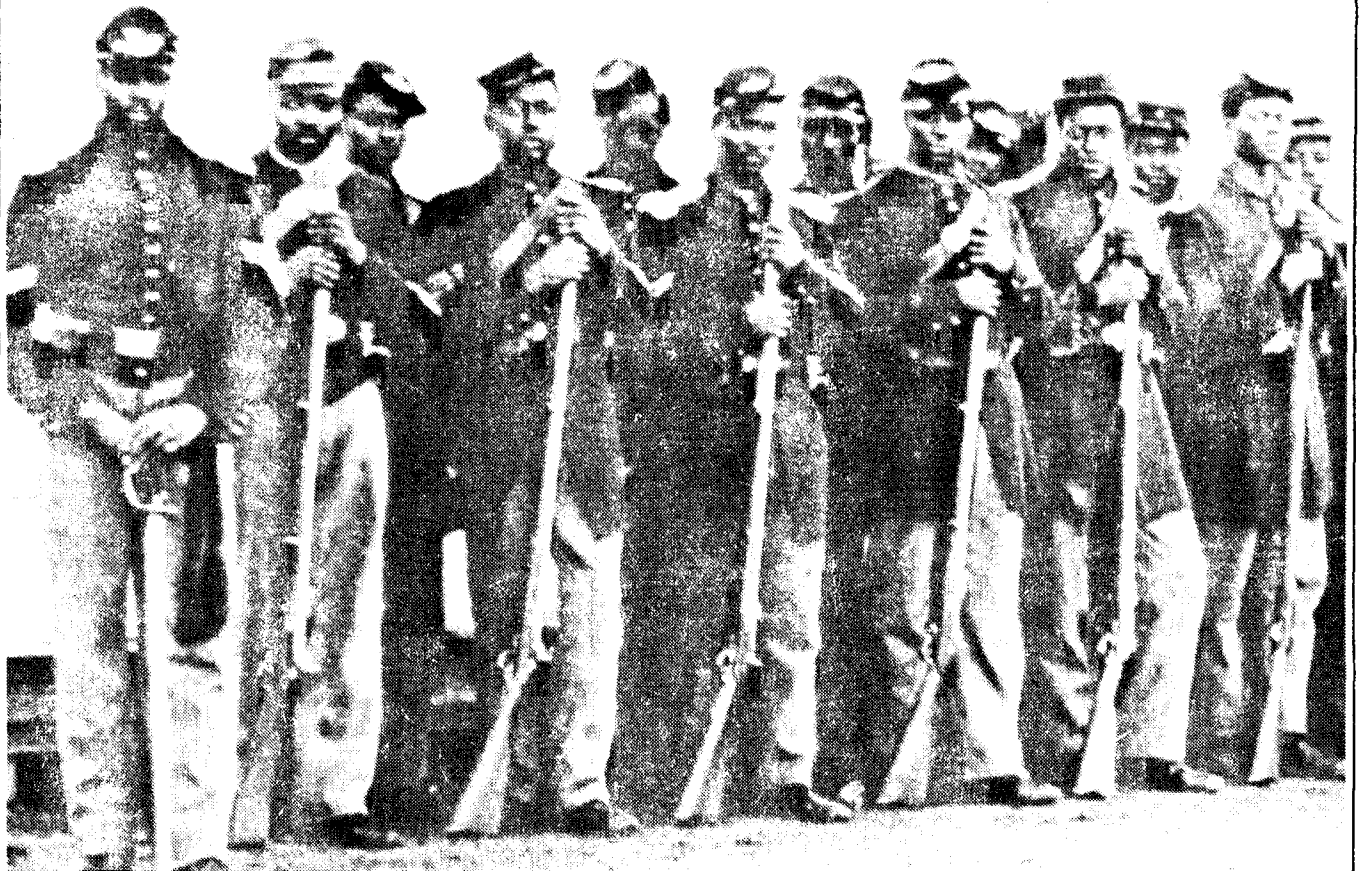


Black History and the Class Struggle No. 5

Finish the Civil War!



U.S. Army Military History Institute

Two hundred thousand black recruits turned the tide for the Union Army in the Civil War.

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No. 32, Winter 1986-87

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Introduction

The Civil War was the shaping event of American history. It grew out of the conflict between two economic systems—the industrial capitalism of the North vs. the slave-based agricultural plantation system of the South. From the founding of the American republic, the Northern bourgeoisie had attempted to evade a definitive clash over slavery through a series of “compromises,” and even when the Southern slavocracy went into open rebellion, Lincoln and the federal government hesitated to emancipate the slaves. But in order to win the war, Lincoln was led inexorably to the Emancipation Proclamation and then to the arming of free blacks and former slaves. Arms in hand, 200,000 black Union soldiers fought for their own liberation and the destruction of the hideous slave system, and turned the tide of the war.

The bourgeoisie’s inability to avoid a bloody national conflagration over the slave system was a confirmation of the views of the radical wing of the abolitionist movement. The “moderate” elements of the movement had argued that “moral suasion” would be sufficient to convince the rulers of the evil of slavery, but more far-sighted figures like John Brown and Frederick Douglass understood that military means would be required to smash the slave system. The Civil War was the second American Revolution—a social revolution in the South which smashed “private property” in human flesh and the plantation system.

The Civil War and its aftermath continue to shape this country to this day. The black population of America are no longer slaves, *but neither are they free*. The smashing of the slavocracy ushered in the period of Radical Reconstruction in the South: with the ex-Confederate states under military occupation, black people had a chance to exercise their rights in such matters as voting and education, and blacks who had served in the Union Army were among the leaders of Reconstruction governments. But the promise of freedom was *betrayed*; following the “Compromise of 1877” the Union troops were withdrawn and the blacks were left defenseless against the ex-slaveholders and the rising racist terror exemplified by the Ku Klux Klan. The capitalist ruling class, having been forced in its own defense to take the profoundly progressive step of uprooting slavery, nevertheless had no intention of undertaking the kinds of measures necessary to free

the ex-slaves from poverty and powerlessness. To fulfill the promise of freedom made over a century ago will require a third American Revolution, a socialist revolution, against the blood-sucking exploitation of all the working people and the pervasive and institutionalized racial oppression which keeps blacks on the bottom. As the section of the working people with the most to gain from the destruction of the class power of the exploiters and oppressors and the reconstruction of society on a new basis of freedom and equality, the militant black proletariat will play a vanguard role as leaders and fighters for socialist revolution.

* * *

This pamphlet, the fifth in the Spartacist League’s *Black History and the Class Struggle* series, is published for Black History Month 1988. It brings together a series of articles from our press concerning the continuing struggles to finish the Civil War and fulfill the promise of freedom. The main historical piece celebrates Harriet Tubman, who was a participant in the radical insurrectionist wing of the abolitionist movement, as well as a figure of extraordinary heroism. This article appeared originally in *Women and Revolution*, journal of the Spartacist League’s Commission for Work Among Women. Tubman’s story exemplifies not only the courage and determination of the slaves who struck back against oppression but also the bitter betrayal by victorious Northern capitalism.

“Breaking the Chains of Slavery” appeared first in the youth pages of *Workers Vanguard*. Focusing on the question of black education, the article discusses Reconstruction and the subsequent reinstitution of segregation. The article suggests a parallel to the civil rights movement of a generation ago, when millions of people, both black and white, put their lives on the line to oppose Jim Crow segregation, only to run up against the hard economic realities of racist oppression in the North—the problems of poverty, unemployment, ghettoization, cop terror, etc., which can only be addressed by an anti-capitalist movement committed to smashing the whole racist status quo and building a society based on workers’ power.

The additional materials included in this pamphlet are of a somewhat diverse character. We present here a short appreciation of Claude McKay, the

reprinted from *Women and Revolution* No. 32, Winter 1986-87

In the Revolutionary Vanguard of the Civil War

Harriet Tubman: Fighter for Black Freedom

Toward the end of her long life, the black abolitionist Harriet Tubman commented on her years of service to the liberation of black people in a conversation with a journalist:

"She looked musingly toward a nearby orchard, and she asked suddenly: 'Do you like apples?' On being assured that I did, she said: 'Did you ever plant any apple trees?' With shame I confessed I had not. 'No,' said she, 'but somebody else planted them. I liked apples when I was young, and I said, "Some day I'll plant apples myself for other young folks to eat," and I guess I did it.'"

—Frank C. Drake, *New York Herald*, 22 September 1907, quoted in Earl Conrad, *Harriet Tubman*

In this simple metaphor, Tubman recognized the vanguard role she played in laying the groundwork for black freedom in the United States in the revolution that was the Civil War. As a conductor on the Underground Railroad and a military strategist and spy during the war, "General" Tubman, as John Brown dubbed her, stood in the revolutionary insurrectionist wing of the abolitionist movement in the struggle against the Southern slavocracy. Like John Brown, the heroic martyr of the

1859 raid on Harpers Ferry, and the outstanding political leader of the abolitionist movement, Frederick Douglass, Tubman knew that freedom for the slave would come about only through blood and iron. Harriet Tubman's life is a microcosm of the struggle for black liberation in the 19th century; her life directly reflects the issues of the time.

Although the hope for a complete liberation of black people was later defeated in the cowardly betrayal of Reconstruction, Tubman's "apple orchard"—freedom for the slave—was a tremendous historical advance. The abolition of slavery and the fight for full citizenship for the black population was the great historic task of the Civil War, the second American Revolution, which carried forward the unfinished business of the first American Revolution.

The abolitionist movement was part of a broader bourgeois radicalism, the 19th century descendant of the 18th century Enlightenment, Protestant religious ideals and the American Revolution so dramatically unfulfilled in the "Land of the Free" where four million suffered in slavery. The abolitionists were part of the religious and



Harriet Tubman

Library of Congress

Jamaican-born black poet and radical journalist who, recognizing in the 1917 Russian Revolution a beacon of hope for the black masses of America as well as the colored colonial peoples oppressed by imperialism throughout the world, visited Russia in 1922. We are publishing also the text of McKay's speech to the Communist International, where he showed himself a keener observer of American conditions than many of the official American delegates. This material has not previously appeared in the Spartacist press.

"Chicago 1919: Racism and Union-Busting" provides a more detailed pic-

ture of the social conditions which McKay described: the mass migration of rural Southern blacks to the Northern cities in search of jobs opened up to them by World War I, the indifference and often hostility of the American Federation of Labor tops to black labor, and the bloody racist terror unleashed in the summer of 1919 which successfully set black and white against each other in the service of union-busting. The article illuminates one of the recurring themes of the *Black History and the Class Struggle* series: that labor and the black masses can never advance at one another's expense, but only by combining in united struggle against our com-

mon enemies.

Finally, we include here an article on "Cop Terror Stalks Black America," which sums up too many *WW* articles on too many cop murders of black people, and outlines our perspective of a fight for a labor movement worthy of the name which will wield the power of the multiracial organized labor movement in defense of the black masses. We conclude with a short article on a modest victory in Chicago, where a black victim of vicious cop brutality refused to become the victim of a subsequent legal lynching by bourgeois "justice."

—February 1988

intellectual upsurge which swept the United States after 1820, encompassing such movements as Transcendentalism and Unitarianism. Particularly among the most politically radical wing, the abolitionists were motivated by a vision of human emancipation profoundly rooted in religion. To men like the clergymen Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Theodore Parker, slavery was an abomination to god and the Christian Bible and a gross betrayal of the rights of man as put forth in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

Although slavery was their pre-eminent concern, these radical bourgeois egalitarians also fought for many other pressing political issues of the time, such as free education, religious tolerance and workers' rights. The women's suffrage movement first began as a fight within abolitionism over the role of women anti-slavery activists. The most deeply committed and politically astute of these revolutionary democrats, like Frederick Douglass, understood that the fight against slavery must be generalized into a struggle against *all* oppression. As the abolitionist and women's rights leader Angelina Grimké said at the May 1863 meeting of the Women's Loyal League, a convention of support for the North in the Civil War, "I want to be identified with the negro; until he gets his rights, we shall never have ours" (see "The Grimké Sisters: Pioneers for Abolition and Women's Rights," *Women and Revolution* No. 29, Spring 1985).

The situation of the triply oppressed black woman slave more than any other cried out for liberation. Even the right to raise their own children was often denied to these women, whose masters could sell them or any member of their family at will. The life of Harriet Tubman illustrates in a particularly acute fashion the tremendous obstacles black women faced regarding even the elementary decencies of life. Despite her courageous work for black freedom—which included years as a soldier in the Union Army—she lived in poverty all her life.

A fugitive from bondage, black and a woman, Tubman triumphed over exceptional odds to become a leader of the second American Revolution. Like Frederick Douglass, she was able to generalize her bitter and brutal experience of oppression into a revolutionary social consciousness and a determination to fight for all the oppressed. She was an advocate of militant political



Yale University Press

Radical black abolitionist Frederick Douglass advocated militant political action and insurrection against slavery.

action and revolutionary insurrectionism. As opposed to the "moral suasion" Garrisonian wing, she was part of the revolutionary vanguard of the abolitionist movement. As the "Moses" of her people on the Underground Railroad, Tubman was famous throughout the U.S. and beyond by the time of the war.

However, many details about her work are obscure, since she operated in the secrecy of what was essentially a revolutionary underground. She was illiterate, and much of what is known about her life comes from a biography of her by Sarah Bradford, who interviewed Tubman as an old woman (quotes from Tubman which were originally printed

in dialect are here transposed into modern English spelling). Thus much of the story of her life must be told by others, especially by Frederick Douglass, with whom she shared the conviction, through the bleak decade of the 1850s, that the coming war must crush the slave system and break the bonds of black oppression. She was a coworker and friend not only to John Brown and Douglass, but to many other key figures of her time, from abolitionist William H. Seward, Lincoln's secretary of state, to Sojourner Truth, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Wendell Phillips and Gerrit Smith. She knew Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bronson Alcott and most of the leading women's rights activists of her day.

Douglass honored Tubman's role in a letter written in 1868, in which he defended her right to an army pension as a Civil War veteran:

"The difference between us is very marked. Most that I have done and suffered in the service of our cause has been in public, and I have received much encouragement at every step of the way. You, on the other hand, have labored in a private way. I have wrought in the day—you in the night. I have had the applause of the crowd and the satisfaction that comes of being approved by the multitude, while the most that you have done has been witnessed by a few trembling, scarred, and foot-sore bondmen and women, whom you have led out of the house of bondage, and whose heartfelt 'God bless you' has been your only reward. The midnight sky and the silent stars have been the witnesses of your devotion to freedom and of your heroism. Excepting John Brown—of sacred memory—I know of no one who



William Still

Slaves escaping from the eastern shore of Maryland. Many fugitives became activists for abolition and black rights.



