racist pro self-determination stand rooted in our critique of moving beyond the capitalist system.

There are many documents that represent all of us. In fact the forces of Black liberation and anti-capitalist social transformation are in general agreement on most of the key issues. In this part of the *Black Activist* we will focus on issues around which we can unite as diverse forces converging on common positions.

In our first issue we take up two critical issues in the 2012 summer:

1. the political attack against the Black Freedom Movement by setting a \$2 million bounty on Assata Shakur as a US designated terrorist
2. the racist murder of Black youth in the case of Trayvon Martin

Assata Shakur has been protected by the Cuban government as an expression of their international solidarity with the Black Freedom Movement. She has been there for 29 years. The Obama government is bending to the right to pull out all stops to beat down Black revolutionary forces. Not only is she not guilty of the alleged murder of a Policeman, to brand her as a terrorist raises the ominous message that all Black freedom fighters are terrorists according to this US president.

The BLUN intends to join with all other forces to make this an international campaign against the terrorism of the US government under the leadership of Barack Obama.

Trayvon Martin's death and the subsequent actions of authorities and others reveals a corrupt political system complicit with racist attacks against Black people. Trayvon was a young brother targeted by color-class-gender-generation prejudice against young working class Black brothers. The convergence of right wing forces to support the killer Zimmerman is testimony to the political importance of this drive and the trial.

On a national level the report released by the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement suggests that it is now "open season" on Black people. (Report on Black People Executed without Trial by Police, Security Guards and Self-Appointed Law Enforcers January 1 - June 30, 2012, <http://mxgm.org/report-on-the-extrajudicial-killings-of-120-black-people/>)

We invite you to read these commentaries and spread the news through your conversations at work, at home, at school, in church, and with your neighbors and friends.

## 15 On Our Sister Assata



Assata Shakur, from <http://mxgm.org/assata-shakur/>

### **An Open Letter From Assata Shakur**

My name is Assata Shakur, and I am a 20th century escaped slave. Because of government persecution, I was left with no other choice than to flee from the political repression, racism and violence that dominate the US government's policy towards people of color. I am an ex-political prisoner, and I have been living in exile in Cuba since 1984.

I have been a political activist most of my life, and although the U.S. government has done everything in its power to criminalize me, I am not a criminal, nor have I ever been one. In the 1960s, I participated in various struggles: the black liberation movement, the student rights movement, and the movement to end the war in Vietnam.

I joined the Black Panther Party. By 1969 the Black Panther Party had become the number one organization targeted by the FBI's COINTELPRO program. Because the Black Panther Party demanded the total liberation of black people, J. Edgar Hoover called it "greatest threat to the internal security of the country" and vowed to destroy it and its leaders and activists.

In 1978, my case was one of many cases brought before the United Nations Organization in a petition filed by the National Conference of Black Lawyers, the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression, and the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, exposing the existence of political prisoners in the United States, their political persecution, and the cruel and inhuman treatment they receive in US prisons. According to the report:

'The FBI and the New York Police Department in particular, charged and accused Assata Shakur of participating in attacks on law enforcement personnel and widely circulated such charges and accusations among police agencies and units. The FBI and the NYPD further charged her as being a leader of the Black Liberation Army which the government and its respective agencies described as an organization engaged in the shooting of police officers. This description of the Black Liberation Army and the accusation of Assata Shakur's relationship to it was widely circulated by government agents among police agencies and units. As a result of these activities by the government, Ms. Shakur became a hunted person; posters in police precincts and banks described her as being involved in serious criminal activities; she was highlighted on the FBI's most wanted list; and to police at all levels she became a 'shoot-to-kill' target.'

I was falsely accused in six different "criminal cases" and in all six of these cases I was eventually acquitted or the charges were dismissed. The fact that I was acquitted or that the charges were dismissed, did not mean that I received justice in the courts, that was certainly not the case. It only meant that the "evidence" presented against me was so flimsy and false that my innocence became evident. This political persecution was part and parcel of the government's policy of eliminating political opponents by charging them with crimes and arresting them with no regard to the factual basis of such charges.

On May 2, 1973 I, along with Zayd Malik Shakur and Sundiata Acoli were stopped on the New Jersey Turnpike, supposedly for a "faulty tail light." Sundiata Acoli got out of the car to determine why we were stopped. Zayd and I remained in the car. State trooper Harper then came to the car, opened the door and began to question us. Because we were black, and riding in a car with Vermont license plates, he claimed he became "suspicious." He then drew his gun,

pointed it at us, and told us to put our hands up in the air, in front of us, where he could see them.

I complied and in a split second, there was a sound that came from outside the car, there was a sudden movement, and I was shot once with my arms held up in the air, and then once again from the back. Zayd Malik Shakur was later killed, trooper Werner Foerster was killed, and even though trooper Harper admitted that he shot and killed Zayd Malik Shakur, under the New Jersey felony murder law, I was charged with killing both Zayd Malik Shakur, who was my closest friend and comrade, and charged in the death of trooper Forester.

Never in my life have I felt such grief. Zayd had vowed to protect me, and to help me to get to a safe place, and it was clear that he had lost his life, trying to protect both me and Sundiata. Although he was also unarmed, and the gun that killed trooper Foerster was found under Zayd's leg, Sundiata Acoli, who was captured later, was also charged with both deaths. Neither Sundiata Acoli nor I ever received a fair trial. We were both convicted in the news media way before our trials. No news media was ever permitted to interview us, although the New Jersey police and the FBI fed stories to the press on a daily basis. In 1977, I was convicted by an all-white jury and sentenced to life plus 33 years in prison. In 1979, fearing that I would be murdered in prison, and knowing that I would never receive any justice, I was liberated from prison, aided by committed comrades who understood the depths of the injustices in my case, and who were also extremely fearful for my life.

