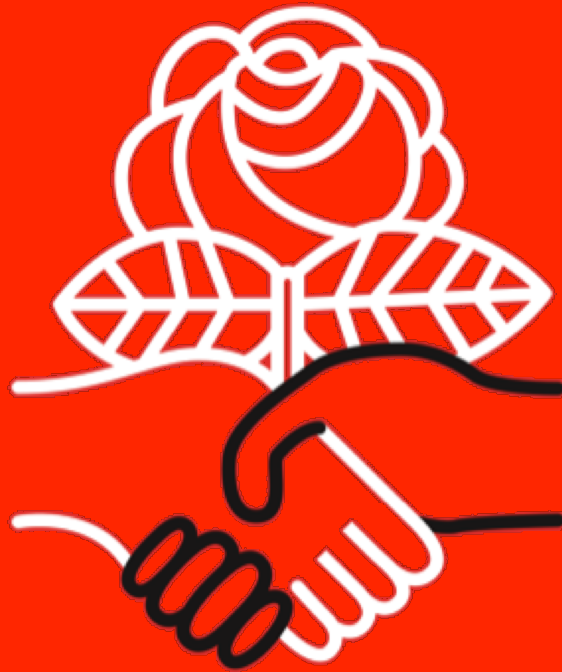


DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA

BOSTON

2017



READINGS

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ALL ABOUT DSA

A HISTORY OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA 1971- 2017 *Bringing Socialism from the Margins to the Mainstream*

JOSEPH M. SCHWARTZ

Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)—and its two predecessor organizations, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) and the New American Movement (NAM)—had their origins in the early 1970s, at the beginning of a long-term rightward shift of U.S. and global politics. This shift to the right—symbolized by the triumph in the 1980s of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher—somewhat overshadowed the central role these organizations played in the movements of resistance to corporate domination, as well as in today's ongoing project: organizing an ideological and organizational socialist presence among trade union, community, feminist and people of color and other activists.

DSA made an ethical contribution to the broader American Left by being one of the few radical organizations born out of a merger rather than a split. DSA also helped popularize the vision of an ecumenical, multi-tendency socialist organization, an ethos that enabled it to recently incorporate recently many thousands of new members, mostly out of the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign. If you are committed to a pluralist, democratic conception of a just society then you can join DSA's collective project, regardless of your position (or lack thereof) on some arcane split in socialist history, or even whether you believe in the possibility of independent electoral work inside or outside the Democratic Party ballot line.

THE FOUNDING OF DSA THROUGH THE MERGER OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST ORGANIZING COMMITTEE (DSOC) AND THE NEW AMERICAN MOVEMENT (NAM)

We were 6,000 strong at the time of merger in spring 1982. Before the merger, both DSOC and NAM had made modest but significant contributions to the trade union, community organizing and feminist movements, as well as to rebuilding a left-labor coalition within and without the Democratic Party. Though shaped by distinct cultural and historical experiences, most members of both organizations had come to the same political conclusions: an American socialist movement must be committed to democracy as an end in itself and work as an open, independent socialist organization in anti-corporate, racial justice and feminist coalitions with non-socialist progressives.

DSOC, founded in 1973 when a defeated anti-Vietnam War wing split from the remnants of the Debsian Socialist Party, grew in less than a decade from a small cadre of a few hundred to an organization of nearly 5,000. It had a significant network among trade union and left Democratic Party activists as well as a rapidly growing, predominantly campus-based Youth Section.

Unlike DSOC, the New American Movement, founded in 1971, had its origins not in a wing of the Old Left but in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the socialist-feminist women's unions of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Founded by a talented core of New Left veterans fleeing the sectarian excesses of late SDS and graduating from campus to community politics, NAM focused on building a grassroots "revolutionary democratic socialist-feminist" presence in local struggles around issues such as affordable housing, reproductive freedom and utility rate reform. NAM not only played an important role in the reproductive rights movement, but also helped the Left reconceptualize the relationship between race, gender and class.

DSOC's greatest political contribution undoubtedly lay in making real Michael Harrington's vision of building a strong coalition among progressive trade unionists, civil rights and feminist activists and the "new politics" left-liberals in the McGovern wing of the Democrats.

The history of the 1960s and early 1970s had made the concept suspect: how could a labor movement led by pro-war, socially conservative George Meany, which had implicitly supported Richard Nixon over George McGovern

in the 1972 presidential race, unite with middle-class, anti-war and "new politics" activists who often dismissed the entire labor movement as bureaucratic, anti-democratic, sexist and racist? And how could activists of color and feminists trust labor leaders or mainstream Democrats who urged these social movements not to rock the boat by militantly demanding an equal voice at the table? Harrington envisioned uniting the constituencies of the three Georges (Meany, McGovern and Wallace) and getting feminists, trade unionists and black, Latino and socialist activists in the same room talking politics. It seemed utopian, if not naive, in 1973. But by the late 1970s, partly because of the success of the DSOC-inspired Democratic Agenda, coalition politics had become a mantra among trade unionists, activists in communities of color, feminists and the LGBTQ community.

Democratic Agenda began as the Democracy '76 project. DSOC put together a labor-left coalition to fight for a real commitment to full employment at the 1976 Democratic Convention. The project, which gave headaches to Carter operatives at the nominating convention, foreshadowed the political divisions of Carter's presidency. After the election of 1976, Democracy '76 evolved into Democratic Agenda, which picked up active support from the leadership of such unions as the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the United Auto Workers and the Machinists, as well as from feminists, activists in communities of color and left activists in and around the Democratic Party.

The height of Democratic Agenda's influence came in the spring of 1978 when, at the Democratic Party mid-term convention, it got 40 percent of the conference vote for resolutions rejecting the Carter administration's abandonment of the fight for full employment and for efforts to curtail the power of Big Oil. In the spring of 1979, Machinists Union President (and DSOC Vice-Chair) William Winpisinger announced a "Draft [Senator Ted] Kennedy" movement. The coalition brought together by Democratic Agenda reached its fullest political expression in that campaign, although it was ultimately unsuccessful.

The founding leaders of NAM and DSOC could not have constructed a merger on their own. NAM's New Left veterans, nurtured by the "anti-anti-Communist politics" of the anti-Vietnam War movement, could not accept the left-wing anti-Communism of DSOC's founding leadership (an anti-communism formed in anti-Stalinist struggles). Conversely, many of DSOC's

leaders could not understand the refusal of some NAM leaders to recognize opposition to authoritarian communism as a central moral obligation of democratic socialists. Not surprisingly, the two most sticky issues in the merger talks focused on the organization's ideological positions on communism and the Middle East. Interestingly enough, few members have since questioned the organization's principled opposition to authoritarian regimes of all stripes nor the need for a viable, independent Palestinian state and a cutoff of U.S. military aid to Israel to promote complete and unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories.

The infusion of newer members in both camps spurred the merger process. DSOC's younger activists, many of them students, some veterans of the Gene McCarthy and McGovern campaigns, found NAM's emphasis on grassroots activism and socialist-feminism inspiring. In NAM, former communists, many of whom had joined in the mid-1970s, agreed with DSOC's emphasis on coalition work with non-socialists and valued DSOC's greater national visibility.

Joint work on Democratic Agenda and on mobilizing for an anti-draft march in Washington (where 40,000 people called for an end to both the military draft and the economic draft based on mass inner-city unemployment) led to a decrease in mutual suspicions. In December of 1980, DSOC put the accomplishments of European social democracy on display in Washington, D.C., at a 3,000-person conference on "Eurosocialism and America: An International Exchange" featuring Olof Palme, François Mitterrand, Michel Rocard, Michael Manley and Willy Brandt, among scores of others. The conference's emphasis on the struggle for greater worker control over investment and production decisions convinced many in NAM that the distance between themselves and DSOC had dwindled.

DSA IN THE 1980S: LINKING STRUGGLES FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE ABROAD AND AT HOME

When delegates from DSOC and NAM met in Detroit in March 1982 to form Democratic Socialists of America, they shared Michael Harrington's perpetual optimism that corporate irresponsibility would give rise to popular demands for democratic control over the economy. Reagan's "evil empire" rhetoric and his assaults on the women's, civil rights and labor movements temporarily served to coalesce the American Left.

Across the globe, a new ecumenical spirit of unity and optimism pervaded the Left, centering upon a rejection of statist and authoritarian conceptions of socialism. In Europe, the French Left gained the presidency for the first time. Numerous socialist parties adopted workers' control as a programmatic focus and developed relations with Eurocommunist parties whose members concurred that democracy and civil liberties must be central to the socialist project. In the Third World, revolutionary movements in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Zimbabwe and elsewhere searched for a third way between inegalitarian capitalist development and authoritarian communist modernization.

Little did we know that the militarist, Keynesian, indebted "economic recovery" begun in early 1983 would provide the material basis for the following decade of right-wing dominance across the world. The unequally distributed benefits of the recovery in the United States were not the only reason for a conservative presidential majority. The right successfully displaced the economic anxieties of many working- and middle-class whites into hostility toward "liberal" means-tested social welfare programs, seen as disproportionately benefiting people of color. In the United States, but also in Europe (to a lesser extent), the Right convinced a majority of the public that the causes of economic stagnation were strong unions and over-expanded public provision.

It was on this terrain—the most conservative decade in Western politics since the 1950s—that DSA would be built. At its founding, DSA consisted of almost 5,000 members from DSOC and 1,000 members from NAM. By 1983 DSA reached 8,000 members, which it would not surpass till the early 1990s. The 1980s were not easy on DSA or on the broader Left; there were many defensive battles. As the liberal coalition decomposed, DSA continued to argue that only democratic industrial, labor and trade and investment policy could restore global growth with equity.

And, we managed to help build an alternative, affirmative, democratic left program and vision. Although DSA's refusal to endorse a Democratic Party candidate in the 1984 primary reflected the electoral Left's split among presidential primary candidates Alan Cranston (nuclear freeze), Walter Mondale (the AFL-CIO and the National Organization for Women) and Jesse Jackson (African-Americans, some left trade unionists and independent

Leftists), our work in the 1984 Democratic presidential primary built ties among labor, feminist and anti-militarist progressives that made a modest, but real, contribution to broader left unity four years later behind the stronger, second "Rainbow Coalition" Democratic primary bid in 1988 by Rev. Jesse Jackson, whom DSA endorsed early, in November 1987. Many of DSA's policy goals—progressive taxation, cuts to wasteful "defense" spending and the need for universal social provision of quality health care, child care, education and housing—found a more powerful expression in this primary campaign, the first truly multiracial, (implicitly) social democratic one in U.S. history.

Jackson lost the nomination to Walter Mondale and Michael Dukakis. Following their defeat by Reagan in 1988, the mass media pronounced the "L" word—liberalism—dead. It was left to socialists to speak up against the gutting of public provision through liberal social welfare programs, despite our criticisms that the liberal welfare state failed to democratize power relations and treated its beneficiaries more as "clients" than as citizens.

The Youth Section, in part thanks to the punishing speaking schedule of Michael Harrington, its indefatigable staff and the visibility of then Co-Chair Barbara Ehrenreich and many others, showed the most "counter-cyclical" growth in the organization through much of the 1980s. The Youth Section played a significant role in both the anti-apartheid and anti-intervention in Central America movements, linking the struggles for social justice abroad with the struggle for social justice at home. And it helped introduce scores of student activists to trade union struggles, with our campus-labor institutes enabling many of our Youth Section alums to go on to make impressive contributions as labor organizers and union staffers.

DSA's presence among progressive trade unionists and the movements for a democratic U.S. foreign policy allowed us to play an initiating role in the large labor-led, anti-apartheid/anti-intervention marches held in Washington, D.C., and San Francisco in 1987. By linking these struggles with the fight for democratic trade union rights at home and abroad, DSA contributed to the growth in awareness on the Left of the importance of international labor solidarity.

In the fall of 1987, in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the publication of Michael Harrington's *The Other America*, a DSA-inspired

coalition, Justice for All, held rallies, teach-ins and press conferences in more than a hundred cities across the nation. Protesting cuts in Medicaid, food stamps, welfare and federal aid to housing, the events also reminded the public of many of the successes of the Great Society (for example, Head Start, Medicaid, public health centers and a radical decrease in poverty among the elderly because of the expansion of Social Security). The DSA office hummed with the sound of organizing.

DSA IN THE 1990S: SUPPORT FOR MEDICARE FOR ALL; OPPOSITION TO AUSTERITY, WELFARE "REFORM," AND NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION

Our argument that democratic public provision increases social justice and efficiency took on a new level of public visibility in the early 1990s when DSA made the struggle for a universal health care system (modeled on the Canadian "single-payer" system) its major national priority. We helped build the "single-payer" or "Medicare for All" movement as an alternative to the Clintons' failed plan to expand coverage by the private insurance system. The high moment of our campaign was a multi-city tour by Canadian health care providers, trade unionists and health care advocates who explained the Canadian system to U.S. audiences.

The collapse of communism in 1989 proved less of an immediate boon to democratic socialists than many of us had hoped. Those who had suffered in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union did not embrace socialism with a human face, but rushed headlong into the embrace of a mythic, free market capitalism. And the failures of capitalist reforms did not revitalize the Left so much as increase support for xenophobic nationalism.

In the short run, however, the mass media's trumpeting of the end of history and the final triumph of capitalism may have driven many unaffiliated socialists to stand up and be counted. Our direct mail campaigns in the early to mid-1990s boosted membership from 7,000 to 10,000. Thousands responded to DSA's argument that the collapse of communism (a critical gain for democracy) in no way justifies the blatant injustices of capitalism nor ends the struggle against them. And perhaps more would have joined if Michael Harrington had lived beyond the collapse of the Berlin Wall to be able to articulate, in accessible language, why the collapse of an authoritarian system that democratic socialists had always opposed did not refute the socialist project.

Harrington never wanted DSA to be overly reliant on him, but we all understand our debt to him as his generation's most effective voice for socialism in the United States. DSA continued to grow without him, but a new nationally recognized spokesperson for democratic socialism would later appear—Bernie Sanders.

The Clinton administration's commitment to balanced-budget austerity, plus its support for the North American Free Trade Agreement and for the gutting of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) foreshadowed the move of center-left governments to what British Prime Minister Tony Blair would term "third way" social democracy. This neoliberal program of economic deregulation (particularly of finance), decrease in taxes on the rich and corporations, decimation of union power and defunding of public goods (particularly means-tested anti-poverty programs), became the dominant policy of social democratic parties in the United Kingdom, France and Germany.

While many liberal organizations tepidly opposed Clinton's welfare reform (which yielded a radical increase in child poverty over the next 20 years), DSA organized strongly against it. In addition, the Youth Section (which changed its name to Young Democratic Socialists in 1997) founded the "Prison Moratorium Project," one of the earliest anti-mass incarceration efforts in the age of the New Jim Crow. In the late 1990s many YDS and DSA chapters participated actively in the "global justice" movement to build transnational solidarity, as well as institutions, that would democratize the benefits of a global economy.

DSA turned much of its attention in the late 1990s to working closely with the Congressional Progressive Caucus and local global justice groups to oppose the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). This proposed international treaty, which would have stripped national governments of the right to legislate democratic controls over the behavior of foreign investment capital, foreshadowed President Obama's proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership. By 1999 a new global Left appeared to be forming, with progressive unions and socialists joining with younger more anarchist-oriented protesters to take on the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization.

DSA 2000-2015: OPPOSITION TO WAR; SUPPORT FOR THE ECONOMIC JUSTICE AGENDA, OCCUPY AND RACIAL AND GENDER JUSTICE

But 9/11/2001 would change all that, as the Bush administration deployed the "war on terror" as a means to quash any forms of anti-imperialist or anti-corporate protests. DSA actively participated in the anti-Iraq and Afghanistan war movement, with Young Democratic Socialists playing a significant role within it. But once ground troops (recruited for a volunteer army in a class- and racially-biased manner) were committed to Afghanistan and Iraq, the movement found it hard to convince the public that you cannot fight decentralized terrorist threats by massive military means.

DSA can take some solace from the role it played in the Bush II era in building massive opposition to the bipartisan efforts of the Bush administration and the Wall Street wing of the Democrats to forge a "Grand Compromise." The compromise aimed to use long-term cuts in Social Security and Medicare to secure lower taxes on corporations and to achieve "fiscally responsible" budget deficit reduction. DSA brought into this work an alternative vision of an "Economic Justice Agenda" (EJA), which chapters popularized through local Congressional and state legislative hearings. In retrospect, the EJA prefigured the program of the 2016 Sanders campaign. The agenda called for creating a truly progressive tax system so as to redistribute from the 1% to the 99%, expanding universal social welfare programs and engaging in large-scale public investment in alternative energy and mass transit. But the Bush II era saw the left and DSA playing defense to prevent attacks on existing universal social welfare programs. Bipartisan elites dominated the mainstream media with obsessive calls for "fiscal discipline" and public spending cuts.

DSA AFTER THE GREAT RECESSION

The bipartisan elite consensus around budgetary austerity crashed and burned with the Great Recession of 2008, a direct product of the neoliberal model of growth through financial and real estate speculation. Just as DSA grew through its opposition to the neoliberal Democratic Clinton agenda in the 1990s, by 2010, frustration with the Obama administration's moderate program gave rise to the first significant growth in DSA chapter activity in over a decade. This growth was in part aided by a revival in YDS activity from 2006 onwards and the graduation of some of this cohort into DSA

chapter leadership. The Occupy Movement of fall 2011 resulted, in part, from the failure of the administration's recovery program to redress the rampant growth in inequality and the bleak employment prospects for even college-educated youth. Many DSA and YDS chapters joined Occupy from Day One. In a few major cities, the predominant "horizontalist" and "anti-statist" youthful leadership of the encampments meant DSAers (young and old) had to operate with considerable skill to appeal to the newly politicized participants (as DSA does take the question of who holds state power seriously). But DSA grew among activists who realized that the occupation itself was a tactic, while building a mass movement for economic democracy involved long-term movement and institution building. At the same time, DSA groups became heavily involved in movements for a living wage and for a path to citizenship for undocumented peoples.

But while DSA and YDS did win to their ranks a stratum among this renewed radical cohort, the organization still stood at 6500 members in 2012, with DSA having ten or so moderately strong locals and a similar number of campus groups. The New Left veterans who had built DSA were now aging into their 60s, and often DSA gatherings would have very few people present between the ages of 25 and 60. But we were able to mount a national student debt campaign that helped bring the issue into mainstream electoral politics. At the 2013 and 2015 conventions the organization also reiterated the centrality of racial justice struggles to socialist organizing, with a good number of chapters supporting #Black Lives Matter and fighting against mass incarceration and for equitable urban public education. In addition, our Socialist-Feminist Working Group helped numerous locals raise tens of thousands of dollars for the National Network of Abortion Funds through participation in their annual bowl-a-thon fundraisers (with DSA teams taking such names as "Bowlsheviks," "Jacopins" and "The General Strike").

DSA: BERNIE AND BEYOND

But the levelling off of organizational growth in the 2000s would all change with DSA's decision in late 2014 to make its number one priority the movement to support Bernie Sanders running for president. DSA took the position that for maximum exposure and effectiveness, Sanders should not only run, but should run in the Democratic primaries—and that advice proved to be spot-on. We started out with a coordinated "We Need Bernie"

campaign that had DSA urging Bernie to run, and then shifted to "People's Revolution 101" DSA-sponsored teach-ins that introduced Bernie activists to basic democratic socialist principles. As a result, DSA grew healthily through the Sanders campaign, going from 6,500 members in fall 2014 to 8,500 by election day 2016.

DSA made clear that Bernie's New Deal or social democratic program did not fulfill the socialist aim of establishing worker and social ownership of the economy. But in the context of 40 years of oligarchic rule, Sanders' program proved sufficiently radical and inspiring. (Sanders made clear that he opposed state ownership of corporations, but no mainstream reporter was astute enough to know that the particular socialist tradition that Sanders came out of favored worker, not state ownership, of most firms.) DSA also worked in the campaign to reach out to organizations rooted in communities of color and to feminists, as those were the two constituencies most needed to broaden out Bernie's base among millennials and white working-class Democratic primary voters.

Bernie's refusal to abandon his democratic socialist identity, and his clear position that only by building mass social movements could you change power relations, gave his campaign a clear class-struggle character. Polls indicated that the majority of people under 40 had a more favorable view of socialism than of capitalism. DSA's visibility grew, amid the press noting the increasingly favorable attitude towards "socialism" (for some a vague desire for a more egalitarian society, akin to Sanders' Denmark examples). Curious Sanders supporters Googling "democratic socialism" found DSA's web page coming up first. Many in DSA had hoped that a Hillary Clinton victory would allow DSA to help lead an anti-neoliberal Democrat opposition pushing for Medicare for All, progressive taxation, stricter regulation of the financial sector, etc. Ironically, Trump's victory drove thousands to join DSA.

DSA veterans and national staff were shocked to see that on the day after Trump's victory one thousand people joined DSA (in our best past year maybe 1,200 new members joined over 12 months). From November 9, 2016, to July 1, 2017, over 13,000 people, mostly between the ages of 18 and 35, joined DSA. The creative use of social media and Twitter by DSA volunteers drove much of this growth. In addition, through a strong chapter mentoring program, our national leadership, volunteers and staff helped people in 48 states and D.C. create over 100 new DSA chapters and scores of new YDS

chapters. In many red states, brand new DSA chapters have led the opposition to the Trump administration's attempts to gut Medicaid, organizing an open socialist presence in March 2017 at the House of Representatives and local town hall meetings and sitting in at local Senate offices during the July 4th recess. In blue states such as New York, New Jersey, New Mexico and California, DSAers are at the forefront of the fight for state-level Medicare for All legislation.

While Sanders did not run an explicit socialist campaign, he did make clear that the global ruling class has been engaged in class warfare from above for the past 40 years. This elite project has consciously aimed to destroy union power and create an ideology of "TINA" ("there is no alternative" to the "free" market or unrestrained corporate power). The Great Recession of 2008, and the rise of unemployment or precarious employment for young people across the globe, have given rise to the growth of new left and socialist formations (see Podemos in Spain, Syriza in Greece, the Mélenchon presidential candidacy in France, and, most parallel to Sanders, the revival of British Labour under socialist Jeremy Corbyn). All these movements, along with DSA, understand that only if working people gain control of the wealth we create in common can there be an equitable and sustainable future for people and the planet.

DSA at 24,000 members in July 2017 is the largest socialist organization in the United States since the Communist Party before its implosion in 1956 after the Khrushchev revelations about Stalin. Most young people joining the organization want to be active, and our new chapters across the country have already incorporated thousands of members into activist projects. These include working to elect open socialists such as Khalid Kamau (GA) and Dylan Parker (IL) to local city and county councils, as well as Mike Sylvester (ME) and Mike Connolly (MA) to state legislatures.

As democratic socialists, we enter coalition efforts with no preconditions that our allies embrace our socialist politics. But we engage in these politics as open socialists—we will be called socialists whether we choose the name or not. Anti-socialism remains the most profound anti-democratic ideology in the United States. Whatever the struggle—be it for a humane, efficient national health care system or for public investment in child care—the right red-baits the proposals as "socialist" and thus forbidden.

Our 2017 convention will determine a realistic set of national priorities and work to strengthen relations among our national staff, a new elected leadership (the National Political Committee) and the most crucial element of the organization—our local chapters and campus groups. We face the daunting task of joining the resistance to the ruling far Right's attacks on working people, women, immigrants, people of color and LGBTQ individuals. But we also know that neoliberal Democratic Party elites offer a tepid vision of "inclusiveness" that refuses to challenge the oligarchic nature of U.S. society. DSA, therefore, works to build its own organizational capacity and to legitimate socialism as a mainstream part of U.S. politics. We also are committed to working in coalition with forces that oppose both right-wing rule and the dominant national corporate wing of the Democrats. We want to continue Sanders' "political revolution" by broadening out that political trend to include a stronger base within the labor movement and, most importantly, among progressive organizations rooted in communities of color. If we take up those challenges, DSA may be able to sustain the most important socialist presence in U.S. politics since the Debsian Socialist era of 1900 to 1920. That's a huge responsibility, but one that the influx of talented organizers into DSA enables us to take on.

Joseph M. Schwartz has been active in DSA since he served as DSOC's first campus organizer in 1979-1981. He teaches radical political theory at Temple University, is an active member of his faculty union (AFT) and serves on DSA's National Political Committee.