Culver Pictures

Nat Turner led heroic revolt of slaves in 1831.

has willingly encountered more perils and hardships to serve our enslaved people than you have. Much that you have done would seem improbable to those who do not know you as I know you."

—quoted in Sarah Bradford,
*Harriet Tubman:
The Moses of Her People*

Slave vs. Free in the Antebellum U.S.

Like Frederick Douglass, Tubman was born a slave on the eastern shore of Maryland, probably in 1820. At that time the country was embroiled in the first of the major fights over slavery and the expanding U.S. territory, "resolved" in this instance by the Missouri Compromise of 1820.

Since the founding of the U.S. in the late 18th century, when the slave system was left intact throughout the South, two economic systems, capitalism and slavery, coexisted within one country. The inevitable clash of economic interest which must lead to the victory of one over the other was postponed in a series of "compromises" centering on the maintenance of control by the slave states over the relatively weak federal government. But the underlying economic conflicts between the two systems eventually reached the point at which compromise was no longer possible. The development of large-scale industrial capitalism required wage labor to exploit, the source of its tremendous profits, as well as a mobile and at least somewhat educated working population. Key to capitalist expansion

was control of a growing home market. In contrast, the slave system was based on primitive, labor-intensive agricultural production; the slaveowners sought new lands to increase the highly profitable slave trade and to move plantations to fresh, non-exhausted soil. The clash came to a head over the huge, expanding territories of the West: would they be slave or free?

Karl Marx described the slow but inexorable sweep of political power by the slave states in their effort to increase control of the growing U.S.:

"The last Continental Congress of 1787 and the first Constitutional Congress of 1789-90 had legally excluded slavery from all Territories of the republic northwest of the Ohio.... The so-called Missouri Compromise (1820), in consequence of which Missouri became one of the States of the Union as a slave state, excluded slavery from every remaining Territory north of 36° 30' latitude and west of the Missouri. By this compromise the area of slavery was advanced several degrees of longitude, whilst, on the other hand, a geographical boundary-line to its future spread seemed quite definitely drawn. This geographical barrier, in its turn, was thrown down in 1854 by the so-called Kansas-Nebraska Bill, the initiator of which was St[ephen] A. Douglas, then leader of the Northern Democrats. The Bill, which passed both Houses of Congress, repealed the Missouri Compromise, placed slavery and freedom on the same footing, commanded the Union government to treat them both with equal indifference and left it to the sovereignty of the people, that is, the majority of the settlers, to decide whether or not slavery was to be introduced in a Territory. Thus, for the first time in the history of the United States,

every geographical and legal limit to the extension of slavery in the Territories was removed."

—Karl Marx, "The North American Civil War,"
Collected Works, Vol. 19

In 1820, when Tubman was born, news of the first of these bitter debates undoubtedly reached even the slave quarters, however isolated the slaves were kept from news of the day. Perhaps the slaves with whom Tubman lived as a child heard rumors about the deep split in Congress over the Tallmadge Amendment, which would have prohibited the introduction of more slaves into Missouri and provided for gradual emancipation of those already there. This first great debate on slavery was a harbinger of things to come. Abandoning even his earlier contradictory anti-slavery position altogether, Thomas Jefferson strongly opposed the Tallmadge Amendment. In 1821 he wrote, "All, I fear, do not see the speck on our horizon which is to burst on us as a tornado, sooner or later."

As a child Tubman was acquainted with all the horrors of slavery. By the age of five or six she was at work and suffering from whippings on her face and neck by a vicious mistress. Later she worked as a field hand. She was still a child at the time of Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831, put down by the slaveholders swiftly and ruthlessly. In 1832, the opposition of the agricultural South to the federal tariff designed to protect Northern industry led to the Nullification Crisis, in which South Carolina threatened to secede from the Union. The slaveholders' fear of black insurrection, sparked by Nat Turner's revolt, fueled their intransigence against the federal government.

Tubman was around 15 years old when the incident that literally marked her for life occurred. While trying to defend a fellow slave from the vindictiveness of the overseer, she was struck on the head with a two-pound iron weight which cracked her skull. For months she lingered between life and death, lying on rags in her family's slave cabin. The injury left a deep scar on her head and left her subject to spells of unconsciousness, sometimes three or four times a day, which plagued her for the rest of her life.

But instead of being crushed by the brutality of her life, Tubman hardened and determined to fight. When she recovered, she built up her physical strength until she could lift huge barrels of produce as well as a man, despite her small size. Her master would exhibit her strength as one of the "sights" of the



Free blacks rout slave-catchers at Christiana, Pennsylvania; flyer issued by the Boston Vigilance Committee in 1851 to warn blacks against catchers.

Crown Publishers

CAUTION!!
COLORED PEOPLE
OF BOSTON, ONE & ALL,
 You are hereby respectfully CAUTIONED and advised, to avoid conversing with the **Watchmen and Police Officers of Boston,**
 For since the recent ORDER OF THE MAYOR & ALDERMEN, they are empowered to act as
KIDNAPPERS
 AND
Slave Catchers,
 And they have already been actually employed in KIDNAPPING, CATCHING, AND KEEPING SLAVES. Therefore, if you value your LIBERTY, and the Welfare of the Fugitives among you, Name them in every possible manner, as so many HOUNDS on the track of the most unfortunate of your race.
Keep a Sharp Look Out for KIDNAPPERS, and have TOP EYE open.
 APRIL 24, 1851.

plantation. She let people think her half-witted because of her brain injury, and plotted her escape. She began to experience daily visions, which inspired her driving commitment to black freedom as part of a deeply personal religion.

In 1849, although it meant leaving her husband, a freeman who refused to go with her, Harriet Tubman escaped from slavery. Rumor had reached her and her family that their owners planned to sell them to the Deep South, a dreaded fear of every slave in the border states. Already two of her sisters had been sent off in a chain gang, separated from their children. Her brothers lost courage for the escape; Tubman went on alone. As she later told Bradford: "I had reasoned this out in my mind; there was one of two things I had a *right* to, liberty, or death; if I could not have one, I would have the other; for no man should take me alive; I should fight for my liberty as

long as my strength lasted, and when the time came for me to go, the Lord would let them take me."

Aided by a white woman who gave her the first address of the Underground Railroad, Tubman made her way North, traveling at night. "I had crossed the line of which I had so long been dreaming. I was free; but there was no one to welcome me to the land of freedom, I was a stranger in a strange land, and my home after all was down in the old cabin quarter. . . . But to this solemn resolution I came; I was free, and they should be free also." Cooking and laundering to support herself, she began the life of a fugitive slave in the North.

The 1850s: The Irrepressible Conflict at the Boiling Point

Tubman arrived in the North on the eve of the biggest struggle yet over the question of slavery. Congressional

debate sparked over California's petition for admission to the Union as a free state continued for months, while legislatures and mass rallies North and South adopted fiery resolutions. Mississippi called for a convention of Southern states. Over time a compromise satisfactory to few on either side was worked out, largely due to the efforts of Henry Clay, Stephen Douglas and Daniel Webster, who was voted out of his Senate seat by an enraged Massachusetts legislature in 1851. Webster was replaced by the uncompromising abolitionist radical, Charles Sumner. Later a leader of the Radical Republicans, in 1856, after a stirring anti-slavery speech Sumner was beaten into unconsciousness on the Senate floor by a Southern Congressman.

The terms of the Compromise of 1850 centered on a series of tradeoffs: while California would be admitted as a free state, no restrictions on slavery were to be made in the Mexican cession; and while Washington, D.C. ceased to be a depot for the slave trade, the 1793 fugitive slave law was to be replaced with a much tougher version. This new law was an unspeakable atrocity, a threat to the lives and freedom of black people in every state. In his scathing indictment of hypocritical American "democracy," "July Fourth and the Negro" (5 July 1852), Frederick Douglass described it:

"For black men there is neither law nor justice, humanity nor religion. The Fugitive Slave Law makes mercy to them a crime; and bribes the judge who tries them. An American judge gets ten dollars for every victim he consigns to



New York Public Library

The 1856 beating of abolitionist Senator Charles Sumner by a Southerner in Congress outraged anti-slavery forces.

what most conductors can't say—I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger.”

As Frederick Douglass said of the Underground Railroad:

“I never did more congenial, attractive, fascinating and satisfactory work. True, as a means of destroying slavery, it was like an attempt to bail out the ocean with a teaspoon, but the thought that there was *one* less slave, and one more freeman—having myself been a slave, and a fugitive slave—brought to my heart unspeakable joy.”

—*Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*

Indeed, the political impact of the Underground Railroad spread beyond the comparatively small numbers it freed, which have been estimated at probably less than 1,000 a year out of a total slave population of four million. As an interracial network of activists who were willing to risk imprisonment or death in their work, it was a rallying point in abolition work. Speaking tours of ex-slaves, who described the horrors of their lives in bondage, won over many to abolition. The vigilance committees not only helped to settle newly arrived blacks, but tried to fight the racism of the North.

Most importantly, the Underground Railroad effectively allowed the crystallization of a black abolitionist vanguard in the North. As the black historian W.E.B. Du Bois wrote:

“Nowhere did the imminence of a great struggle show itself more clearly than among the Negroes themselves. Organized insurrection ceased in the South, not because of the increased rigors of the slave system, but because the great safety-valve of escape northward was opened wider and wider, and the methods were gradually coordinated into that mysterious system known as the Underground Railroad. The slaves and freedmen started the work and to the end bore the brunt of danger and hardship; but gradually they more and more secured the cooperation of men like John Brown, and of others less radical but just as sympathetic.”

—W.E.B. Du Bois, *John Brown*

It was becoming more and more clear that liberation for the American slave was a national task beyond the scope of local slave insurrections like Nat Turner's or Denmark Vesey's. Leadership for black emancipation thus developed in the North, among the core of militant ex-slaves, free blacks and white abolitionists—people like Douglass, Tubman, Brown, Wendell Phillips and Charles Sumner. A small but crucial element of experienced radicals existed in the “Red 48ers,” European refugees from reaction following the crushing of the 1848 revolutions. Black, white, foreign-born, many of these later

formed the left wing of the Republican Party.

The abolitionists were by no means a homogeneous group. One of the most famous abolitionists, William Lloyd Garrison, opposed all political activity—running for office, petitioning the government—on the grounds that the U.S. Constitution was pro-slavery. Advocating “moral suasion,” Garrison opposed the use of force in the fight against slavery. He finally ended up by proposing the secession of the North as the “answer”—which needless to say would have done nothing to end slavery.

Although Douglass and Brown originally subscribed to “moral suasion,” they both soon realized that it was

slave power: only that way could the Union Army win the war.

Harpers Ferry: The First Battle of the Civil War

As the years passed, to anti-slavery forces it seemed that the slaveholders were winning every battle. Every “compromise” increased the power of slavery. In 1857 the Supreme Court ruling on the Dred Scott case effectively extended the boundaries of slavery throughout the country. Chief Justice Roger Taney, a Southern Democrat, led the court decision that residency in a free state did not free a slave and that the Missouri Compromise barring slavery



Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly

Engraving of John Brown and his dying sons at Harpers Ferry. This heroic raid was the opening shot of the Civil War.

doomed to fail. Even the Underground Railroad, although constantly defying the slave system and the federal laws which protected it, was not a critical weapon to end slavery and as such was more inspirational than strategic. Douglass, Brown and Tubman embraced all means to fight slavery, from petitioning and agitation to armed self-defense and insurrection. As Douglass commented in 1852 at a national free-soil convention, “The only way to make the Fugitive Slave Law a dead letter is to make half a dozen or more dead kidnapers. A half dozen more dead kidnapers carried down South would cool the ardor of Southern gentlemen, and keep their rapacity in check” (“The Fugitive Slave Law,” *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, Vol. 2). When the war broke out, it was Douglass and the other radical abolitionists who argued for the immediate freeing and arming of the slaves. Black insurrection at last would destroy the

in the Northern territories was unconstitutional. As Marx said, “now the Supreme Court of the United States, by its decision of 1857, tore down even this political barrier and transformed all the Territories of the republic, present and future, from nurseries of free states into nurseries of slavery” (“The North American Civil War,” *Collected Works*, Vol. 19). Most notoriously, Taney wrote that blacks had no claim to U.S. citizenship under the Constitution because blacks “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.”

But many abolitionists and free-soilers were determined to fight with every weapon available. To the free-soil farmers of the West, the expansion of slave-based agriculture was a direct threat. The South hindered by every possible means the colonization of the territories by free labor, seeking instead new lands for the plantation system and for the immensely profitable slave trade. Outraged free-state settlers organized

in self-defense. When the Kansas-Nebraska bill opened Kansas to slavery under the dubious slogan of "popular sovereignty," border ruffians from the neighboring slave-state of Missouri spread terror and murder throughout the area to prevent a free-soil government from forming. John Brown and his followers, armed with rifles and the determination that slavery would not triumph, were key in the eventual victory of freedom in Bleeding Kansas.

It was shortly thereafter that Brown began to finalize and execute his plan to initiate a slave insurrection to found a black republic in the South. When Brown approached Gerrit Smith, Frederick Douglass and others (among whom were the Secret Six) in 1858 with his plan for launching a guerrilla war

team at once. *He Harriet* is the most of a man naturally; that *I ever* met with. There is the most abundant material; & of the *right quality*; in this quarter; beyond all doubt" (quoted in Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge This Land With Blood*).

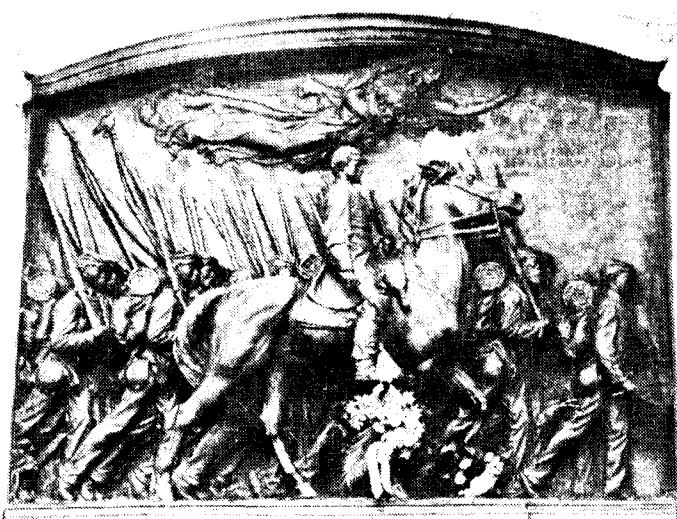
But when the time came to launch the raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry which was to begin the guerrilla war, Tubman was ill and out of reach. Only sickness, brought on by her toil and exposure, kept her from being with Brown at Harpers Ferry. Thus Tubman was not there when federal troops dispatched by President Buchanan and under the command of Colonel Robert E. Lee and Lieutenant J.E.B. Stuart rounded up Brown and his men. A few escaped; of the rest, those who were not

For the 1860 presidential election the Republicans nominated Abraham Lincoln as a moderate capable of winning wider support than more radical candidates. Although he opposed the expansion of slavery, Lincoln's platform did not call for its elimination in the states where it already existed. Lincoln explicitly denounced John Brown's raid and declared his execution just. But Lincoln was still too anti-slavery for the South, and the secession of (eventually) eleven states led to the Confederate States of America. The Northern government, hoping for yet another compromise, had to be dragged kicking and screaming into the war, which was forced on them by the slaveholders' cannons at Fort Sumter. To Lincoln and the majority of the Northern ruling class, the goal of the war was not to end slavery but to put down the secession of the South.