The U.S. Senate's 1976 Church Commission report on intelligence operations inside the USA, revealed that "The FBI has attempted covertly to influence the public's perception of persons and organizations by disseminating derogatory information to the press, either anonymously or through "friendly" news contacts." This same policy is evidently still very much in effect today.

On December 24, 1997, The New Jersey State called a press conference to announce that New Jersey State Police had written a letter to Pope John Paul II asking him to intervene on their behalf and to aid in having me extradited back to New Jersey prisons.

The New Jersey State Police refused to make their letter public. Knowing that they had probably totally distort the facts, and attempted to get the Pope to do the devils work in the name of religion, I decided to write the Pope to inform him about the reality of "justice" for black people in the State of New Jersey and in the United States. (See attached Letter to the Pope).

In January of 1998, during the pope's visit to Cuba, I agreed to do an interview with NBC journalist Ralph Penza around my letter to the Pope, about my experiences in New Jersey court system, and about the changes I saw in the United States and its treatment of Black people in the last 25 years. I agreed to do this interview because I saw this secret letter to the Pope as a

vicious, vulgar, publicity maneuver on the part of the New Jersey State Police, and as a cynical attempt to manipulate Pope John Paul II. I have lived in Cuba for many years, and was completely out of touch with the sensationalist, dishonest, nature of the establishment media today. It is worse today than it was 30 years ago.

After years of being victimized by the “establishment” media it was naive of me to hope that I might finally get the opportunity to tell “my side of the story.” Instead of an interview with me, what took place was a “staged media event” in three parts, full of distortions, inaccuracies and outright lies. NBC purposely misrepresented the facts. Not only did NBC spend thousands of dollars promoting this “exclusive interview series” on NBC, they also spent a great deal of money advertising this “exclusive interview” on black radio stations and also placed notices in local newspapers.

Like most poor and oppressed people in the United States, I do not have a voice. Black people, poor people in the U.S. have no real freedom of speech, no real freedom of expression and very little freedom of the press. The black press and the progressive media has historically played an essential role in the struggle for social justice. We need to continue and to expand that tradition. We need to create media outlets that help to educate our people and our children, and not annihilate their minds. I am only one woman.

I own no TV stations, or Radio Stations or Newspapers. But I feel that people need to be educated as to what is going on, and to understand the connection between the news media and the instruments of repression in Amerika. All I have is my voice, my spirit and the will to tell the truth. But I sincerely ask, those of you in the Black media, those of you in the progressive media, those of you who believe in truth freedom, To publish this statement and to let people know what is happening. We have no voice, so you must be the voice of the voiceless.

Free all Political Prisoners, I send you Love and Revolutionary Greetings From Cuba, One of the Largest, Most Resistant and Most Courageous Palenques (Maroon Camps) That has ever existed on the Face of this Planet.

Assata Shakur, Havana, Cuba

## **An Open Letter from Assata Shakur to Pope John Paul II**

Your Holiness,

I hope this letter finds you in good health, in good disposition, and enveloped in the spirit of goodness. I must confess that it had never occurred to me before to write to you, and I find myself overwhelmed and moved to have this opportunity.

Although circumstances have compelled me to reach out to you, I am glad to have this occasion to try and cross the boundaries that would otherwise tend to separate us.

I understand that the New Jersey State Police have written to you and asked you to intervene and to help facilitate my extradition back to the United States. I believe that their request is unprecedented in history. Since they have refused to make their letter to you public, although they have not hesitated to publicize their request, I am completely uninformed as to the accusations they are making against me. Why, I wonder, do I warrant such attention? What do I represent that is such a threat?

Please let me take a moment to tell you about myself. My name is Assata Shakur and I was born and raised in the United States. I am a descendant of Africans who were kidnapped and brought to the Americas as slaves. I spent my early childhood in the racist segregated South. I later moved to the northern part of the country, where I realized that Black people were equally victimized by racism and oppression.

I grew up and became a political activist, participating in student struggles, the anti-war movement, and, most of all, in the movement for the liberation of African Americans in the United States. I later joined the Black Panther Party, an organization that was targeted by COINTELPRO, a program that was set up by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to eliminate all political opposition to the U.S. government's policies, to destroy the Black Liberation Movement in the U.S., and to discredit activists and to eliminate potential leaders.

As a result of being targeted by COINTELPRO, I, like many other young people, was faced with the threat of prison, underground, exile or death.

At this point, I think that it is important to make one thing very clear. I have advocated and still advocate revolutionary changes in the structure and in the principles that govern the U.S. I advocate an end to capitalist exploitation, the abolition of racist policies, the eradication of sexism, and the elimination of political repression. If that is a crime, then I am totally guilty.

To make a long story short, ...let me emphasize that justice for me is not the issue, it is justice for my people that is at stake. When my people receive justice, I am sure that I will receive it, too. I know that Your Holiness will reach your own conclusions, but I feel compelled to present the circumstances surrounding the application of "justice" in New Jersey. I am not the first nor the last person to be victimized by the New Jersey system of "justice." The New Jersey State Police are infamous for their racism and brutality. Many legal actions have been filed against them and just recently, in a class action legal proceeding, the New Jersey State Police were found guilty of having an "officially sanctioned, de facto policy of targeting minorities for investigation and arrest."