RESISTANCE RISING *Socialist Strategy in the Age of Political Revolution*

A SUMMARY OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA'S STRATEGY DOCUMENT (JUNE 2016)

2016 was a game changing year for leftists and progressives. We are finally reemerging as a vital and powerful force after an extended period of stagnation and demoralization, and we face a political landscape more favorable than perhaps at any time since the 1960s. For roughly 30 years after the end of World War II, the United States and non-Communist Europe experienced solid economic growth, declining inequality, expanding social services and increasing working-class power, coupled with landmark advances toward racial, gender and sexual equality. In countries such as France and Sweden, labor and socialist movements even made significant (if fleeting) progress toward a democratic socialist transition. Though these gains were tainted in countries such as the United States by the racialized and gendered manner in which they were distributed, this period represents the high-water mark of working-class strength and security in the 20th century.

THE RISE OF NEOLIBERALISM

Starting in the 1970s, however, in a movement that would become known as neoliberalism, economic elites in these countries began mobilizing politically to lower taxes for the rich and corporations, to eviscerate democratic decision-making both in the workplace as well as at the ballot box, to slash spending on essential social services such as education and social security, to deregulate industries across the economy and to open up flows of capital across national borders. These “reforms” enabled corporations to evade virtually all forms of accountability either to the workers they employed or to the communities in which they operated. In the United States neoliberalism was aided by racialized attacks on social service provision in which African American and Latino recipients of welfare and other anti-

poverty programs were portrayed as an “undeserving poor” whose lifestyle was being subsidized by (white) taxpayers (even though whites constituted the largest group of welfare beneficiaries).

The success of neoliberalism across the United States and Europe differed based upon the relative strength or weakness of left-wing political parties and trade unions – leaving working people in traditional bastions of social democracy such as Sweden relatively better off than working people in countries such the United States where trade unions and the Left have been weak historically. But by the early 2000s the historic gains made across these countries in the post-World War Two period had been rolled back dramatically. This, combined with the fall of Soviet and East European Communism and the marketization of the Chinese economy by the early 1990s, led most pundits and politicians to proclaim the ultimate triumph of neoliberalism: “there is no alternative” to the free market became the mantra of policy makers around the world.

INSURGENT RESPONSES TO NEOLIBERALISM

Given the profound and sustained defeats suffered by the Left and progressive movements during this period, by the mid- 2000s socialists and progressives in the United States and Europe could boast of virtually no examples of successful resistance to neoliberalism. Many turned their eyes to South America, which during this time was practically the only democratic leftist political stronghold in the world. Only a few short years later, however, the situation in Europe and the United States looked completely different: the Left had finally galvanized significant support in the electoral arena, and had pulled the terms of political debate significantly leftward through creative social movement organizing. To name but a few electoral examples, in Greece the left-wing Syriza party came to power in 2014, in Spain the left-wing Podemos party emerged from antiausterity protests in 2014 and only two years later it was the third largest party in the country. Even more surprising were the rise of Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of the British Labor Party in 2015 and the phenomenal success of Bernie Sanders’ “political revolution” during the 2016 United States’ presidential election.

These electoral successes have been paralleled by, and to a large degree made possible by, the rise of a new generation of progressive social movements committed both to thoroughgoing critiques of capitalism,

racism, sexism, xenophobia and other forms of oppression, as well as to the creation of an ecologically sustainable, democratic and egalitarian future. To take the United States as one example, the progressive offensive against neoliberalism began in earnest with the Occupy protests of 2011 and the resistance to Governor Scott Walker's anti-labor offensive in Wisconsin, which put the issue of inequality at the center of U.S. political discourse and cultivated a new generation of activists that have been crucial in more recent movements. In the wake of Occupy, powerful new movements arose to challenge brutal immigration policies (The Dreamers), the shamefully low federal minimum wage (Fight for \$15), the epidemic of police brutality and structural racism (Black Lives Matter) and inequality (the Sanders Political Revolution) to name a few. These movements have opened up space for a serious discussion of capitalism, male dominance and racism in our society that has not existed in decades, and which provides unique opportunities for the growth of a democratic socialist movement that emphasizes the interconnectedness of all of the struggles and the structural character of the reforms needed to make real and lasting change.

CHALLENGES FACING THE LEFT AND PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENTS

Yet we must not overstate the strength of progressive and leftist politics today, and likewise we must not understate the extent of the challenges that lie before us. While a new wave of social movement organizing appears to be underway, and while younger people especially are increasingly open to radical alternatives, the Left and progressive movements remain weak. Today we celebrate more the possibility of political openings than the achievement of significant concrete gains. Beyond our relative lack of resources, the structural barriers placed in our path by the nature of the U.S. political system and the extraordinary power of individualist ideology to undermine collective action, Leftists and progressives face a groundswell of racist and antiimmigrant political organization – represented most dramatically by Donald Trump's presidential campaign. As the life prospects of many white people in the 99% continue to decline, and as demographic tides shift steadily toward a United States in which people of color constitute a majority, this reactionary organizing is likely to grow ever more serious.

Racist and anti-immigrant politics not only represent a direct assault on the civil rights of millions (in the form of voter disenfranchisement, harassment

and deportation of undocumented workers, and hate crimes, to name a few), but also serve as an effective tool that economic elites can employ to divide sections of the working class (who, by focusing on racial/ethnic fear and hatred, are unable to forge ties of solidarity around shared economic struggles against the capitalist class). In the absence of powerful multiracial coalitions capable of connecting the struggles of working people across race and ethnicity, appeals to racism and fear will continue to gain traction among economically and socially insecure white voters – particularly men, who face the erosion of traditional gender prominence due to the gains of the feminist movement – and the possibility of expanding desperately needed programs to assist the most vulnerable people in our society (let alone more ambitious programs pushing in the direction of democratic socialism) will be further diminished.

In their current form, however, the Left and progressive movements are not well positioned to build the multiracial organizations and coalitions necessary to confront the scourge of right-wing racism and anti-immigrant politics. Historically the Left has been, and, despite the best intentions of many, continues to be dominated by white activists (often middle class men). Organizations of the Left (including DSA) generally reflect the interests, aspirations, and cultural assumption of white working- and middle class individuals more than people of color. Several other factors have also played an important role in limiting the development of multiracial leftist organizations and multiracial coalitions that include a significant leftist presence. These include structural barriers that often constrain the participation of working-class and poor activists in political organizing (such as lack of time, energy and economic resources), the racial segregation of U.S. society that is typically reflected in the demographic makeup of activist organizations, and an individualistic national conversation about race that omits any discussion of class.

Leftists and progressives also face a staggering array of additional challenges: we must defend a woman's right to abortion and confront a wide range of gender inequities that persist in our male dominant society, even as neoliberalism increasingly divides working and professional women through the rhetoric of meritocracy and "leaning-in." We must curtail the United States' often illegal and generally counterproductive military adventures and "democracy promotion" efforts around the world. We must fight to win

citizenship for the millions of immigrants who contribute massively to our national prosperity but who are forced to live in constant fear of deportation, and who do not enjoy the political and economic benefits of citizenship. We must find a way to forge deeper cross-national ties among an increasingly global working class with diverse and often conflicting material interests and, perhaps most critically of all given the grave implications of inaction, we must build a progressive coalition capable of forcing the U.S. government to take dramatic action around the effects of human-caused climate change.

Despite these challenges, once in a generation opportunities currently exist for taking the offensive and launching an assertive anti-capitalist politics in the United States. The most difficult – and most important – question that remains, is how, specifically, to make democratic socialist politics a force to be reckoned with in rural communities, towns, cities and states across the country in the coming years. Before addressing this question, however, we turn first to a no less fundamental issue: what is democratic socialism, and why do we place our hope for a better, more egalitarian and humane future in this seemingly abstract ideal?

II. OUR VISION OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

Our vision of democratic socialism is necessarily partial and speculative, and is in no way intended to be a blueprint for a democratic socialist society. To the contrary, the specific contours of the future to which we aspire will be democratically determined not by us, but rather by those who live it. Further, DSA members will – and should – disagree on specific aspects of this vision. Nonetheless, we put forth such a vision, in part to put to rest misconceptions people may have about how our vision of socialism differs from failed models of the past, in part to spark the passion and imagination of potential DSA members wondering what separates our vision from those of liberals and progressives and in part to help expand the terms of our national political discourse in the face of the often overwhelming logic of “there is no alternative.” History has shown time and again that societies fall short of their full potential for human emancipation without radical trailblazers working ceaselessly to pull mainstream political discourse to the Left and thereby expand the “politics of the possible.”

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM AS RADICAL DEMOCRACY

DSA believes that the fight for democratic socialism is one and the same as the fight for radical democracy, which we understand as the freedom of all people to determine all aspects of their lives to the greatest extent possible. Our vision entails nothing less than the radical democratization of all areas of life, not least of which is the economy. Under capitalism we are supposed to take for granted that a small, largely unaccountable group of corporate executives should make all fundamental decisions about the management of a company comprised of thousands of people. This group has the power to determine how most of us spend the lion's share of our waking hours, as well as the right to fire anyone for basically any reason, no matter how arbitrary. Under democratic socialism, this authoritarian system would be replaced with economic democracy. This simply means that democracy would be expanded beyond the election of political officials to include the democratic management of all businesses by the workers who comprise them and by the communities in which they operate. Very large, strategically important sectors of the economy – such as housing, utilities and heavy industry – would be subject to democratic planning outside the market, while a market sector consisting of worker-owned and -operated firms would be developed for the production and distribution of many consumer goods. In this society, large-scale investments in new technologies and enterprises would be made on the basis of maximizing the public good, rather than shareholder value. Crucially, investments in renewable energy and efficient technologies would be prioritized to guarantee ecological sustainability and the future existence of life on Earth.

A democratic socialist society would also guarantee a wide range of social rights in order to ensure equality of citizenship for all. Vital services such as health care, child care, education (from pre-K through higher education), shelter and transportation would be publicly provided to everyone on demand, free of charge. Further, in order to ensure that the enjoyment of full citizenship was not tied to ups and downs in the labor market, everyone would also receive a universal basic income – that is, a base salary for every member of society, regardless of the person's employment status. Finally, the work week would be gradually reduced and vacation time would be expanded to guarantee that everyone in society benefited from increasingly efficient technologies that decrease the overall amount of labor needed in

the economy (and also to ensure that all who wish to find employment are able to do so).

Economic democracy would be complemented in the political sphere by a new system that combined an overhauled form of representative democracy (our current system) with direct democracy, a system in which individuals participate directly in the making of political decisions that affect them. In this system, the Senate (an extremely unrepresentative political body in which states with very small populations have the same level of representation as the most populous states) would be abolished, and a system of proportional representation would be established so that Congress actually reflects the political will of the electorate. A democratic socialist government would also implement new referenda and recall mechanisms to hold elected officials accountable during their tenure in office, and a vast system of local participatory institutions would be set up to ensure individuals had a direct voice in political decision-making beyond the ballot box. These institutions would include citizen boards for various government services, program councils (at the national, state and local levels) for those who receive government services, and municipal and state-level citizen assemblies that would be open to all and would be tasked with making budget decisions (much like participatory budgeting processes currently in use around the world today). Finally, individual civil and political rights (freedom of speech, assembly, the right to vote, etc.), which are currently routinely violated, would be strengthened, and public resources would be devoted to the development of a genuinely free press and a democratically administered mass media.

While DSA believes that economic exploitation cuts across all other forms of oppression, and therefore that radical economic and social democracy would dramatically enhance most people's capacity for self-determination, we do not believe that racial, gender, sexual and other forms of oppression are reducible to economic exploitation. Solidarity among all working people who are ensnared in the capitalist system may be a prerequisite for a strong socialist movement, but socialism as radical democracy is much more than the emancipation of a single economic class. The democratic socialist project also entails addressing a wide range of oppressions in law, culture and society that limit people's capacity for self-determination.

To give a few examples, the work of caregiving, which under capitalism falls disproportionately on women – particularly women of color and migrant women – would be publicly supported through universal daycare, eldercare and paid family leave. In the legal sphere, all citizens would have equal rights, in contrast to the current reality in which millions of citizens (in the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, overseas territories and Native American tribes) do not have the ability to elect their own congressional representatives. In the legal system, the racialized system of unequal justice that currently exists would be replaced by a system that featured citizen review boards (vested with real authority) of both the police and court systems. The disgraceful use of prisons to regulate behavior (which disproportionately affects communities of color and the poor) would be replaced with a system that decriminalized a wide range of offenses (particularly nonviolent drug-related offenses) and combined full services to victims with restorative justice, mental health care and various forms of counseling to help people find productive ways to move forward after committing serious crimes. Finally, racial/ethnic and sex/gender-based oppressions may well continue in a socialist society. Hence a wide range of programs to dismantle the privileges associated with whiteness, maleness and heteronormativity would have to be developed, and antidiscrimination policies in the workplace and in social organizations would have to be intensified.

Beyond addressing the legacies of gender, racial, sexual and other forms of oppression, democratic socialism would bring about a cultural renaissance in which a vast array of new artistic practices and lifestyles would flourish. With more free time, protection from the vagaries of economic exploitation and deepened norms of respect and solidarity, individuals on a mass scale would be able for the first time to freely choose how they wanted to develop as individuals, limited only by principles of mutual respect and the absence of exploitation and oppression. Race- and gender-based identities, despite having their origins in systems of oppression, would no longer be imposed upon individuals by society, and would likely play a positive role in shaping individuals' identities.

It should always be remembered, however, that like every other form of society, a democratic socialist society cannot produce total social harmony. Such a society will always have to navigate among the competing claims of

different groups and democratic political institutions will always be needed to arbitrate and mediate such conflict. Democratic socialism, that is, will not be the utopia that many socialists of old imagined. Yet the achievement of a democratic socialist society would nevertheless mark one of the greatest advances in human history. Instead of war, there would be peace; instead of competition, cooperation; instead of exploitation, equality; instead of pollution, sustainability and instead of domination, freedom. Life would still have sorrows as well as joys, and there would still be failed projects and unrequited love. But with democratic socialism there would no longer be unnecessary suffering imposed on the mass of society by institutions over which we have no control.

III. OUR STRATEGY

With this vision in place, we turn finally to an overview of DSA's strategy for moving the needle of emancipation closer to democratic socialism over the coming years and decades. We believe democratic socialism is the only humane and democratic alternative to capitalism, but considering our limited resources at present we must think carefully about how to translate our socialist ideals and values into a viable political strategy. Given the magnitude and scope of the challenges we face, as well as the democratic and decentralized nature of our organization, there is no strategic silver bullet, or single, all-encompassing campaign to which we can devote all of our organizational resources. Rather, our strategy – based on the preceding analysis of current political and economic conditions – consists of fighting on a number of interconnected fronts in the short-term, leveraging gains made in these struggles into more structural, offensively-oriented changes in the medium-term and ultimately employing the strength of a mass socialist party or coalition of leftist and progressive parties to win political power and begin the process of socialist transformation.

In the short-term, our strategy consists of working concurrently on a range of projects that we detail below (the relative emphasis placed on each will be determined by local conditions). Regardless of the particular struggle(s) in which a given DSA chapter is engaged, however, in all cases we will focus on overcoming the historic bias of our organization toward white (particularly male) activists. We will do this by building deeper ties with organizations representing poor and working-class women and people of color, and by devoting significant organizational resources to educating our

members about the importance of antiracist organizing and of cultivating welcoming, inclusive DSA chapters. Below is a summary of the most important struggles in which DSA will participate over the coming years (this list is by no means exhaustive of all the activities undertaken by DSA chapters; details of additional lines of work can be found in DSA's strategy document).

BUILDING MULTIRACIAL, INTENTIONALLY INTERSECTIONAL COALITIONS

DSA's analysis of the interrelationships among many different forms of oppression under capitalism suggests that the only democratic socialist strategy capable of effective resistance to capitalism is one that links together antiracist, feminist, LGBTQ, labor, anti-ableist, and anti-ageist (as well as other) movements by "connecting the dots" between them. We consider each of these struggles to be mutually reinforcing, and believe that the success of one ultimately depends on the success of the others. Further, capitalists have consistently used appeals to white racism, and tensions at the intersection of gender and race, to maintain divisions among the working class. In order to overcome these divisions and forge deeper solidarities across the working class, it is essential that a disproportionately straight, white, male, English-speaking, mostly college-educated socialist organization such as DSA prioritize racial justice work and organize actively within struggles where racial, gender, class and sexual oppression intersect. We must do so with humility and take our lead from the organizations that organize and are led by poor and working-class people in those communities.

The specific coalitional work undertaken by each DSA chapter will vary depending on local circumstances, but could include, to name a few, fights for universal health care and for higher quality public education, and struggles against prison expansion, police brutality and discriminatory treatment of undocumented workers. In most cases DSA chapters will have to choose between several equally worthy campaigns to which they might devote their organizational resources. In these cases, chapters will have to pick campaigns based on considerations such as the degree to which the campaign engages issues important to a diverse range of communities, and the degree to which those involved with the campaign are likely to be open to democratic socialist politics.

LABOR ORGANIZING

The fundamental social relationship in capitalism is between the worker and the capitalist (employee and employer), and the exploitation of workers by capitalists is the primary source of profitability within the capitalist system. This relationship gives an organized working class tremendous potential power, and it makes the self-organization of working people an essential weapon in anticapitalist struggle. Further, labor organizing gives DSA members a chance not only to work toward a revived workers' movement but also to build DSA. U.S. history has shown that the best recruits for socialism are experienced and radicalized workers, and, similarly, that the best workplace organizers are socialists. For these reasons we must place the trade union movement and newer, less traditional forms of worker self-organization (e.g. workers' centers) front and center in our priorities. This work is especially necessary today, when worker organization is at a historic low after decades of relentless corporate attacks.

The most important DSA involvement in the labor movement in the coming years will be in our individual capacities as unionists. We cannot – and should not – direct our members to find employment in certain sectors of the economy in order to work as rank-and-file organizers. We can, however, encourage and support our members who become rank-and-file activists, as well as shop stewards and local union officers, and encourage dialogue and coordination in sectors where many DSA members work, such as health care, social services and teaching. Unions need good staff and paid organizers, but a revival of the labor movement will depend above all else on militancy among rank-and-file workers themselves.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Although organizing in the workplace is still essential, smaller workplaces, less-stable employment, and the antisocial tendencies of neoliberalism point toward the importance of community organizing as a crucial complement to labor organizing. Most DSA chapters have been organized on the basis of a metropolitan area. Nothing should stop DSA members from organizing on a neighborhood basis as well. They should talk to their neighbors, determine which issues most urgently face the community (for example, tenants' rights, police brutality or shoddy, under-funded public services) and organize strategically around those issues. Community organizing is a particularly effective means of developing strong and lasting ties with

communities, which has often been a shortcoming of DSA chapters. Such work could also help our activists connect to people of diverse backgrounds and thereby incorporate a broader range of views and create an organization more representative of the working people of this country.

ORGANIZING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Every year, state legislatures slash funding for public colleges and universities, resulting in dramatic increases in tuition and class size. University administrators have replaced state workers with privatized, exploited workers in food and housekeeping. At the same time, they have replaced full-time, tenured, and tenure-track faculty with graduate students and a low-paid, no benefits army of adjunct professors (professors without job security and usually without benefits) to provide instruction. Students graduate with large amounts of debt and their degrees are less and less likely to secure them adequate post-college employment. This crisis in higher education could result in the death of an affordable, democratic system of higher education in the United States or in a powerful movement of students, staff, faculty and communities capable of taking back the system. We believe the latter option is possible and that DSA can play an important role in fostering its development.

Free public higher education is a key example of what we might call a “transformative” reform that helps to popularize the idea of socialism and to make further, more dramatic reforms possible in the future. Free public higher education would mean taking what should be a universal public good out of the marketplace, putting it under democratic control and guaranteeing it as a right to all citizens – and funding it by a truly progressive tax system that makes the wealthy and corporations pay their fair share of government revenue. Beyond its inherent benefits, such a campaign would also show people that socialist policies are both desirable and achievable. Gaining free public higher education could serve as a crucial step in making democratic socialist politics more attractive to a wider cross-section of the U.S. public.

ELECTORAL ORGANIZING

Achieving our goals will require grassroots organizing and “street heat,” but it will also require a critical mass of political office holders to implement them. Although elections in and of themselves will not bring about major

political, economic or social reforms – let alone establish a pathway to socialism – it is difficult to imagine how we could achieve any of our objectives in the United States without taking part in the electoral process. In the short term, we need to engage in electoral activity for several important reasons: to defend existing rights; to put forth new demands for social and economic justice that could change public conversations and thereby create openings for more fundamental structural reforms down the road; to attract new members to DSA and thereby build our capacity as an organization; and to build and sustain non-electoral activism. The nature of our electoral activism will vary based on local political conditions. But it will include supporting progressive and socialist candidates running for office, usually in Democratic primaries or as Democrats in general elections but also in support of independent socialist and other third-party campaigns outside the Democratic Party. In the medium-to-long-term we will work to build the organizational capacity necessary to run candidates of our own (as one of DSA's predecessor organizations, Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, and DSA itself were able to do in the 1970s and 1980s), to forge larger socialist electoral coalitions both within and outside of the Democratic Party and ultimately to create a majoritarian electoral coalition in support of socialist political and economic reforms.

ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZING

We will also participate in the climate justice movement against the devastation wreaked by global capitalism on the most vulnerable people, cultures and ecosystems. Our commitment to this movement aligns us with the struggles of indigenous peoples against the plunder of their fossil fuel and forest resources and the life-destroying pollution of our air and water. It also positions us against the negligent attitude shown by the global North towards black and brown communities around the world who are disproportionately affected by the violent storms, floods and famines caused by the carbon poured into the atmosphere by the developed world.

Climate justice organizing for DSA chapters will often take the form of campaigns for institutional divestment from fossil fuel capital, protests and other forms of organized dissent against domestic policies and international agreements that undermine environmental protections. Organizing as open socialists gives DSA members the opportunity to organize around widely supported “green” causes under the banner of the anticapitalist “red”

movement. Participation in the climate justice movement also enables DSA to stress its internationalist politics, as this movement is part of a broader fight against corporate domination of social and economic life, and in favor of a democratic international order that enhances global labor, human rights and environmental standards.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZING

In a globalized economy, the commitment of socialists to international solidarity is not just a moral imperative but a pragmatic necessity. DSA will stand in solidarity with movements around the world fighting to raise global labor, environmental, and human rights standards in opposition to corporate “race to the bottom” policies. Such solidarity often will take the form of opposing our government’s own foreign policy, which supports undemocratic international institutions (including pro-corporate “free trade agreements”), and which backs, often through military intervention, authoritarian regimes that support U.S. government and economic interests.

BUILDING DSA AND THE SOCIALIST LEFT

DSA’s role in building progressive social movements is essential to our work; regardless of what we gain as an organization from this work, it is an end in itself. Additionally, through our coalition work and community organizing we learn invaluable organizing skills and discover countless ways to improve the work that we do. However, in order to be effective in this work, as well as to build broader-based, independent socialist organizations that we hope will grow over time into a powerful political force, we need to dramatically increase the ranks of the socialist movement in the United States. While DSA has expanded significantly since 2010, there is still tremendous room for growth, especially in the wake of Sanders’ Political Revolution, which exposed countless young people to the idea of democratic socialism for the first time. In order to take advantage of this potential, DSA chapters will use a range of tactics to help expand our activist and membership base. First, we will place a greater emphasis on our critique of capitalism and positive vision of democratic socialism in our coalition, public education and community organizing work. We will also devote more resources to developing new leaders through individual mentoring, skills training and educational programming. Finally, we will engage in regular and intensive assessments of our organizational progress, while always working to recruit as many new members from a diverse an array of backgrounds.

Success across this spectrum of struggles should lead to a period when we can talk seriously about the transition to democratic socialism through reforms that fundamentally undermine the power of the capitalist system (often referred to as “non-reformist reforms”), such as the nationalization of strategic industries (banking, auto, etc.) and the creation of worker-controlled investment funds (created by taxing corporate profits) that will buy out capitalist stakes in firms and set up worker-owned and -operated firms on a large scale. While it may sound premature to begin discussing such long-term objectives before we have achieved our more modest (though ambitious) short-term goals, it is critical that we advance a clear vision of our short-, medium- and long-term objectives and a credible account of how we might move from each stage of struggle to the next (more details related to this question can be found in DSA’s strategy document). If we are not clear about where we are heading, we risk both losing track of the importance of our socialist identity and making strategic errors for the sake of short-term tactical gains.