Harriet Tubman again saw further, earlier: that the war for the Union must become a war to free the slaves. The abolitionist Lydia Maria Child quoted her words in a letter to the poet John Greenleaf Whittier (quoted in Conrad, *op. cit.*):

"They may send the flower of their young men down South, to die of the fever in the summer and the ague in the winter.... They may send them one year, two year, three year, till they tire of sending or till they use up the young men. All of no use. God is ahead of Mister Lincoln. God won't let Mister Lincoln beat the South till he does the right thing. Mister Lincoln, he is a great man, and I'm a poor Negro; but this Negro can tell Mister Lincoln how to save the money and the young men. He can do it by setting the Negroes free. Suppose there was an awfully big snake down there on the floor. He bites you. You send for the doctor to cut the bite; but the snake, he rolls up there, and while the doctor is doing it, he bites you again...and so he keeps doing till you kill him. That's what Mister Lincoln ought to know."

But in the early months of the war Lincoln was opposed to the abolition of slavery in the U.S. in a military/political maneuver to woo secessionists and would-be secessionists into the Union. When General John C. Frémont, commander of the western department, declared in August 1861 that all property of Missourians in rebellion was confiscated and the slaves emancipated, Lincoln fired him and rescinded the order. It took two years of ignominious defeats at the hands of the rebels to convince Lincoln of the necessity of freeing the slaves. When it became clear by late 1862 that the North could not win the war in any other way, he made plans to issue the Emancipation Proclama-



Women and Revolution

Monument by Saint-Gaudens memorializing Robert Gould Shaw and his heroic black troops still stands in Boston Common.

against the slavocracy, they recommended Tubman as the key to recruiting followers among the many freedmen who had settled in Canada, beyond the reach of the Fugitive Slave Law. Her work in bringing slaves out of the South gave her not only detailed knowledge of the terrain throughout Brown's planned Appalachian route, but invaluable military experience. Brown went to meet the woman he called "General Tubman" at St. Catherines in Canada; she enthusiastically embraced his plan for arming the slaves and setting up mountain strongholds from which to wage war against slavery.

Tubman agreed to recruit followers and raise money for the plan. She also may have attended the Chatham, Ontario convention in May 1858, where Brown and his followers discussed the constitution for the new black republic. A sternly religious man not given to superlatives, Brown wrote to his son: "Harriet Tubman hooked on *his* whole

killed on the spot were railroaded and hanged by the vindictive courts of Virginia. At his execution in December 1859, John Brown's last, prescient words spoke of the years to come: "I John Brown am now quite *certain* that the crimes of this *guilty, land*: will never be purged *away*; but with *Blood*. I had *as I now think*: vainly flattered myself that without *very much* bloodshed; it might be done" (*ibid.*, emphasis in original). In the North John Brown's martyrdom was a rallying cry for abolition, while hysterical fear of insurrection swept the South and led to lynchings of suspected agitators. In later years Harriet Tubman spoke of Brown, "We Negroes in the South never call him John Brown; we call him *our* Saviour. *He died for us.*"

The Civil War Years

The Republican Party was founded in 1854 out of the struggle for Kansas.



Library of Congress

Black soldiers tipped the balance for Union victory in the Civil War. Members of the "107th U.S. Colored Infantry" at Fort Corcoran near Washington saw action late in the war.

tion—finally ending the spirit of compromise which had immobilized the North:

"That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom."

Although the Emancipation Proclamation expressly left intact slavery in Union-loyal states like Maryland, 1 January 1863 was a day of rejoicing among all anti-slavery people. Douglass described his reaction:

"...I took the proclamation, first and last, for a little more than it purported, and saw in its spirit a life and power far beyond its letter. Its meaning to me was the entire abolition of slavery, wherever the evil could be reached by the federal arm, and I saw that its moral power would extend much further."

—*Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*

Almost as important as freedom itself was the government's decision to form regiments of black soldiers. Harriet Tubman herself was within earshot of one of the first battles employing blacks in combat: the heroic assault on the Confederate Fort Wagner, South Carolina, in July of 1863. It was here that the Massachusetts 54th, the first regiment of free Northern blacks, led by Tubman's friend Robert Gould Shaw,

demonstrated before the eyes of the nation the courage and commitment of black soldiers. It was probably this battle Tubman was describing in her dramatic words: "And then we saw the lightning, and that was the guns; and then we heard the thunder, and that was the big guns; and then we heard the rain falling, and that was the drops of blood falling; and when we came to get in the

crops, it was dead men that we reaped." From then on black soldiers were thrown into the fighting on all fronts, tipping the balance of power for the ultimate Northern victory against the slavocracy.

Fort Wagner was quite near to Port Royal, South Carolina, where Tubman spent most of the war years working for the Union Army. One of the earliest

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TROTSKYIST LEAGUE OF CANADA

Toronto

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Union victories had liberated the lush Sea Islands from the slaveholders; from here the Union Army ran its Department of the South. Control of the port allowed Union gunboats to patrol the coastline from Savannah to Charleston and begin a blockade of Confederate shipping, cutting off trade between the cotton South and the textile merchants of Great Britain. Fugitive slaves and freedmen flocked to the protection of the Union Army. Abolitionists set up schools to teach the blacks, young and old, to read and write.

Here Tubman worked in the army's service in many capacities. Her authority as the "Moses" of the Underground Railroad was enormously important in reassuring the freedmen of the trustworthiness of the Yankees. As a nurse she first ministered predominantly to the blacks suffering from malnutrition. Later she nursed both black and white soldiers, going from camp to camp where men were dying of dysentery, smallpox and malaria. She set up a laundry and taught women to earn a living, while supporting herself by baking pies and brewing root beer at night after her hard day's labor.

Tubman's outstanding contribution to the war was as a Union spy and scout. General Hunter, the commander at Port Royal, recognized her expertise, tempered by her years in the Underground Railroad; under him Tubman organized a scouting service of black scouts and

river pilots who surveyed and patrolled the Combahee River area in South Carolina.

In this capacity she was integral to a celebrated military action on the Combahee on 2 June 1863. Three ships under the command of Colonel James Montgomery, a veteran of the guerrilla battles in Kansas and a trusted comrade of John Brown, raided deep into South Carolina in a blow pointing forward to Sherman's march on Georgia. The *Boston Commonwealth* described the battle:

"Col. Montgomery and his gallant band of 300 black soldiers, *under the guidance of a black woman*, dashed into the enemy's country, struck a bold and effective blow, destroying millions of dollars worth of commissary stores, cotton and lordly dwellings, and striking terror into the heart of rebellion, brought off near 800 slaves and thousands of dollars worth of property, without losing a man or receiving a scratch."

The liberated slaves were brought back to Port Royal, where the able-bodied men among them were inducted into Montgomery's regiment.

Reconstruction Betrayed

At the war's end in 1865, over 600,000 Americans lay dead—almost equal to the number of American deaths in all the rest of the nation's wars combined. It took this bloody conflagration to resolve two key questions in American

history: the Civil War forged a loose confederation of individual states into a modern nation. And underlying this question of political power lay the conflict between slavery and capitalism. The black question is the linchpin of American history.

Northern industrialism, unfettered at long last from the opposition of the slaveholders, wasted no time. In 1869, the transcontinental railroad was completed. A federal protective tariff fostered the growth of domestic industry. The Homestead Act of 1862 provided for the free-soil colonization of the vast territories of the West.

But in 1865 the question of what position the newly liberated slaves should occupy in American society cried out for an answer. The initial conciliationist policy of the federal government under Andrew Johnson was strenuously opposed by the Radical Republicans under the leadership of Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner. Congressional legislation provided for full political equality for blacks: the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution are the legal codification of the gains of the Civil War. Slavery was wiped from the American Constitution, and blacks were made full citizens by law. The 15th Amendment, as well as the Civil Rights Act of 1866, was passed to provide federal protection of blacks against Southern counterrevolutionary violence. Black rights were enforced at riflepoint by the interracial Union Army.

But the foundation upon which black equality must rest was never laid: only confiscation of the huge plantation holdings of the ex-slaveowners and their distribution among the ex-slaves would have laid the economic basis without which "equality" remained a legal formality. Having completed their revolution against slavery—the last great bourgeois revolution—the Northern capitalists turned their backs on the blacks. Although they may have been opposed to property in human flesh, the robber barons of the late 19th century allied with Southern landholders for private property in the means of production. Even the most basic of political rights, the right to vote, was denied to all women at this time, both black and white. The capitalist reaction flowed from the inherent inability of a system based on private ownership of the means of production to eliminate scarcity, the economic source of all social inequality. Only abolition of private property will remove the social roots of racial and sexual oppression.



Schomburg Collection



Valentine Museum, Richmond

"You wouldn't think that after I served the flag so faithfully I should come to want in its folds," Harriet Tubman commented scornfully late in life. Radical Reconstruction attempted to carry out liberating goals of Civil War, including building schools for black children, but was destroyed through political counterrevolution, leaving blacks impoverished and defenseless.

Workers Vanguard



**Finish the Civil War!
Spartacist League-
initiated Labor/Black
Mobilization of over
5,000, based on support
from black unionists,
stopped KKK march/
provocation in
Washington, D.C.,
27 November 1982.**

Radical Reconstruction was destroyed in a political counterrevolution which stripped blacks of their newly won economic and political rights. Nightriding race-terrorists intimidated and murdered the freedmen; the Ku Klux Klan was founded shortly after the war by ex-Confederate officers. The Compromise of 1877 codified the rollback of Reconstruction: the Republican Party bought the presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes in exchange for the removal of Union troops from the South. Over the years a new form of rural repression developed to replace the slave plantations. The Jim Crow system of segregation and disenfranchisement bound the liberated slaves to poverty and oppression as landless sharecroppers.

The betrayal of the struggle for black freedom was certainly experienced by Harriet Tubman. At the war's end, almost 50 years old, she was at last able to head for her home in Auburn, New York. Exhausted by her years of labor, subject to increasing bouts of sickness, and with family members looking to her for support, her active political life was essentially over. En route North she was beaten by a train conductor who ridiculed her Union pass entitling her to free transportation as an army veteran. She was thrown into the baggage car, badly hurt and humiliated by this racist and sexist attack. She suffered from the effects of this injury for years. Then began a decades-long battle for the pension to which her three years of war service entitled her. Tubman commented scornfully, "You wouldn't think that after I served the flag so faithfully I should come to want in its folds." She did not receive a penny until after the death of her second husband, Nelson Davis, in 1888, when she was awarded \$8 a month. In 1899, when she was

nearly 80 years old, the government made some recognition of her service to the Union. She received a full pension, much of which she used to establish a home, named in honor of John Brown, for indigent elderly blacks. Harriet Tubman died in 1913, over 90 years old.

Finish the Civil War!

At the time of Lincoln's re-election in 1864, the International Workingmen's Association, of which Karl Marx was a leading member, sent the president a letter of congratulation:

"From the commencement of the titanic American strife the workingmen of Europe felt instinctively that the star-spangled banner carried the destiny of their class.... When an oligarchy of 300,000 slaveholders dared to inscribe, for the first time in the annals of the world, 'slavery' on the banner of armed revolt; when on the very spots where hardly a century ago the idea of one great democratic republic had first sprung up, whence the first Declaration of the Rights of Man was issued, and the first impulse given to the European revolution of the eighteenth century;... then the working classes of Europe understood at once... that the slaveholders' rebellion was to sound the tocsin for a general holy crusade of property against labor...."

But the stars and stripes, the proud banner of the Civil War, has long since become mired in the filth of racism and imperialist war. Only the working class, under revolutionary socialist leadership, can lead mankind out of the putrid decay that is capitalist society today.

Marx said, "Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded." The destruction of slavery signaled the birth of the American labor movement, the rise of unions and agitation for the eight-hour day. Blacks today play a strategic role in the American working class. Over the years mass migration from the rural South

into the cities, both North and South, has transformed the black population from a largely rural, agricultural layer into an urban, industrial group. As an oppressed race-color caste integrated at the bottom of the U.S. economy, blacks suffer from capitalist exploitation compounded with vicious racial oppression—for them, the "American dream" is a nightmare! In precise Marxist terms black people are the reserve army of the unemployed, last hired, first fired, a crucial economic component of the boom/bust cycle of the capitalist mode of production. Thus Marx's words are all too true today: the fight for black liberation is the fight for the emancipation of all working people. It is the race question—the poison of racism—that keeps the American working class divided. As long as the labor movement does not take up the struggle of black people, there will be no struggle for any emancipation—just as the Civil War could not be won without the freeing and arming of the slaves.

Today the oppressed and exploited must look to the red banner of socialist revolution for their liberation. The Spartacist League raises the slogans, "Finish the Civil War! Forward to the Third American Revolution!" to express the historic tasks which fall to the revolutionary party. A workers party as the tribune of the people will fight for the interests of all the oppressed. Liberation for blacks and women can be won only by a workers government which will smash the capitalist system and reorganize society on the basis of a planned socialist economy. Key leadership in the revolutionary struggle will be provided by the Harriet Tubmans and Frederick Douglasses of our time. We honor these great black leaders for their role in bringing the day of liberation one giant step closer. ■

The Freedmen's Fight for Education

Breaking the Chains of Slavery



Library of Congress

New England schoolteachers stand behind their pupils—black troops, shown here with spelling books. Literacy was prized weapon of former slaves in struggle for their freedom.