Although New Jersey's population is more than 78 percent white, more than 75 percent of the prison population is made up of Blacks and Latinos. Eighty percent of women in New Jersey prisons are women of color. There are 15 people on death row in the state and seven of them are Black. A 1987 study found that New Jersey prosecutors sought the death penalty in 50 percent of cases involving a Black defendant and a white victim, but in only 28 percent of cases involving a Black defendant and a Black victim.

Unfortunately, the situation in New Jersey is not unique, but reflects the racism that permeates the entire country. The United States has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. There are more than 1.7 million people in U.S. prisons. This number does not include the more than 500,000 people in city and county jails, nor does it include the alarming number of children in juvenile institutions.

The vast majority of those behind bars are people of color and virtually all of those behind bars are poor.

The result of this reality is devastating. One third of Black men between the ages of 20 and 29 are either in prison or under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system.

Prisons are big business in the United States, and the building, running, and supplying of prisons has become the fastest growing industry in the country. Factories are being moved into the prisons and prisoners are being forced to work for slave wages. This super-exploitation of human beings has meant the institutionalization of a new form of slavery. Those who cannot find work are forced to work in prison.

Not only are prisons being used as instruments of economic exploitation, they also serve as Instruments of political repression. There are more than 100 political prisoners in the U.S. They are African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Native Americans, Asians, and progressive white people who oppose the policies of the United States government. Many of those targeted by the COINTELPRO program have been in prison since the early 1970s.

Although the situation in the prisons is an indication of human rights violations inside the United States, there are other, more deadly indicators.

There are currently 3,365 people now on death row, and more than 50 percent of those awaiting death are people of color. Black people make up only 13 percent of the population, but we make up 41 percent of persons who have received the death penalty.

The number of state assassinations has increased drastically. In 1997 alone, 71 people were executed.

A special reporter assigned by the United Nations organization found serious human rights violations in the U.S., especially those related to the death penalty. According to these findings, people who were mentally ill were sentenced to death, and people with severe mental and learning disabilities, as well as minors under age 18. Serious racial bias was found on the part of judges and prosecutors.

Specifically mentioned in the report was the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal, the only political prisoner on death row, who was sentenced to death because of his political beliefs and because of his work as a journalist, exposing police brutality in the city of Philadelphia.

Police brutality is a daily occurrence in our communities. The police have a virtual license to kill and they do kill: children, grandmothers, anyone they perceive to be the enemy. They shoot first and ask questions later. Inside the jails and prisons there is at least as much brutality as there was on slave plantations. An ever increasing number of prisoners are found hanging in their cells.

The United States is becoming a land more hostile to Black people and other people of Color. Racism is running rampant and xenophobia is on the rise. This has been especially true in the sphere of domestic policy.

Politicians are attempting to blame social problems on Black people and other people of color. There have been attacks on essentially all affirmative action programs designed to help correct the accumulated results of hundreds of years of slavery and discrimination. In addition, the government seems determined to eliminate all social programs that provide assistance to the poor, resulting in a situation where millions of people do not have access to basic health care, decent housing or quality education.

It was with great happiness that I read the Christmas message that Your Holiness delivered. I applaud you for taking up the cause of the poor, the homeless, the unemployed. The fact that you are addressing the issues of today, unemployment, hopelessness, child abuse, and the drug problem, is important to people all over the world.

One third of Black people in the United States live in poverty, and our communities are inundated with drugs. We have every reason to believe that the CIA and other government agencies are involved in drug trafficking.

Although we live in one of the richest, most technically advanced countries in the world, our reality is similar to an undeveloped, Third World country. We are a people who are truly seeking freedom and harmony.

All my life I have been a spiritual person. I first learned of the struggle and the sacrifice of Jesus in the segregated churches of the South. I converted to Catholicism as a young girl. In my adult life I have become a student of religion and have studied Christianity, Islam, Asian religions and the African religions of my ancestors. I have come to believe that God is universal in nature although called different names and with different faces. I believe that some people spell God with one "O" while others spell it with two.

What we call God is unimportant, as long as we do God's work. There are those who want to see God's wrath fall on the oppressed and not on the oppressors. I believe that the time has ended when slavery, colonialism, and oppression can be carried out in the name of religion. It was in the dungeons of prison that I felt the presence of God up close, and it has been my belief in God, and in the goodness of human beings that has helped me to survive. I am not ashamed of having been in prison, and I am certainly not ashamed of having been a political prisoner. I believe that Jesus was a political prisoner who was executed because he fought against the evils of the Roman Empire, because he fought the greed of the money changers in the temple, because he fought against the sins and injustices of his time. As a true child of God, Jesus spoke up for the poor, the meek, the sick, and the oppressed. The early Christians were thrown into lion dens. I will try and follow the example of so many who have stood up in the face of overwhelming oppression.

I am not writing to ask you to intercede on my behalf. I ask nothing for myself. I only ask you to examine the social reality of the United States and to speak out against the human rights violations that are taking place.

On this day, the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., I am reminded of all those who gave their lives for freedom. Most of the people who live on this planet are still not free. I ask only that you continue to work and pray to end Oppression and political repression. It is my heartfelt belief that all the people on this earth deserve justice: social justice, political justice, and economic justice. I believe it is the only way that we will ever achieve peace and prosperity on earth. I hope that you enjoy your visit to Cuba. This is not a country that is rich in material wealth, but it is a country that is rich in human wealth, spiritual wealth and moral wealth.

Respectfully yours,

Assata Shakur, Havana, Cuba

## **National Conference of Black Lawyers Condemns the FBI's Continued Attacks on Activist Assata Shakur**

The National Conference of Black Lawyers (NCBL) condemns the Federal Bureau of Investigation's recent placement of activist Assata Shakur on its Most Wanted Terrorists list,

and its increase of the reward for her capture to \$2 million. These actions by the FBI should alarm everyone in the United States as they only serve to criminalize the right of people to disagree with governmental policies. These actions intimidate activists and recklessly expand the use and meaning of the word “terrorist.”