For the foreseeable future our primary focus will be on building a vibrant, independent democratic socialist movement and helping to cultivate progressive coalitions capable of wielding political power at all levels. But we should never lose sight of the democratic socialist vision that serves as the guiding thread tying together the many struggles for freedom and equality in which we are constantly engaged, day in, day out.

CLASSICS

EXCERPTS FROM THE **COMMUNIST MANIFESTO**

KARL MARX AND FRIEDRICH ENGELS

*Ed note: Marx and Engels used a couple of terms here that need to be clarified. First of all, **bourgeoisie** referred to the new business and industrial class that had emerged in the last few centuries before his time (as opposed to the traditional landed aristocracy); **proletariat** referred to the workers in these factories (owned by the bourgeoisie), who, in Marx' view, were "wage slaves," bound to work for wages lest they starve.*

PART I: BOURGEOIS AND PROLETARIANS

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society, has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: It has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more

and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other bourgeoisie and proletariat. . . .

Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. This development has, in its turn, reacted on the extension of industry; and in proportion as industry, commerce, navigation, railways extended, in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed, increased its capital, and pushed into the background every class handed down from the Middle Ages.

We see, therefore, how the modern bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange.

The bourgeoisie has played a most revolutionary role in history.

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors,” and has left no other bond between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment.” It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom—Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

PART II: PROLETARIANS AND COMMUNISTS

What else does the history of ideas prove, than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed? The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.

When people speak of ideas that revolutionize society, they do but express the fact that within the old society the elements of a new one have been created, and that the dissolution of the old ideas keeps even pace with the dissolution of the old conditions of existence.

When the ancient world was in its last throes, the ancient religions were overcome by Christianity. When Christian ideas succumbed in the eighteenth century to rationalist ideas, feudal society fought its death-battle with the then revolutionary bourgeoisie. The ideas of religious liberty and freedom of conscience, merely gave expression to the sway of free competition within the domain of knowledge.

We have seen above that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy.

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state, i. e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible.

These measures will, of course, be different in different countries.

Nevertheless, in most advanced countries, the following will be pretty generally applicable.

1. Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.
2. A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
3. Abolition of all rights of inheritance.
4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
5. Centralization of credit in the banks of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the state.
7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the state; the bringing into cultivation of waste lands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.

8. Equal obligation of all to work. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.

9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of all the distinction between town and country by a more equable distribution of the populace over the country.

10. Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labor in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production, etc.

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

PART IV: POSITION OF THE COMMUNISTS IN RELATION TO THE VARIOUS EXISTING OPPOSITION PARTIES

Workers of all countries, unite!

***EXCERPTS FROM* THE THREE SOURCES AND THREE COMPONENT PARTS OF MARXISM**

V.I. LENIN

Throughout the civilized world the teachings of Marx evoke the utmost hostility and hatred of all bourgeois science (both official and liberal), which regards Marxism as a kind of “pernicious sect.” And no other attitude is to be expected, for there can be no “impartial” social science in a society based on class struggle. In one way or another, all official and liberal science defends wage slavery, whereas Marxism has declared relentless war on that slavery. To expect science to be impartial in a wage slave society is as foolishly naïve as to expect impartiality from manufacturers on the question of whether workers’ wages ought not to be increased by decreasing the profits of capital.

But this is not all. The history of philosophy and the history of social science show with perfect clarity that there is nothing resembling “sectarianism” in Marxism, in the sense of its being a hidebound, petrified doctrine, a doctrine which arose *away from* the high road of the development of world civilization. On the contrary, the genius of Marx consists precisely in his having furnished answers to questions already raised by the foremost minds of mankind. His doctrine emerged as the direct and immediate *continuation* of the teachings of the greatest representatives of philosophy, political economy, and socialism.

The Marxist doctrine is omnipotent because it is true. It is comprehensive and harmonious, and provides men with an integral world outlook irreconcilable with any form of superstition, reaction, or defense of bourgeois oppression. It is the legitimate successor to the best that man produced in the nineteenth century, as represented by German philosophy, English political economy, and French socialism.

It is these three sources of Marxism, which are also its component parts, that we shall outline in brief.

I
The philosophy of Marxism is *materialism*. Throughout the modern history of Europe, and especially at the end of the eighteenth century in France, where a resolute struggle was conducted against every kind of medieval rubbish, against serfdom in institutions and ideas, materialism has proved to be the only philosophy that is consistent, true to all the teachings of natural science, and hostile to superstition, cant, and so forth. The enemies of democracy have, therefore, always exerted all their efforts to “refute,” undermine, and defame materialism, and have advocated various forms of philosophical idealism, which always, in one way or another, amounts to the defense or support of religion.

Marx and Engels defended philosophical materialism in the most determined manner and repeatedly explained how profoundly erroneous is every deviation from this basis. Their views are most clearly and fully expounded in the works of Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach* and *Anti-Dühring*, which, like the *Communist Manifesto*, are handbooks for every class-conscious worker.

But Marx did not stop at eighteenth-century materialism: he developed philosophy to a higher level, he enriched it with the achievements of German classical philosophy, especially of Hegel’s system, which in its turn had led to the materialism of Feuerbach. The main achievement was *dialectics*, i.e., the doctrine of development in its fullest, deepest, and most comprehensive form, the doctrine of the relativity of the human knowledge that provides us with a reflection of eternally developing matter. The latest discoveries of natural science—radium, electrons, the transmutation of elements—have been a remarkable confirmation of Marx’s dialectical materialism despite the teachings of the bourgeois philosophers with their “new” reversions to old and decadent idealism.

Marx deepened and developed philosophical materialism to the full, and extended the cognition of nature to include the cognition of human society. His *historical materialism* was a great achievement in scientific thinking. The chaos and arbitrariness that had previously reigned in views on history and politics were replaced by a strikingly integral and harmonious scientific theory, which shows how, in consequence of the growth of productive

forces, out of one system of social life another and higher system develops—how capitalism, for instance, grows out of feudalism.

Just as man's knowledge reflects nature (i.e., developing matter), which exists independently of him, so man's social knowledge (i.e., his various views and doctrines—philosophical, religious, political, and so forth) reflects the *economic system* of society. Political institutions are a superstructure on the economic foundation. We see, for example, that the various political forms of the modern European states serve to strengthen the domination of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat.

Marx's philosophy is a consummate philosophical materialism which has provided mankind, and especially the working class, with powerful instruments of knowledge.

II

Having recognized that the economic system is the foundation on which the political superstructure is erected, Marx devoted his greatest attention to the study of this economic system. Marx's principal work, *Capital*, is devoted to a study of the economic system of modern, i.e., capitalist, society.

Classical political economy, before Marx, evolved in England, the most developed of the capitalist countries. Adam Smith and David Ricardo, by their investigations of the economic system, laid the foundations of the *labor theory of value*. Marx continued their work; he provided a proof of the theory and developed it consistently. He showed that the value of every commodity is determined by the quantity of socially necessary labor time spent on its production.

Where the bourgeois economists saw a relation between things (the exchange of one commodity for another) Marx revealed a *relation between people*. The exchange of commodities expresses the connection between individual producers through the market. *Money* signifies that the connection is becoming closer and closer, inseparably uniting the entire economic life of the individual producers into one whole. *Capital* signifies a further development of this connection: man's labor power becomes a commodity. The wage worker sells his labor power to the owner of land, factories, and instruments of labor. The worker spends one part of the day covering the cost of maintaining himself and his family (wages), while the

other part of the day he works without remuneration, creating for the capitalist *surplus value*, the source of profit, the source of the wealth of the capitalist class.

The doctrine of surplus value is the cornerstone of Marx's economic theory.

Capital, created by the labor of the worker, crushes the worker, ruining small proprietors and creating an army of unemployed. In industry, the victory of large-scale production is immediately apparent, but the same phenomenon is also to be observed in agriculture, where the superiority of large-scale capitalist agriculture is enhanced, the use of machinery increases, and the peasant economy, trapped by money-capital, declines and falls into ruin under the burden of its backward technique. The decline of small-scale production assumes different forms in agriculture, but the decline itself is an indisputable fact.

By destroying small-scale production, capital leads to an increase in productivity of labor and to the creation of a monopoly position for the associations of big capitalists. Production itself becomes more and more social—hundreds of thousands and millions of workers become bound together in a regular economic organism—but the product of this collective labor is appropriated by a handful of capitalists. Anarchy of production, crises, the furious chase after markets, and the insecurity of existence of the mass of the population are intensified.

By increasing the dependence of the workers on capital, the capitalist system creates the great power of united labor.

Marx traced the development of capitalism from embryonic commodity economy, from simple exchange, to its highest forms, to large-scale production.

And the experience of all capitalist countries, old and new, year by year demonstrates clearly the truth of this Marxian doctrine to increasing numbers of workers.

Capitalism has triumphed all over the world, but this triumph is only the prelude to the triumph of labor over capital.

III

When feudalism was overthrown and “free” capitalist society appeared in the world, it at once became apparent that this freedom meant a new system of oppression and exploitation of the working people. Various socialist doctrines immediately emerged as a reflection of and protest against this oppression. Early socialism, however, was *utopian* socialism. It criticized capitalist society, it condemned and damned it, it dreamed of its destruction, it had visions of a better order, and endeavored to convince the rich of the immorality of exploitation.

But utopian socialism could not indicate the real solution. It could not explain the real nature of wage slavery under capitalism, it could not reveal the laws of capitalist development, or show what *social force* is capable of becoming the creator of a new society.

Meanwhile, the stormy revolutions which everywhere in Europe, and especially in France, accompanied the fall of feudalism, of serfdom, more and more clearly revealed the *struggle of classes* as the basis and the driving force of all development.

Not a single victory of political freedom over the feudal class was won except against desperate resistance. Not a single capitalist country evolved on a more or less free and democratic basis except by a life-and-death struggle between the various classes of capitalist society.

The genius of Marx lies in his having been the first to deduce from this the lesson world history teaches and to apply that lesson consistently. The deduction he made is the doctrine of the *class struggle*.

People always have been the foolish victims of deception and self-deception in politics, and they always will be until they have learned to seek out the *interests* of some class or other behind all moral, religious, political, and social phrases, declarations, and promises. Champions of reforms and improvements will always be fooled by the defenders of the old order until they realise that every old institution, how ever barbarous and rotten it may appear to be, is kept going by the forces of certain ruling classes. And there is *only one* way of smashing the resistance of those classes, and that is to find, in the very society which surrounds us, the forces which can—and, owing to their social position, must—constitute the power capable of

sweeping away the old and creating the new, and to enlighten and organize those forces for the struggle.

Marx's philosophical materialism alone has shown the proletariat the way out of the spiritual slavery in which all oppressed classes have hitherto languished. Marx's economic theory alone has explained the true position of the proletariat in the general system of capitalism.

Independent organizations of the proletariat are multiplying all over the world, from America to Japan and from Sweden to South Africa. The proletariat is becoming enlightened and educated by waging its class struggle; it is ridding itself of the prejudices of bourgeois society; it is rallying its ranks ever more closely and is learning to gauge the measure of its successes; it is steeling its forces and is growing irresistibly.

ELECTORAL POLITICS

A BLUEPRINT FOR A NEW PARTY

SETH ACKERMAN

When Bernie Sanders announced he would run for president as a “democratic socialist,” few believed it would amount to much. Then, against all expectations, Sanders drew massive crowds, commanded high levels of favorability in almost every demographic category (including overwhelming support among [young people](#)), and raised hundreds of millions in campaign dollars from small donors.

Not least, he came within a few percentage points of beating Hillary Clinton, a frontrunner once assumed to be unassailable.

Waged by a candidate who had never run as a Democrat before and has declined to do so in the future, the Sanders campaign has revived hope that a serious electoral politics to the left of the Democratic Party might be possible.

The question is what such a politics would mean in practice.

The question isn’t new, and so far the debate has unfolded along familiar lines. Advocates of third-party politics who backed Sanders in the primaries, like Seattle councilmember [Kshama Sawant](#), went on to support Jill Stein’s Green Party candidacy. Meanwhile, longstanding opponents of the third-party route, like democratic socialist columnist [Harold Myerson](#), have argued that the Left should focus on trying to change the Democratic Party from within.

Others have called for a different approach, standing neither wholly inside nor wholly outside the Democratic Party. But few concrete proposals have been discussed so far.

This political moment offers a chance to fill in some of these blanks — to advance new electoral strategies for an independent left-wing party rooted in the working class.

But we won't get far unless we grapple seriously with the exceptional character of the American party system, and the highly repressive laws that undergird it.

LESSONS FROM THE LABOR PARTY

The last major effort to form a national vehicle for working-class politics was the [Labor Party](#) (LP), founded twenty years ago. Under the leadership of [Tony Mazzocchi](#), president of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union, the party's organizers gathered support from other major unions and grassroots trade-unionists and held its founding convention in 1996.

The Labor Party's history is not well-known in the broader progressive world. But as the most recent major effort by organized labor to form an independent party, it is a story that should interest anyone who hopes to see a revival of left politics, because on the Left only unions have the scale, experience, resources, and connections with millions of workers needed to mount a permanent, nationwide electoral project.

By all accounts it was an inspiring effort that seemed, for a moment, to portend a renaissance for the labor-left. But the party lost momentum just a few years after its founding. By 2007 it had effectively ceased to exist.

In a history of the party based on interviews with major participants, LP activist Jenny Brown cited two key factors as being most important in explaining its decline. The first was the weakening of the labor movement itself after 2000, especially the industrial unions that had formed its original core.

But the second, more immediate reason was essentially political: the party failed to attract enough support from major national unions. That wasn't due to any great fondness for the Democratic Party on the part of the labor leadership of the time, or because they opposed the idea of a labor party on principle. As Mazzocchi said in 1998: "I've never found a person in the top labor leadership say they're opposed to a labor party."

Instead, the problem arose from the oldest dilemma of America's two-party system: running candidates against Democrats risked electing anti-labor Republicans. For unions whose members had a lot to lose, that risk was considered too high.

Despite the dedication of its organizers, the Labor Party didn't succeed. But its founders were right to believe that a genuinely independent party, rather than a mere informal faction of the Democrats, is indispensable to successful working-class politics.

Today we can learn some lessons from their effort. A true working-class party must be democratic and member-controlled. It must be independent – determining its own platform and educating around it. It should actually contest elections. And its candidates for public office should be members of the party, accountable to the membership, and pledged to respect the platform.

Each of those features plays a crucial role in mobilizing working people to change society. The platform presents a concrete image of what a better society could look like. The candidates, by visibly contesting elections and winning votes under the banner of the platform, generate a sense of hope and momentum that this better society might be attainable in practice. And because the members control the party, working people can have confidence that the party is genuinely acting on their behalf.

But notice what is missing from this list: there is no mention of a separate ballot line.

The Labor Party always assumed that a genuinely independent labor party must have a separate party ballot line. That assumption was a mistake.

The assumption gave rise to an intractable dilemma: if the party took a separate line and ran candidates against incumbent Democrats, it would destroy relationships with Democratic officeholders who might otherwise be sympathetic to unions, and thus lose the support of the unions that depended on those officeholders.

On the other hand, if it didn't run candidates – which is ultimately the path it chose – the nagging question would arise: what's the point of having this so-called “party” in the first place? That question ended up spurring endless internal debates over whether and when to run candidates. And in the end, by not contesting elections, the party failed to give workers a reason to pay attention to the organization in the first place.

The dilemma stands out clearly in the recollections of Labor Party veterans. “The Labor Party had to start with the assurance that it wouldn’t play spoiler politics and that it would [first] focus on building the critical mass necessary for serious electoral intervention,” former LP national organizer Mark Dudzic recalled in a [recent interview](#). Yet, as Les Leopold of the Labor Institute told Brown, that path ultimately led to irrelevance: “It’s not easy for Americans to understand a party that’s not electoral. I think that that was just a difficult sell.”

“In retrospect,” Dudzic concluded, “I think it was premature for us to coalesce into a party formation without an understanding of how we would relate to elections.”

“ONLY IN THE USA”

Labor Party organizers were not the first to worry about being electoral “spoilers” – discussions of third-party politics have hinged on this problem for decades. However, history shows that, contrary to popular belief, the spoiler problem is not insurmountable. In fact, the [trade-union activists](#) in other countries who organized the [successful labor parties](#) of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries faced the same dilemma: the prospect of splitting the vote and causing defeat for more labor-sympathetic mainstream parties (usually liberal parties).

But those activists and their allies persevered, and as labor parties gained in strength the spoiler issue gradually became a threat to the *mainstream* parties. At that point, in the interests of self-preservation, liberal parties moved to accommodate the upstarts, either by forging defensive [electoral pacts](#) (in which the two parties agreed not to run candidates against each other in specified districts) or by pushing through [proportional representation](#) systems. That gave the labor parties an initial foothold in the political system.

But the United States is different. Beneath our winner-take-all electoral rules, we also have a unique – and uniquely repressive – legal system governing political parties and the mechanics of elections. This system has nothing to do with the Constitution or the Founding Fathers. Rather, it was established by the major-party leaders, state by state, over a period stretching roughly from 1890 to 1920.

Before then, the old Jacksonian framework prevailed: there was no secret ballot, and no officially printed ballot. Voters brought their own “tickets” to the polls and deposited them in a ballot box under the watchful eye of party workers and onlookers.

Meanwhile, the parties – which were then wholly private, unregulated clubs, fueled by patronage – chose their nominees using the “caucus-convention” system: a pyramid of county, state, and national party conventions in which participants at the lower-level meetings chose delegates to attend the higher-level meetings.

At the base of the pyramid were precinct-level caucuses: informal, little-publicized gatherings where decisions on delegates to be sent to the county convention were sewn up through private bargaining among a few patronage-minded local notables.

In the 1880s and 1890s, this cozy system was disrupted by a new breed of “hustling candidates,” who actively campaigned for office rather than quietly currying favor with a few key party workers. When informal local caucuses started to become scenes of open competitive campaigning by rival factions, each seeking lucrative patronage jobs, they degenerated into chaos, often violence.

Worse, candidates who lost the party nomination would try to win the election anyway by employing their own agents to hand out “pasted” or “knifed” party tickets on election day, grafting their names inconspicuously onto the regular party ticket.

Party leaders were losing control over their traditional means of maintaining a disciplined political army. Their response was a series of state-level legislative reforms that permanently transformed the American political system, creating the electoral machinery we have today.

REPRESSION

Henceforth, state governments would administer party primaries, print the official ballot for primary and general elections, and mandate that voting be conducted in secret.

In the lore of American politics, these direct-primary and “[Australian ballot](#)” laws (i.e., laws mandating government-printed ballots cast inside a private booth) were the work of idealistic progressive reformers aiming to depose the party bosses and enshrine popular sovereignty. In reality, they were [adopted by the party leaders](#) themselves when such measures were deemed to suit their interests.

Of course, there’s nothing objectionable about secretly cast, government-printed ballots. Countries around the world were adopting such good-government reforms around the same time. But once the job of printing the ballot was handed over to governments, some mechanism was needed to determine who was “officially” a candidate, and under which party label.

This is where the American system began to diverge wildly from democratic norms elsewhere.

When the world’s first government-printed secret ballot was adopted in Australia in the 1850s, the law required a would-be parliamentary candidate to submit a total of [two endorsement signatures](#) to get on the ballot. When Britain adopted the reform in 1872, its requirement was [ten endorsement signatures](#). But when the first US state, Massachusetts, passed an Australian-ballot law in 1888, it [required](#) one thousand signatures for statewide office, and, in district-level races, signatures numbering at least 1 percent of the total votes cast at the preceding election.

Yet those barriers were mild compared to what came afterward. Over the three decades following US entry into World War I, as [working-class](#) and [socialist parties](#) burgeoned throughout the industrialized world, American elites chose to deal with the problem by radically restricting access to the ballot. In state after state, petition requirements and filing deadlines were tightened and various forms of routine legal harassment, unknown in the rest of the democratic world, became the norm.

The new restrictions came in waves, usually following the entry of left-wing parties into the electoral process. According to data gathered by Richard Winger of [Ballot Access News](#), in 1931 Illinois raised the petition requirement for third-party statewide candidates from one thousand signatures to twenty-five thousand. In California, the requirement was raised from 1 percent of the last total gubernatorial vote to 10 percent. In 1939,

Pennsylvania suddenly decided it was important that the thousands of required signatures be gathered solely within a three-week period. In New York, according to one account, “minor-party petitions began to be challenged for hyper-technical defects.”

“Although these statutes have been assailed on all sides,” a 1937 *Columbia Law Review* article [reported](#), “their severity is constantly being increased, probably because the interests oppressed seldom have representation in the legislatures.” Indeed, when the Florida legislature found socialists and communists advancing at the polls, it responded in 1931 by banning any party from the ballot unless it had won 30 percent of the vote in two consecutive elections; naturally, when the Republican Party failed to meet that test, the state immediately lowered the threshold.

By comparison, in Britain getting on the ballot was never a major concern for the newly founded [Labour Party](#); the only significant requirement was a £150 deposit (first instituted in [1918](#)), to be refunded if the candidate won at least 12.5 percent of the vote. In its first general-election outing in 1900, the party started with a mere 1.8 percent of the national vote. Despite the allegedly fatal “spoiler” problem, it then gradually increased its vote share until it overtook the Liberals as the major party of the Left in 1922.

Today, in almost every established democracy, getting on the ballot is at most a secondary concern for small or new parties; in many countries it involves little more than filling out some forms. In Canada, any party with [250 signed-up members](#) can compete in all 338 House of Commons districts nationwide, with each candidate needing to [submit one hundred voter signatures](#). In the United Kingdom, a parliamentary candidate [needs to submit](#) ten signatures, plus a £500 deposit which is refunded if the candidate wins at least 5 percent of the vote. [In Australia](#), a party with five hundred members can run candidates in all House of Representatives districts, with a \$770 deposit for each candidate, refundable if the candidate wins at least 4 percent of the vote.

In Ireland, Finland, Denmark, and Germany, [signature requirements](#) for a parliamentary candidacy range from 30 to 250, and up to a maximum of 500 in the largest districts of Austria and Belgium. In France and the Netherlands, only some paperwork is required.

The Council of Europe, the pan-European intergovernmental body, maintains a “[Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#),” which catalogs electoral practices that contravene international standards. Such violations often read like a manual of US election procedure. In 2006, the council [condemned the Republic of Belarus](#) for violating the provision of the code proscribing signature requirements larger than 1 percent of a district’s voters, a level the council regards as extremely high; in 2014, Illinois required more than triple that number for House candidacies. In 2004, the council [rebuked Azerbaijan](#) for its rule forbidding voters from signing nomination petitions for candidates from more than one party; California and many other states do essentially the same thing.

In fact, some US electoral procedures are unknown outside of dictatorships: “Unlike other established democracies, the USA [permits one set of standards](#) of ballot access for established ‘major’ parties and a different set for all other parties.”

That America’s election system is uniquely repressive is common knowledge among experts. “Nowhere is the concern [about governing-party repression] greater than in the United States, as partisan influence is possible at all stages of the electoral contest,” concludes a recent [survey](#) of comparative election law.

“Perhaps the clearest case of overt partisan manipulation of the rules is the United States, where Democrats and Republicans appear automatically on the ballot, but third parties and independents have to overcome a maze of cumbersome legal requirements,” [writes](#) Pippa Norris, a world elections authority at Harvard and director of democratic governance at the United Nations Development Program.

“One of the best-kept secrets in American politics,” the eminent political scientist Theodore Lowi [has written](#), “is that the two-party system has long been brain dead – kept alive by support systems like state electoral laws that protect the established parties from rivals and by federal subsidies and so-called campaign reform. The two-party system would collapse in an instant if the tubes were pulled and the IVs were cut.”

REGULATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

These considerations cast the usual debates about third parties, particularly on the Left, in a peculiar light.

Typically, advocates of the third-party route depict their strategy as a revolt against a rigged two-party system; sometimes they even castigate doubters as timid accommodationists. Yet, in the context of American law, when such advocates speak of creating an independent “party,” what they mean, ironically, is choosing to subject their organization to an elaborate regulatory regime maintained by, and continually manipulated by, the two parties themselves.

This is one fundamental problem with the third-party strategy: the need to continually maintain ballot status – an onerous process in most states – places the party’s viability at the mercy of the legislature.

A cautionary tale unfolded last year in Arizona, where the Republican-controlled legislature, concerned about the strength of the Libertarian Party, passed a law effectively raising the number of signatures each Libertarian candidate needs to appear on his or her party’s primary ballot from 134 to 3,023. (This is in addition to the hoops the party itself has to jump through to keep a ballot line in the first place.)