The fight for knowledge and culture has always been a hallmark of struggles by the oppressed for social emancipation, for one must know the world in order to change it. In the pre-Civil War South, black chattel slaves who dared to learn to read met the lash of their masters' whips; those who dared to teach them suffered imprisonment or worse at the hands of lynch mobs. Before the 19th century, only South Carolina and Georgia forbade the teaching of blacks. But when the lessons of the slave uprisings in the Western Hemisphere sank in—particularly the successful Haitian Revolution which achieved independence in 1804, the Gabriel Prosser (1800) and Denmark Vesey (1822) insurrectionary conspiracies, and the Nat Turner revolt (1831), all of which were led by literate blacks—the American slaveowners passed laws in all states

south of the Mason-Dixon line making it a crime to teach a slave to read or write. For Frederick Douglass, who fought his way out of slavery and became a political leader of the radical left wing of the abolitionist movement, there was no greater motivation to educate himself, no matter what the cost:

“Very well,” thought I. “Knowledge unfits a child to be a slave.” I instinctively assented to the proposition, and from that moment I understood the direct pathway from slavery to freedom.”

—*Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1962)

One of the most profound gains resulting from the defeat of the slavocracy in the Civil War was the establishment of a system of public education for all. It's an indictment of this decaying capitalist society that America's rulers

have let public education go completely to hell. Particularly for black youth, the reactionary climate of the Reagan years has meant a dramatic rise in racist attacks—including “Up North” at traditionally liberal college campuses—and an enforced *resegregation* of education at every level. More than 20 years after the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision overturned *separate and unequal* education, busing for school integration is a dead letter—killed by liberal politicians in Congress abetted by racist mobs in the streets.

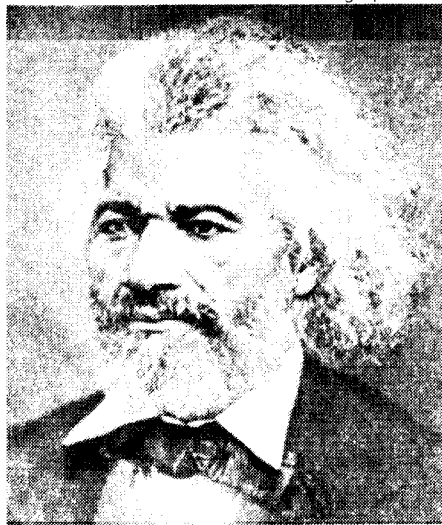
In the last decade, federal grants and scholarships have dropped 62 percent, resulting in a huge drop in black enrollment in colleges even while the number of black high school graduates is rising. At so-called integrated colleges, blacks are fast becoming missing persons: the more fortunate enrolling in historically



Young Spartacus



Library of Congress



Historical Pictures Service

Top: Spartacists protest attack on black students at Columbia U., spring 1987. Our Civil War heroes: John Brown (left), whose Harpers Ferry raid was opening shot of war against slavery; Frederick Douglass (right), leading black abolitionist.

inferior black colleges, the less fortunate facing a "life" of unemployment on the mean streets or serving as imperialism's cannon fodder in the military. Even the most basic democratic struggle like integrating the schools in this country requires a revolutionary fight—a fight to fulfill the promise of black freedom by *finishing the Civil War*.

The Cartridge Box and the Spelling Book

When the Civil War began in 1861, the federal government was initially uncommitted on the status of blacks behind Union lines, and hence made no provisions for the education of blacks they degradingly called the "contraband

of war." But radical abolitionists and private freedmen's aid societies took up this fight, sending thousands of teachers south to plant schools wherever they could in Union-occupied territory. The freedmen's schools educated an estimated 200,000 blacks *during the war* with a staff of brave New England schoolteachers and freed blacks, who comprised some 20 percent of the teachers in the 1860s. Anywhere blacks could find a place to meet and someone to teach them, they went. In Savannah, the Bryant Slave Mart became a school; the whips and handcuffs found on the premises became museum pieces. A slave pen in New Orleans became the Frederick Douglass school, with the

auction block converted to use as a globe stand.

In 1863, the vacillating Lincoln administration finally recognized the need to use black troops and unleash what Douglass called the "Black Phalanx" to win the war against the slaveholders. Freedmen were recruited to the Union Army by the tens of thousands. The commanders of these black regiments, many of them dedicated abolitionists like Robert Shaw and Thomas Higginson, recognized the importance of helping their troops break out of a condition of enforced ignorance. Military necessity also dictated that at least some black soldiers be taught to read and write, facilitating efficient running of the regiments. In some cases, the fight for literacy was put on a par with military training. The commander of a Kentucky black regiment issued the following order:

"Instead of drills, a school will be held in each company: The company commanders will find the men of their companies who are sufficiently instructed to teach their comrades, and will see that lessons are properly taught, and that the men give their attention.... The best way to win the respect of all, and to render themselves worthy of the right which Freedom confers, is for every man to acquire the best Education he can. Let it be deemed a disgrace for any man, in this Regiment, to leave the service without, at least knowing how to read. Every facility will be given in carrying out this important work."

—*Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867* (1982)

The black troops learned their lessons with the same alacrity as they learned to load and fire their weapons. As the chaplain of a Louisiana black regiment wrote to his division commander:

"The attendance of the men has been as regular as was consistent with the performance of their military duties, and they have made rapid progress in learning to read and write.

"I am sure that I never witnessed greater eagerness for study; and all, who have examined the writing books and listened to the recitations in the schools, have expressed their astonishment and admiration. A majority of the men seem to regard their books as an indispensable portion of their equipments, and the cartridge box and spelling book are attached to the same belt."

Blood, Iron and Freedom

The victory of the Union Army in the Civil War opened the road for education—North as well as South. The South had no public school system, not even for whites. The slavocracy itself barely knew the "three R's" and op-

posed educating white laborers for fear it would make their exploitation more difficult. This is just another indication of the extreme social backwardness of the antebellum South and how the yoke of slavery oppressed all the working masses.

Beginning in 1865, when General Oliver O. Howard (who had marched with Sherman from Atlanta to the sea) took charge of the Freedmen's Bureau, some semblance of order was established out of the fast-growing educational system in the South under joint private and public sponsorship. The Bureau provided funds for the construction of schools, while various other religious and benevolent societies were encouraged to pay the salaries of the teachers. Of the new battle against the defeated slaveholders, General Howard wrote:

"Yet the ruling classes among the Southern whites were deeply offended. They said at first: 'If the Yankees are allowed to educate the negroes, as they are now doing, the next thing will be to let them vote.' No one can describe the odium that awaited the excellent, self-denying teachers of freedmen in those days. Our first official summary of these schools declared that 'doubtless the treatment to which they, the teachers, have been subjected is due in part to the feelings engendered by the war, but it is mostly attributable to prejudice against educating the blacks, and the belief that the teachers are fostering social equality.'"

The New England schoolmarm who came south faced deadly terror from the



1917 October Revolution brought literacy to Russian masses. Bolshevik poster reads: "He who is illiterate is like a blind man."



NY Public Library

Democratic Party/Klan terror: ex-Confederate soldiers burn down black school in Memphis, 1866.

terrorist Ku Klux Klan. The Klan operated as the armed auxiliary of the Democratic Party, the so-called "Redeemers" who sought unchallenged white-supremacist rule and viewed black schools as a particular threat to their aims. Scores of schoolhouses were burned to the ground, teachers were ostracized, maimed and even murdered. A New Orleans newspaper summed up the trials of these courageous teachers saying, "The record of the teachers of the first colored schools in Louisiana will be one of honor and blood."

The passage of the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 by Congress mandated the military occupation of the ex-Confederate states and provided for universal common-school education. Blacks who served in the Union Army were among the principal leaders of Reconstruction governments and fought tenaciously against segregation. Robert Smalls, who earned fame for seizing the *Planter*, the Confederate flagship he delivered to the Union Navy, was elected to South Carolina's new government and won legislation mandating desegregated schools in the state. But when the first black student entered the University of South Carolina, the teachers resigned and the entire student body left the school! When the collection of a general tax for schools was suspended in Louisiana, blacks re-

sponded with a 30-foot-long petition representing 10,000 signatures, yet received no redress. The widespread and violent opposition to "race-mixing" ensured that the majority of Southern schools were segregated, and without exception the black schools were inferior.

Though abolitionists opposed the heinous institution of slavery, securing full equality for blacks was seen by many as another matter entirely. William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* denounced those radical egalitarians who would "inflame the minds of our working classes against the more opulent." Already prior to the Civil War systematic segregation of blacks had evolved in the North, where the fight against the color line was waged as well. Radical abolitionist Charles Sumner fought in every Congressional session from 1870 until his death against Jim Crow, what he termed "the last tinge of slavery." Civil War hero Colonel Higginson was unceremoniously ejected from a local school board in 1869 for demanding an end to segregated schools in Rhode Island.

In 1872, Frederick Douglass argued the case for integration powerfully, citing the basis for unity of poor whites and blacks against their common enemy, the white ruling class:

"Throughout the South all the schools should be mixed. From our observations during a trip to the South we are



Workers Vanguard

Norfolk 1983: Union power marched in defense of busing. Jesse Jackson, black shill for Dixiecrats, told marchers: "I'm not marching for busing, I'm marching for voter registration." Racist Supreme Court axed Norfolk busing in 1986.

convinced that the interests of the poor whites and the colored people are identical. Both are ignorant, and both are the tools of designing educated white men; and the poor whites are more particularly used to further schemes opposed to their own best interests. In that section everything that will bring the poor white man and the colored man closer together should be done; they should be taught to make common cause against the rich land-holders of the South who never regarded a poor white man of as much importance as they did slaves. . . . Now in the South the poor white man is taught that he is better than the black man, and not as good as the 250,000 slaveholders of former days; the result is that the slaveholders command the poor white man to murder the black man, to burn down his school-houses, and to in every conceivable manner maltreat him, and the command is obeyed. This tends to make the ex-slaveholder more powerful, and is of no good to the poor white who is really as much despised as the Negro. The cunning ex-slaveholder sets those who should be his enemies to fighting each other and thus diverts attention from himself. Educate the colored children and white children together in your day and night schools throughout the South, and they will learn to know each other better, and be better able to cooperate for mutual benefit."

Betrayal of Black Freedom Struggle

The withdrawal of Union troops with the Compromise of 1877 made clear that

Northern capital was interested in consolidating the economic advantages of their victory over the Confederacy, not in black rights. Left defenseless before their former owners, blacks were driven out of government and off their land as Reconstruction regimes were smashed by racist terror. In this period of dark reaction, Booker T. Washington emerged as the voice of accommodation and acceptance of the rising tide of racist violence and Jim Crow institutions. The ideological granddaddy of today's peddlers of bogus "black capitalism" and "self-help" schemes like Jesse Jackson (and Louis Farrakhan), Washington decried Reconstruction, *blaming black people for their own oppression*—and the Redeemers loved him for it.

Booker T. Washington's influence ascended in direct proportion to segregation and disfranchisement of blacks and the decline in Northern philanthropy for education. Deeming his own people "unfit" for "high-minded" professions, Washington founded the Tuskegee Institute in 1881 to teach blacks only manual and domestic trades. His program for menial "schooling" for a "subordinate" race coincided exactly with the period in which black workers were forced out of the skilled trades. Many graduates of Tuskegee Institute could find employment only as teachers

in Washington's school. Embracing racist segregation, Washington believed that "in all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers." He groveled that the "wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extreme folly." However, Washington made damn sure that *he* moved with ease in white circles and that *his* children got a decent liberal arts education!

Finish the Civil War!

Booker T. Washington's political heirs are the product of the *defeat* of Reconstruction—and the defeat of the liberal-led civil rights movement which attempted to fulfill the promise of black equality a century after the Civil War. With the dead-end strategy of appealing to the capitalist courts and troops to strike down formal, *de jure* inequality in the Jim Crow South, the civil rights movement of the 1960s was defeated when it came north, unable to address the *de facto* segregation of blacks trapped in the ghettos. Here there were no laws forbidding blacks to eat at the same lunch counters with whites—except the laws of capitalist exploitation which keep blacks as a "last hired, first fired" doubly oppressed race-color caste.

The grinding poverty, mass unemployment and rampant cop terror endemic to Northern ghettos could not be solved with a new "civil rights" bill but required an integrated, labor-centered struggle against the capitalist system. In the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks, the Spartacist League fights for working-class rule, to *finish the Civil War* and achieve black emancipation through *revolutionary integration* into a socialist society. November 27, 1982 provided a taste of this power, when black and red came together in a 5,000-strong Labor/Black Mobilization initiated by the Spartacist League and stopped the KKK terrorists from marching through the nation's capital. As we wrote then (*WV* No. 319, 10 December 1982):

"Today, unlike the period of Reconstruction, the material conditions for posing the question of political power in class terms have fully matured. Blacks are still segregated at the bottom of American society, but are integrated into its economy, especially in the strategic sectors of the industrial proletariat. The key to social revolution in this country is the united struggle of black and white workers led by a multiracial vanguard party. And there is no road to eliminating the special oppression of black people other than through the working-class conquest of power." ■

Claude McKay: From Harlem to Moscow

Blacks and Bolsheviks

The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution was an inspiration to workers and the oppressed throughout the world, and the United States was no exception. Thousands of fighters for black freedom were eventually cohered by the authority of the Russian Revolution and the Communist Party claiming to represent it. In 1922, Claude McKay, the Jamaican-born militant black poet who adopted America as his home and became one of the premier figures in the Harlem Renaissance, journeyed to the Soviet Union, about which he later wrote:

"In Russia I was alertly aware that it was something different from anything that ever was, that officially it was the highest privilege I could have in the world, to be shown the inside working of the greatest social experiment in the history of civilization. I was fired and uplifted by the thundering mass movement of the people, their boisterous surging forward, with their heads held high, their arms outstretched in an eager quest for more light, more air, more space, more glory, more nourishment and comfort for the millions of the masses."

—*A Long Way From Home*
(1937)

McKay went to the Soviet Union not as a Communist but as a radical writer and champion of the Russian Revolution. When McKay arrived in Moscow he was befriended by Comintern leaders, especially Trotsky, and met an old friend from New York, the Japanese Marxist Sen Katayama. Katayama had spent a number of years in the U.S. and had studied the black question closely, including attending Fisk University in Nashville. McKay was invited as a "special delegate" to the Fourth Congress of the Communist International where his profound sense of American social reality, more acute than that of many official delegates, found expression in his speech to the Congress which we reprint below.

At the Congress, McKay had a number of run-ins with American delegates. The early Communist movement in the U.S. was shot through with factionalism and sectarian vices. A majority of the American delegates argued that the party ought to organize "underground," as the Bolsheviks had done under tsarist absolutism in Russia,



American black poet Claude McKay addresses Fourth Congress of Communist International in Moscow, 1922.

despite the existence in America of bourgeois-democratic rights outside of the South. McKay understood that Communist Party work in the South would be "illegal," but told the American delegation that the party should take advantage of the conditions of legality that existed elsewhere. Inadvertently, McKay had aligned himself with a minority faction headed by James Cannon.