In the 1960s Assata Shakur was active in several human rights causes, such as the Black Liberation Movement, the struggle for student rights and activism to end the war in Vietnam. She joined the Black Panther Party, an organization that by the late 1960s was persecuted by the FBI’s Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO). COINTELPRO notoriously utilized covert and often illegal tactics in an attempt to discredit and destroy a wide range of groups, including the NAACP, groups advocating for the rights of Native Americans, groups associated with the women’s rights movement and groups that opposed the war in Vietnam. Like other members of the Black Panther Party, on more than one occasion Shakur was falsely charged with crimes, and in six different cases where she was indicted she was either acquitted or the charges were dismissed.

On May 2, 1973, Shakur was a passenger in a vehicle that was stopped on the New Jersey turnpike by state troopers for an alleged “faulty tail light.” That vehicle stop ended in one of Shakur’s companions being killed and a trooper being killed. Shakur, whose hands were in the air per the police’s instructions, was shot twice. Sundiata Acoli, the third person in Shakur’s car, was also shot. Another state trooper present admitted to shooting Shakur’s companion, yet Shakur and Acoli were charged for his death under the felony murder law. Shakur and Acoli were also both charged for the trooper’s death, though both were unarmed and the evidence indicated that someone else shot the trooper. Shakur was found guilty by an all-white jury and sentenced to life imprisonment plus 33 years. Shakur’s treatment as a prisoner—which included being confined to a men’s prison and being subjected to anal and vaginal searches—led to her being declared a political prisoner by the United Nations and other organizations and individuals. On November 2, 1979, with outside assistance, Shakur escaped from prison. In 1984 she fled to Cuba, where she was granted political asylum.

Why, when Shakur has lived in Cuba for nearly three decades, has the FBI elevated the importance of her capture by placing her on its Most Wanted Terrorists list? Why, since 2005, has the FBI labeled Assata Shakur a terrorist?

These actions by the FBI are a continuation of the government’s efforts to intimidate activists and stifle political dissent. In 2005, utilizing the definition of “domestic terrorist” under the PATRIOT Act, the FBI was able to designate Shakur a terrorist. The criminalization of dissent is a standard tactic of State repression.

Labeling Shakur as a terrorist and placing her on the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorists list not only further criminalizes Shakur, it creates political and emotional circumstances on which the government could rely for justification or excuse in the event of her assassination.

The FBI's actions can also be interpreted as maneuvering by the Obama Administration to keep Cuba on the list of countries supporting terrorism. This also sends a message to the leftist governments in Latin America that are friendly with Cuba.

In addition, very importantly, this recent action by the U.S. government specifically sends a message to Black people in America that if they oppose systemic oppression and police violence they will be labeled criminals and hunted down. Further, it attempts to revise history by claiming that the brave people that fought for the rights of Black people in the 1960s and 1970s are not heroes, but vicious criminals. It attempts to absolve the United States government of its sins of the past, as it ignores its sins of the present.

The NCBL demands that the government remove Assata Shakur from any terrorist list, and cease all pursuit of her. Further, the U.S. government must finally acknowledge the role that it played in criminalizing people such as Assata Shakur who fought for Black liberation in the 1960s and 1970s, and free all political prisoners.

### **Take Assata Shakur off the Terrorist List! Statement by Lawrence Hamm, Chair of People's Organization for Progress**

The People's Organization For Progress (POP) calls upon the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to remove Assata Shakur (Joanne Chesimard) from its Most Wanted Terrorists List. She does not belong on the list because Ms. Shakur was never charged nor convicted of an act of domestic or international terrorism.

To place her on such a list is fundamentally unjust. It is a perversion of justice and involves the ex post facto application of terrorist laws and definitions of terrorism that were not in existence or applied to her case at the time of her arrest and conviction.

Furthermore, she did not commit the crime she was accused of. She was placed on the list because her conviction connected her to the murder of a police officer. However, evidence in her case shows that she could not have shot and killed that officer. She became a fugitive because given the circumstances of her case, the atmosphere of repression, and the racism of the criminal justice system she could not get justice in this country and to remain here may have cost her life.

The move to place her on the list and the doubling of her bounty to \$2 million has little to do with justice and everything to do with politics. It is an opportunistic attempt to use the criminal justice system to score political points in this highly charged post Boston bombing environment.

Placing Assata Shakur on the terrorists list when she was not convicted of a "terrorist act" is in essence falsely accusing her of a crime that she did not commit. It is the abandonment of the law in the name of enforcing the law.

Like the war in Iraq, weapons of mass destruction, preemptive strikes, and the abandonment of international law, it is the establishment of a false premise as a rationale for violent action, which has no legal basis but for which political support may be imagined or conjured up. Placing Assata Shakur on the terrorists list sets a dangerous precedent.

With the false premise established what will be next? Will Cuba be given the ultimatum to give up Shakur like the Afghanistan government was told to give up Osama Bin Laden before the US invasion of that country? Will there be a drone strike of Shakur's supposed residence in Cuba? Will Navy Seal Team "7" be sent on a covert mission to assassinate Assata Shakur who is an American citizen?