The bill’s Republican sponsor, Representative J.D. Mesnard, helpfully explained his thinking on the floor of the state House: “I believe that, if you look at the last election, there was at least one, probably two, congressional seats that may have gone in a different direction, the direction I would have liked to have seen them go, if this requirement had been there.”

Another unique aspect of American party law raises similar issues: in their internal affairs, ballot-qualified parties in the United States are “some of the most comprehensively regulated parties in the world.”

Normally, democracies regard political parties as voluntary associations entitled to the usual rights of freedom of association. But US state laws dictate not only a ballot-qualified party’s nominating process, but also its leadership structure, leadership selection process, and many of its internal

rules (although it's true that these mandates are often waived for third parties deemed too marginal to care about).

In other words, when third-party activists seek ballot status, they are often seeking to grant far-reaching control over their own internal affairs to a hostile two-party-dominated legislature. That is a peculiar way to go about smashing the two-party system.

Yet the perverse consequences of the system are often at their most visible when third parties *do* succeed in getting on the ballot.

These parties are frequently forced to devote the bulk of their resources not to educating voters, or knocking on doors on election day, but to waging petition drives and ballot-access lawsuits. The constant legal harassment, in turn, ends up exerting a subtle but powerful effect on the kinds of people attracted to independent politics. Through a process of natural selection, such obstacles tend to repel serious and experienced local politicians and organizers, while disproportionately attracting activists with a certain mentality: disdainful of practical politics or concrete results; less interested in organizing, or even winning elections, than in bearing witness to the injustice of the two-party system through the symbolic ritual of inscribing a third-party's name on the ballot.

The official parties are happy to have such people as their opposition, and even happy to grant them this safe channel for their discontent. And if, unexpectedly, a third party's fortunes were to start rising, the incumbents could always put a stop to it, simply by adjusting the law.

The Labor Party — wisely, in my opinion — adopted a strategy of not seeking ballot status until it had built enough strength to mount a credible challenge to the Democrats. But confronted with the dilemmas of a repressive electoral system, combined with the more familiar spoiler problem, it never actually reached that point. In the end, the party sought and obtained a ballot line only once, in South Carolina (a state where ballot laws were relatively relaxed), in a last-ditch effort near the end of its active life. But by then it was too late, and ultimately the party chose not to wage a serious electoral campaign in the state.

One lesson from this history is clear: We have to stop approaching our task as if the problems we face were akin to those faced by the organizers of, say, the British Labour Party in 1900 or Canada's [New Democratic Party](#) in 1961. Instead, we need to realize that our situation is more like that facing opposition parties in soft-authoritarian systems, like those of Russia or Singapore. Rather than yet another suicidal frontal assault, we need to mount the electoral equivalent of guerrilla insurgency. In short, we need to think about electoral strategy more creatively.

BORING FROM WITHIN?

Does that mean opting for the strategy championed by most progressive critics of the third-party route – namely, “working within the Democratic Party”?

No. Or at least, not in the way that phrase is usually meant.

It's true that a number of sincere, committed leftists, or at least progressives, run for office on the Democratic ballot line at all levels of American politics. Sometimes they even win. And all else equal, we're better off with such politicians in office than without them. So in that limited sense, the answer might be “yes.”

But electing individual progressives does little to change the broad dynamics of American politics or American capitalism. In fact, it can create a kind of placebo effect: sustaining the illusion of forward motion while obscuring the fact that neither party is structurally built to reflect working-class interests.

“Working within the Democratic Party” has been the prevailing model of progressive political action for decades now, and it suffers from a fundamental limitation: it cedes all real agency to professional politicians. The liberal office-seeker becomes the indispensable actor to whom all others, including progressives, must respond.

Think of [Ted Kennedy](#) or [Mario Cuomo](#) in the 1980s; Paul Wellstone or Russ Feingold in the 1990s; [Howard Dean](#), [Elizabeth Warren](#), or [Bill de Blasio](#) since 2000. Each emerges into the spotlight as they launch their careers or seek higher office. Each promises to represent “the democratic wing of the Democratic Party.” Each generates a flurry of positive coverage

in progressive media and a ripple of excitement within a narrow circle of progressive activists and voters.

Orbiting around these ambitious office-seekers are the progressive “grassroots” organizations exemplified by MoveOn.org, Democracy for America, or Progressive Democrats of America. (In an earlier, direct-mail era, it was Common Cause, People for the American Way, or even the Americans for Democratic Action.)

Run by salaried staffers, these groups monitor the political scene in search of worthy progressive candidates or legislative causes, alerting their supporters with bulletins urging them to “stand with” whichever progressive politico needs support at the moment. (Support, in this usage, usually means sending money, or signing an email petition.) Such groups generally maintain no formal standards for judging a candidate’s worthiness. Even if they did, in drawing up such standards they would be accountable to no one, and would have no power to change those candidates’ policy objectives.

Although it’s too early to tell, Bernie Sanders’s recently created [Our Revolution](#) organization seems in danger of falling into the same trap: becoming a mere middleman, or broker, standing between a diffuse, unorganized progressive constituency and a series of ambitious progressive office-seekers seeking their backing.

In this “party-less” model of politics, it’s the Democratic *politician* who goes about trying to recruit a *base*, rather than the other way around. The politician’s platform and message are devised by her and her alone. They can be changed on a whim. And there is no mechanism by which the politician can be held accountable to the (fairly nebulous) progressive constituency she has recruited to her cause.

The approach taken by the [Working Families Party](#) (WFP) is different, but it, too, remains vulnerable to the problems of such “party-less” politics. The WFP has built an impressive record of policy achievements in its New York State home base, using “fusion” voting – a ballot strategy forbidden by most state laws. (The ban on fusion is [another legacy](#) of the two-party election reforms of the 1890s.) Under fusion, a minor party places the name of a major-party’s nominee on its own ballot line, hoping that, if the major-

party candidate wins, he or she will feel beholden to the minor party for however many votes it managed to “deliver.”

But the contradictions of its 2014 [endorsement](#) of New York governor Andrew Cuomo showed how the WFP’s fusion strategy can place it in the worst of both worlds. On the one hand, the party remains chained to the interests of Democratic Party politicians, forced to endorse candidates that are not its own, who run on platforms far removed from its priorities, as if it were a mere faction of the Democratic Party. On the other hand, it still needs to worry about keeping its third-party ballot line, leaving it exposed to the kind of ballot-repression problems that more marginal third parties face.

At a deeper level, the “party-less” model that dominates progressive politics today is an outgrowth of America’s lamentable history of “internally mobilized” parties: that is, parties organized by already-established politicians for the sole purpose of creating a mass constituency around themselves. The Democratic Party – created in the 1830s by a network of powerful incumbents led by New York senator and power broker Martin Van Buren – is the classic case.

This stands in contrast to “externally mobilized” parties: organized by ordinary people, standing outside the system, who come together around a cause and then go about recruiting their own representatives to contest elections, for the purpose of gaining power they don’t already have.

For reasons that are not hard to guess, historical parties of the Left – true parties of the Left – have, almost without exception, been mobilized externally. As the historian Geoff Eley recounts in his [history](#) of the Left in Europe:

Parties of the Left sometimes managed to win elections and form governments, but, more important, they organized civil society into the basis from which existing democratic gains could be defended and new ones could grow. They magnetized other progressive causes and interests in reform. Without them, democracy was a nonstarter.

By contrast, not a single externally mobilized party has ever attained national electoral significance in the United States. “The major political parties in American history,” writes [Martin Shefter](#) – who first introduced this taxonomy of party mobilization – “and most conservative and centrist parties in Europe,” were founded “by politicians who [held] leadership

positions in the prevailing regime and who [undertook] to mobilize and organize a popular following behind themselves.”

“Modern democracy,” in E.E. Schattschneider’s classic formulation, “is unthinkable save in terms of the parties.”

Popular, working-class democracy, on the other hand, is unthinkable without parties mobilized from outside the political system – that is, by people organizing around common goals.

WHAT IS A DEMOCRATIC PARTY?

In a genuinely democratic party, the organization’s membership, program, and leadership are bound together tightly by a powerful, mutually reinforcing connection. The party’s *members* are its sovereign power; they come together through a sense of shared interest or principle. Through deliberation, the members establish a *program* to advance those interests. The party educates the public around the program, and it serves, in effect, as the lodestar by which the party is guided. Finally, the members choose a party *leadership* – including electoral candidates – who are accountable to the membership and bound by the program.

It might seem obvious that those are the characteristics of a truly democratic party. Yet the Democratic Party has none of them.

Start with the most fundamental fact about the Democratic Party: it has no members. A few months ago I was flattered to receive a letter signed by Debbie Wasserman Schultz, then chair of the Democratic National Committee, in which she urged me to consider sending a donation, thereby “becoming a DNC member,” in her words.

Was she proposing to let me vote on the Democratic primary schedule, or its mode of selecting convention delegates – or, for that matter, the next DNC chair? Obviously not. Mere “members” aren’t allowed to influence such decisions because, fundraising letters aside, there are no real members of the Democratic Party: “Unlike these [British, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand] democracies, where members join a political party through a process of application to the party itself, party membership in the United States has been described as ‘a fiction created by primary registration laws.’”

Just as the Democratic Party has no real membership, it offers only the most derisory semblance of a “program”: a quadrennial platform usually dictated by an individual nominee (or occasionally negotiated with a defeated rival) at the height of the election-season frenzy, a document that in most years no one reads and in all years no one takes seriously as a binding document. (At the state level, party platforms often reach hallucinatory levels of detachment from real politics.)

It’s true, of course, that in a constitutional democracy there’s never anything stopping an elected representative, once elected, from doing the opposite of what he or she had promised. And in the history of left-wing party politics it’s not hard to find instances where elected politicians have gone turncoat. One famous example was Ramsay MacDonald, a founder of the British Labour Party, who betrayed his party after becoming prime minister by joining with the Conservatives and pushing through drastic public spending cuts in the midst of the Depression.

But since MacDonald was accountable to a democratically organized party, he could be repudiated and expelled from that party — as he was in 1931, while still a sitting prime minister. For generations afterward, he was reviled within Labour Party circles, his name synonymous with betrayal.

Suppose, by way of comparison, that some onetime liberal Democratic hero — say, a senator — decides to flout the promises he or she initially made to MoveOn.org, or Democracy for America, or their constituents. Those groups’ staffs — whom no one has elected anyway — would have no power to meaningfully discipline, let alone expel, them.

To whom, then, is the senator accountable? An electorate, in theory, come reelection time. But no party.

This is the treadmill we need to get off.

A PARTY OF A NEW TYPE

The widespread support for Bernie Sanders’s candidacy, particularly among young people, has opened the door for new ideas about how to form a democratic political organization rooted in the working class.

The following is a proposal for such a model: a national political organization that would have chapters at the state and local levels, a binding program, a leadership accountable to its members, and electoral candidates nominated at all levels throughout the country.

As a nationwide organization, it would have a national educational apparatus, recognized leaders and spokespeople at the national level, and its candidates and other activities would come under a single, nationally recognized label. And, of course, all candidates would be required to adhere to the national platform.

But it would avoid the ballot-line trap. Decisions about how individual candidates appear on the ballot would be made on a case-by-case basis and on pragmatic grounds, depending on the election laws and partisan coloration of the state or district in question. In any given race, the organization could choose to run in major- or minor-party primaries, as nonpartisan independents, or even, theoretically, on the organization's own ballot line.

The ballot line would thus be regarded as a secondary issue. The organization would base its legal right to exist not on the repressive ballot laws, but on the fundamental rights of freedom of association.

Such a project probably wouldn't have been feasible in the past, due to campaign-finance laws. For most of the last four decades, the Federal Elections Campaign Act (FECA), along with similar laws in many states, would have left any such organization with little alternative but to fundraise through a political action committee (PAC). That PAC would have been limited to giving a maximum of \$5,000 (the current threshold) to each of its candidates per election, and barred from taking money from unions or collecting donations larger than \$5,000 from individuals. That kind of fundraising could never support a national organization.

All of these restrictions would be waived if, like the DNC or RNC, the group registered as a "party committee." But there's a catch: a group can only register as a party committee if it runs the ballot-access gauntlet at the state level (a requirement from which Democrats and Republicans are exempt), then wins a ballot line and runs its candidates on it. (Here we find

one of the many reasons scholars have described the FECA as a “[major-party protection act](#).”)

In the years leading up to the Supreme Court’s 2010 [Citizens United](#) decision, these regulations were already being eroded by the emergence of so-called “527” groups, which evaded the laws by taking unlimited donations to finance “independent expenditures” on behalf of candidates.

But in the wake of *Citizens United* (and subsequent rulings), the restrictions no longer pose a serious obstacle at all. Today, a national political organization could adopt the “[Carey](#)” model of campaign finance, validated in 2011 by the [Carey v. FEC](#) federal court decision. In this model, the national organization would incorporate as a 501(c)4 social welfare organization, permitting it to endorse candidates and engage in explicit campaigning, while accepting unlimited donations and spending unlimited amounts on political education. (It would also, of course, be free to adopt rigorous self-imposed disclosure rules, as it should.)

In addition, it would be allowed to establish a PAC that maintains two separate accounts: one permitted to donate to, and directly coordinate with, individual candidates (though subject to FECA contribution limits and allowed to actively solicit contributions only from the organization’s own members); and the other allowed to accept unlimited contributions and make unlimited independent expenditures on behalf of its candidates (though not donations to candidates themselves). A separate online “conduit” PAC, on the ActBlue model, could aggregate small-donor hard-money fundraising on a mass scale to finance the individual campaigns.

With a viable fundraising model patterned along these lines, all of the organization’s candidates nationwide, up and down the ballot, would be able to benefit from its name recognition and educational activities. It could sponsor speakers, hold debates, establish a network of campus affiliates, and designate spokespeople who would be recognized as its public voices. In the media and on the internet, voters would be continually exposed to its perspective on the events of the day and its proposals for the future.

To put the electoral possibilities of this approach into perspective, consider a few numbers. In 2014, [there were](#) 1,056 open-seat state-legislative races

(races where no incumbent was running). The median winner spent only \$51,000, for the primary and general elections combined. Two-thirds of the races cost less than \$100,000. And in 36 percent of *all* state-legislative races that year – almost 2,500 seats – the winner had run unopposed.

I think this model can work. But like any blueprint, it's not a panacea. Simply filing the paperwork to create such an organization is not going to magically conjure a large and successful movement into existence. To make it work, it needs to be a real vehicle and voice for working-class interests. And that means a significant part of the labor movement would have to be at its core.

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IT'S THEIR PARTY

PAUL HEIDEMAN

In 1964, there were few things that Students for a Democratic Society and [Barry Goldwater](#) agreed on.

SDS was becoming a key voice of a new wave of American radicalism, and the organization's veterans would go on to shape the US far left for decades. In much the same way, backers of Goldwater's failed presidential campaign that year would eventually become key figures in the new Republican Party, turning it into a proselytizer for free-market fundamentalism whose vigor was matched only by the evangelical commitments of its new voting base.

Though the future trajectories of SDS and the Goldwater campaign were unknown at the time, in 1964 they were already implacable opponents. SDS, convinced of the threat Goldwater represented, reluctantly agreed to campaign for his opponent, Lyndon Baines Johnson, with the slogan "Half the way with LBJ."

Yet SDS and Goldwater did find themselves in agreement on one central question in American politics: the place of the South. Historically a one-party region controlled entirely by segregationist Democrats known as the Dixiecrats, the successes of pro-civil rights forces inside the national Democratic Party had thrown the region's alignment into question.

For Goldwater, it was obvious that these reactionaries belonged inside his emerging Republican coalition. Speaking before an audience of Georgia Republicans, the candidate assured them that he "would bend every muscle to see that the South has a voice in everything that affects the life of the South."

In a time of federal civil rights laws, and the use of federal troops to enforce school desegregation, this kind of appeal to regional self-determination had a clear meaning. And the rationale for such an overture was equally obvious – black voters were not about to abandon the Democrats, and as such, they should "go hunting where the ducks are."

Strangely enough, SDS agreed. In the [1962 Port Huron Statement](#), the defining manifesto produced by the group, they called for “the shuttling of Southern Democrats out of the Democratic Party.” It went on to comment specifically on Goldwater, musing that

It is to the disgrace of the United States that such a movement should become a prominent kind of public participation in the modern world – but, ironically, it is somewhat to the interests of the United States that such a movement should be a public constituency pointed toward realignment of the political parties, demanding a conservative Republican Party in the South.

SDS was hardly alone on the Left in welcoming such a shift. From liberals to socialists, the attempt to push the Dixiecrats out of the Democratic Party was widely held to be a necessary step in the project of building a more equal country, allowing the Democrats to become a party more like those of European social democracy.

Things did not exactly work out this way. The defection of the South to the Republicans coincided with the conservatization of the Democrats, and, in some accounts, even laid the foundation for the reemergence of the Republicans as a majority party. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to dismiss the advocates of the realignment perspective, who included both liberals like Walter Reuther of the United Automobile Workers (UAW) and radicals like [Bayard Rustin](#), as deluded or shortsighted in their strategy.

Indeed, their project was based on an analysis of American society whose level of sophistication and scale of ambition puts much of progressive thought today to shame. And, unlike most recent projects of the US left, it succeeded. Though many revolutionary leftists dismissed the possibility at the time, the Dixiecrats really were driven from the Democratic Party, even if the consequences of that exodus were not what SDS and other radicals had expected they would be.

Ultimately, the realignment strategy represented one of the high points of the struggle for social democracy in the United States. For a time, it seemed possible to transform the Democrats into a social-democratic party. The failure of this project should not be taken as a verdict on the failure of social democracy as a strategy. Its history does, however, contain lessons for adherents of that strategy today, as well as for socialists looking beyond it.

THE STRATEGY

The strategy of realigning the Democrats by pushing out the Dixiecrats and creating a party run by a liberal-labor coalition was backed by much of the union leadership and social movements at the time. Figures from Walter Reuther to Martin Luther King Jr noticed that the Democratic Party contained within it both the most liberal forces in official American politics, like [Hubert Humphrey](#), and the most reactionary, like [Strom Thurmond](#).

The idea that the latter could be forced out, and that the party could be hegemonized by the former, was an attractive one that gained plausibility as the incipient civil rights insurgency intensified the contradiction between the two groups. By the early 1960s, realignment was the implicit strategy guiding the work of many of the leaders of the national Civil Rights Movement.

Inside the movement, the most important partisan of realignment was Bayard Rustin, perhaps the most talented organizer the US left ever produced. Rustin had been, among other things, a Young Communist, a pacifist, and an organizer for A. Philip Randolph's [March on Washington Movement](#) for civil rights.

By the 1950s, he was a well-known figure. When the Montgomery Bus Boycott began in 1955, Rustin quickly headed down to Alabama, becoming a key advisor to [Martin Luther King Jr](#). A few years later, Rustin would become the main organizer behind the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

Rustin was a tireless advocate of realignment. He consistently argued that black Americans had to secure real political power in order to achieve equality. The only way to do this, he asserted, was by transforming the Democratic Party. Traditional methods of protest were insufficient:

We have to look at political parties differently than we look at other institutions, like segregated schools and lunch counters, because a political party is not only the product of social relations, but an instrument of change as well. It is the Dixiecrats and the other reactionaries who want to paralyze the Democratic Party in order to maintain the status quo. . . .

If we only protest for concessions from without, then that party treats us in the same way as any of the other conflicting pressure groups. This means it offers us the most minimum concessions for votes. But if the same amount of pressure is exerted from inside the party using highly sophisticated political tactics, we can change the structure of that party.

Later in the decade, Rustin's insistence that black insurgents orient themselves around official politics in the US would bring him into direct conflict with the nascent expressions of black power, and he would eventually become one of its most prominent black critics. In the early 1960s, however, he was still moving with the general current of black protest.

His position on realignment was similarly popular in left milieus. In 1960, Reuther declared his intention to "bring about a realignment and get the liberal forces in one party and the conservatives in another." And the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, who famously attempted to unseat the segregationist delegation from their state at the 1964 Democratic Party convention, was in part motivated by the same perspective.

Looking back on their effort, [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee](#) (SNCC) and MFDP organizer Cleveland Sellers recalled that

We were thinking far beyond Atlantic City. If our venture there was successful, we intended to utilize similar tactics in other Southern states, particularly Georgia and South Carolina. Our ultimate goal was the destruction of the awesome power of the Dixiecrats, who controlled over 75 percent of the most important committees in Congress. With the Dixiecrats deposed, the way would have been clear for a wide-ranging redistribution of wealth, power, and priorities throughout the nation.

Realignment's embrace by such a wide variety of progressive forces belies its rather obscure origins. Before Reuther and Rustin threw their considerable skills behind the strategy, it was being promoted by a little-known but key figure in the history of American radicalism: [Max Shachtman](#).

Shachtman was the leader of a heterodox Trotskyist grouping that, although small, had helped lead important struggles in an earlier era, such as the fight against the no-strike pledge, enforced by both the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) officialdom and the Communist Party during World War II.

Shachtman had come to the position that the advance of the American workers movement was dependent on the formation of a labor party, and looked to union leaders like Reuther as the incipient nucleus of such a party.

During the late 1940s, Shachtman and his associates attempted, unsuccessfully, to convince Reuther and other left-wing labor leaders to break from the Democrats and start such an organization.

By the late 1950s, it had become clear that a split was not on the agenda. Even before the 1955 reunification of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the CIO – in which progressives like Reuther took a back seat to the new organization's head, the apostle of business unionism, George Meany – the labor movement had grown more conservative.

At the same time, the development of the civil rights insurgency raised the possibility that a right-wing split from the Democrats, led by the Dixiecrats, might be more likely than a left-wing one. The way might then be clear, Shachtman reasoned, for labor and its liberal allies to take over the party, transforming it into something like a European social-democratic party.

Shachtman's thinking gained influence through the efforts of his followers, most importantly [Michael Harrington](#). Harrington had joined Shachtman's group in the early 1950s and, as the leader of the party's youth section, quickly became a prominent member.

Hard-working, intelligent, and charming, Harrington gained influence in left-liberal circles, writing for *Dissent* magazine and becoming chairman of the League for Industrial Democracy, out of which SDS would be born. He befriended Rustin in the mid 1950s and forged an alliance between the older civil rights activist and Shachtman's milieu. Together, the three men worked to build a broad consensus in the American left around realignment.

The material conditions supporting such a strategy certainly existed. What political scientists have called "the Southern veto" had effectively blocked efforts to secure progressive legislation around race or labor at the national level. Moreover, the Dixiecrats had prevented the Democrats from assuming a coherent political identity as the party of American liberalism.

Thus, the partisans of realignment held, even if the exit of the Dixiecrats cost votes in the short term, it would allow liberals and labor to run the party unopposed, finally creating a national political party unambiguously committed to a left agenda.

REALIGNING EXPECTATIONS

The story of realignment harkens back to a time when large-scale historical projects still animated the US left. Even though it is apparent in retrospect that the strategy never had much of a chance, it is possible to look back with respect at the strategic thinking that motivated Rustin, Harrington, and their comrades. They astutely identified one of the major fault lines in American politics, and developed a way to shake that fault line such that when the dust settled, something like an American social democracy would exist.

Today, this kind of thinking has all but disappeared. To be sure, there are many who continue to labor in the shadow of Harrington's vision, who often speak of "intensifying the contradictions" between the Democratic Party's base and its investors by backing left candidates within the party. What's missing from this orientation is any sense of the momentum of the party.

The contradiction between the party's base and its investors has existed since the birth of the modern Democratic Party in the New Deal. It has persisted through the Great Society, through the New Politics era, through Carter, all the way up until the present. Again and again, this contradiction alone has proven inert, unable to change the basic structure of power within the party.

In the late 1950s, it was obvious that tensions between Dixiecrats and the rest of the party were coming to a head. And if the internecine schism between base and investors could not turn the party leftwards then, when accompanied by the civil rights revolution, there's little reason to believe it will do so today, in our far drearier historical moment.

Gloomy as this conclusion is, the history of realignment also offers if not hope, then at least some sense of the grounds on which hope can be built.

The strategy was correct in looking for divisions in official politics. It failed, ironically, in not recognizing the divisions that made its strategy even possible — the fractures in capital that allowed a more accommodating sector, fearful of losing everything to working-class insurgency, to compromise with labor. This concession was the condition of existence for the Democratic Party, and when its own conditions of existence were undermined in the crisis of the 1970s, that compromise ended.