The early American Communist movement was in the main made up of foreign-language federations composed of immigrant workers unfamiliar with the black question and indifferent or even hostile to the special needs and problems of black people. It was a movement that inherited the native backwardness of American social democracy and AFL craft unionism on racial oppression. It took the direct intervention of the Bolsheviks, who embodied the experience of victorious socialist revolution in the Russian "prison house of peoples," to force the American Communists to transcend their partial, insensitive and economist understanding of the black question.

In the period of the First World War, there was a mass migration of blacks from the rural South to the cities. The black question was transformed from a primarily Southern agrarian question to the key question of the American *prole-*

tarian revolution. Blacks were brought into industry. Blacks were needed to replace white workers who had been conscripted into the army; sometimes, black workers—rejected by the Jim Crow craft unions—were recruited to act as scabs. Many blacks would flock to the anti-union pro-capitalist black nationalist Marcus Garvey.

Some American "Communists" even argued that the black masses would be mobilized by fascist reaction *against* a revolutionary mobilization of workers. They did not recognize that blacks would be among the first *targets* of a fascist movement. This was made clear during the summer of 1919 when tensions resulting from a downturn in the economy, combined with the prior mass migration of blacks to the cities, led to violence and rioting directed at blacks throughout the country. Reacting to the 1919 anti-black riots, McKay wrote the defiant "If We Must Die," his most famous poem.

Similarly, there was a good deal of worry that black soldiers would be used as shock troops against workers revolution in Europe and America. American blacks had fought in World War I, and the rest of the imperialist powers had used their black colonial subjects as cannon fodder—and they had fought well. Leon Trotsky, who was then Soviet Commissar of War, outlined in a

letter to McKay steps that had to be taken to prevent blacks from being used by the imperialists:

"The Negroes themselves must offer resistance against being so employed. Their eyes must be opened, so that they realize that when they help French imperialism to subjugate Europe, they are helping to subjugate themselves, in that they are supporting the domination of French capitalism in the African and other colonies."

Trotsky went on to demand "direct and practical action":

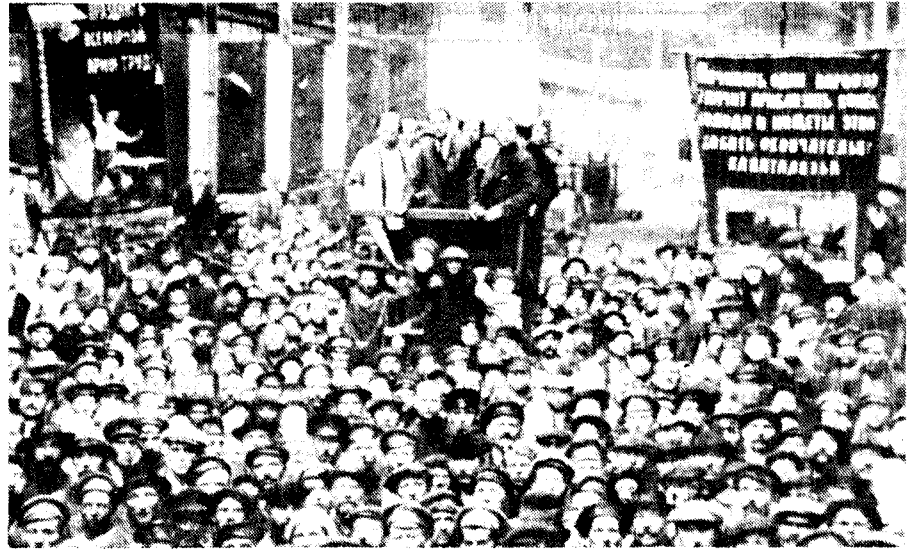
"A Communist Party confining itself to mere platonic resolutions in this matter, without exerting its utmost energies towards winning the largest possible number of enlightened Negroes for its ideas, within the shortest possible time, would not be worthy of the name of Communist Party."

—*The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol. 2

By the time of the Fourth Congress, under the prodding of the Communist International, the American Communists had begun to treat the black question seriously, though in a confused and contradictory way, and they began to recruit black cadre to their party. The most significant of these were the leaders of the African Blood Brotherhood, a militant group which had formed in response to the lynching and terrorism of 1919. The Fourth Congress established a "Negro Commission" whose "Resolutions on the Negro Question" called attention to the radicalization of American and colonial black people due to World War I. It took special note in the U.S. of the "post-war industrialization of the Negro in the North and the spirit of revolt engendered by post-war persecutions and brutalities."

Following the Fourth Congress, McKay met with top Soviet leaders. Trotsky sent him on a tour of Soviet military installations, and he was toasted by the Red Army and Navy. The finale of his visit was in Petrograd where he stood with Zinoviev and other Bolshevik leaders in reviewing the 1923 May Day celebration. Before leaving revolution-

Comrades,...I feel that my race is honored by this invitation to one of its members to speak at this Fourth Congress of the Third International. My race on this occasion is honored, not because it is different from the white race and the yellow race, but [because it] is especially a race of toilers, hewers of wood and drawers of water, that belongs to the most oppressed, exploited, and suppressed section of the working class of the world. The Third



Viktor Bulla

Workers at Putilov metal factory elect delegates to Petrograd Soviet, 1920. Bolshevik Revolution inspired workers and oppressed peoples throughout the world.

ary Russia, McKay paid it tribute in his poem, "Petrograd: May Day, 1923," which celebrates the "warrior-workers" who wrested power from "magnate, monarch, priest" and by their victory opened a new era for humanity.

McKay never became a Communist. But he continued his literary work, including his promise to write an account of his trip to the Soviet Union. It is contained in his autobiographical *A Long Way From Home*, published in 1937. This account conveys a warm sense of comradeship toward Communist leaders like Cannon, Zinoviev, Radek and Trotsky, and McKay favorably compares Trotsky's views on blacks to those of other Russian leaders.

It is ironic that McKay's account was published at the very moment that the infamous "Moscow Trials" in Russia were under way, as Stalin and his bureaucratic traitors to the revolution were retailing the most loathsome slanders against Trotsky and all the Old Bolsheviks, with the slavish Stalinized Communist Parties following along behind. The Stalinists' technique of lies reflected their betrayal of the authentic

communist program and revolutionary perspective in the service of *reformism*—in the vain hope of softening imperialism's hostility to the USSR, the CPs were to stop struggling for revolution and to form "united fronts" with sections of their own ruling classes which were said to be "progressive." In this country, for example, where the CP had gained considerable political capital among militant blacks by leading anti-racist struggles like the famous "Scottsboro Boys" case, this meant betraying blacks by becoming apologists for the "New Deal" Democratic Party of FDR. It is our responsibility to reforge real communist parties and a revolutionary International to complete the task begun 70 years ago by the Bolshevik Revolution: the liberation of mankind from capitalist exploitation and oppression.

It is with pride and pleasure that we celebrate Claude McKay, a voice of militant black protest. We reprint below slightly abridged McKay's Fourth Congress "Report on the Negro Question," from *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 3 (5 January 1923).

International stands for the emancipation of all the workers of the world, regardless of race or color, and this stand of the Third International is not merely on paper like the Fifteenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America. It is a real thing.

The Negro race in the economic life of the world today occupies a very peculiar position. In every country where the Whites and Blacks must work together

the capitalists have set the one against the other. It would seem at the present day that the international bourgeoisie would use the Negro race as their trump card in their fight against the world revolution. Great Britain has her Negro regiments in the colonies and she has demonstrated what she can do with her Negro soldiers by the use that she made of them during the late War. The revolution in England is very far away because of the highly organized exploi-

Schomburg Collection

1917 march in
Harlem protests
East St. Louis
race riot.



tation of the subject peoples of the British Empire. In Europe, we find that France had a Negro army of over 300,000 and that to carry out their policy of imperial domination in Europe the French are going to use their Negro minions.

In America we have the same situation. The Northern bourgeoisie knows how well the Negro soldiers fought for their own emancipation, although illiterate and untrained, during the Civil War. They also remember how well the Negro soldiers fought in the Spanish-American War under Theodore Roosevelt. They know that in the last war over 400,000 Negroes who were mobilized gave a very good account of themselves,

and that, besides fighting for the capitalists, they also put up a very good fight for themselves on returning to America when they fought the white mobs in Chicago, St. Louis and Washington.

But more than the fact that the American capitalists are using Negro soldiers in their fight against the interests of labor is the fact that the American capitalists are setting out to mobilize the entire black race of America for the purpose of fighting organized labor. The situation in America today is terrible and fraught with grave dangers. It is much uglier and more terrible than was the condition of the peasants and Jews of Russia under the Tzar. It is so ugly and terrible that very few people in America are willing to face it. The reformist bourgeoisie have been carrying on the battle against discrimination and racial prejudice in America. The Socialists and Communists have fought very shy of it because there is a great element of prejudice among the Socialists and Communists of America. They are not willing to face the Negro question. In associating with the comrades of America I have found demonstrations of prejudice on the various occasions when the White and Black comrades had to get together: and this is the greatest difficulty that the Communists of America have got to overcome—the fact that they first have got to emancipate themselves from the ideas they entertain towards the Negroes before they can be able to reach the Negroes with any kind of radical propaganda. However, regarding the Negroes themselves, I feel that as the subject races of other nations have come to Moscow to learn how to fight against their exploiters, the Negroes will also come to Moscow. In 1918 when the Third International published its Mani-

festos and included the part referring to the exploited colonies, there were several groups of Negro radicals in America that sent this propaganda out among their people. When in 1920 the American government started to investigate and to suppress radical propaganda among the Negroes, the small radical groups in America retaliated by publishing the fact that the Socialists stood for the emancipation of the Negroes, and that reformist America could do nothing for them. Then, I think, for the first time in American history, the American Negroes found that Karl Marx had been interested in their emancipation and had fought valiantly for it. I shall just read this extract that was taken from Karl Marx's writing at the time of the Civil War:

“When an oligarchy of 300,000 slaveholders for the first time in the annals of the world, dared to inscribe “Slavery” on the banner of armed revolt, on the very spot where hardly a century ago, the idea of one great democratic republic had first sprung up, whence the first declaration of the Rights of Man was issued, and the first impulse given to the European revolution of the eighteenth-century, when on that spot the counter-revolution cynically proclaimed property in man to be ‘the cornerstone of the new edifice’—then the working class of Europe understood at once that the slaveholders’ rebellion was to sound the tocsin for a general holy war of property against labor, and that (its) hopes of the future, even its past conquests were at stake in that tremendous conflict on the other side of the Atlantic.”

Karl Marx, who drafted the above resolution, is generally known as the father of Scientific Socialism and also of the epoch-making volume popularly known as the socialist bible, *Capital*. During the Civil War he was correspondent of the *New York Tribune*. In the company of Richard Cobden, Charles Bradlaugh,

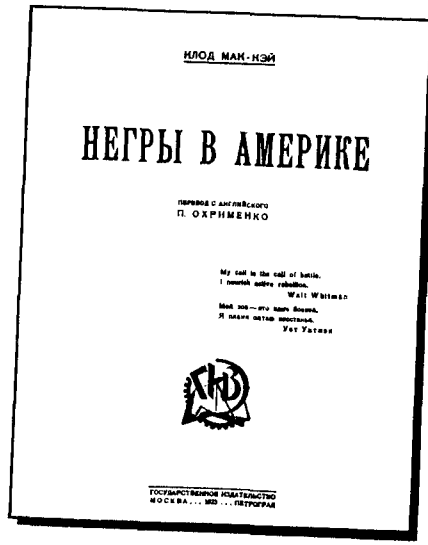


Robert Minor

Cover of radical journal *The Masses* (1915), depicting blacks tortured on crosses, stirred McKay: “It haunted me for a long time.”



Wide World



no credit

Claude McKay's Negroes in America published in Soviet Russia in 1923.

the atheist, and John Bright, he toured England making speeches and so roused up the sentiment of the workers of that country against the Confederacy that Lord Palmerston, [the] Prime Minister, who was about to recognize the South, had to desist.

As Marx fought against chattel slavery in 1861, so are present-day socialists, his intellectual descendants, fighting wage slavery.

If the Workers party in America were really a Workers party that included Negroes it would, for instance, in the South, have to be illegal, and I would inform the American Comrades that there is a branch of the Workers party in the South, in Richmond, Virginia, that is illegal—illegal because it includes colored members. There we have a very

small group of white and colored comrades working together, and the fact that they have laws in Virginia and most of the Southern states discriminating against whites and blacks assembling together means that the Workers party in the South must be illegal. To get round these laws of Virginia, the comrades have to meet separately, according to color, and about once a month they assemble behind closed doors.

This is just an indication of the work that will have to be done in the South. The work among the Negroes of the South will have to be carried on by some legal propaganda organized in the North, because we find at the present time in America that the situation in the Southern States (where nine million out of ten million of the Negro population

live), is that even the liberal bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie among the Negroes cannot get their own papers of a reformist propaganda type into the South on account of the laws that there discriminate against them.

The fact is that it is really only in the Southern States that there is any real suppression of opinion. No suppression of opinion exists in the Northern states in the way it exists in the South. In the Northern states special laws are made for special occasions—as those against Communists and Socialists during the War—but in the South we find laws that have existed for fifty years, under which the Negroes cannot meet to talk about their grievances. The white people who are interested in their cause cannot go and speak to them. If we send white comrades into the South they are generally ordered out by the Southern oligarchy and if they do not leave they are generally whipped, tarred and feathered; and if we send black comrades into the South they generally won't be able to get out again—they will be lynched and burned at the stake.

I hope that as a symbol that the Negroes of the world will not be used by the international bourgeoisie in the final conflicts against the World Revolution, that as a challenge to the international bourgeoisie, who have an understanding of the Negro question, we shall soon see a few Negro soldiers in the finest, bravest, and cleanest fighting forces in the world—the Red Army and Navy of Russia—fighting not only for their own emancipation, but also for the emancipation of all the working class of the whole world. ■

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The Killing Floor—A Review



Chicago Historical Society



William Loren Katz Collection

White racists stone defenseless black to death (left). Government troops occupy the Black Belt.