By identifying Shakur as a terrorist the FBI is taking the terrorists list and making it a "political enemies" list, which is an instrument of state terror. And why not? This fits in perfectly with unjust and illegal trillion dollar wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, extraordinary renditions, black site secret prisons in foreign lands, torture, assassination of US citizens, military courts, secret trials, Guantanamo, elimination of habeas corpus, indefinite detention, government domestic spying, arbitrary arrests, police brutality, racial profiling, stop and frisk, mass incarceration, school to prison pipeline, suppression of dissent, COINTELPRO type operations, ignoring the Constitution, trashing the Bill of rights, and trampling upon our civil liberties.

And let's look at her accusers. Who is calling her a terrorist? The FBI who spied on Dr. Martin Luther King. The FBI whose Director J. Edgar Hoover made it his mission to destroy Dr. King. The FBI who engaged in acts of state terror that included assassination against people and organizations in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements.

And the New Jersey State Police who shot up Newark and killed innocent people during the rebellion. The New Jersey State Police who for years engaged in the worst forms of racial profiling. The New Jersey State Police, a department so rife with racism that the federal government had to put it under a "master" to force it to reform its racist ways.

With this precedent the rights of all Americans are placed in greater jeopardy. Now, anyone can be deemed a terrorist, not because this was proven in a court of law but by fiat, proclamation

or declaration by the President, US Attorney General, FBI, CIA, Homeland Security, or some other agency of the federal government.

And this can be done not just for transgressions of the present. It can be done retroactively for sins of the past, ten, twenty, thirty, and forty years ago. If the government doesn't like someone just put them on the terrorist list.

Of course, this exercise of twenty-first century US democracy would not be complete unless accompanied by the economic incentive that American capitalism can provide. In this age of robber billionaires a \$1 million dollar bounty on the head of Assata Shakur was not enough. It has been doubled to \$2 million.

Who are the \$2 million pieces of silver for? Are they for enterprising US citizens? No. Assata Shakur has been given political asylum in Cuba. This pot of gold is to entice elements within Cuban Society to violate the laws and policies of the Cuban government.

The FBI and company hope that in Cuba there are corrupt persons within the police, or criminal elements, or people opposed to the government who will take the bait and do this bit of subcontracting work and keep some of the heat off the bosses in the US.

They hope that there are Hamid Kharzais in Cuba who would like to have bags of money delivered to them on a monthly basis. "Bring Assata Shakur to us and you too can be a millionaire." Dead or alive has not been specified.

The placing of Assata Shakur on the terrorist list while portrayed as a noble act in the attempt to get justice for a slain police officer is in fact a shameful act of revenge, opportunism, political manipulation, and authoritarianism. It is part and parcel of a corrosive trend eating away at the democratic processes and institutions in our country for half a century and which has accelerated since 9/11.

Assata Shakur should not be on the terrorist list. She should be removed from that list just as Nelson Mandela was removed from that list several years ago. When the threat of terrorism and the terrorist label is misused in this manner the victims of real acts of terror are dishonored.

## **Hands Off Assata From the Organization for Black Struggle**

"Hands off Assata!!!" is the cry being heard all throughout the world as people stand up in support of our revolutionary sister and comrade, Assata Shakur. In concert with allies across the globe, the Organization for Black Struggle opposes and condemns the recent decision made by the State of New Jersey and President Obama's Justice Department to increase the bounty on the head of our sister.

The decision to place her on the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorists List is a sharp reminder that the repression of Black radical activists remains a top priority for the powers that be—all in the name of a racist and corrupt American "justice" system.

If we are clear about American history, we know that it is incorrect and outright deceptive to label Assata a "terrorist." The fact is that Assata is a victim of government-sanctioned harassment, violence and terror, as a result of the joint efforts of the CIA and FBI, through the Counter Intelligence Program (commonly referred to as COINTELPRO). In 1975 the Church Committee of the U.S. Senate condemned the program's use of questionable, immoral, and illegal tactics, including everything from wiretapping, fraud, manipulation, torture, liable, theft, wrongful persecution, assassination and murder. So how can Assata be a terrorist if the criminal charges filed against her were constructed under the aegis of this very same program? Rather than spending taxpayer money to pursue and harass citizens who were targeted by illegal government persecution, there needs to be a national effort to acquit and compensate victims, like Assata and other activists, for the physical, mental and emotional damages that have been inflicted upon them.

Assata's case also reveals the way that the State continues to place a high value on some lives, while rendering others expendable. Why is the State of New Jersey, willing to spend millions of dollars in resources to pursue a wrongfully alleged, police murder, yet unable to invest in pensions for state workers? How does the destruction of three Black lives (Assata and her fellow passengers Zayd Shakur and Sundiata Acoli) equate to justice for one white New Jersey patrolman? Why is a white police officer's life treated with more value than the average citizen, or the lives of those black citizens murdered by law enforcement every 36 hours—Oscar Grant, Sean Bell, Amadou Diallo? Why is the Justice Department wasting resources on the pursuit of one, harmless Black woman, while at the same time allowing corporate criminals to get away with a slap on the wrist for running the U.S. economy to a near-Depression?

Unlike these corporate raiders who hid their money in foreign tax shelters, Assata herself is hiding in Cuba from unjust persecution. Even as you read this, these corporate interests and their political allies are trying to pry Cuba open to their greed and expose the island to capitalist looting. And since the American government is clearly willing to sacrifice genuine democracy for economic profiteering, we cannot expect this same government to invest in real justice. In these troubled economic and political times, the State of New Jersey and the Justice Department continue to persecute Assata not because she is a "terrorist" but because these government entities are terrified of what she stands for—she is the embodiment of resistance, she is a strong, vibrant symbol of the Black Liberation Movement, who has continued to elude the reach of the corrupt and racist American system of injustice.