The contemporary left should aspire to do what the realignment strategy tried to accomplish – to recognize the different interests that exist within capital, and leverage them to our own ends. To be successful in this endeavor, however, and to avoid the sorry end of postwar realignment, it will have to organize on the basis of two truths that Harrington and his co-thinkers ultimately forgot.

First, working-class insurgency is the only force that renders the contradictions between capitals dynamic and capable of serving the Left. Second, whatever power labor manages to assert against capital, whether on the shop floor, in a capitalist party like the Democrats, or even in an actual social-democratic party, will always be partial, and subject to dismemberment as soon as capital is able. While Harrington's intellectual work stresses this, the project he helped built did not reflect it.

The failure that ensued was nothing to celebrate. The absence of an American social democracy is not only responsible for the brutal and devastated character of working-class life in US society – it has also yielded a feeble revolutionary left.

Deprived of the robust class-wide organizations built and preserved by social democracy elsewhere, the revolutionary left has perpetually struggled with the most extreme forms of political isolation, and the political and organizational pathologies that accompany it. The sectarianism and splintering that afflict the radical left are not, as is sometimes smugly implied, a cause of the radical left's powerlessness. They are instead a symptom of a situation in which splitting over obscure questions of doctrine carries no real consequences for the Left's ability to change anything.

American social democrats have also suffered from the failure of realignment. The absence of a real American reformism has left would-be social democrats largely holding on to the coattails of the unreformed Democratic Party. Again and again, this has occasioned the spectacle of committed radicals, including Harrington, campaigning for politicians, like Carter, who oppose everything they believe in.

The problem with this dynamic is not so much that radicals sully themselves with the impurities of compromise – some measure of compromise is necessary in any kind of electoral participation. Rather, it is that in arguing

that workers should defend their interests by voting for progressive Democrats when possible (or neoliberals when there are no progressives), American social democrats orient politics on a sphere in which it is actually impossible to defend those interests.

The argument always goes, of course, that social struggles outside the electoral sphere are necessary as well. But as anyone who has ever been inveigled to support the lesser of two evils knows, somehow the emphasis on those forms of struggle never reaches the frenzied pitch of election year appeals.

Any political action comes with opportunity costs, and the costs of a strategic focus on electing Democrats have been grave – from the labor movement’s inability to defend itself against attacks from “their” party to antiwar movements that disappear when a Democrat comes to office. Configuring left politics around electoral action, in the absence of any kind of social democracy, inevitably results in a situation where, as Robert Brenner puts it, reformism doesn’t even reform.

The failure of realignment, then, contains lessons for socialists who fall on both sides of the old “reform or revolution” argument. Its history should not be taken as a verdict against reformism. Indeed, the story of realignment serves to clarify what, exactly, will be required for a successful American reformism. Because ultimately, the kind of grand strategic vision that animated realignment is a prerequisite for both those who wish to see, at long last, social democracy in the United States – and those who wish to go beyond it.

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LESSONS FROM VERMONT

LUKE ELLIOTT-NEGRI

In 1981, after several failed statewide bids on the Liberty Union Party ticket, Bernie Sanders was elected mayor of Burlington, Vermont as an independent. The Democratic Party proceeded to launch a war against Sanders and several other progressives who won city council seats that year. Yet through a combination of popular mobilization, sewer socialism, and the gradual construction of parallel institutions, the crew outlasted the assault.

Today, Sanders is the country's most successful left politician, and the Vermont Progressive Party (VPP) – which grew out of the original slate of left-wing insurgents and disaffected Rainbow Coalition Democrats – is on the short list of most successful left parties. Attaining major party status in 2000, the VPP still controls the Burlington City Council and has members in both chambers of the statehouse as well.

This election cycle, VPP chair Emma Mulvaney-Stanak says, the party is running more candidates than ever: between twenty-five and thirty. And, Mulvaney-Stanak notes, the VPP finally has a genuine pipeline – it cultivates elected officials at the local level, moves them into legislative seats, and then vies for statewide office.

The VPP's strategy is not without complications, as the fight over the state's single-payer health care bill showed. Strident champions of the legislation, the VPP successfully injected single-payer into the public discourse and secured Governor Peter Shumlin's support by agreeing not to "spoil" his election bid. But when Shumlin reversed his position and the bill's prospects dimmed, the VPP was unable to mount a robust response. The act died.

Progressives have had more clout at the local level, so much so that it's reasonable to attribute both the good and the bad in Burlington politics over the past decades to the VPP. On the one hand, Progressives have introduced state ownership into typically market-driven areas, through projects like a

municipal cable company. But mismanagement of that very project – revealed in the wake of the financial crisis – caused the party to lose the mayoralty. The VPP’s electoral wins, it learned, didn’t automatically translate into a model for effective, clean social-democratic government.

At the same time, both in Burlington and Montpelier, the VPP has championed policies that distinguish it from Vermont Democrats and built a distinct party identity in the process.

So what lessons does the VPP offer for those seeking to carve out a space to the left of the Democratic Party? Provisional answers to this question may provide the beginning of an answer to an even more pressing question: what’s next after the Sanders campaign?

1. START WITH THE CITY . . .

Political scientists talk about [Duverger’s law](#), the idea that single-member districts lead inexorably to two-party systems. But Duverger himself recognized that *which* two parties predominate could vary by region and locale. In Burlington, the two just happen to be Progressives and Democrats, not Democrats and Republicans.

There’s a similar opening in other cities where single-party rule prevails. In New York City, only three out of fifty-one council seats are held by Republicans, and GOP infrastructure is weak. Philadelphia, another effectively one-party town, sets aside two city council seats for non-majority candidates. These spots go to the Republicans simply because there is no left organization like the VPP poised to take them.

New York and Philadelphia are not extreme outliers. Many urban centers in the US are Democratic strongholds that skew ideologically left. Fears of playing the “spoiler” run deep – particularly in the presidential election – and not for nothing. But left-liberal cities under one-party rule naturally avoid this potential pitfall, giving the Left a clear opportunity to make electoral gains.

In short, there is no reason why many cities in the US can’t become two-party towns – dominated not by Democrats and Republicans, but by socialists and Democrats.

2. . . . OR START SMALL.

Political scientists also tell us that canvassing can substantially boost voter mobilization. In rural states like Vermont, direct engagement with residents can have even bigger payoffs, allowing third parties to overcome financial and logistical barriers and increase name recognition.

Indeed, the VPP has been able to establish a base partly because Vermont is a small state. Many VPP candidates claim to have personally knocked every – or almost every – door in their districts. That’s simply not possible in big cities.

Part of the Bernie Sanders story is that a crew of socialists built power in a small pond and then, in 2016, leapt into the ocean. While socialists tend to congregate in cities, one lesson of the VPP is that the Left should look for openings in smaller and more rural states. Even Wyoming has two Senate seats.

3. BUILD A PARTY IDENTITY.

In an era of increasing voter antipathy toward both major parties, the Progressive label can seem unsullied and more attractive to disaffected voters. As VPP elections director Josh Wronski put it: “We are able to get attention because we are not the Dems.”

Yet even in the age of independents, party identification still often shapes voting behavior, over and above other factors. This presents obvious challenges for a third-party formation like the VPP: it has to foster a Progressive identity, different from that of the Democrats and Republicans, among the party rank-and-file and the voting population more broadly.

It’s had some success. One Progressive I talked to said that in response to Democrats who tell people they are “small-p progressives,” she now says, “I’m a big-P Progressive, small-d democrat.” Another party activist told me that, door-knocking in Burlington, you come across second- and even third-generation Progressives.

It may be some time before Kshama Sawant, the Seattle socialist city councilor, is able to claim any second-generation socialists in the city. And the VPP seems more interested in fostering a capital-P Progressive identity

than a broadly socialist one. But leftists shouldn't underestimate the importance of creating new partisan attachments.

It's one thing for a majority of city councilors to be "independent" of Democrats and Republicans. It's quite another when Progressives control an entire city council.

4. KNOW THE RULES.

In Vermont, many districts for state office are actually multi-member. The most electorally savvy in the VPP quickly learned, however, that this was not necessarily to the party's advantage.

VPP voters were less likely to "bullet vote" (i.e. select just one candidate, even if given the option to choose more than one) than their Democratic Party counterparts. If one Progressive was running in a two-seat district, for instance, most Progressives would vote first for their candidate and then for a Democrat. Democratic voters were more apt to back two Democrats. As a result, even a very popular Progressive candidate could end up coming in third.

Pursuing electoral reform was one way to mitigate this problem. But in the immediate term, VPP developed "sponge candidates" who would get on the ballot simply to absorb the second Progressive vote, thus preventing it from going to a Democrat.

The lesson here is not that the Left needs to study the boring details of Vermont electoral law, but that the Left needs to study the boring details of local electoral law wherever they are active. In every place we see successful third parties, we see a group that has taken the time to examine the legal minutiae.

5. ADDRESS THE FUSION DILEMMA.

Vermont has what is called "partial fusion" – candidate names are listed once on the ballot, and parties are listed after their names. The candidate signals the party with which she will caucus by the order in which the parties are listed. This is distinct from "full fusion," like in [New York](#), where a candidate's name is listed under each party that has nominated her.

Electoral fusion has a long history. In the 1890s, the People's Party was on the rise, in part thanks to the successful use of a fusion strategy. They challenged the major parties where they could win, and accrued name recognition where they couldn't.

At the time, fusion was legal everywhere. But before long, Republicans – afraid the tactic would spell its demise – passed legislation outlawing fusion balloting in states throughout the country, beginning in the Pacific Northwest. Today, the only places where fusion balloting remains legal are the states where such legislation never arrived (save for Oregon, the only state to have re-legalized fusion balloting and where the Working Families Party now operates with notable influence).

Many VPP activists think of themselves as to the left of the WFP, and given the party's history and the Progressive versus Democrat battles that still play out in Burlington, this is no surprise. But at the state level, the VPP's approach looks much like the WFP's: push Democrats to the left using fusion voting.

For some, the VPP's fusion strategy represents a break with the party's core mission that subordinates it to the Democratic Party. Party officials, by contrast, are confident their candidates are of a different breed when they reach elected office. They point to the statehouse caucus as evidence – P/Ds and Ps meet separately from Ds, and tend to champion more social-democratic legislation.

Whether leftists in other cities and states adopt a similar strategy will depend on local conditions. But evaluating the contexts in which fusion may be justified will be a key task. On this and other strategic issues post-Bernie, hardheaded thinking can't be in short supply.

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RACE

HOW RACE IS CONJURED

BARBARA FIELDS AND KAREN FIELDS, INTERVIEWED BY JASON FARBMAN

In the three years since Trayvon Martin was killed, the realities of police racism and violence, of segregation from schools to swimming pools, and of the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow have returned to mainstream discussions. And now as Confederate flags disappear in the wake of the murders in Charleston, racism is once again at the center of the popular consciousness.

There is a window, then, for the US left to push a deeper and broader conversation about the implications of racism and to build working-class organizations that fight for social justice for all.

But that opportunity will only be open to the degree we can overcome the ideological legacy of the last three decades. Since the 1980s, structural inequality has been increasingly replaced by personal responsibility as the main explanation for gross inequality. At the same time, attention to persistent and structural racism faded, supplanted by a focus on race and “race relations.”

This could not have been possible without the enshrinement of race as a natural category, the spread of the fiction that certain traits define members of one “race” and differentiate them from members of other races.

No one has better articulated why race cannot serve as the starting point for discussions about inequality in the United States – and what we miss when they are – than Barbara and Karen Fields, authors of the 2012 book Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life.

JASON FARBMAN

Many events in the past year have forced attention to the problems of racism in the United States – most recently the terrorist attack in Charleston. But debates around Rachel Dolezal, which captured everyone’s

attention in the week before Charleston, were very unlike these other discussions. What was striking about those debates is that they weren't much about racism at all, and much more about what race Dolezal is.

BARBARA FIELDS

The focus on Dolezal seemed to trivialize other recent events that put racism on people's horizons. Karen and I don't talk about race, except to explain the relationship between race and racism and racecraft. Race is a category that means something to most Americans, but in *Racecraft* we're trying to explain exactly what it cannot mean. It cannot mean visible physical differences that, by themselves, produce consequences in everyday life.

We see race not as a physical fact, but as a product of racism. And we see racism not as an attitude or a state of mind, like bigotry: it's an action. It's acting on a double standard, with that double standard itself based on ancestry or supposed ancestry.

Extreme individual bigotry, like that exhibited by Dylann Roof in Charleston, may figure in racist action. But it is incomparably less frequent than the vast background of workaday racism against which it occurs.

When people act on a racist double-standard regularly – as people do in our society – then race starts to look like something that comes from nature. In other words it turns racism into race, through racecraft. The Dolezal matter moves us away from actions and practices.

JASON FARBMAN

*For most people, race is the obvious starting point for discussions of racism. You invert that assumption in *Racecraft*, arguing that race has no biological basis and therefore can't be the starting point for any reasonable discussion. You created the word "racecraft" to identify how – when those practices are repeated widely and persevere for decades and centuries – racist practice produces a general belief in race.*

KAREN FIELDS

My breakthrough, personally, came from work I had done in colonized African societies where witchcraft was believed in widely. Not just believed in, but taken for granted as real.

The British colonial officials, there to rule the country, said that it was not real. But in order to control the communities they were seeking to control, those very officials found they had to operate within the idiom of witchcraft. Indeed, one of them said, “Let’s find one of the better class witch doctors!”

What a thing to say, but it is ideology in the same sense we mean race is. It’s a vocabulary of everyday life. It’s a commonplace idiom of thought. It’s a commonplace language. It’s given. If you say there’s no such thing as race people will look at you and say you’re crazy. How is it they came to believe in witchcraft? In much the same way that Americans come to believe in racecraft.

Racecraft shares characteristics with witchcraft, two in particular. First, there’s no rational causality. We often speak as if black skin causes segregation or shootings. Second, there’s (witting or unwitting) reliance on circular argument. For example, blood serves as a metaphor of race but is often taken as a feature of race, even by scientifically trained people. So we find explanations meant to be scientific that end up using logic has to deny causality.

For instance, they say black people get this disease or that black people have more of a certain blood factor than others, with a certain statistical frequency, but you can’t derive a causal explanation from a statistical frequency. If everyone takes race for granted, there’s no reason that scientists would wean themselves from doing the same.

Race is the category they start and end with.

BARBARA

When you have arguments or observations that do without workaday causality in the twenty-first century, you are on a terrain very similar to that of believers in witchcraft.

In *Racecraft* we tell a story about a study of asthma among children living in the Bronx. The researchers had children wear monitors so they could find out exactly what emissions were in the air and what the children were actually breathing in. They reported the results and concluded the high volume of truck traffic, because of the nearby highways, contributed to the high incidence of asthma.

The story as reported in the *New York Times* featured commentary by an expert, who agreed that the study showed this and that environmental factor had been shown to be contributors. But he said the high incidence of asthma also had to do with the high percentage of Hispanic and black children in the area.

It was reported uncritically that being Hispanic or black ranked along with the actual causes of their susceptibility to asthma. That reasoning makes as much sense as claiming the things that cause asthma are pollution but also speaking Spanish in the household. Everybody would see that was ridiculous, but miss the anomaly when the subject is race. That's what racecraft is.

KAREN

What witchcraft and racecraft have in common is they are part of something that cannot have a regular causal explanation – the cause of good and bad fortune such as sicknesses and draughts. What we do in America is to explain inequality by saying there are certain characteristics of people who come out on the wrong end of things.

Since we can't talk about inequality in America, or at least until very recently we could not, the explanation becomes something inherent in black and Hispanic people.

JASON FARBMAN

Racism is not just the product of interpersonal interactions (although it frequently plays out at the level of individual interactions). We get plenty of encouragement from politicians, corporations, and the media to justify unequal outcomes for different groups.

KAREN

People are captives of ideology, but they also can understand it just as the witch doctors knew how to produce the tricks to keep people faithful to the rituals they performed. There are racecraft artists who understand how to push those levers.

One was the guy who did public relations for Republican Sen. Jesse Helms's reelection. He mobilized fear of white people losing their jobs to black people, when the main agenda, as he surely knew very well, was everybody

losing their manufacturing jobs in North Carolina. Which happened very rapidly in the following decade.

There's also the funding and propagation of the blood industry. Blood may be the deepest metaphor and mobilizing image of race. We find American Red Cross now promoting – at least as late as 2010, if not more recently – the notion that people do best if they get blood from their own race or ethnic group.

They have gotten funds for studies that purport to demonstrate that. But there were studies in the 1930s that fell far short of proof. So when I saw this donor recruitment from the Red Cross, I asked them where the science was on which they were basing this claim. They sent me a 1992 paper from the *New England Journal of Medicine* that was heavily criticized by some doctors, but nevertheless appeared in a distinguished journal. That means people know, and simultaneously don't know, what is wrong with claims of that kind.

There's no harm from the ruling class point of view in letting people think blood differs by race. It's such a motivating image. I've been kept up at nights thinking that I might get to a hospital where someone thinks this is truth, and I would be denied blood that matched my blood type because it was not "racially matched."

JASON FARBMAN

It's fairly common on the US left to hear "race is a social construction," which seems to support what you two argue. But what is often meant, though, is that race is just made up, that race could mean anything to anybody.

BARBARA

There is an important difference between identity and identification, which Karen and I have talked about in our book *Racecraft*. Rachel Dolezal was able to define her identity well enough to become what she said she was in her environment, in Spokane. And that's something available to her partly because of the way that we as a society define who is black and who is not.

Anybody can be black – black is defined as any known or visible ancestry – or "one drop of blood." So it's really not based on what you look like, even if you go to the trouble of tanning and wearing a wig and whatnot.

Most Afro Americans don't have any control over identification. Their identity, how they define themselves, how they perceive themselves, can be overruled by that identification. That's what happens when we see Afro-American police officers killed by their comrades by mistake. Their identity as a police officer is overruled instantly and fatally because the identification takes precedence.

That's what happens to people who are visibly Afro American or who are identified that way in our racist society, if not always in so dramatic and terminal a way. Mistaken identification can put an end to one's identity by terminating the human being it's attached to.

KAREN

We should hammer on identification, and not identity. For instance, how someone is treated when they go into a store. [Trayon Christian](#) went into a boutique in New York, and he might have had the identity of a student and a consumer of expensive goods, using money he earned. But he was identified immediately as a black person, and the police were called on him by someone at the store. He was arrested by police, who examined his valid sales slip, and the valid debit card, he had used to purchase the merchandise, but then arrested him anyway.

BARBARA

Another feature of what we talk about as racecraft is the sumptuary code, which applies to a skin color or a social status. Trayvon Martin was in a largely white subdivision, so he was identified as an anomaly because the sumptuary code said he shouldn't be there. Racism and racecraft is the collection of those mechanical things people do in a routine way, when someone's presence is anomalous in a store or a residential area, that is primed in us as an equation of other people's "race."

JASON FARBMAN

Is it possible to fruitfully discuss racism at the individual level? In Racecraft you argue the social construction of race is social – a relationship, between an individual and the world, something negotiated. Not just something people determine for themselves or that nature determines for them.

KAREN

Well, you have put your finger on something very important and contested. Psychology, which operates on the individual level, can't bring much to the discussion. Some psychologists go so far as to discover features of the brain. But that doesn't account for somebody not having legitimate access to housing.

The socially constructed part of race is not that it is unreal, but that it is invisible in its construction, and that it is being done by people all the time, in action and in understanding. We all are pushing the levers every day.

It's easier on the conscience of people who benefit from these codes of exclusion and preferences for professional advancement, if the notion is that we have dealt with racism because people quickly say, "I don't have a racist bone in my body!"

In the minds of some people, once you've gotten rid of the intention you've gotten rid of the thing. But they will continue to do the opposite spontaneously and without taking moral account or accepting moral accountability for what that means.

BARBARA

Race appears to be self-evident to people, so that when people throw around the expression "it's a social construction," you'll get two reactions. (I don't use the expression either in writing or in teaching.)

One of them, that man or woman in the street reaction is, "What do you mean it's not real?" And the man and the woman in the street, especially if the man or the woman in the street is of African descent, knows that you can't say it's not real because people get killed because of it! And people are affected in all kinds of ways in their daily life, short of death. To say that race is not real is not to say that racism is not real and that it does not have real consequences.

The other way "race is a social construction" can be apprehended, which is also wrong, is to say race is infinitely malleable. That has come up quite a bit in discussions about the Dolezal situation, that people should have the freedom to decide who they are. Well, we don't have the freedom to decide

for ourselves – although some people do have a greater ability than others to to decide for themselves. Identity is one thing; identification is another.

KAREN

When my daughter was growing up, my husband and I in our fallible wisdom put her into a private school where everyone else was white. And it wasn't long before she was heard sitting by herself one day saying, "I am a black child, I am a black child, I am a black child." She was five years old.

That singling out was not part of her subjective awareness before she got to the school, but she had to take it in from what was being done at school. So the racecraft went on for her but it also went on for them, because the other children learn that is what you do to somebody of her complexion and hair type.

JASON FARBMAN

You talk about how the word black has been the virtual equivalent of "poor" and "lower class" since very early in the country's history. When this equivalence becomes a commonsense notion, you argue, "It is easy to overlook the fact that the apparatus of Jim Crow, like that of slavery, imposed relations of dominance and subordination among Euro Americans, and not just between Afro Americans and Euro Americans . . . One group of white people outranked the other precisely because it was in a position to oppress and exploit black people."

BARBARA

That equivalence between "black" and "poor" obscures the class structure of inequality in this country, which is something studiously avoided. For a long time our public mythology has been that our political system has a genius for compromise, and that it doesn't fracture on class lines the way it does in other countries.

That story isn't working now, but over the years when it was working we paid a very high price for that. It meant the real experiences of people's everyday lives couldn't be talked about as what they were. That goes for white people as well as black people.

In the book, we used one example to illustrate this. When our father was a baby, our great-grandmother would take him to a park in Charleston and

ride him around in a baby carriage that she had fancied up with her own handwork – crocheted ruffles and flourishes and so on. It looked from the outside like the equipment of an upper-class white baby. She would go to the park every day taking my father around, where a white Irish police officer would smile at her.

He thought he knew what he was looking at: a servant in an upper-class white family, taking the baby of that family for an outing. But when he came close enough to see there was a black baby in the carriage then everything changed, and he tried to order our great-grandmother out of the park.

What that episode also illustrates is a relationship of class hierarchy between white people. When that police officer smiled and was congenial toward the black woman pushing along the baby carriage, he was expressing his sense of subservience to the employers he assumed she was working for. In other words a class relationship between white people took the form of a relationship between white and black people.

Much of the substance was beneath the surface, but his attitude changed after kowtowing to white employers only to realize they weren't there, that he had actually been kowtowing to a black woman.

KAREN

I have told that story again and again because people have a stick-figure version of what Jim Crow meant, that a mechanism went off as soon as black and white people encountered one another. This doesn't allow us to see white people as a differentiated group. In that story the police officer is not a respected category or person, Irish on top of it, meaning an immigrant who was not well viewed at the time.

Another example is when our grandmother was a teacher on [James Island](#), not far from Charleston. She decided one day she was going to have a bang-up closing program for the year. She wanted some special things for it and so approached her supervisor, who was a well-to-do white landowner.

In her spirit of uplift to show white people (whom she thought of as an undifferentiated group) what black people could accomplish, she told him, "I want to invite all the neighbors." And he said, "Oh no. There are white people

and there are crackers, and they have nothing to do with one another. Don't you think about inviting them, they'll burn it down!"

Grandma came home that night to tell her husband and they exploded, because they realized there was not a united front the Southern ideology had worked so hard to establish: all white folks together, behind the Confederate flag. They laughed until they cried; it was discovery of something new!

But in our time lower-class white people are still kept much out of sight. Inequality among white people, and the solution and the nature of inequality as a social problem, is easily submerged by this racist discourse. Racist discourse may allow a satisfying explanation of why people do badly, but not a true one.

JASON FARBMAN

If racism creates race, as you argue, can we undo a belief in race by attacking racism?

BARBARA

We certainly need to attack racism when we see its tracks, which are all over our public life. But we also need to understand if we simply see that as a matter of antiracism then we're back tilting at the smoke, fighting "race."

KAREN

And we're affirming race.

BARBARA

I would like to refer you to one of the great authorities on antiracism, Adolph Reed. What [he says](#) is that antiracism by itself can't be a sufficient content for politics. That it does not work.

KAREN

A broader struggle has to go on. The restoration of unions and their old functions is part of the politics needed alongside antiracism. But in and of itself antiracism only points out what the racists are doing, which gets us in a devilish circle.