Chicago 1919: Racism and Union-Busting

In July 1919 Chicago erupted in one of the most violent explosions of racist terror in the history of the United States. Organized and spurred on by white neighborhood gangs—so-called “athletic clubs”—racist mobs rampaged through the streets. Blacks were ambushed as they walked to work, dragged from streetcars, chased through the streets, cornered in alleys. They were shot and stabbed, beaten and clubbed to death. The cops joined in the carnage: black victims of white mobs were arrested and beaten while their attackers went free; seven blacks were gunned down by the racists in blue. Outraged blacks, many of them decorated veterans of World War I, struck back. In many cases this retaliation was against marauding white racists who rode through the South Side Black Belt shooting at random pedestrians. But often, innocent whites were the victims. After five days, 23 blacks and 15 whites were dead. Over 500 people were seriously injured, 342 of them black.

The Chicago race riot came in the midst of a massive postwar upsurge of labor militancy and radicalism. Historian William M. Tuttle, Jr.’s account of the events, *Race Riot* (New York, 1970) is appropriately subtitled, “Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919.” The Russian Revolution, then in its second year, inspired proletarian fighters throughout the world. It was the year of the Seattle general strike and the Great Steel Strike. That fall, Seattle dockers refused to handle a shipment of guns destined for the White Guard counter-revolutionary armies fighting to overthrow the fledgling Soviet workers state. Close to four million workers were on strike. In Tuttle’s book the Chicago labor movement is described as “more closely organized, more self-conscious, more advanced in its views...than in any other American city.” But however militant, Chicago unions at best ignored the hideous oppression and exploitation of newly industrialized black workers who were segregated into the most

menial, backbreaking jobs and increasingly the target of lynch mobs.

Tuttle was a consultant for the powerful and moving public television film *The Killing Floor*, which is based on the actual participants and documented events of the drive to organize Chicago’s then-enormous packinghouse industry. The 1919 race riot directly shattered this organizing drive. As Tuttle points out in *Race Riot*: “It is not coincidental that the summer of 1919 also marked the beginning of the xenophobic and hysterically anti-radical ‘Red Scare.’ Both phenomena were the ugly offspring of some of the same unrest....” Across the country racist terror was the spearhead for reaction down the line: the robber barons were riding high and membership of the overwhelmingly white unions nationally fell to one-fifth the pre-1919 level. Karl Marx’s dictum was written in blood and fire: “Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded.”

The Killing Floor opens with footage



Jim Taylor



USDA

The Killing Floor shows militants Custer and Bremmer (left) in fight to unionize black and white stockyard workers.

of U.S. troops being sent off to join in the imperialist carnage of World War I. It then flashes to the central character, Frank Custer, a black sharecropper from Mississippi preparing to move to Chicago. Custer says to himself: "If it wasn't for the war I probably would have never left the South and come to the 'Promised Land,' that's what we called it." In the four decades since the last Union troops were pulled out of the South in 1877, blacks had been the victims of Jim Crow segregation and Ku Klux Klan terror. In the North there was little chance of escaping poverty and destitution. Blacks were barred from jobs in the growing industries—except when they were brought in as strike-breakers. But with the onset of WW I the cheap supply of immigrant labor from Europe was cut off and blacks were actively recruited to industry by labor agents sent to the South.

Between 1916 and 1918 close to half a million blacks moved to the North, over 50,000 of them to Chicago. *The Killing Floor* portrays the optimism of Custer and his friend Thomas when they arrive in Chicago and get jobs in the stockyards paying \$2 a day, more than they ever dreamed possible in the South. Later, they are completely taken aback when two white soldiers reflexively step off the sidewalk to go around them. Says Custer, "I was a free man in Chicago. They could get off the streets for me now." But it is not long until Custer is introduced to the racist realities of Chicago's streets and the packinghouse industry. Segregated in the Black Belt ghetto he is surrounded on all sides by discrimination. Other black workers warn Custer of the racist gangs in the all-white neighborhoods he

has to walk through to get to the stockyards. On the killing floor he is consigned to mopping up pools of blood.

The stockyard bosses had earlier fanned the flames of white racism by bringing in blacks to break a stockyard strike in 1904. The AFL labor leaders only added fuel to the fire. Lily-white job trusts, AFL craft unions in the stockyards, not only did nothing to organize black workers but in most cases actively kept them from joining, either by racist union constitutions or by custom. The racism of the white labor aristocracy was captured by AFL president Samuel Gompers who wrote in 1905: "If the colored man continues to lend himself to the work of tearing down

what the white man has built up, a race hatred far worse than any ever known will result. Caucasian civilization will serve notice that its uplifting process is not to be interfered with in any way."

During World War I, the stockyards were literally the killing floor for labor which was driven at a murderous pace to meet the profiteering meat packers' contract of 1,000 train carloads of meat a day for the government. In 1917 the Stockyards Labor Council (SLC) was founded to unite the AFL unions in the stockyards in an unprecedented mass organizing campaign. It was initiated by William Z. Foster and led by John Fitzpatrick, president of the Chicago Federation of Labor. Foster, who would go on to join the Communist Party and later become its national chairman, had split from the IWW in favor of his strategy to "bore from within" the AFL. Fitzpatrick, who opposed U.S. entry into the war and called himself a friend of the Russian Revolution, was considered a maverick among AFL officialdom.

The black question confronted the SLC from day one. Blacks comprised over 25 percent of the workforce and in some of the smaller packinghouses were a majority. The union leaders appealed to Gompers for a "solution" to organizing blacks in the stockyards; Gompers "resolved" the problem by telling them to create separate all-black locals! The SLC leadership called for organizing on a "neighborhood" basis, but it amounted to Jim Crow unionism. Local 651, based in the Second Ward, was all black and represented 90 percent of all blacks organized in the yards. As Philip Foner notes in his book *Organized Labor and the Black Worker* (New York, 1974):



Chicago Historical Society

Blacks used by stockyard bosses to break 1904 strike.

"Secretary Johnstone of the Stockyards Labor Council apologized to the black packinghouse workers for the necessity of organizing blacks into separate unions. But the blacks were tired of such explanations, which only confirmed their belief that white unionists would permit racist prejudices to stand in the way even of their own interests."

Jack Johnstone would also go on to become a leader of the Communist Party. But the attitude of even the radical leadership of the SLC toward black oppression reflected the prevailing views of the early socialist movement. As Socialist Party leader Eugene Debs described it: "We have nothing special to offer the Negro..." As James P. Cannon, a former "Wobbly" and CP leader who went on to become the founder of American Trotskyism, pointed out: "the predominant AFL unions, with only a few exceptions, were lily-white job trusts. They also had nothing special to offer the Negroes; nothing at all, in fact" ("The Russian Revolution and the American Negro Movement," in *The First Ten Years of American Communism*, 1962). It was the impact of the 1917 Russian Revolution, Cannon wrote, thundering "its demand throughout the world for freedom and equality for all national minorities and all races," which brought the struggle for black freedom to the forefront.

Organizing the Killing Floor

The stockyards organizing drive met with rapid-fire success among the



B.W. Huebsch, Inc.

Organizers of 1919 packinghouse union drive: John Fitzpatrick (left), William Z. Foster (later a leader of Communist Party).



National Archives

Black soldiers, decorated by France for their valor, return from World War I wearing the Croix de Guerre.

unskilled non-English-speaking immigrants—Lithuanians, Poles, Russian Jews. Undoubtedly many were members of the Socialist Party's foreign-language federations, radicalized by the 1917 Russian Revolution. Within six months 20,000 members had been signed up. In *The Killing Floor*, when initially confronted by union organizers, Custer says, "I come up here to make a living. I ain't getting in no white man's fight." Later, however, in one of the most powerful scenes in the movie, Custer's white coworker Bill Bremmer fights to teach him the butcher trade, which was the exclusive domain of white native-born Americans. When a foreman tries to stop Bremmer, the rest of the workers on the floor stand with their arms folded across their chests and refuse to work. The foreman backs down and Custer is won to the union.

Backed by the power of his class brothers on the shopfloor, Custer becomes a skilled worker. Later, in a touching incident, reflecting the power of integrated class struggle to break down racial and national antagonisms in the workforce, Custer's Polish friend Dan gives him a small gift for Christmas. However, while most Northern-born blacks joined the union, only 25 percent of the black workers signed up. And the power of labor united was never brought to bear in struggle against the Big Five meatpacking companies. In

1918 when the industry was running at full blast and unemployment was at its lowest ebb, a strike of black and white workers could have brought the packers to their knees. But the union leadership shackled the workers to a no-strike arbitration agreement. The SLC did not even win union recognition.

At a union celebration party in *The Killing Floor* Fitzpatrick announces, "The government got this for us in recognition of our work for the boys overseas." Reflecting the labor shortage at the time, government arbitrator Judge Samuel Alschuler granted an eight-hour day and wage increase to all stockyard workers. But by tying the union to the war aims of U.S. imperialism the SLC had dug its own grave. Bremmer bitterly comments to Custer: "All we had to do was strike, then they would have to recognize us. But no, we opened the damn door to the government to come sneaking in.... There will be a showdown some day. It should come now when they need us."

The showdown came in the summer of 1919, and racism was the packers' most effective union-busting weapon. In the first half of the year some 2.6 million U.S. troops were demobilized, intensifying the effects of the postwar recession. Blacks were the first to lose their jobs; then the companies laid off white union men. *The Killing Floor* shows people scrounging through garbage

cans for food. Thousands stand in front of the packinghouses begging for work, among them Custer and other union organizers. The foreman yells "I ain't hiring no union troublemakers!" and Custer is incredulous that "new boys from the South" are the only ones being hired.

In the bar Custer sees his friend Thomas who has come back from the war bearing medals he won for heroism in battle. (Many blacks from Chicago were part of the 8th Illinois, a highly decorated unit the Germans had learned to fear, and the only regiment commanded wholly by blacks for much of the war.) Blacks returning from service in the "great war for democracy" justly expected that they would finally get some "democracy" at home. Instead they were met with lynch mobs and racist riots across the U.S., North and South. Every day Custer and Thomas walk to the stockyard to look for work past graffiti in the white neighborhoods reading "Niggers go home!"

When Custer is finally rehired, racism is at a fever pitch. A black company union appears on the scene warning blacks not to join a "white man's union." In the movie the packers put out a bogus leaflet in the name of the SLC declaring, "we demand an all-white union." In early July 1919, in a last-ditch effort to cut through this dangerous surge of racism, the Labor Council organized a mass integrated parade through the

IF WE MUST DIE

By Claude McKay
(1919)

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, Oh let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!

Oh, kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

Black Belt. The cops intervened at the behest of the packinghouse bosses to force blacks and whites to march separately on the grounds that an integrated march would start a race riot! The two columns met in a playground for a united rally. Here Johnstone and other union organizers appealed for black and white workers to stand together against the stockyard bosses. But it was too little, and too late.

Racist Terror and Union-Busting

On July 27, the day after the Stockyards Labor Council had finally submitted its demands to the packers, a

black teenager drowned after being stoned by a white racist in the waters off the segregated 29th Street beach. Chicago exploded in racist terror. For over a week black Chicago was trapped in the South Side ghetto. No one could get out to work, there was no food, garbage piled up on the streets threatening disease of epidemic proportions. Eventually the meatpacking companies set up food distribution centers in the black neighborhood for their employees. In *The Killing Floor*, when Custer gets to the YMCA he is confronted by a black pro-company provocateur distributing the meager food supplies, who taunts, "Where's the union?" The scene ends with black workers whom Custer had organized coming up and handing in their union pins.

When Custer's friend Bremmer comes to his home a week after the racist onslaught had begun, Custer also asks, "Why ain't no one from the union been here?" Good question, to which he receives a lame response. Nevertheless he responds to Bremmer's plea for help in stopping the packers' drive to bust the union by playing the race card, and goes to a union meeting. Homeless Lithuanians and Poles huddle in the stairwells, burned out of their tenements by arsonists the night before. When Custer goes to shake his friend Dan's hand he is slapped away as Dan yells, "You burnt down our houses!" Custer is completely taken aback. Blacks couldn't even get out of the Black Belt, much less enter the all-white "Back of the Yards" neighborhood where most of the arson occurred. In the smoke and flames that destroyed the homes of these impoverished East Europeans, many of whom were the backbone of the union organizing drive, there was the smell of a company provocation.



Atheneum

Chicago black ghetto sealed off by racist terror; troops hand out food provisions.

Custer makes a powerful appeal: "Can the packers stop this riot? No! The union's got to do it.... I am a colored man but I am a union man!" The union should have been out there long before, ensuring safe passage for black workers through the all-white neighborhoods around the yards. It would have been a simple matter then for integrated union patrols to beat some respect into a few bigoted skulls. In the riots, union defense guards mobilizing the integrated power of the thousands of workers in the packinghouse industry not only could have protected black workers and their families, they would have changed the face of 1919 Chicago...and the country. But the SLC never made the slightest move to aid or defend the black stockyard workers who were trapped in the Black Belt by racist mobs.

Jeered and threatened on his way out of the meeting, a demoralized Custer decides to go back to work in the union-busting mobilization of black workers organized by the packinghouse bosses and led by the militia. In one of the last scenes of the movie, a near-bloodbath between black and white workers outside the stockyards is averted by union organizers, who lead the white workers away from the yards. Inside, expressing the degradation and humiliation of the black workers, Custer says: "Look at us. They herded us to the slaughterhouse like cattle. When we get on the killing floor we're going to be exactly what the company wants us to be." Putting on his union pin he says, "Those men and women who just walked away, we need them, and they need us."

It was the failure of the union leadership, among the most militant and radical in the country, to defend the rights of the black workers which allowed the packers to defeat the organizing drive with racist terror. After the standoff in front of the yards, SLC leaders called a strike that lasted for four days. David Brodie, who consulted on *The Killing Floor*, wrote that "the underlying issue" was the demand that only union blacks be allowed back to work, and quotes one leader saying the men "have a right to know whether the Negroes returning to work are members in good standing of the unions" (*The Butcher Workmen* [1964]). Yet at this point, black union membership was at its lowest ebb and blacks were least inclined to join. Fitzpatrick commented, "The breach is so broad that it is almost impossible now to cement or bridge it over." It would be two decades before black and white stockyard workers were organ-

ized by the Packing House Workers Organizing Committee as part of the CIO organizing drive.

For Revolutionary Integrationism!

The Killing Floor is a stark and bitter portrayal of race and class oppression in this country and the unbreakable link between them. But it can suggest no alternative to the racism and union-busting that engulfed Chicago in the summer of 1919. Another significant omission in the film is any mention of the 1917 October Revolution which awakened the hopes and aspirations of the working and oppressed masses around the globe. Through the Communist International Lenin sought to impart to the young Communist parties

movement to expose the lie of bourgeois equality and emphasize the necessity of the social revolution which will not only liberate all workers from servitude but is also the only way to free the enslaved Negro people."