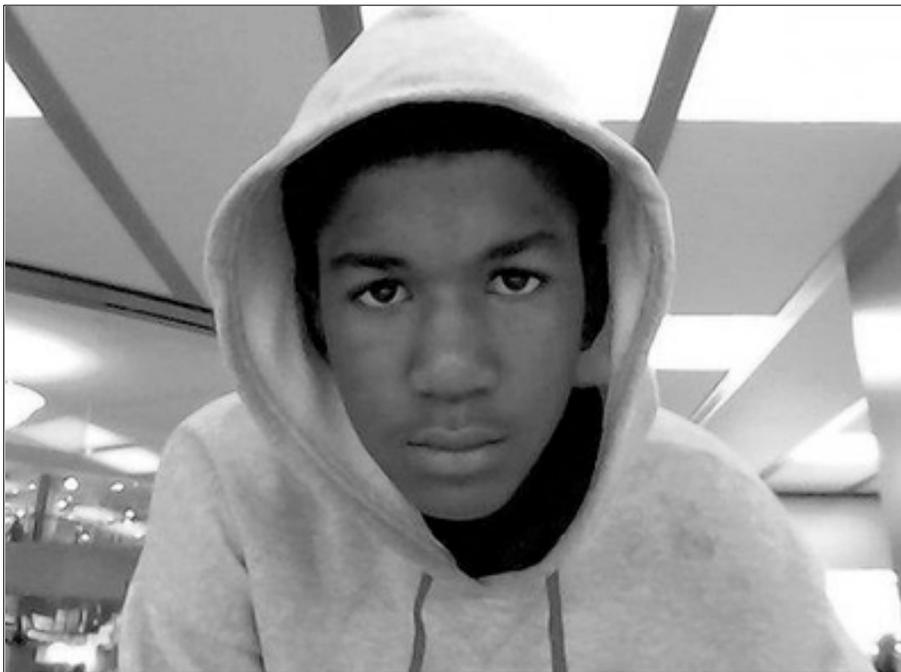
So we say, loud and clear, “Hands off Assata!” We encourage everyone to get familiar with this case.

Read her open letter. Join the Hands off Assata Campaign, download, read and circulate her autobiography, form study groups, post signs for support, and join the Organization for Black Struggle for their Freedom School Session (Saturday May 18th, 12-2pm @ 1401 Rowan Ave) where we will watch her documentary *Eyes of the Rainbow*, discuss her case, and find ways to organize in support of our sister!

Please sign the petition to President Obama to take Sista Assata off the FBI’s “Most Wanted Terrorists” List! Click on the photo to the right to go to the petition.

Source: <http://www.blackleftunity.blogspot.com/search?q=assata>

## 16 On Our Brother Trayvon



Trayvon Martin, from <http://www.essence.com/2012/03/21/trayvon-martins-parents-to-attend-nyc-million-hoodie-march/>

### Sixteen Months Later: George Zimmerman’s Trial Begins by Jelani Cobb

June 11, 2013—It’s been sixteen months since an encounter between Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman left the former mortally wounded on the rain-soaked ground of Sanford, Florida, and placed the latter on a circuitous path to the defendant’s table at the Seminole

County Courthouse, where jury selection for his trial began Monday. During that time, we've witnessed the hooded sweatshirt transform from a utilitarian garment into a statement of political solidarity; we've become aware of the hazy shades of innocence created by Stand Your Ground laws in Florida and beyond. We've seen cable news parse audio of Zimmerman's 911 call to determine what he had said about Martin before getting out of his car to confront him. The faces of Martin's parents, dignified though grief-stricken, have become familiar to us, as has that of Robert Zimmerman, George's look-alike sibling and chief defender in the media. But more than anything we have come to understand context.

It's possible—no, reasonable—to look at Martin's death as the opening scene in a four-act drama centering on American gun culture. The subsequent scenes were set in Aurora, Colorado; Oak Creek, Wisconsin; and Newtown, Connecticut.

If we've been hesitant to recognize Martin as part of that procession of slain bystanders, it's because the public sympathies here are muddied. More than in any of the other instances, people quietly, perhaps ashamedly—or not—can find it easier to imagine themselves in Zimmerman's shoes than those of James Holmes, Wade Michael Page, or Adam Lanza. How else to explain the impressive sums proffered by supporters via Zimmerman's Web site? Or the nauseating popularity of Trayvon Martin shooting targets last spring? Not all unarmed citizens facing down armed men are created equal. Where Newtown, the tragic climax to a season of violence, caused deep self-reflection on the presumed bonds between weaponry and liberty and the unchallenged authority of the National Rifle Association, the Martin-Zimmerman incident prompted far less pondering about these questions. Context matters.

This week, the prosecution will try to narrow down a prospective pool of five hundred people to a set of jurors and alternates who can imagine themselves in Martin's position, while the defense will attempt to empanel a jury of people who might sympathize with a man fearing for his life despite the sidearm within reach. (It's an ironic moment when the prosecution might reasonably favor potential jurors who've been racially profiled by police.) Statistical palm-reading and lawyerly gut instincts will yield preëemptory strikes on both sides until a few handfuls of citizens are left to ponder evidence that can be distilled to a single question: Under what circumstances is it permissible to shoot an unarmed citizen whom you have pursued against the advice of law enforcement?