JASON FARBMAN

In the chapter “Slavery, Race, and Ideology,” you draw a clear connection between a ruling group’s ability to oppress another group, and the latter’s ability to organize and resist or fight back.

BARBARA

I think it’s true that there is a relationship between how people are oppressed and what those oppressing them can or think they can get away with. We’re seeing that today, we’re living in a period where there has been a major onslaught against organized labor. We’ve seen many of the protections that labor fought for and achieved over decades being unraveled. We may be at the start of a reversal of that process. I hope so. It’s not going to be pretty, and it’s not going to be automatic. It’s going to be hard-fought, and it’s going to be nasty.

KAREN

That onslaught against labor was accompanied by the racist politics of the 1980s, beating the drums of racism. That’s the time when every form of racism was deployed. With that deployment we saw the return of race to science in a way that had been absent for several decades. Republican support was strong for a new multiracial census category, patents were issued for treating “black” congestive heart failure as distinct from white, and so on.

BARBARA

One of the hopeful signs to me, even if it’s starting very small and locally, is the mobilizations about substandard wages in the fast-food industry. The people who have those jobs are now demanding they be decent jobs that provide decent wages, etc. And there have been mobilizations from people who do housekeeping in hotels. Those mobilizations have the advantage that they come from people who know what they’re talking about and they know what they’re demanding.

Mobilization along those lines has to be a good indicator of unrest where there needs to be unrest in this society. People are being told they have to live without the resources that have been put before people for decades as the Standard American Package: a decent place to live, a decent

neighborhood, decent public schools and the prospect of higher education, and so on.

KAREN

There are some potential teachable moments emerging. We're talking about what we can do with our understanding of how the political dynamic that has evolved in our country historically handles inequality among citizens.

You have to be looking at these and other movements, and be prepared to take advantage of the blowup that happens, that will happen, from the top. You have to be able to make it not, as the economists imply, merely a "they" problem for someone else, but a "we" problem. That's the training we need to be able to do.

If I could put a pin in someone who is sometimes well thought of, Jeffrey Sachs in his book asks in [Common Wealth](#) why is it in the United States where inequality is growing, it hasn't been possible to establish a welfare state such like those of northern Europe. He said, the problem was that in the United States we have our racial difficulties. "Within the US race is the single most important predictor of support for welfare. America's troubled race relations are clearly a major reason for the absence of an American welfare state."

He argued that if we did the statistics state by state, we'd find that places with more homogenous populations tend to have the greater tendency at state level to enact social welfare legislation.

BARBARA

Which is on a par with saying that the reason for the high level of asthma in the Bronx is that there are a lot of black or Hispanic people there.

KAREN

But this one has genocidal implications, does it not?

JASON FARBMAN

The US ruling class has had enormous success in dividing working people by convincing one group to accept poor outcomes for other groups, or even that there are meaningful biological or [cultural distinctions](#) between groups of workers.

BARBARA

We need to keep going on about the falsity of biological racism. Because that's the root, the source and resource, of racist discourse in public life that short-circuits arguments about inequality in general and reroutes them into conversations about what's unequal naturally between "black" people and "white" people. We have to be teaching that to the point it looks ridiculous and a joke.

KAREN

That brings us back where we began. Dolezal erred by not telling the truth about her race. And there has been an attempt to get a doctor's examination, presumably to establish by some kind of family what race she is, and somehow connect that back to what she was doing.

There was a man at the Yale School of Medicine in the 1930s named George H. Smith who was trying to find a definitive way to distinguish between black, Indian, and European blood. In the paper he wrote at the end of it all, he confessed he had not yet found the correct method for doing it. But he never let go of his assumptions, that the right method was out there somewhere.

That was at the eve of World War II, in which blood was segregated blood even though the secretary of war had to say there was no scientific basis for doing so. I think we have to go after the (supposed) science, because good lord they're passing these notions on to practitioners. So there's an intellectual function that's part of the struggle even though it may not appear to be.

BARBARA

Belief in witchcraft didn't disappear because science disproved it, but because it ultimately became something people couldn't take seriously in the world of everyday life. Right now people take race seriously, they think it's something that nature has bestowed. Even the people who think they don't, who say "race is a social construction," also take it seriously as something that nature has bestowed.

KAREN

We'd like to see more people blowing through the smoke instead of breathing it in.

This interview was first published by Jacobin Magazine, 06.29.2015.

THE SPEECH RACISTS DIDN'T WANT YOU TO HEAR

KEEANGA-YAMAHTTA TAYLOR

After her commencement address at Hampshire College, author and Princeton University professor Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor endured a campaign of intimidation and abuse when alt-right media websites, followed by Fox News, smeared the views she expressed. After receiving threats of violence through the Internet and in person, Taylor decided to cancel a speech for Town Hall Seattle, scheduled for early June, on racism in the Trump era in early June. “The cancellation of my speaking events is a concession to the violent intimidation that was, in my opinion, provoked by Fox News,” Taylor wrote in a statement. “But I am releasing this statement to say that I will not be silent.”

On July 6, in defiance of the racist harassment, Taylor gave the speech she couldn't in Seattle – at the Socialism 2017 conference in Chicago. Here we are printing the text of that speech as a co-publication of Socialist Worker, *Jacobin*, and the [International Socialist Review](#), three co-sponsors of the conference. Taylor has been a contributor to these publications among many others, and is the author of [From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation](#).

Obviously, they don't mind illegals coming in. They don't mind drugs pouring in. They don't mind, excuse me, MS-13 coming in. We're getting them all out of here . . . Members of Congress who will be voting on border security have a simple choice: They can either vote to help drug cartels and criminal aliens trying to enter the United States, like, frankly, the Democrats are doing. Or they can vote to help American citizens and American families be safe. That's the choice. Who do you want to represent you? We're finding the illegal immigrant drug dealers, gang members and killers, and removing them from our country. And once they are gone, folks – you see what we're doing – they will not let them back in. They're not coming back.

– Donald Trump, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, April 29, 2017

The free world...all of Christendom . . . is at war with Islamic horror. Not a single radicalized Islamic suspect should be granted any measure of quarter. Their intended entry to the American homeland should be summarily denied. Every conceivable measure should be engaged to hunt them down. Hunt them, identify them, and kill them. Kill them all. For the sake of all that is good and righteous. Kill them all.

– US Rep. Clay Higgins, Louisiana Republican, June 5, 2017

You cannot rebuild your civilization with somebody else's babies. You've got to keep your birth rate up, and you need to teach your children your values.

– US Rep. Steve King, Iowa Republican, March 13, 2017

The fantasy-fueled discussion that the election of Barack Obama in 2008 ushered the United States into a post-racial period has come to a stark and dramatic end. Far from post-racial, what we are seeing at the highest ranks of government is open fawning toward white supremacist and white nationalist ideas and politics.

The Ku Klux Klan and David Duke endorsed Donald Trump. His candidacy was met with enthusiasm from white supremacists, neo-Nazis and other organized racist hate groups. Steve Bannon, a self-described architect of the so-called “alt-right,” is Trump’s chief strategist and has an office in the White House. It is not hyperbole to say that white supremacy is resting at the heart of American politics.

And it is a deadly serious matter. It can be measured by the weight of the bodies of those, known and unknown, who have paid the price for the normalization and sanctification of racism, bigotry, and hatred in this country.

Ricky John Best. Taliesin Myrddin Namkai Meche. Richard W. Collins III. Nabra Hassanen. Srinivas Kuchibhotla.

Since the election of Donald Trump, people who may have been considered the racist fringe have been emboldened and activated to engage in intimidation, violence, and even murder. From Washington, DC, to Portland,

Oregon, from the East Coast to the West, racist violence has been documented.

In the ten days after Trump was elected, there were nine hundred reported incidents of hate crimes. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, in 40 percent of those cases, Trump's name was used when victims were attacked.

Between January and March of this year, the Council on American Islamic Relations received 1,597 complaints. Of the verified reports, nearly half involved abuse by representatives of federal agencies. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Department of Homeland Security officers were implicated in 23 percent of those complaints.

Campuses of all varieties have been targeted for racist hate speech. Between November and the end April, there were racist incidents at 284 primary and secondary schools and 330 incidents on college campuses. These numbers did not include a flurry of neo-Nazi and other racist posters that went up in the weeks after the election and then during Black History Month in February.

The right views college campuses as sites of political struggle. At its national meeting in April, the National Rifle Association's vice president, Wayne LaPierre, said, "It's up to us to speak up against the three most dangerous voices in America: academic elites, political elites, and media elites. These are America's greatest domestic threats."

It's no coincidence, then, that college campuses and universities are under attack by groups like the NRA and right-wing media sites that publicize and more fully articulate their agenda. Part of the attack includes trolling students and faculty members – parsing closely every word they write or say and then deliberately twisting and distorting those views to egg on and fuel their readerships and viewerships. In effect, right-wing media, in particular, organize racist and sexist cyber-mob attacks not just on faculty members of color, but they specifically target any faculty who speak out against racism.

Campuses have become easy targets for manipulative campaigns aimed at scaring administrators into admonishing, but more importantly disciplining,

or if possible firing radical and left-wing faculty. When administrators act in this way, it is an act of surrender that will not bring quiet, but feeds the mob and invites a continuation of these orchestrated attacks.

And it is orchestrated. Fox News published a story – based on a story originally published by Campus Reform – about my commencement address at Hampshire College. In my opinion, both news organizations published the story with the intention of activating a racist mob made up of its readers and viewers. Fox ran various news stories about my nineteen-minute speech four days in a row over a holiday weekend.

As a result, I received fifty-four e-mails in a span of five days. Here is some of the content of those e-mails:

“would not piss in your mouth if you were dying of thirst, lib bitch FUCK YOU, FUCK LIBS”

“I read about your nasty tirade against the president.. Have you ever, just for a moment, considered counseling, a good shrink, or if all else fails, a .44 round to the brain?”

“If Trump is what you say, you are a dirty ass coon dyke cunt. Jus sayin...Cunt..”

“Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor is a stupid FUCKING NIGGER!!! Burn in HELL Nigger!!”

“Saw your tirade bout Mr. TRUMP...u like your isms, “race ism, corp ism,” and so on. Be clear, what you preach is 105 percent NIGGER ISM...fuck you and your hate speech!”

“Hey nigger keep you keep talking down on the President of the United States we will try you in federal court for hate crimes and have you lynched”

For the right wing, it's not just the thrill of victory in humiliating weak administrators, but there is the agenda of isolating, intimidating and ultimately silencing radical faculty, staff, and students. The university is one of the few places in this country where, if you are a faculty member, you can freely express your politics and radical ideas.

The Right seeks to kill that atmosphere while simultaneously benefitting from it. If nothing else, the right wing recognizes that part of the political struggle is the battle over ideas. That is why alt-right, neo-Nazi Richard Spencer was on a campus speaking tour in the spring that will resume in the fall.

The Right doesn't want to just have fistfights over its presence on campus, though they love the free attention that comes with it – but they actually do want to speak on campus. They believe that their ideas can get a hearing. And make no mistake about it, they can get a hearing on campus and off campus.

But the onslaught of racism and repression are not just about hate speech, about the racist cyber mob or nasty fliers placed on campuses. It has real implications when those sentiments are reflected in the government itself. It leads to violent attacks. It has led to murder.

And it has to be organized against in numbers that demonstrate that they are a minority and our side – the side against racism, murder, and the terrorism of the right wing in this country – is the majority. They are confident right now because our side has yet to mobilize in a way that reflects that we are the majority.

But the violence of the Right is obviously not the only problem. The most profound and dangerous aspects of the Trump agenda can be found in the growing list of policy initiatives to remove regulatory protections while emboldening agents of the state to act against oppressed and exploited individuals across this country.

In other words, the actions of the racist fringe have been amplified in the policies of the Trump administration. Consider as a single example the case of Jean Carlos Jiménez-Joseph.

Jiménez-Joseph, a twenty-seven-year old black Panamanian immigrant, was taken into custody by ICE in March. He was placed in solitary confinement for nineteen days after he hopped from a second-floor landing to a first-floor landing, instead of using the stairs, breaking the detention facility's rules.

After spending nineteen days in solitary confinement, he hung himself. When officials in the private detention center where he was held found him, an ambulance was called, and he was driven to a hospital thirty-five miles away, where he was pronounced.

In the first one hundred days of the Trump administration, ICE has arrested more than forty-one thousand people – a 37 percent increase over the same time period last year. ICE agents are arresting, on average, four hundred immigrants a day. Some eleven thousand of those immigrants had no criminal record at all.

The Muslim travel ban, in combination with a policy of endless war across the Middle East, underpins an unrelenting campaign against Muslims led by the Trump administration.

The group of people who may ultimately absorb the brunt of Trump's policy changes are African American. Black people suffer from disproportionate poverty and certainly from racism in this country. As a result, African Americans have historically called upon the federal state to intervene to defend against racial discrimination that runs rampant in the private sector.

Because black people have been poorer because of discrimination, we have relied on the federal state to improve conditions through vigorous defense of existing civil rights legislation as protection against discrimination, while also pursuing affirmative policies aimed at lifting and improving the material conditions of black citizens.

The efforts to dismantle the “administrative state,” as Steve Bannon puts it, will have a devastating impact on those who need those protections. This is clear in the Department of Education, where officials seem to be avoiding even platitudes professing a commitment to racial equality in education.

It certainly applies to the misnamed Department of Justice, where the administration is calling for an official return to the kinds of law-and-order policies that created the conditions of “mass incarceration” by rationalizing racial profiling as a crime-fighting tool and signaling to police departments across the country that there will be no pretense of reform or oversight – and that they are empowered to harass, arrest, beat, detain, and even kill whomever they choose.

These moves are known and understood by many, but the rollback of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) protections is just as dangerous.

Black and Latino communities live in closer proximity to toxins, whether in the form of poor air quality, abandoned industrial sites, active industrial sites, highways or railroads, and more. As a result, nearly half of Latinos live in counties that do not meet EPA air quality standards, for example.

The Flint water crisis has tellingly demonstrated the intersection of racial discrimination and environmental degradation. It is not only evident in the fact that city officials allowed Flint's water supply to have dangerous levels of lead, while doing nothing to clean it up.

But when a city employee in Flint was asked about the water crisis, he said, "Flint has the same problems as Detroit – fucking niggers don't pay their bills, believe me, I deal with them." This wasn't a public official, but given the fact that Flint's water is still polluted today, it would not be difficult to envision a public official saying the same thing.

These are the three components of Trump's racial regime: anti-immigrant hysteria, Islamophobia, and anti-black racism.

But racism in America is never just about racism for racism's sake. It is always in the service of a larger agenda.

In the case of Trump it is obvious. It is no coincidence that the racism animating much of Trump's politics accompanies a harsh and draconian economic agenda intended to gut the living standards of the entire working class.

In other words, Trump and the Republican Party explain the inequality experienced by workers – white workers in particular – as the fault of Mexican immigrants who steal jobs; or the fault of black criminals who make us unsafe; or the fault of Muslim terrorists who make us spend billions on defense. And meanwhile, they pursue policies intended to destroy the living standards of those same workers.

The ruling elite doubled down on the idea that the least powerful among us is responsible for the hardship experienced by millions in this country –

while the rich white millionaires and billionaires at the helm of the government are innocent bystanders.

During the campaign, this was not just an appeal to white workers – Trump used scapegoating to appeal to black workers as well. Donald Trump’s campaign drafted a “New Deal” for black America, which included a ten-point plan. Number seven of that plan was a crackdown on “illegal immigration.” Trump’s campaign website explained:

No group has been more economically harmed by decades of illegal immigration than low-income African American workers ...We will suspend reckless refugee admissions from terror-prone regions that cost taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars. We will use a portion of the money saved by enforcing our laws and suspending refugees to reinvested in our inner cities.

Scapegoating and lies: the essential ingredients of the Trump candidacy and now the Trump presidency.

But here is where the cynicism of both liberals and the right converge. Both think very little of ordinary people – the much-maligned working class.

On the Right, they believe that a steady diet of racism and war is enough to satisfy the appetite of working-class white people. This is what Kellyanne Conway meant when she got into a post-election argument with Clinton surrogates and sneered, “Do you think you could have just had a decent message for white, working-class voters?” It is also what Donald Trump meant when he bragged that he could shoot someone on Fifth Avenue in New York and not lose any support.

Among liberals is a similar attitude, in which ordinary white workers are boorish Neanderthals who eat and drink racism, bathe in their privilege, and are an unchanging ignorant bulwark against any and all progress in the United States.

Of course, what has been lost in this stultifying picture of race, class, and consciousness is that the bulk of Trump’s support did not come white working-class people. According to the most recent reports, only a third of Trump voters made less than the national median income of \$50,000. Another third made between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and another third

made over \$100,000. According to one study, Trump received one in four votes from whites without a college degree making under \$50,000 a year.

The two main things that stand out about the election are: one, Trump lost the election by more than three million votes. And two, tens of millions of people did not vote. There are 238 million eligible voters in the United States, and slightly more than half of them voted. That means that more than 120 million people did not vote.

Of course, we know that the Republican Party continues to try and find ways to strip black voters of their right to vote, but there is an even bigger reason for such a dramatically low turnout. Neither party offers a serious attempt to grapple with the vicious inequality that exists in this country. They used to say, “There is no alternative” to the status quo and to inequality. Now we can look at them and say, “They have no solutions.”

Those people who continue to insist that we give our support to the Democratic Party while getting nothing in return have lost touch with reality. The reason that 120 million people did not vote in last year’s election is quite simple: tens of millions of ordinary people do not believe it is capable of delivering the changes that are necessary to make their lives better. You cannot run a candidate who is a millionaire and who collects speaking fees from the most powerful banks in the country on Monday and then turn around and insist she’s for ordinary and working-class people on Tuesday.

Barack Obama promised to change Washington. He promised hope and tens of millions of people believed him. And then we experienced eight years of the status quo, and in some cases, worse than that.

Angrily repeating that Trump is worse – and he undoubtedly is in every way – won’t change the fact that people want something to vote *for* – and simply saying that they are not Trump or the Republicans is not enough. What are you for?

Instead of grappling with this issue, the Democratic Party stays transfixed on Russia. The mass media is obsessed with finding the smoking gun that finally connects Trump to some Russia scandal.

Meanwhile, they ignore the ongoing assault on working-class life and living standards in this country. They turn the hardships and anxieties of white working-class people into a caricature to explain their supposedly unquestioned support of Trump, while simultaneously ignoring the hardships and anxieties of black working-class life altogether.

How else do we make sense of the utterly vapid commentary from the Trump administration in response to the crisis of guns and violence in black communities across Chicago?

Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the spokesperson for Trump – if you can imagine a worst lot in life – said last week that shootings in Chicago were an issue of morality. It was as callous as it is ignorant. But it is also the exact same thing the Rahm Emanuel and Barack Obama have said for years, whether it was Obama complaining about the absence of role models in black working-class neighborhoods or Emanuel blaming black parents.

What none of these elected officials will do is tell the truth: that poor and working-class African Americans in Chicago have been abused and abandoned. Through a combination of public policy and the private actions of banks, real estate brokers and universities on both ends of this city, residential segregation has been entrenched and enforced for almost one hundred years.

Segregation has created substandard and inferior housing. It has cut black people off from the best jobs. It has strangled public schools, public hospitals, libraries, parks, and clinics of desperately needed resources. It has isolated and demoralized young and old. Fifty percent of young black men in Chicago aged twenty to twenty-four are not in school nor are they employed – 35 percent of black women in the same age group are also unemployed and out of school.

These are structural and institutional problems created by an absence of human and material resources. And this is the exact reason why the political and economic establishments cling to their explanations that blame and punish. What would it mean to tell the truth about the real reasons behind the social crisis in Chicago and in every city around this country?

It would mean two things. It would explode the myths that capitalism and its free market can actually end poverty and suffering through privatized provision. And second, it would require that they do something about these material conditions, rather than ignore them. Put simply, structural problems demand structural answers. Instead, in Chicago and across the country, human need is met with cruel shouts of “personal responsibility” and policing, policing, and more policing.

Of course, we will see the full-throated revival of rhetoric like “culture of poverty” because it has always been a way of blaming the victims of free-market capitalism, instead of looking at a system that has produced poverty, misery, and human suffering on scales that seem unimaginable in a world as rich as this one. How do they get away with it? They blame the victims for their hardship, and they get everyone to believe it.

And it is not only black and brown people who experience this. As more ordinary white people become visible markers of the failure of capitalism, conservatives increasingly blame white poverty and social crisis – most notably drug addiction – on a morality crisis.

In Charles Murray’s book *Coming Apart: The State of White America*, he blames declines in white working-class living standards on high divorce rates, out-of-wedlock births, dwindling church attendance, and men who can’t hold jobs. Murray, of course, became infamous by insisting that disproportionate rates of poverty in black working class communities were because of biological differences between blacks and whites. He rehashes these ideas to analyze white poverty and also concludes that low IQ and biology are factors – but instead of between blacks and whites, the biological differences are between rich and poor white people.

The much lauded but underwhelming *Hillbilly Elegy* also argues that white Appalachian poverty is driven by poor choices behavior and morality, and not material deprivation. But perhaps the most succinct contempt for poor and working-class white people came from an article published in *National Review*:

If you spend time in hardscrabble, white upstate New York, or eastern Kentucky, or my own native West Texas, and you take an honest look at the welfare dependency, the drug and alcohol addiction, the family anarchy –

which is to say, the whelping of human children with all the respect and wisdom of a stray dog – you will come to an awful realization. It wasn't Beijing. It wasn't even Washington, as bad as Washington can be ... Nothing happened to them. There wasn't some awful disaster. There wasn't a war or a famine or a plague or a foreign occupation. Even the economic changes of the past few decades do very little to explain the dysfunction and negligence – and the incomprehensible malice – of poor white America.

The truth about these dysfunctional, downscale communities is that they deserve to die. Economically, they are negative assets. Morally, they are indefensible. The white American underclass is in thrall to a vicious, selfish culture whose main products are misery and used heroin needles. Donald Trump's speeches make them feel good. So does OxyContin.

Of course, liberals don't provide a credible alternative to this uniquely American cruelty when they parrot the same contempt by reducing the experiences of ordinary white people to "privilege" in ways that do not resemble and certainly do not make sense of the actual experiences of working-class white people.

There are twenty million poor white people in this country. The imprisonment of white women is "surging," according to recent reports, because of growing alcohol abuse and drug addiction.

Life in poor and working-class white enclaves is increasingly defined by economic insecurity, alcoholism, and opioid addiction. And while it is important to point out how elected officials are very willing to paint a sympathetic picture of opioid addiction as a health care issue and not a criminal issue, as they did with the crack phenomenon in the 1980s and 1990s – because opioids affect white people and crack was centered in Black neighborhoods – I would caution against believing all of that rhetoric that opioid addicts are getting loving care from the government.

For example, in Middletown, Ohio, a town of fifty thousand people that is 87 percent white and where 532 people died of opioid overdose last year, a member of the city council has proposed that drug addicts get two opportunities for medical treatment in the event of an overdose – but if there is a third call for an ambulance or medical treatment because of

overdose, there should be no response. The councilman says the drug is too expensive at thirty-six dollars a dose.

This is not white privilege. This is capitalism in its most savage form.

The point of this is not to deny that racism exists among working-class and poor white people. It obviously does. Not all working-class white people voted for Trump but millions did.

So the point is to not deny the reality of the depths of racism in our society – it is to understand *why* it exists and the conditions under which it can be challenged and changed. Of course, it is easy to uniformly dismiss ordinary white workers as hopeless racists, but in doing so, we uniformly give up on the chance or potential to build a genuine mass movement that can fundamentally change this country.

In a country where public officials readily serve up racist explanations for social and economic inequality, it should not be surprising when those ideas take hold. Of course, not everyone readily accepts racism to explain their life circumstances – most people just blame themselves and the people they know in their families or neighborhoods for their troubles.

But there is a difference between people's perception of reality and reality itself. Even when ordinary white people buy into the idea that the stagnation in their standard of living is because of the presence of immigrants or because the presidency of Barack Obama improved the standard of living of blacks at their expense, that doesn't actually make it true.

But it takes more than an assertion or argument to convince people that their perceptions are not reality. So when well-meaning people suggest that the way white radicals can fight racism is to talk to their racist uncle or father-in-law at Thanksgiving, it is both a sign of the low expectations of the antiracist movement, but it also reveals the extent to which people accept that racism is just bad ideas that someone can be talked into or out of.