It would take a decade before the Comintern's exhortation to lead the struggle for black emancipation would be translated into action, in the (by then Stalinized) Communist Party's fight for black rights during the early 1930s, particularly around the racist frame-up of the Scottsboro Boys. Thousands of blacks were recruited, above all in Chicago. But blacks were subsequently betrayed by the CP, the defense of their rights sacrificed on the altar of the popular front in support of Roosevelt's racist Democratic Party and the war aims of U.S. imperialism.

**A company provocation?
Arsonists destroyed homes of East European workers.**



in the West the need to rally the oppressed to the banner of the proletariat. This stood in stark contrast to the social democrats who did nothing to fight racial or colonial oppression, acting as the handmaidens for their "own" imperialist rulers.

At the Comintern's Second Congress in 1920, American Communist John Reed gave a report on the black question in which he spoke of the Chicago race riot. Reed stressed:

"The Communists must not stand aloof from the Negro movement which demands their social and political equality and at the moment, at a time of the rapid growth of racial consciousness, is spreading rapidly among Negroes. The Communists must use this

In the mid-'30s, the CIO organizing drive brought thousands of blacks into the new industrial unions, many of them built by CP union organizers. But simple trade unionism and "unite and fight" rhetoric did not overcome the realities of racial oppression. Blacks were still segregated in the lowest paid unskilled work and were still targets for racist terror. As the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party wrote in 1943 when lynch mobs rode against blacks in the streets of Detroit:

"The labor leaders must do more than deplore these attacks upon the Negro people. They must do more than order their members to stay off the streets and appeal for grand jury investigations. They must summon their membership

to take determined and organized action against the instigators and organizers of these lynch mobs. The unions of Detroit could have repulsed this threat to their very existence as they repulsed General Motors in 1937 and Ford in 1941. Detroit would be far different today and the native fascists would be cowering in their holes, demoralized instead of triumphant, had the union leaders called out the veteran flying squadrons to defend the Negro people."

Only the Trotskyists of the Spartacist League can claim the Leninist banner of multiracial revolutionary struggle to win emancipation for all the exploited and oppressed.

Chicago: Segregation City USA

Almost 70 years later, Chicago remains one of the most segregated cities in the United States and blacks on the South Side are still in danger if they cross Western Avenue. Smelling the opportunity for race war in the explosive situation of black mayor Harold Washington seeking to govern "Segregation City USA," the KKK has made Chicago the staging ground for lynch mob terror. Last summer, while black and Hispanic homes were firebombed, a Klan rally in Marquette Park egged on a crowd of 3,000 white racist punks. Although itself the target of the fascist mobilizations, the Harold Washington administration has no intention of lifting a finger against the marauding racist scum. Indeed it was Washington's cops and courts who protected the fascists while beating, arresting and trying to legally lynch protesters who courageously sought to stop the KKK killers.

The way to defeat the racist terrorists in white sheets and in blue uniforms is through mobilizing the integrated power of Chicago labor. Unlike in 1919, when blacks had just established their presence in industry, today they make up over 40 percent of Chicago's population and an even greater proportion of the organized working class. In August 1985 hundreds of Chicago transit workers gave a show of this power in an integrated mobilization outside police headquarters which stopped the racist frame-up of a black bus driver charged with manslaughter in an unavoidable traffic accident. A decade earlier, integrated union defense guards from UAW Local 6 (International Harvester) set up 24-hour integrated patrols to protect the home of a black union brother in a Chicago suburb after the house was repeatedly firebombed and stoned by nightriding racists.



It took two decades for black and white workers to again unite against packinghouse bosses in the CIO organizing drive of late 1930s.

Powerful and integrated working-class action, championing the rights of every oppressed and exploited section of the population, can crush the growing fascist threat and make the streets of Chicago safe for all working people. What is desperately needed is a communist vanguard party that can draw the lessons of 1919 and carry forward the revolutionary heritage of the Russian Bolsheviks, to lead labor and the ghetto masses in the struggle for socialist revolution.

Then and now, racism and anti-communism go hand in hand. In 1919, from Mississippi to Washington, D.C. to Chicago blacks were targeted by lynch mobs and race riots. In the early 1920s, thousands of leftists were rounded up, jailed or expelled from the country in the Palmer Raids aimed at smashing the postwar proletarian upsurge.

Today in the supercharged climate of Cold War II, war on blacks, reds and labor is being brought home once again and with a vengeance. The struggle for black freedom is integrally linked to the struggle for proletarian revolution against racist American capitalism. In the introduction to our *Marxist Bulletin* No. 5 (revised), "What Strategy for Black Liberation? Trotskyism vs. Black Nationalism," the Spartacist League answers the bitter message of *The Killing Floor* with the program of revolutionary integrationism:

"...wage slavery has placed in the hands of black workers the objective conditions for successful revolt. But this revolt will be successful only if it takes

as its target the system of class exploitation, the common enemy of black and white workers. The struggle to win black activists to a proletarian perspective is intimately linked to the fight for a new, multiracial class-struggle leadership of organized labor which can transform the trade unions into a key weapon in the battle against racial oppression. Such a leadership must break the grip of the Democratic Party upon both organized labor and the black masses through the fight for working-class political independence. As black workers, the most combative element within the U.S. working class, are won to the cause and party of proletarian revolution, they will be in the front ranks of this class-struggle leadership. And it will be these black proletarian fighters who will write the finest pages of 'black history'—the struggle to smash racist, imperialist America and open the road to real freedom for all mankind." ■

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Cop Terror Stalks Black America

It was a chemically pure case of the violence against black people which permeates this racist country. It happened in the small Southern town of Hemphill, Texas but it could have been Anywhere, USA. The *New York Times* (6 January) told the chilling story:

"Early Christmas night Loyal Garner Jr. said goodbye to his wife and six children in nearby Florien, La., hopped in his pickup truck and headed with two companions to retrieve a friend's automobile just across the border in Texas.

"Two days later he was dead, his swollen, bloodied features almost unrecognizable after a night in the Sabine County Jail in this East Texas town of about 1,500 people."

Just after crossing the Texas line, Garner was stopped by the local police, who charged him with drunk driving. The white cops say he refused to take a breathalyzer test, so they threw the three black men in jail. There Garner and his companions banged on the bars, asking to make a call to their families.

Two deputies entered the cell and started beating Garner. They dragged him to a room down the hall; his friends could hear his moans as the beating continued. Later he was dumped back in the cell, his shirt soaked in blood, his face battered. He spent the night lying on the ground. The next day he was taken to the hospital where he died on December 27.

If Loyal Garner had so much as one drug bust, the cops would have gotten away with it entirely. But he had no police record, he drove a truck for the county and was liked by just about everybody in Sabine Parish, Louisiana. "To put it mildly, I think Junior Garner was one of the finest men I ever met in my life, white or black," said a white friend. So this time three cops have been charged. But for "civil rights" violation, not for murder.

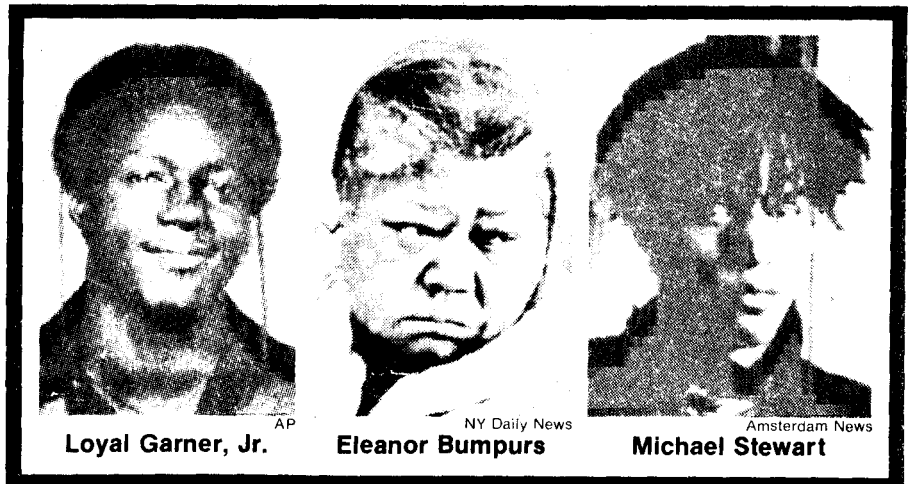
The Cops Are the Perps

Black people in America receive mixed signals. There are areas of formal equality. The Supreme Court struck



Jaydie Putterman/Rosalynde Lesur

NYPD thugs maul black victim (above). Across the country, racist cops have license to kill. Workers revolution will avenge victims of racist cop terror.



down school segregation; the army is now integrated; after the Civil Rights Act, Jim Crow is supposed to be dead. And in some circumstances, you're allowed to act like the formal equality is real. Until you find yourself in a situation where the real racist rules apply. Loyal Garner made a horrible mistake.

He thought he had rights; after being arrested, he thought he could ask to make a phone call. That mistake was fatal.

Cop terror against black people in America is not an "excess," it's a calculated program. It is the way U.S. capitalism resolves the contradiction

between the assertion of some formal equal rights and the need to forcibly segregate a huge impoverished black population at the bottom of society. After his home in East Elmhurst, Queens was bombed on 14 February 1965, Malcolm X spoke that evening in Detroit about the experience of black people in America with police brutality: "...any Negro in the community can be stopped in the street. 'Put your hands up,' and they pat you down. Might be a doctor, a lawyer, a preacher or some other kind of Uncle Tom, but despite your professional standing, you'll find that you're the same victim as the man who's in the alley." Denied the right to carry a carbine to defend himself, one week later Malcolm was shot dead.

The killing of Loyal Garner "presented an unsettling glimpse of life and justice in the isolated backwoods of East Texas," wrote *Times* reporter Peter Applebome. But it happens every day on the streets of America's big cities, North and South. And it's the cops, the "duly constituted authorities," who are everywhere the main perpetrators of racist murder.

• *Indianapolis*: "The shooting death of a 16-year-old boy has emotions running high in this city's black community, which doesn't accept the official police account that Michael Taylor killed himself in a police patrol car while his hands were cuffed behind his back" (*Chicago Tribune*, 2 October 1987).

• *Memphis*: "Four white police officers were relieved of active duty pending the investigation into the shooting death of Robinson in front of his home as his mother and sister and neighbors watched. The man was apparently attempting to commit suicide by stabbing himself with a 12-inch butcher knife when he was shot ten times by

police, witnesses said" (*Call and Post* [Cleveland], 15 October 1987).

• *Washington*: On 14 December 1987 black D.C. policeman James Gordon was shot and killed by the police in his Prince George's County home. After a neighbor reported a burglar, a white cop came busting in and blew away a black man he saw in the house—the owner. Gordon was the sixth person killed by cops in the D.C. area in a five-week period.

In capitalist America black people are supposed to be able to drive a Mercedes or shop the Miracle Mile in L.A., if they can afford it. But just try it. In December 1983 three members of the Harlem Globetrotters were doing their Christmas shopping at a jewelry store in a posh suburb of Santa Barbara, California. The next thing they knew, the cops had yanked them out of a cab, forced them to lie spread-eagle in the middle of the street with drawn pistols in their faces. The police later said they had "followed proper procedures," and simply mistook the slender, towering basketball stars for some husky guys more than a foot shorter who had robbed another jewelry store earlier! They were blacks who weren't "in their place." Just like Mets pitcher Dwight Gooden, who was pulled over, choked and beaten by the Tampa police in December 1986, because the sight of a black man in a silver Mercedes stuck in the cops' craw.

With black America in conditions of intensified permanent depression for the last decade and a half, the prison population has skyrocketed (quadrupling in New York State from 1972 to 1987). There are now almost 2,000 people on death row, 41 percent of them black. And now the sluice gates have been opened wide for the legal bloodbath.

But the cops don't wait for the electric chair or the lethal injection, they've turned the inner cities into a killing floor, wantonly executing black men in the street. Black women and children are gunned down by the police in their homes, like 67-year-old infirm Eleanor Bumpurs in the Bronx or 5-year-old Patrick Mason in Orange County, California.

And the racist terrorists out of uniform take the cue. As Martin Luther King Day approaches, there have been threats of racist KKK provocations in Forsyth County, Georgia, Raleigh, North Carolina and by a fascist Estonian in Queens, New York. Last year after a Klan attack on MLK Day civil rights marchers in Forsyth County, Atlanta city councilman Rev. Hosea Williams led thousands into the lily-white racist enclave, hemmed in on all sides by the Georgia National Guard. Such faith that the armed might of the Confederate state of Georgia will "protect" blacks against racist terror is positively suicidal! When Atlanta cops shot down 38-year-old Vietnam veteran Eddie Lee Callahan last September, Williams called to "get rid of some rotten apples." Yet Williams has praised the Atlanta police as the best big city department in the nation and led songs with refrains of "We love the police."

After Forsyth County, many establishment black leaders sought to deflect blacks away from struggle against racist terror. Giving a populist theme to his Democratic Party presidential bid, Jesse Jackson says:

"Our struggle is shifting.... Our challenge 20 years ago was to end racial violence. Tonight our challenge is to end economic violence. Civil rights and racial violence were black and white, but economic violence knows no color, no sex or religion."

—quoted in *Public Employee Press*, 11 December 1987

Racial violence has not ended—it's rampant and growing in Reagan's America and the triggermen are the cops. But whether establishment or "maverick," these black politicians preach reliance on the bourgeois state.

New York at the Flash Point

In New York, cop terror and racist atrocities have brought the city to the flash point. Official racism emanating from the White House and Koch and the cops' rampaging racist terror on the streets led straight to the December 1986 lynch mob murder of black construction worker Michael Griffith in Howard Beach. Since then, there has

What Strategy for Black Liberation? Trotskyism vs. Black Nationalism

(Marxist Bulletin No. 5 Revised)

\$2.50 (64 pages)

Selected documents and articles on the black question in the U.S., 1955-1977.

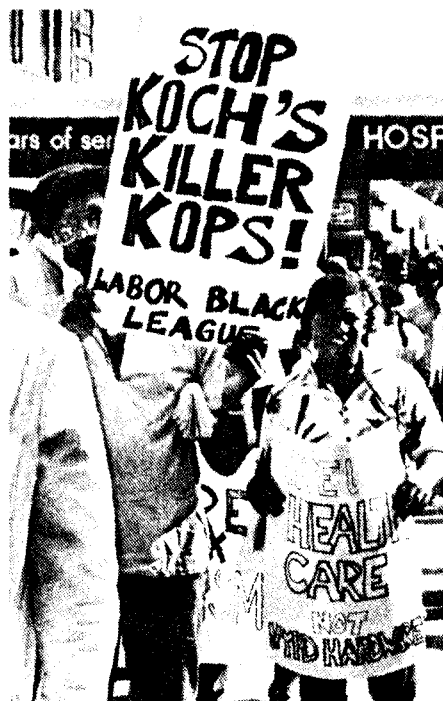
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Young Spartacus



Workers Vanguard

Left: Spartacist youth join protest against attacks on black and Jewish students, Madison, November 6. Right: Protest against police attack on a black doctor in Harlem Hospital, June 11.

been one racist atrocity after another. Even according to official statistics there were 500 "bias" incidents in 1987, nearly double the number in 1986. At least 18 blacks and Hispanics died at the hands of Koch's cops last year. And since the Howard Beach verdict December 21—in which three of the killers were convicted of manslaughter, not murder—there have been at least 30 reported racial attacks.