That the judge has ruled out any evidence regarding Martin's alleged use of marijuana or proclivity for fisticuffs is significant. In the weeks following Zimmerman's arrest, the already-febrile imaginations of Internet conspiracy jockeys were arguing that Martin was far from the baby-faced tween we've seen repeatedly but rather a six-foot, hundred-and-ninety-pound, facially-tatted thug apparent. (The image used as evidence turned out to be that of the very much alive rapper The Game.) The presumption—unspoken but very much relevant—was that

a heavily muscled black man walking down the street is not as innocent as a group of religious worshippers in their temple, or moviegoers taking in a summer blockbuster. Robert Zimmerman implied as much when, following the horrid murder of a thirteen-month-old child, he tweeted a picture of the alleged assailant alongside that of Martin, with the message: “A picture speaks a thousand words. Any questions?” He went on to state that actions like the murder of a toddler were a rationale for thinking of blacks as “risky.”

That doctrine of collective guilt and epidermal suspicion is what makes this case different than the others. George Zimmerman is on trial but so is a set of durable fears about black men in this society. For that reason and others, it’s difficult to separate the context of this trial from that of other similar debates—most pointedly, the legal battles over the N.Y.P.D.’s stop-and-frisk policies. At the heart of both these issues are questions regarding who is suspicious, when the intervention of authorities is justified, and the extent to which one segment of the public is willing to accept the forfeiture of civil liberties in another one. Yet, if 2012 should have taught us anything, it’s that none of us can be hermetically sealed off from these questions. The Second Amendment fundamentalism that makes incidents like the Martin shooting possible also makes ones like Newtown inevitable.

We know, or ought to know, that in moments when civil rights and civil liberties find themselves in conflict, absolutism is the enemy of resolution. In the coming weeks, there will be a great deal spoken about the contexts in which Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman encountered each other, but no matter how the legal stagecraft plays out, there will not be catharsis for the rest of us. A jury will render a verdict and, in place of closure, a new concern will emerge. This drama will be restaged with an entirely new cast but a sickeningly familiar plot.

Source: <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2013/06/sixteen-months-later-george-zimmermans-trial-begins.html>

## **Statement on the Anniversary of the Vigilante Murder of Trayvon Martin by Carl Dix, co-founder of the Stop Mass Incarceration Network and representative of the Revolutionary Communist Party, February 25, 2013**

Almost 60 years ago a Black teenager named Emmitt Till was lynched by white men in Money, Mississippi. Last year, Trayvon Martin, another Black teenager, was murdered by George Zimmerman, a vigilante and a wannabe cop, who saw Trayvon’s Black skin and decided that he must be a criminal. How long are we gonna have to put up with these kinds of racist outrages? Murders like this concentrate the way this country has criminalized Black and Latino youth,

treating them as guilty until proven innocent, if they can survive to prove their innocence. This is unacceptable. It must stop, and it is up to us to stop it!

No one should want to live in a world where there's a death sentence hanging over every Black and Latino youth. This death sentence might, or might not, get carried out, but it's always there. We must say NO MORE to living in a society and a world like this anymore. We have to mean it when we say that, and we have to act to make our determination to end this kind of world.

That's why the Stop Mass Incarceration Network issued a Call for people to wear hoodies and take to the streets on this day. It's why the slogan, "We Are All Still Trayvon!" is being raised today. And it's why we have to not only act today, but continue to express our rage at the vigilante murder of Trayvon and at the way the whole criminal "injustice" system of this country targets Blacks and Latinos.

Remember that the system has already "worked" once in this case. It "worked" when the cops discovered Zimmerman standing over Trayvon's dead body and let him walk away free. The only reason Zimmerman faces a trial today is because Trayvon's parents refused to silently accept their son's murderer being set free, and people all across the country responded to their call for justice by taking their outrage to the streets. This forced the system to re-arrest Zimmerman and put him on trial. If we had failed to take to the streets today, and if we fail to continue expressing our determination to fight for justice in this case, that system will "work" again, in the way it always has, by letting the racist murderer walk away free again. And they will continue to give green lights to killer cops and racist vigilantes who prey on our youth.

It is a basic truth that this kind of racist violence has happened since the very 1st African was dragged to these shores in slave chains. It's built into the very fabric of this country, and it will take Revolution - Nothing Less to uproot it and all the other horrors—the brutality inflicted on women, the wars for empire, the long distance death rained down on people thru drone strikes and more—that this system enforces on humanity. As a revolutionary communist, this is what I'm working to do—I'm spreading the need for, and possibility of, revolution everywhere and mobilizing people to fight the power and transform themselves and others, for revolution. The key way I'm spreading revolution right now is thru promoting the premier of "BA Speaks: Revolution-Nothing Less!" which is a film of a recent talk by Bob Avakian, the leader of the Revolutionary Communist Party. Everybody who hates the hell on earth this system enforces on humanity needs to check out this film because it breaks down why revolution is possible, the kind of world we could bring into being thru revolution, what those who see the need for revolution need to be doing today and more.

This is a critical time for people to act, from whatever perspective they feel compelled to resist this outrage. Horrors like the vigilante murder of Trayvon jolt people into standing up and resisting the system's attacks. It is in times like these that people are more open to hearing about and acting on what is the source of all these horrors and what needs to be and can be done about them. This part of why we needed to take to the streets and wear our hoodies today and why we need to continue standing up and saying NO MORE to the murder of Trayvon and to the way they criminalize our youth overall.

One year ago today, George Zimmerman stalked and murdered Trayvon Martin. Today we are declaring, all across the country, that we refuse to accept this outrage in silence. And that we will no longer accept all the outrages the criminal "injustice" system of this country enforces on people. In this way, we are working toward the day when all these outrages—the police murder, the racial profiling, the horrific numbers of people warehoused in prisons and all the rest—are NO MORE. Everyone who is disturbed by these outrages needs to join us.

WE ARE ALL STILL TRAYVON!