Of course, political argument is crucial, but it actually matters what you are saying. It takes radical politics and struggle to uncover the true nature of any society, but especially one like ours, where the political establishment regularly uses rhetoric, lies, and distortions to cloud the truth.

For example, the social eruption of Occupy Wall Street helped to lay bare how the wealthy live at the expense of everyone else, with the simple yet extraordinarily clarifying idea of the 1 percent versus the 99 percent.

The Black Lives Matter movement helped to expose the systemic and routine ways that police abuse and violence shape the social reality in Black communities. Despite the efforts of the Trump administration and the misnamed Department of Justice, led by Attorney General Jefferson Beauregard Sessions, to return to an era of mass incarceration of African Americans, millions of people, including white people, have had their consciousness change about the police.

Ten years ago, the immigrant rights movement brought millions of undocumented immigrants onto the streets and challenged the right wing's efforts to criminalize their existence. Their struggle gave us the slogans "No human is illegal" and "Undocumented and unafraid."

The Dakota Access Pipeline struggle made the powerful connection between land rights of the indigenous and the need for and access to clean, unadulterated water. It also demonstrated what it means to struggle, and how struggle can transform an impossible situation into a winnable one.

Of course, none of these examples has been enough to completely transform the circumstances or conditions they have exposed. And how could they? Racism is the lifeblood of American capitalism. We cannot end racism and the inequality it produces within capitalism. It means that even when we move forward, the political and economic establishment responds quickly with their best effort to return life to the way it was.

We don't necessarily forget our victories or forward movement right away, but unless there is an active effort to assess those victories, draw lessons from them, and quickly transform those lessons into new strategies and tactics for moving forward, it is all too easy to regress.

No movement is guaranteed success simply by existing. We will not win just because we believe that our side is right. We have to know what it is we are fighting for, and we have to openly debate and strategize our way forward. And most of all, we have to be involved in protests and demonstrations and

building social movements to win concessions from the political and economic establishment.

This is all true, but at some point in the feverish effort to build the next movement, and then the next movement, and the next and the next – we must ask: What is wrong with a society, an economic and political system, that will make you beg, fight and struggle for the basic rights of existence?

Why do we have to struggle for affordable housing when everyone knows that the human species cannot live without proper shelter? Why is housing not a right?

Why do we have to struggle for health care when everyone knows that the human species cannot continue without proper medical care? Why is health care not a right?

Why do we have to struggle for a living wage just so we can afford the ever-growing cost of food when everyone knows that our species cannot live without food?

Why do we have to struggle against corporate America's insistence on polluting the air we breath, the water we drink, and the food we eat?

The list could go on, but the answer is simple: Capitalism is killing our planet; it is destroying our future; it is destroying the lives of millions of people in this country and on this planet today.

These are crises that no political party in the United States can solve. They are the permanent problems of the market: misery means profit; hunger means profit; disease means profit; prisons mean profit; racism means profit.

What does any of this have to do with the struggle against racism? Everything. Racism is the central divide between ordinary people in this country, and without a struggle against it, it will be impossible to organize any coherent movement for anything. What I'm suggesting is not organizing on a false basis of unity for unity's sake, but unity on the basis of solidarity and the understanding that an injury to one is an injury to all.

It is no mystery why socialism is no longer a dirty word in the United States. It is no mystery why thirteen million people voted for an open socialist – Bernie Sanders – in this country. Not only is this an indictment of capitalism's failures, but it is also an expressed desire for a better way. We want real democracy, where the people who create the wealth in this society are entitled to have a say in how it is distributed. We want real freedom – freedom from racism, imprisonment, borders, detention, and second-class personhood.

This is not the first time in history that socialist ideas were dominant, and where ordinary people demanded a social prioritizing of human needs and not corporate profits. This year marks the hundredth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, where for the first time in human history, the poor and the peasantry, led by the Russian working class, organized a revolution against capitalism and built a different kind of society.

The revolution was hailed by the working class around the world, which saw ordinary people like themselves take their country out of World War I and take democratic control of the direction of society. In this country, the Russian Revolution inspired socialists and radicals and eventually Communists to get serious about political organizing and building a revolutionary alternative to the viciousness of capitalism and all of the horrors that came with it.

I am going to close with a long quote from American socialist Eugene Debs. This quote is from a speech he gave in Canton, Ohio in 1918 in opposition to World War I. Debs is known for this speech because, as a result of giving it, he was found guilty of sedition and imprisoned. But this was so much more than an antiwar speech. It was a speech that was also imbued with the hope and optimism that found expression in the Russian Revolution. He said:

Socialism is a growing idea; an expanding philosophy. It is spreading over the entire face of the earth: It is as vain to resist it, as it would be to arrest the sunrise on the morrow. It is coming, coming, coming all along the line. Can you not see it? If not, I advise you to consult an oculist. There is certainly something the matter with your vision.

It is the mightiest movement in the history of mankind. What a privilege to serve it! I have regretted a thousand times that I can do so little for the

movement that has done so much for me. The little that I am, the little that I am hoping to be, I owe to the Socialist movement. It has given me my ideas and ideals; my principles and convictions, and I would not exchange one of them for all of Rockefeller's bloodstained dollars. It has taught me how to serve – a lesson to me of priceless value. It has taught me the ecstasy in the handclasp of a comrade. It has enabled me to hold high communion with you, and made it possible for me to take my place side by side with you in the great struggle for the better day; to multiply myself over and over again, to thrill with a fresh-born personhood; to feel life truly worthwhile; to open new avenues of vision; to spread out glorious vistas; to know that I am kin to all that throbs; to be class-conscious, and to realize that, regardless of nationality, race, creed, color or sex, every man, every woman who toils, who renders useful service, every member of the working class without an exception, is my comrade, my brother and sister – and that to serve them and their cause is the highest duty of my life.

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REVOLUTION AND THE NEGRO

C.L.R. JAMES

The Negro's revolutionary history is rich, inspiring, and unknown. Negroes revolted against the slave raiders in Africa; they revolted against the slave traders on the Atlantic passage. They revolted on the plantations.

The docile Negro is a myth. Slaves on slave ships jumped overboard, went on vast hunger strikes, attacked the crews. There are records of slaves overcoming the crew and taking the ship into harbor, a feat of tremendous revolutionary daring. In British Guiana during the eighteenth century the Negro slaves revolted, seized the Dutch colony, and held it for years. They withdrew to the interior, forced the whites to sign a treaty of peace, and have remained free to this day. Every West Indian colony, particularly Jamaica and San Domingo and Cuba, the largest islands, had its settlements of maroons, bold Negroes who had fled into the wilds and organized themselves to defend their freedom. In Jamaica the British government, after vainly trying to suppress them, accepted their existence by treaties of peace, scrupulously observed by both sides over many years, and then broken by British treachery. In America the Negroes made nearly 150 distinct revolts against slavery. The only place where Negroes did not revolt is in the pages of capitalist historians. All this revolutionary history can come as a surprise only to those who, whatever International they belong to, whether Second, Third, or Fourth, have not yet ejected from their systems the pertinacious lies of Anglo-Saxon capitalism. It is not strange that the Negroes revolted. It would have been strange if they had not.

But the Fourth International, whose business is revolution, has not to prove that Negroes were or are as revolutionary as any group of oppressed people. That has its place in agitation. What we as Marxists have to see is the tremendous role played by Negroes in the transformation of Western civilization from feudalism to capitalism. It is only from this vantage-ground that we shall be able to appreciate (and prepare for) the still greater role they must of necessity play in the transition from capitalism to socialism.

What are the decisive dates in the modern history of Great Britain, France, and America? 1789, the beginning of the French Revolution; 1832, the passing of the Reform Bill in Britain; and 1865, the crushing of the slave-power in America by the Northern states. Each of these dates marks a definitive stage in the transition from feudal to capitalist society. The exploitation of millions of Negroes had been a basic factor in the economic development of each of these three nations. It was reasonable, therefore, to expect the Negro question to play no less an important role in the resolution of the problems that faced each society. No one in the pre-revolutionary days, however, even faintly foresaw the magnitude of the contributions the Negroes were to make. Today Marxists have far less excuse for falling into the same mistake.

THE NEGRO AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The French Revolution was a bourgeois revolution, and the basis of bourgeois wealth was the slave trade and the slave plantations in the colonies. Let there be no mistake about this. "Sad irony of human history," says Jaures, "the fortunes created at Bordeaux, at Nantes by the slave-trade gave to the bourgeoisie that pride which needed liberty and contributed to human emancipation." And Gaston-Martin the historian of the slave trade sums up thus: though the bourgeoisie traded in other things than slaves, upon the success or failure of the traffic everything else depended. Therefore when the bourgeoisie proclaimed the Rights of Man in general, with necessary reservations, one of these was that these rights should not extend to the French colonies. In 1789 the French colonial trade was eleven million pounds, two-thirds of the overseas trade of France. British colonial trade at that time was only five million pounds. What price French abolition? There was abolitionist society to which Brissot, Robespierre, Mirabeau, Lafayette, Condorcet, and many such famous men belonged even before 1789. But liberals are liberal. Face to face with the revolution, they were ready to compromise. They would leave the half million slaves in their slavery, but at least the Mulattoes, men of property (including slaves) and education, should be given equal rights with the white colonials. The white colonial magnates refused concessions and they were people to be reckoned with, aristocrats by birth or marriage, bourgeois their trade connections with the maritime bourgeoisie. They opposed all change in the colonies that would diminish their social and political domination. The maritime bourgeoisie, concerned about their millions of investments,

supported the colonials, and against eleven million pounds of trade per year the radical politicians were helpless. It was the revolution that kicked them from behind and forced them forward.

First of all the revolution in France. The Gironde right wing of the Jacobin club, overthrew the pro-royalist Feuillants and came to power in March, 1792.

And secondly the revolution in the colonies. The Mulattoes in San Domingo revolted in 1790, followed a few months later by the slave revolt in August 1791. On April 4, 1792 the Girondins granted political and social rights to the Mulattoes. The big bourgeoisie agreed, for the colonial aristocrats, after vainly trying to win Mulatto support for independence, decided to hand the colony over to Britain rather than tolerate interference with their system. All these slave owners, French nobility and French bourgeoisie, colonial aristocrats and Mulattoes, were agreed that the slave revolt should be suppressed and the slaves remain in their slavery.

The slaves, however, refused to listen to threats, and no promises were made to them. Led from beginning to end by men who had themselves been slaves and were unable to read or write, they fought one of the greatest revolutionary battles in history. Before the revolution they had seemed subhuman. Many a slave had to be whipped before he could be got to move from where he sat. The revolution transformed them into heroes.

The island of San Domingo was divided into two colonies, one French, the other Spanish. The colonial government of the Spanish Bourbons supported the slaves in their revolt against the French republic, and many rebel bands took service with the Spaniards. The French colonials invited Pitt to take over the colony, and when war was declared between France and England in 1793, the English invaded the island.

The English expedition, welcomed by all the white colonials, captured town after town in the south and west of French San Domingo. The Spaniards, operating with the famous Toussaint Louverture, an ex-slave, at the head of four thousand black troops, invaded the colony from the east. British and Spaniards were gobbling up as much as they could before the time for sharing came. "In these matters," wrote the British minister, Dundas, to the governor of Jamaica, "the more we have, the better our pretensions." On June 4th, Port-au-Prince, the capital of San Domingo, fell. Meanwhile

another British expedition had captured Martinique, Guadeloupe, and the other French islands. Barring a miracle, the colonial trade of France, the richest in the world, was in the hands of her enemies and would be used against the revolution. But here the French masses took a hand.

August 10, 1792 was the beginning of the revolution triumphant in France. The Paris masses and their supporters all over France, in 1789 indifferent to the colonial question, were now striking in revolutionary frenzy at every abuse of the old regime and none of the former tyrants were so hated as the “aristocrats of the skin.” Revolutionary generosity, resentment at the betrayal of the colonies to the enemies of the revolution, impotence in the face of the British navy – these swept the Convention off its feet. On February 4, 1794, without a debate, it decreed the abolition of Negro slavery and at last gave its sanction to the black revolt.

The news trickled through somehow to the French West Indies. Victor Hugues, a Mulatto, one of the great personalities produced by the revolution, managed to break through the British blockade and carried the official notice of the manumission to the Mulattoes and blacks of the West Indian islands. Then occurred the miracle. The blacks and Mulattoes dressed themselves in the revolutionary colors and, singing revolutionary songs, they turned on the British and Spaniards, their allies of yesterday. With little more from revolutionary France than its moral support, they drove the British and Spaniards from their conquests and carried the war into enemy territory. The British, after five years of trying to reconquer the French colonies, were finally driven out in 1798.

Few know the magnitude and the importance of that defeat sustained at the hands of Victor Hugues in the smaller islands and of Toussaint Louverture and Rigaud in San Domingo. Fortescue, the Tory historian of the British army, estimates the total loss to Britain at 100,000 men. Yet in the whole of the Peninsular War Wellington lost from all causes – killed in battle, sickness, desertions – only 40,000 men. British blood and British treasure were poured out in profusion in the West Indian campaign. This was the reason for Britain’s weakness in Europe during the critical years 1793-1798. Let Fortescue himself speak: “The secret of England’s impotence for the first six years of the war may be said to lie in the two fatal words St. Domingo.” British historians blame chiefly the fever, as if San Domingo was the only place in the world that European imperialism had met fever.

Whatever the neglect or distortions of later historians, the French revolutionaries themselves knew what the Negro question meant to the revolution. The Constituent, the Legislature, and the Convention were repeatedly thrown into disorder by the colonial debates. This had grave repercussions in the internal struggle as well as in the revolutionary defense of the Republic. Says Jaures, "Undoubtedly but for the compromises of Barnave and all his party on the colonial question, the general attitude of the Assembly after the flight to Varennes would have been different." Excluding the masses of Paris, no portion of the French empire played, in proportion to its size, so grandiose a role in the French Revolution as the half million blacks and Mulattoes in the remote West Indian islands.

THE BLACK REVOLUTION AND WORLD HISTORY

The black revolution in San Domingo choked at its source one of the most powerful economic streams of the eighteenth century. With the defeat of the British, the black proletarians defeated the Mulatto Third Estate in a bloody civil war. Immediately after, Bonaparte, representative of the most reactionary elements of the new French bourgeoisie, attempted to restore slavery in San Domingo. The blacks defeated an expedition of some 50,000 men, and with the assistance of the Mulattoes, carried the revolution to its logical conclusion. They changed the name of San Domingo to Haiti and declared the island independent. This black revolution had a profound effect on the struggle for the cessation of the slave trade.

We can trace this close connection best by following the development of abolition in the British Empire. The first great blow at the Tory domination of Britain (and at feudalism in France for that matter) was struck by the Declaration of Independence in 1776. When Jefferson wrote that all men are created equal, he was drawing up the death-warrant of feudal society, wherein men were by law divided into unequal classes. Crispus Attucks, the Negro, was the first man killed by the British in the war that followed. It was no isolated or chance phenomenon. The Negroes thought that in this war for freedom, they could win their own. It has been estimated that of the 30,000 men in Washington's army 4,000 were Negroes. The American bourgeoisie did not want them. They forced themselves in. But San Domingo Negroes fought in the war also.

The French monarchy came to the assistance of the American Revolution. And Negroes from the French colonies pushed themselves into the French expeditionary force. Of the 1,900 French troops who recaptured Savannah, 900 were volunteers from the French colony of San Domingo. Ten years later some of these men – Rigaud, André, Lambert, Beauvais and others (some say Christophe also) – with their political and military experience will be foremost among the leaders in the San Domingo revolution. Long before Karl Marx wrote, “Workers of the world, unite,” the revolution was international.

The loss of the slave-holding American colonies took much cotton out of the ears of the British bourgeoisie. Adam Smith and Arthur Young, heralds of the industrial revolution and wage-slavery, were already preaching against the waste of chattel-slavery. Deaf up to 1783, the British bourgeois now heard, and looked again at the West Indies. Their own colonies were bankrupt. They were losing the slave trade to French and British rivals. And half the French slaves that they brought were going to San Domingo, the India of the eighteenth century. Why should they continue to do this? In three years, the first abolitionist society was formed and Pitt began to clamor for the abolition of slavery – “for the sake of humanity, no doubt,” says Gaston-Martin, “but also, be it well understood, to ruin French commerce.” With the war of 1793, Pitt, cherishing a prospect of winning San Domingo, piped down on abolition. But the black revolution killed the aspirations of both France and Britain.

The Treaty of Vienna in 1814 gave to France the right to recapture San Domingo: the Haitians swore that they would rather destroy the island. With the abandonment of the hopes for regaining San Domingo, the British abolished the slave trade in 1807. America followed in 1808.

If the East Indian interest in Britain was one of the great financial arsenals of the new bourgeoisie (whence the diatribes of Burke, Whig spokesman, against Hastings and Clive), the West Indian interest, though never so powerful as in France, was a cornerstone of the feudal oligarchy. The loss of America was the beginning of their decline. But for the black revolution, San Domingo would have strengthened them enormously. The reformist British bourgeoisie belabored them, the weakest link in the oligarchic chain. A great slave revolt in Jamaica in 1831 helped to convince those who had doubts. In Britain “Better emancipation from above than from below” anticipated the

Tsar by thirty years. One of the first acts of the victorious reformers was to abolish slavery in the British colonies. But for the black revolution in San Domingo, abolition and emancipation might have been postponed another thirty years.

Abolition did not come to France until the revolution of 1848. The production of beet-sugar, introduced into France by Bonaparte, grew by leaps and bounds, and placed the cane sugar interests, based on slavery in Martinique and Guadeloupe, increasingly on the defensive. One of the first acts of the revolutionary government of 1848 was to abolish slavery. But as in 1794, the decree was merely the registration of an accomplished fact. So menacing was the attitude of the slaves that in more than one colony the local government, in order to head off the servile revolution, proclaimed abolition without waiting for authorization from France.

THE NEGRO AND THE CIVIL WAR

1848, the year following the economic crisis of 1847, was the beginning of a new cycle of revolutions all over the Western world. The European revolutions, Chartism in England, were defeated. In America the irrepressible conflict between capitalism in the North and the slave system in the South was headed off for the last time by the Missouri Compromise of 1850. The political developments following the economic crisis of 1857 made further compromise impossible.

It was a decade of revolutionary struggle the world over in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. 1857 was the year of the first war of Indian independence, commonly misnamed the Indian Mutiny. In 1858 began the civil war in Mexico, which ended with the victory of Juarez three years later. It was the period of the Taiping revolution in China, the first great attempt to break the power of the Manchu dynasty. North and South in America moved to their predestined clash unwillingly, but the revolutionary Negroes helped to precipitate the issue. For two decades before the Civil War began, they were leaving the South in thousands. The revolutionary organization known as the Underground Railway, with daring, efficiency and dispatch, drained away the slave owners' human property. Fugitive slaves were the issue of the day. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 was a last desperate attempt by the Federal Government to stop this illegal abolition. Ten Northern states replied with personal liberty laws which nullified the heavy penalties of the 1850

law. Most famous perhaps of all the whites and Negroes who ran the Underground Railway is Harriet Tubman, a Negro who had herself escaped from slavery. She made nineteen journeys into the South and helped her brothers and their wives and three hundred other slaves to escape. She made her depredations in enemy territory with a price of \$40,000 on her head. Josiah Henson, the original of Uncle Tom, helped nearly two hundred slaves to escape. Nothing so galled the slave owners as this twenty-year drain on their already bankrupt economic system.

It is unnecessary to detail here the causes of this, the greatest civil war in history. Every Negro schoolboy knows that the last thing Lincoln had in mind was the emancipation of Negroes. What is important is that, for reasons both internal and external, Lincoln had to draw them into the revolutionary struggle. He said that without emancipation the North might not have won, and he was in all probability right. Thousands of Negroes were fighting on the Southern side, hoping to win their freedom that way. The abolition decree broke down the social cohesion of the South. It was not only what the North gained but, as Lincoln pointed out, what the South lost. On the Northern side 220,000 Negroes fought with such bravery that it was impossible to do with white troops what could be done with them. They fought not only with revolutionary bravery but with coolness and exemplary discipline. The best of them were filled with revolutionary pride. They were fighting for equality. One company stacked arms before the tent of its commanding officer as a protest against discrimination.

Lincoln was also driven to abolition by the pressure of the British working class. Palmerston wanted to intervene on the side of the South but was opposed in the cabinet by Gladstone. Led by Marx, the British working class so vigorously opposed the war, that it was impossible to hold a pro-war meeting anywhere in England. The British Tories derided the claim that the war was for the abolition of slavery: hadn't Lincoln said so many times? The British workers, however, insisted on seeing the war as a war for abolition, and Lincoln, for whom British non-intervention was a life and death matter, decreed abolition with a suddenness which shows his fundamental unwillingness to take such a revolutionary step.

Abolition was declared in 1863. Two years before, the movement of the Russian peasants, so joyfully hailed by Marx, frightened the Tsar into the semi-emancipation of the serfs. The North won its victory in 1865. Two years

later the British workers won the Second Reform Bill, which gave the franchise to the workers in the towns. The revolutionary cycle was concluded with the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871. A victory there and the history of Reconstruction would have been far different.

THE NEGRO AND WORLD REVOLUTION

Between 1871 and 1905 the proletarian revolution was dormant. In Africa the Negroes fought vainly to maintain their independence against the imperialist invasions. But the Russian Revolution of 1905 was the forerunner of a new era that began with the October Revolution in 1917. While half a million Negroes fought with the French Revolution in 1789, today the socialist revolution in Europe has as its potential allies over 120 million Negroes in Africa. Where Lincoln had to seek an alliance with an isolated slave population, today millions of Negroes in America have penetrated deep into industry, have fought side by side with white workers on picket lines, have helped to barricade factories for sit-down strikes, have played their part in the struggles and clashes of trade unions and political parties. It is only through the spectacles of historical perspective that we can fully appreciate the enormous revolutionary potentialities of the Negro masses today.

Half a million slaves, hearing the words Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity shouted by millions of Frenchmen many thousands of miles away, awoke from their apathy. They occupied the attention of Britain for six years and, once again to quote Fortescue, "practically destroyed the British army." What of the Negroes in Africa today? This is a bare outline of the record.

French West Africa: 1926-1929, 10,000 men fled into the forest swamps to escape French slavery.

French Equatorial Africa: 1924, uprising. 1924-1925, uprising, 1000 Negroes killed. 1928, June to November, rising in Upper Sangha and Lai. 1929, a rising lasting four months; the Africans organized an army of 10,000.

British West Africa: 1929, a revolt of women in Nigeria, 30,000 in number; 83 killed, 87 wounded. 1937, general strike of the Gold Coast. Farmers, joined by dockers and truck drivers.

Belgian Congo: 1929, revolt in Ruanda Urundi; thousands killed. 1930-1931, revolt of the Bapendi, 800 massacred in one place, Kwango.

South Africa: 1929, strikes and riots in Durban; the Negro quarter was entirely surrounded by troops and bombarded by planes.

Since 1935 there have been general strikes, with shooting of Negroes, in Rhodesia, in Madagascar, in Zanzibar. In the West Indies there have been general strikes and mass action such as those islands have not seen since the emancipation from slavery a hundred years ago. Scores have been killed and wounded.

The above is only a random selection. The Negroes in Africa are caged and beat against the bars continually. It is the European proletariat that holds the key. Let the workers of Britain, France, and Germany say, "Arise, ye children of starvation" as loudly as the French revolutionaries said Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity and what force on earth can hold these Negroes back? All who know anything about Africa know this.

Mr. Norman Leys, a government medical officer in Kenya for twenty years, a member of the British Labour Party, and about as revolutionary as the late Ramsay MacDonald, wrote a study of Kenya in 1924. Seven years later he wrote again. This time he entitled his book *A Last Chance in Kenya*. The alternative, he said, is revolution.

In *Caliban in Africa*, Leonard Barnes, another milk and water socialist, writes as follows: "So he [the South African white] and the native he holds captive go spinning down the stream fatally, madly spinning together along the rapids above the great cataract, both yoked to one omnipotent hour." That is the revolution, wrapped in silver paper.

The revolution haunts this conservative Englishman. He writes again of the Bantu, "They crouch in their corner, nursing a sullen anger and desperately groping for a plan. They will not be many years making up their minds. Time and fate, even more prevailing than the portcullis of the Afrikaner, are driving them on from the rear. Something must give; it will not be fate or time. Some comprehensive social and economic reconstruction must take place. But how? By reason or by violence? ..."