On December 29, Alfred Sanders, a 39-year-old black man, was gunned down in a hail of *eleven* bullets while surrounded by four white cops in the Laurelton section of Queens. The cops claimed that Sanders, a bus maintainer and member of the Transport Workers Union, lunged at them with a knife. But at least five witnesses told the *Daily News* (31 December 1987) that Sanders' hands were in the air and that he never threatened the police. The black weekly *Amsterdam News* (9 January) quoted an eyewitness who said, "I overheard Sanders tell the officers that they were only concerned about white justice, and boom they began to shoot at him." At Alfred Sanders' funeral January 8, his union brothers from Coliseum garage came out to pay their respects to this latest black victim of the NYPD.

Meanwhile, NYC mayor Koch has

been fanning the flames for racist terror. At a City Hall press conference he said: "I don't think black New Yorkers fear an attack by white New Yorkers." Tell it to Steven and Sylvester Lamont, two black brothers who were savagely attacked in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn on Christmas night by a white mob screaming "This is our Howard Beach!" When several hundred demonstrators, overwhelmingly black, marched through Bensonhurst January 2 to protest, the racists were out in force screaming "Go back to Africa!" "KKK!" and "Howard Beach!" Many carried signs reading "Whites Unite" and waved Confederate and Italian flags. The racist mob formed a gauntlet as the blacks marched up Bath Avenue. Between them were up to 1,000 of Koch's killer cops, on foot, motorcycles, horseback, rooftops and in helicopters.

This was a trap for the black marchers, and the confrontation could only embolden the racist losers of this impacted white enclave. The demonstration was led by black preachers Al Sharpton, Herbert Daughtry, Timothy Mitchell and attorneys Alton Maddox and C. Vernon Mason. They knew the howling bigots would be waiting in Bensonhurst—in fact they were counting on it (as well as on the massive police presence). So while the deadly NYPD is

running wild in the ghettos, as Koch pushes New York City toward race war, the city's "militant" black leaders feed into this by seeking a losing racial confrontation. *What's needed is a massive show of force led by a fighting, integrated labor movement that would strike fear in the racists' hearts.*

They're also playing into Koch's hands as they spew out anti-Semitic filth. At a December 28 rally in Brooklyn supporting black educator Adelaide Sanford in the ugly ethnic wrangling over the new school chancellor, black activist priest Lawrence Lucas compared the Board of Education to "the Knesset in Israel." By this poisonous demagoguery the black "leaders" threaten to spark a racial confrontation like the one whipped up during the 1968 NYC teachers strike. And while racist pig Koch plays for the Howard Beach and Bensonhurst vote, this "activist" coalition is dealing in the same coin of Democratic Party ethnic politics. At the Sanford rally, attended by assemblyman Roger Greene, NYC black politicians announced a summit meeting January 15 to map strategy "to get out the black vote in the 1988 presidential primaries and the 1989 mayoral election in which they hope to unseat Mayor Koch" (WBAI, 5 January).

Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

The black bourgeois politicians seek to become the slave drivers on Reagan's plantation. They appeal to the state, the main instigator of racist violence, calling for "special prosecutors" and more black cops. Revs. Daughtry, Lucas and others actually appeared on a recruiting poster for the NYPD! They want more black mayors, like Harold Washington...or Wilson Goode, the Philadelphia black Democratic "mayor of murder" who ordered the cops to bomb the black MOVE commune, killing eleven, including five black children. The Spartacist League calls for a program of integrated *class struggle* against racist attacks. And even as assaults on oppressed minorities have escalated, there have been some important examples of genuine labor/black mobilizations which have helped stay the hand of the bloody killer cops.

When Chicago cops invaded the home of black bus driver Cassandra Seay last July 21, viciously beating her and terrorizing her children and mother, and then arresting Cassandra on trumped-up charges, they didn't count on her being a member of a powerful union that could fight back. Militants in

the integrated Amalgamated Transit Union organized to defend Seay with a protest campaign, mobilizing their union brothers and sisters to fill the courtroom at every hearing. And they won—on December 23, Cassandra and her mother were found innocent of every bogus charge brought against them by the Chicago cops. Two years earlier, hundreds of ATU members massed in front of police headquarters and successfully squashed the racist frame-up of driver David Johnson. Such actions are but a small taste of the power labor could wield.

Beginning under Democrat Carter and escalating with Reagan in the White House, racist terrorists have become increasingly emboldened. At Greensboro, North Carolina in 1979 Klan and Nazi gunmen carried out a broad daylight massacre killing five leftists, blacks and labor organizers. But the next month, when the fascists tried to “celebrate” their obscene murders in Greensboro with a “vic-

tory” rally in Detroit, this was put to a stop by a labor/black mobilization of several hundred auto workers, other trade unionists and community youth. This was the first of a series of *labor/black mobilizations* initiated by the Spartacist League which kept the KKK off the streets of the big Northern cities.

But behind the hooded racist terrorists, and frequently wearing blue uniforms under their white sheets, stand the badge-toting racists who are *licensed to kill*. The Kluxers and Hitler-lovers are only the auxiliaries—the *capitalist state* is the overwhelming source of violence against black people. The Greensboro massacre was carried out with the active complicity of local, state and federal police agencies, from supplying the guns to leading the caravan of death. And in the big cities of America the cops are organized on a military basis to occupy the ghettos, from Los Angeles with its SWAT squads, “Blue Thunder” attack helicopters, tanks, battering rams and

choke holds, to New York City with stun guns and “Emergency Service” death squads. So when it comes to stopping the likes of the LAPD or NYPD, many militants will ask, “You and whose army?”

It will take a revolutionary workers movement, leading the mass of oppressed blacks and Hispanics from the ghettos and barrios, in a victorious struggle for *power*. To forge that “red army” requires a political struggle, to break the workers and minorities from the Democratic Party which is no “lesser evil” but the main instrument for binding the oppressed to their oppressors, and from the racist, pro-capitalist union tops. Our fight must be to build a multiracial, class-struggle workers party that can lead the difficult battles on the road to the socialist revolution, which alone can put an end to racist terror forever, making possible black freedom in an egalitarian society where the lynch rope and riot stick are relics of a prehistoric past. ■

reprinted from *Workers Vanguard* No. 443, 1 January 1988

Chicago: Black Family Defeats Police Frame-Up

Callie Bryant and Cassandra Seay Win!

CHICAGO, December 23—The South Michigan Avenue courtroom erupted into applause and cheers today after black bus driver Cassandra Seay and her mother Callie Bryant were found innocent of every racist frame-up charge brought against them by the Chicago police. As Judge Leo Holt announced the verdict he angrily called the cops’ testimony “incomprehensible, incredulous and ridiculous,” and acquitted Seay and Bryant of charges of battery, resisting arrest and obstructing a police officer.

During the two-day trial and at a previous appearance November 24, members of Amalgamated Transit Union Locals 241 (bus) and 308 (rail) and other trade unionists and supporters were present, often filling the courtroom. This morning the *Chicago Defender* ran

a front-page story on the trial, with a photo of transit workers protesting the racist frame-up.

Cassandra Seay and Callie Bryant were brutally beaten and arrested last July 21 along with Cassandra’s two teenage sons, David and D’Artagnan, after five white Chicago cops invaded their home. David and D’Artagnan still face charges of aggravated battery and criminal damage to property in a January 4 trial in juvenile court, where they are denied even the right to a jury trial. Drop all the charges!

The impact of the labor mobilization for Seay and Bryant was not lost on Judge Holt when the entire courtroom, including many transit workers in uniform, stood as their case was called. Holt leaned forward, peered at the display of solidarity and said, “You can



Workers Vanguard
Bus driver Cassandra Seay.

take your seats—those of you who can find seats.” When those racists-in-blue brutally beat and arrested the Seay family, they weren’t counting on Cassandra being a member of a powerful integrated union.

Militants in the ATU organized to ensure that Cassandra didn’t face capitalist injustice alone. Beginning in August, they called for the union to mobilize labor/black power to stop the wave of racist cop terror in Chicago. In late October over 150 union members signed a motion and dozens came to the Local 241 meeting to demand that their organization take action.

Both transit locals called on workers to fill the courtroom in defense of “one of our own” on November 24 and again on December 22. Union officials present at the trial included Local 241 president Elcosie Gresham, Local 308 president Elwood Flowers, several 241 Exec Board members and ATU International vice president Jackie Breckenridge. Protest telegrams poured in from transit workers in Atlanta, Philadelphia, the Bay Area, as well as London and Sheffield, England.

Tuesday, the first day of the trial, was taken up by the testimony of the five white cops who invaded the Seay home—the only “evidence” presented by the state. Three were beefy plainclothesmen from the Gang Crimes Unit: William Whalen, James Kelly and Eldon Urbikas. Two were uniformed patrolmen, John Behnke and Stephen Schweiger. During cross-examination defense attorney Loraine Ray drew out a stream of contradictions, distortions and outright lies from the racist thugs, and cited numerous past complaints of brutality and racial bias lodged against them in the police department’s whitewashing Office of Professional Standards (OPS).

Fourteen-year-old D’Artagnan testified that before he realized the break-in was being carried out by policemen, he went to his room at the rear of the house for a baseball bat to defend his family. As Seay’s son came out of the bedroom, Urbikas drew his gun and aimed it at D’Artagnan, shouting “Drop the bat, boy!” D’Artagnan dropped it, only realizing the invaders were cops when they clapped handcuffs on him.

Callie Bryant, 17-year-old David and his 12-year-old sister Wenndi all testified that they helplessly watched the sustained, brutal beating of Cassandra as she was handcuffed on the floor. Barely able to stand, Cassandra was taken from her home and forced into a police car. With blood soaking her pants to her



Workers Vanguard
Victory for labor and blacks: Cassandra Seay (center) and her mother Callie Bryant (left), with supporters from Chicago transit union in front of courthouse December 22.

knees, police ignored her requests for medical help for hours, leaving her and Callie shackled to a bench in the police station. Whalen’s only response was to make a Klan cross with his forefingers in their faces.

The unchallenged testimony concerning these injuries was cited by Judge Holt as a critical factor in determining the finding of not guilty. In his concluding remarks Holt, referring to the cops, said, “I’ve heard a great deal of mendacious testimony.” He called the testimony of Seay’s children “articulate, straightforward and uncontroverted,” and *applauded* Cassandra for defending her home and D’Artagnan for his bravery.

At the same time Judge Holt defended the capitalist state’s monopoly on armed force, telling the cops’ victims to find their redress in court—while admitting this is “not a very fruitful means of addressing this grievance”! Yet the kind of routine police barbarity revealed at the trial runs rampant in Chicago. Just a week before the attack on Cassandra and Callie, the police shot down disabled black auto worker and Navy veteran Larry Hawkins in the basement of his home. No trial will bring Hawkins to life. And no court will undo the racist violence done to the Seay family.

While using every avenue, including the bosses’ courts, to defend the oppressed, the labor movement must

break from reliance on the institutions of the bosses’ state and the twin capitalist Democratic and Republican parties. The defense of the Seay family, initiated by class-struggle militants in the ATU, points the way toward the kind of mass, militant labor/black action that is urgently needed to stop the racist cop and Klan terror which threatens black, Hispanic and all working people.

It was early evening by the time the Seay family and their supporters left the courthouse and gathered at a nearby restaurant to celebrate. Transit unionists immediately began mapping out plans for a victory party and fund-raiser for Cassandra Seay and Callie Bryant. In a toast to Cassandra and Callie, Kevin Quirk, a Local 241 militant who initiated the union defense, said:

“This is a tremendous victory for all of labor and blacks. It was the mobilization of our union and other unions, that packed the courtroom and rallied behind this family, that spiked this racist frame-up.... This is a step in the struggle to build a society where workers and blacks can be free from these vicious racist frame-ups and cop terror.”

Cassandra called the integrated union support “incredible.” “It let the policemen know we’re not going to sit back and let this happen.” To all the unionists who acted in her defense, Cassandra said, “Thanks for all the moral support. It shows you have friends you don’t even think you have.” ■

Black History and the Class Struggle

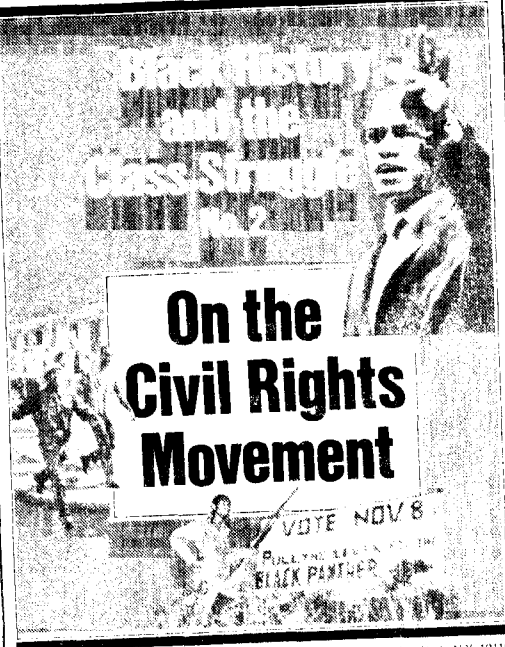


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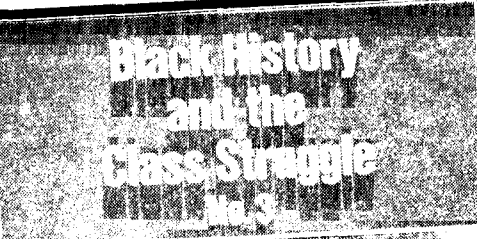
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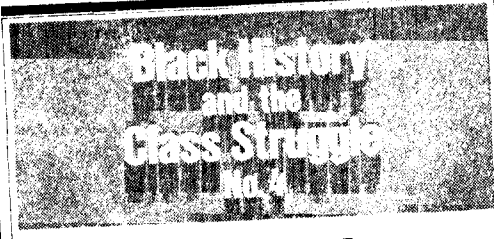
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