Source: <http://comradecarl.blogspot.com/2013/02/statement-on-anniversary-of-vigilante.html>

## **What's Really on Trial in George Zimmerman's Case? by Eric Mann**

"In every case, the black man is on trial, guilty until proven innocent."

George Zimmerman went on trial this week for the murder of Trayvon Martin. But let's be clear, within the defense's opening arguments, for many who follow the trial—which will be televised!—it will be Trayvon Martin who will be on trial.

He in fact already is. On May 23, the Orlando Sentinel offered the following news: "New evidence in Zimmerman case: Trayvon texted about fighting, smoking marijuana about a week before he was killed."

The evidence that George Zimmerman's attorneys have uncovered on Trayvon Martin's cell phone paints a troubling picture of the Miami Gardens teenager: He sent text messages about being a fighter, smoking marijuana and being ordered to move out of his home by his mother.

And photos from that phone offer more of the same: healthy green plants—what appear to be marijuana—growing in pots and a .40-caliber Smith & Wesson handgun.

So here we go again with a script deep in the white American psyche: the impossibility of Black innocence.

My first experience with the horror of racism was the murder of Emmett Till in 1955; he was only a year older than me when he died. It was alleged that Till, a 14-year-old Chicago black boy visiting Mississippi for the summer, did not know his place and whistled at a white woman in a store. That evening the husband of the woman and his friend came to the house of Emmett's grandfather, kidnapped Emmett, beat him beyond recognition, and then drowned his body. When his mutilated body was found, Emmett's Mother, Mamie Till, insisted that his casket be left open because, in her words, "I wanted the world to see what they did to my baby." The images shocked the black community and attracted great anger and sympathy from anti-racist people all over the world.

And yet, for some, the debate focused on whether Emmett had or hadn't made any flirtatious advances toward a southern white woman—with many believing that if so, he had brought his murder on himself.

"It's essential that the civil rights movement and organizers in communities of color put the system on trial."

When I worked in the Newark Community Union Project in 1966-1968 in the city's black south and central wards, we worked on many community issues including police brutality. In each case we worked to identify the facts of the story and document the specifics of the brutality. I still remember George Richardson, a militant black political figure explaining to us his views on the realities of police brutality cases as if it was yesterday:

You know, Eric, in these police brutality cases, we are always looking for the perfect black victim, the completely "innocent" black man, but he doesn't exist. In our ideal case, a white cop beats or shoots a black man and it turns out it was a black doctor walking down the street doing absolutely nothing when a white cop comes up to him and beats him badly. But that is never the way it is. The guy usually is poor or working class, has a criminal record, he was drinking, he talked back to the cop, he ran a traffic sign, he shoplifted, he 'resisted arrest', he yelled at the cop, he raised his hand whether in self-defense or even to fight back. But that has nothing to do with the fact that he was beaten half to death for being black. In every case, the black man is on trial, guilty until proven innocent and you know what, for most of these folks, even our hypothetical black doctor could never been innocent enough.

Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black manchild leaving a gated community and shot down in cold blood was as close in reality to that hypothetical black doctor as one can imagine, but it did not save him from an early grave.

So now, in this important test case, it's essential that the civil rights movement and organizers in communities of color put the system on trial—for this trial is not about George Zimmerman alone, but also about how a system that sanctioned the murder of an un-armed black teenager

until mass national and international pressure forced a trial. We have to win the argument that there are no extenuating circumstances in the stalking and murder of unarmed black men, and while we are there, we have to win the argument that a pen, or a knife, or a shopping cart, or a parked car or “something that looked like a gun” are not lethal weapons at 15 feet, and that lethal force is not an option.

“We have to win the argument that there are no extenuating circumstances in the stalking and murder of unarmed black men.”

Every time someone raises any questions about Trayvon, and we can be assured that as the trial goes on, the character assassination of Trayvon Martin will escalate, we have to counter with the most radical and structural demands on the system possible, to shift the terms of the debate and put the system on trial. This tactic—what’s been called “counter-hegemonic demand development”—was the great contribution of the civil rights movement and is rooted in Frederick Douglass’ advice: Power accedes to nothing without a demand.

We have to roll back all the stop and frisk laws, all the “hold your ground laws,” all the “war on drugs” laws, the endless web of laws that have put one million black people in prison and millions more in probation and parole. We have to demand President Obama enforce the 1964 Civil Rights Act and use his statutory power to withhold federal funds from any agency using those funds in a racially discriminatory manner—from Los Angeles to Chicago, from New York to Houston and everywhere else in between. We need to demand the social welfare state, not the police state—1,000 more buses, 1,000 more teachers, 1,000 more nurses, 1,000 fewer police. When we say Trayvon Martin did not die in vain, we have to fight for the maximum program that his life and his death and his innocence deserve.

Source: <http://blackagendareport.com/content/what%E2%80%99s-really-trial-george-zimmerman%E2%80%99s-case>

## THE LAST WORD

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### **SOS by Amiri Baraka (1965)**

Calling black people  
 Calling all black people, man woman child  
 Wherever you are, calling you, urgent, come in  
 Black People, come in, wherever you are, urgent, calling  
 You, calling all black people  
 Calling all black people, come in, black people, come  
 on in.



Color print by Emory Douglas, from Sam Durant, *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007.

### **There It Is by Jayne Cortez (1984)**

And if we don't fight  
if we don't resist  
if we don't organize and unify and  
get the power to control our own lives  
Then we will wear  
the exaggerated look of captivity  
the stylized look of submission  
the bizarre look of suicide  
the dehumanized look of fear  
and the decomposed look of repression  
forever and ever and ever  
And there it  
is