He poses as alternatives what are in reality one. The change will take place, by violence and by reason combined.

“WE HAVE A FALSE IDEA OF THE NEGRO”

Let us return again to the San Domingo revolution with its paltry half a million slaves. Writing in 1789, the very year of the revolution, a colonist said of them that they were “unjust, cruel, barbarous, half-human, treacherous, deceitful, thieves, drunkards, proud, lazy, unclean, shameless, jealous to fury and cowards.”

Three years later Roume, the French Commissioner, noted that even though fighting with the royalist Spaniards, the black revolutionaries, organizing themselves into armed sections and popular bodies, rigidly observed all the forms of republican organization. They adopted slogans and rallying cries. They appointed chiefs of sections and divisions who, by means of these slogans, could call them out and send them back home again from one end of the province to the others. They threw up from out of their depths a soldier and a statesman of the first rank, Toussaint Louverture, and secondary leaders fully able to hold their own with the French in war, diplomacy, and administration. In ten years they organized an army that fought Bonaparte’s army on level terms. “But what men these blacks are! How they fight and how they die!” wrote a French officer looking back at the last campaign after forty years. From his dying bed, Leclerc, Bonaparte’s brother-in-law and commander-in-chief of the French expedition, wrote home, “We have . . . a false idea of the Negro.” And again, “We have in Europe a false idea of the country in which we fight and the men whom we fight against....” We need to know and reflect on these things to-day.

Menaced during its whole existence by imperialism, European and American, the Haitians have never been able to overcome the bitter heritage of their past. Yet that revolution of a half million not only helped to protect the French Revolution but initiated great revolutions in its own right. When the Latin American revolutionaries saw that half a million slaves could fight and win, they recognised the reality of their own desire for independence. Bolivar, broken and ill, went to Haiti. The Haitians nursed him back to health, gave him money and arms with which he sailed to the mainland. He was defeated, went back to Haiti, was once more welcomed and assisted. And it was from Haiti that he sailed to start on the final campaign, which ended in the independence of the five states.

Today 150 million Negroes, knit into world economy infinitely more tightly than their ancestors of a hundred years ago, will far surpass the work of that San Domingo half million in the work of social transformation. The continuous risings in Africa; the refusal of the Ethiopian warriors to submit to Mussolini; the American Negroes who volunteered to fight in Spain in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, as Rigaud and Beauvais had volunteered to fight in America, tempering their swords against the enemy abroad for use against the enemy at home – these lightnings announce the thunder. The racial prejudice that now stands in the way will bow before the tremendous impact of the proletarian revolution.

In Flint during the sit-down strike of two years ago seven hundred Southern whites, soaked from infancy in racial prejudice, found themselves besieged in the General Motors building with one Negro among them. When the time came for the first meal, the Negro, knowing who and what his companions were, held himself in the background. Immediately it was proposed that there should be no racial discrimination among the strikers. Seven hundred hands went up together. In the face of the class enemy the men recognized that race prejudice was a subordinate thing which could not be allowed to disrupt their struggle. The Negro was invited to take his seat first, and after the victory was won, in the triumphant march out of the factory, he was given the first place. That is the prognosis of the future. In Africa, in America, in the West Indies, on a national and international scale, the millions of Negroes will raise their heads, rise up from their knees, and write some of the most massive and brilliant chapters in the history of revolutionary socialism.

"The Revolution and the Negro," New International, Volume V, December 1939, pp. 339-343.

IDENTITY POLITICS & CLASS STRUGGLE

ROBIN D. G. KELLEY

CLASS POLITICS IS BACK! AND NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON. Income inequality is staggering. Sweatshops and the slave labor conditions that accompany them are on the rise again. Corporate profits are reaching record highs while "downsizing" and capital flight have left millions unemployed. None of this surprises us. For the past 16 years, at least, we've witnessed a greater concentration of wealth while the living conditions of working people have deteriorated -- textbook laissez-faire capitalism, to be sure. Certainly the Reagan/Bush revolution ushered in a new era of corporate wealth and callous disregard for the poor. But President Bill Clinton -- with the help of a right-wing Congress and rightward-leaning Democratic Party -- contributed mightily to the process with the passage of NAFTA, GATT, and the most recent welfare reform bill.

There is a silver lining, perhaps. During the past couple of years, at least, we've witnessed an intensification of class-based opposition to inequality, falling wages, and the overall erosion of working-class life in the United States. Of course, we're far from the intense labor struggles of, say, 1877 or 1935 or 1946, but there are hopeful signs of movement -- from the resurrection of the old AFL-CIO under John Sweeney, Linda Chavez-Thompson, and Richard Trumka, the response to union summer, to the founding of the Labor Party, the New Party, and other progressive Third Party formations. In fact, even the language of populism now permeating much of American political discourse shows flashes of class analysis, if not an outright embrace of class struggle: it's "us against them"; time to end "corporate welfare as we know it"; we are engaged in nothing less than a "class war."

I find it ironic that at the very moment when radical renewal might actually be on the horizon, a handful of self-proclaimed spokespersons on the Left have practically written the "Left's" epitaph. The most vocal and visible of

the bunch are Todd Gitlin (*Twilight of Our Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars*) and Michael Tomasky (*Left for Dead: The Life, Death and Possible Resurrection of Progressive Politics in America*), but some of their ideas have been echoed by the likes of Richard Rorty, Sean Wilentz, Robert McChesney, and Jim Sleeper, to name a few. (I suppose Robert Hughes' *Culture of Complaint* might qualify since he writes about the absence of class analysis, but it is so polemical and so anti-Marxist that his passing suggestions for a renewed "Left" seem gratuitous.) Tomasky and Gitlin, in particular, set out to explain why the Left failed to mobilize a mass-based response to the rise of the Right, why it remains small, divided, and parochial, entrenched for better or worse in the groves of academe. Their explanation: "The Left" has lost touch with its Enlightenment roots, the source of its universalism and radical humanism, and instead has been hijacked by a "multicultural left" wedded to "identity politics" which has led us all into a cul-de-sac of ethnic particularism, race consciousness, sexual politics, and radical feminism.

Much of the blame is assigned to women, gays and lesbians, and colored people for fracturing the American Left, abandoning honest class struggle, and alienating white men who could be allies but aren't because of the terrible treatment meted out to them by the Loud Minority. Universal categories such as class have fallen before the narrow, particularistic mantras of radical chic: race, gender, sexuality, and disability. Indeed, in their view class is not just another identity, it transcends identity. If the "Left" wants to save itself, we must abandon our ever shrinking identity niches for the realm of majoritarian thinking. After all, we're told, the majority of Americans are white and heterosexual and have little interest in radical feminism, minority discourse, and struggles centered on sexual identity.

In some ways, I can sympathize with these people about the limitations of "identity politics." While the growing interest in the politics of identity has extended our analytical scope to overlooked or trivialized cultural spheres and expanded our understanding of intellectual history, in some circles it has also tended to limit discussions of power to cultural politics. And while so-called "identity politics" has always profoundly shaped labor movements and -- even more than vague, abstract notions of class unity -- has been the glue for class solidarity, by the same token it has also become a noose

around the necks of oppressed people, as in the case of white racism or certain variants of black nationalism.

ON THE OTHER HAND, WHATEVER CUL-DE-SACS WE MIGHT HAVE ENTERED, the "Enlightenment train" will not lead us out. These people assume that the universal humanism they find so endearing and radical can be easily separated from the historical context of its making; indeed, that it is precisely what can undo the racism and modern imperialism it helped to justify. The racialism of the West, slavery, imperialism, the destruction of indigenous cultures in the name of "progress," are treated as aberrations, coincidences, or not treated as all. They insist that these historical developments do not render the Enlightenment's radical universalism any less "radical," and those who take up this critique are simply rejecting Enlightenment philosophers because they're "dead white males." Their uncritical defense of the Enlightenment (which includes a strange tendency to collapse Marx, Locke and Jefferson into the same category), betrays an unwillingness to take ideas, let alone history, seriously. Gitlin certainly acknowledges these contradictions inherent in Enlightenment philosophy, as well as the historical context of slavery, racism, and colonialism. But in an intellectual sleight of hand he brackets these contradictions, reduces a huge body of complex, historically specific ideas to transhistorical abstractions (which he uses selectively to make his case against "identity politics"), and then presumes that Enlightenment thought constitutes the central reservoir of ideas for the very identity movements he criticizes. Says Gitlin:

The Enlightenment is not to be discarded because Voltaire was anti-Semitic or Hume, Kant, Hegel, and Jefferson racist, but rather further enlightened -- for it equips us with the tools with which to refute the anti-Semitism of a Voltaire and the racism of the others. . . . In none of these cases was bigotry at the core of the man's intellectual system; it reflected the routine white prejudice of the time. The Enlightenment is self-correcting. The corrective to darkness is more light." (p. 215).

Good liberalism, to be sure, but its analytical insight leaves much to be desired. To pose the question as pro or con, keep the Enlightenment or discard it, sidesteps fundamental questions such as the legacy of 18th century social thought for modern conceptions of race or the philosophical underpinnings of racial slavery in an age when free labor and free market ideology triumphed. For example, while racist ideas can be traced to

ancient thought and forms of domination internal to Europe, the Enlightenment also ushered in a transformation in Western thinking about race. How could it not? After all, as many commentators since the French Revolution have observed, the expansion of slavery and genocidal wars against non-European peoples took place alongside, and by some accounts made possible bourgeois democratic revolutions that gave birth (in the West) to the concept that liberty and freedom are inalienable rights. This contradiction is fundamental to Enlightenment philosophy, notions of progress, and developments in scientific thinking.

As the work of George Mosse, David Theo Goldberg, Cedric Robinson, and many others has demonstrated, modern racism is one of the "gifts" of the Enlightenment. It is not an accident that during the 18th century modern science moves toward classification as one of its primary endeavors, turning to aesthetic criteria derived from ancient Greece as the source of measurement. These Enlightenment scientists -- in some respects, the founders of modern anthropology -- begin to associate outward, physical signs of "beauty" with inner rationality, piety, intelligence and harmony. Thus a century before social Darwinism we see scientific justifications for racial hierarchy and domination. Christian Meiners' influential book, *Outline of the History of Mankind* (1785) put it bluntly: "One of the chief characteristics of tribes and peoples is the beauty or ugliness of the whole body or of the face." At the same time, the idealization of the so-called "primitive" (the "noble savage idea") espoused by several 17th century travel writers, as well as in flashes of Rousseau, began to give way to notions of European superiority vis-a-vis Africans and Native Americans. Non-Europeans were unambiguously classified as representing a lower stage of human development. The primitive mind was constructed as the very opposite of Reason: atavistic, regressive, barbaric. Again, science provided a rationale for racial hierarchies. Climatic theories explaining the origins of racial difference were called into question by Enlightenment thinkers who proposed the radical idea that Africans, Asians, and "Indians" originated from different species. Voltaire certainly made this claim, as did Scottish Jurist Lord Kames in his *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774), and Charles White in his celebrated *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man* (1799). Enlightenment thought not only opened the door for future arguments about the inherent inferiority of different "races," but it sharply limited the definition of "humanity."

Thus, at the very moment when a discourse of universal humanism is finding voice in the bourgeois democratic revolutions of the era, colored people and Europeans rendered marginal to civilization (Jews, Irish, etc.) are being written out of the family of "Man." (Is this why the Haitian Revolution is still not considered one of the most important revolutions of the bourgeois democratic era?)

Besides assuming that the "universal" is truly "self-evident," the neo-Enlightenment Left cannot conceive of movements led by African Americans, women, Latinos, gays and lesbians, speaking for the whole or even embracing radical humanism. The implications are frightening: the only people who can speak the language of universalism are white men (since they have no investment in identity politics beyond renewed ethnic movements arising here and there) and women and colored people who have transcended or rejected the politics of identity. Moreover, they either don't understand or refuse to acknowledge that class is lived through race and gender. There is no universal class identity, just as there is no universal racial or gender or sexual identity. The idea that race, gender, and sexuality are particular whereas class is universal not only presumes that class struggle is some sort of race and gender-neutral terrain but takes for granted that movements focused on race, gender, or sexuality necessarily undermine class unity and, by definition, cannot be emancipatory for the whole.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not giving priority to "identity politics" over the struggle to dismantle capitalism and to build a world we've never seen before -- a world free of market forces and all the terrible things that go with it. Rather, I have trouble with their characterization of race, gender, and sexuality as narrow identity politics while "class" is regarded as some transcendent, universal category that rises above these other identities. Indeed, Gitlin calls the first three, "birthrights," and despite an obligatory nod to Anthony Appiah, he fails to treat these categories as social constructs that have enormous consequences for how class is lived. Along with these so-called "identities" come regimes of oppression. Are churches being burned because black people are alienating white folks? Is that why the Justice Department focuses much of its investigation on black congregations rather than white supremacist groups? Is pro-Prop 187

sentiment and callousness toward immigrants the result of Mexican and Central American immigrants' refusal to be "inclusive?"

I FIND THE NEO-ENLIGHTENMENT POSITION INCREDIBLY PROBLEMATIC GIVEN WHAT WE KNOW of the history of class struggle in the U.S. It rests, not on a serious analysis of the social movements lumped together under the heading "identity politics," but on caricature, stereotypes, omissions, innuendo, and historical analysis that borders on the comical at times. Indeed, these movements are rarely ever named and their positions never spelled out in any detail. Yet, despite the lack of depth and scholarly rigor, as well as an over-reliance on personal impressions, these arguments seem to be winning over a broad section of high profile liberals/leftists who believe the time has come for us to "transcend" all this race and gender stuff and get to the matter at hand: class warfare against the bosses. During the recent labor teach-in at Columbia University, for example, both Betty Friedan and Richard Rorty, taking a page from Gitlin's book, told the audience that the time had come to graduate from narrow identity movements to the bigger picture. It was as if antiracist and antisexist struggles were not fundamental to the struggles of working people across race and gender lines, or worse, that they had been essentially resolved and were no longer pressing problems.

Although their books have been widely reviewed, we have yet to subject the neo-Enlightenment position to a serious political critique. I don't know how many times I've been told, "Don't attack them, they're on our side!" Besides the obvious analogy to the issue of the Left's stance toward Clinton, I'm always inclined to repeat Tonto's response to the Lone Ranger: "What do you mean we'?" Of course, to say "we" invites accusations of "identity politics," of identifying with colored people at the expense of the poor Lone Ranger, who is merely low-level manager of capital rather than an owner. But this is precisely the problem: the "we" I'm speaking of includes all oppressed people, including Mr. Ranger if he chooses to join. The Gitlin/Tomasky group makes the grave error of rendering movements struggling around issues of race, gender, and sexuality as inherently narrow and particularistic. The failure to conceive of these social movements as essential to the emancipation of the whole remains the fundamental stumbling block to building a deep and lasting class-based politics.

Part of their problem has to do with their failure to take seriously the ideas coming out of these "identity movements." Their arguments rest less on what these movements espouse than on their racial, ethnic or gender make-up or their sexual orientation. "Choose a nonwhite ethnicity," Tomasky sneers, "combine it with a sexual practice or a physical condition, and there probably exists a movement to match." (p. 89) Let us take one of their favorite whipping girls: the "black feminist," particularly of the lesbian variety. In a bizarre tautology, black feminists are narrowly concerned with their race and sex because they are black feminists. In fact, aside from Alice Walker and the statement issued by the Combahee River Collective (a radical black feminist group founded in the mid-1970s), black feminists in their texts have no names or organizations -- they function as little more than signifiers (or, to put them in a more traditional context, as scapegoats). Tomasky was kind enough to quote one line from the Combahee River Collective's 1977 statement, though the line he quotes is intended to demonstrate how narrow identity politics can get. For him, the principles of black feminism are succinctly expressed in the following sentence: "We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity." What he neglected to mention, however, is that the same statement proposed a clear socialist agenda, arguing that emancipation for everyone could not take place until racism, homophobia, sexism, and capitalism are annihilated, and criticized mainstream feminist organizations for not being inclusive enough -- for not dealing adequately with the needs of the poor or with racist oppression of men and women. Nor did Tomasky acknowledge the important line in the statement that "as Black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic."

In other words, had Tomasky and Gitlin taken the time to read the material written by black feminists instead of simply reducing them to caricatures of their own imagination, they might have discovered some of the most sophisticated statements of the kind of radical humanism they claim to embrace. Anna Julia Cooper, whose writings continue to have a profound impact on Black feminism, wrote in 1893:

We take our stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life, and the unnaturalness and injustice of all special favoritisms, whether of sex, race, country or condition. . . . The colored woman feels that woman's cause in one

and universal; and that. . . not till race, color, sex, and condition are seen as accidents, and not the substance of life; not till the universal title of humanity to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is conceded to be inalienable to all; not till then is woman's lesson taught and woman's cause won -- not the white woman's nor the black woman's, not the red woman's but the cause of every man and every woman who has writhed silently under a mighty wrong.

This radical humanism, as theorist Patricia Hill Collins points out, has been a consistent principle of black feminist thought. Alice Walker insists that a "womanist" is "committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female," and is "not a separatist" but "traditionally a universalist." Pauli Murray is even more explicit:

The lesson of history that all human rights are indivisible and that the failure to adhere to this principle jeopardizes the rights of all is particularly applicable here. A built-in hazard of an aggressive ethnocentric movement which disregards the interests of other disadvantaged groups is that it will become parochial and ultimately self-defeating in the face of hostile reactions, dwindling allies, and mounting frustrations.

One could see this vision in the writings of many black feminists, including June Jordan, Barbara Christian, Angela Davis, Elsa Barkley Brown, Pearl Cleage, Audre Lorde, Pat Parker, Barbara Smith, Cheryl Clarke, Julianne Malveaux, bell hooks, Margaret Simms, and Filomina Steady, to name a few.

Of course, had Tomasky and Gitlin actually read this stuff, they might jump up in agreement and dismiss these statements as exceptions to the rule. (Whatever the rule is, however, always goes unnamed.) But a close reading reveals that they are not saying the same thing. "If all human rights are indivisible," then why privilege majoritarian concerns over all others and ridicule movements organized around sex, race, and gender? Why presume that such movements are necessarily narrow simply because black women and their concerns are central to them? Nothing could be further from the truth. One vital outgrowth of radical black feminism has been the black women's healthcare movement, its most notable manifestation being the National Black Women's Health Project. Among other things, they have sought to create a healthier environment for poor and working-class women and reduce women's dependence on a health care system structured by

capitalism and run primarily by men. If they succeed, imagine how such a transformation might benefit all of us, irrespective of race or gender?

UNFORTUNATELY, THESE NEO-ENLIGHTENMENT LEFTISTS ARE BLIND TO the radical humanist traditions that have undergirded black feminist movements, and this blindness has kept them from seeing how black feminism could contribute to their own emancipation. Similarly, they don't see how gay and lesbian movements might also contribute to our collective emancipation—a criticism made eloquently by Martin Duberman in his review of Tomasky's book in *The Nation*. Some things are obvious: the continuing struggle of gays and lesbians against discrimination in public and private life have important implications for national civil rights law; the work of ACT UP and other movements have made AIDS visible -- a disease that's killing many heterosexual people, especially poor black women. Less obvious is the role of scholarship coming out of Gay and Lesbian Studies programs as well as Women's Studies programs -- grist for the anti-identity politics mill. Queer theory, for example, begins with the premise that sexuality is a vital part of human existence, and that the way sexual identities are defined (and policed) has to do with social relations of power, the role of the state, public institutions, and social movements. The best work understands that sexual identities and practices are lived through race and class and can only be understood historically. What does this scholarship have to do with the rest of us? What are the implications for the "universal"? For one, we know now that there is no universal masculinity or femininity. The idea of "normal" behavior is a social construction, which means that there is nothing natural or inevitable about male dominance, the overrepresentation of men in positions of power, or the tendency of men to use violence to resolve conflict. These are all obvious points, to be sure. But how many heterosexual men and women stop to think about the emancipatory potential of a more flexible sexual and gender identity for all of us? Besides reducing homophobic anxieties, freeing up self-expression, and enabling us to reconstruct our relationships to one another (isn't that what revolution is all about?), I believe a less rigid definition of masculinity may actually reduce violence -- from police brutality to domestic abuse.

While Gitlin tends to be slightly more sympathetic to feminism and gay and lesbian movements than Tomasky, they both view them as prime examples of dead-end identity politics. On the other hand, when they proclaim a

movement or issue "universal," they don't stop to analyze how race and gender shape various responses to issues. For example, Tomasky believes he hit on a common value/agenda when he writes: "Working people in this country need a movement that will put their interests and livelihoods first." Fair enough. But without an analysis that takes racism, sexism, and homophobia seriously, or considers deep historical differences, we won't know what "interests" mean. Let's take crime and the issue of neighborhood safety, an issue on which many people across race, gender, and even class lines can find common ground. Yet, racism -- not narrow identity politics -- persuaded many African Americans to oppose Clinton's \$22 billion Crime Bill, and the majority of white voters to support it. For many black people, the issue of neighborhood safety is not just about more police but the kind of police -- where they live, how they relate to the community. Indeed, no matter what we might think of the Nation of Islam (NOI), many non-Muslims see its fight against drug dealers in black communities as more effective than the police.

It is precisely this kind of economism that enables these people to claim, without evidence, that declining wages is universally more important to most black people than police brutality or having to wait an hour for a seat at Denny's. One is hard economics that unites people; the other is just narrow identity politics. Thus, when black gays and lesbians take to the streets to protest violence against them, that's "identity politics." When angry white males claim that affirmative action is taking jobs from them, that's class politics muffled beneath a racial blanket they themselves don't understand. When white people vote for David Duke and Pat Buchanan, that's class politics, not identity politics. Something's wrong with this picture.

WHOSE LEFT?

CENTRAL TO THE NEO-ENLIGHTENMENT LEFT'S CASE AGAINST SO-CALLED identity politics is a nostalgia for the Old Left, back in the days before the 60s when everyone who joined checked their race and gender identities at the door and embraced a radical universalism that transcended skin color, ethnic affiliations, and sex. Intense debates over the Negro Question or the Woman Question, not to mention charges of "chauvinism," simply vanish from this romantic narrative. Those were the days of "real" class struggle, the days of the CIO, the Knights, Labor, the IWW, the Reds, the rugged and manly Republican artisans in the Age of Jackson (Andrew,

not Michael), the days before identity politics eroded the class struggle and we knew what the working class looked like. Then, around 1970 according to Tomasky, everything fell apart "when the American left cashiered traditional class-based politics for a new variant in which race and gender were preeminent. . . . For black activists, racism became more important than the exploitation of workers by capitalists; for women, sexism."

Who is he talking about? Black Power and feminism had radical and conservative tendencies, and neither uniformly privileged race or sex, or ignored class, for that matter. And what about the black Left? If these activists and the New Left more broadly abandoned "the exploitation of workers by capitalists," why did so many of these folks join Marxist-Leninist organizations in the early 1970s and begin working in factories to organize industrial workers? Workers became very important for the New Left, particularly for African-American radicals. In 1968 and 1969, a fairly large contingent of black, radical students at Duke and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill helped organize key strikes of maintenance and dining hall workers. Former Wayne State students such as General Baker, Marion Kramer, Ken Cockerel, Ken Hamblin, Luke Tripp, Charles Johnson, and others organized the Revolutionary Union Movement in Detroit's auto plants, which culminated in the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW). Some of the organizers who split from the League joined former SNCC leader James Forman and founded the Black Workers Congress.

Not surprisingly, in his book Gitlin dismisses the industrial concentration movement coming out of the New Left in a sentence, probably because it contradicts his central thesis that the late 60s witnessed the flight from universal class struggle. Yet, some of these same people contributed substantially to labor struggles during the "dark ages," and can take some credit for the current regeneration of the movement -- from Eric Mann, who led the campaign to keep GM Van Nuys open in the 1980s, to labor militants like Joe Alvarez, currently the political director for the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE). Alvarez's presence is no small matter, for UNITE is one of the biggest unions in the country, formed in July of 1995 through a merger of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU). UNITE has also taken the lead in the fight against sweatshops

throughout the Western hemisphere, building cross-border alliances from Latin America and the Caribbean to Canada.

On the other hand, those white construction workers in the 1960s who battled antiwar protesters and supported Nixon -- the folks Gitlin calls "the Common men" -- were also notorious for having the most racist, exclusionary unions. Now, compare their unions to the local, state, and federal employees unions that supported black struggles for justice. Or compare them to, say, District 1199 of the hospital workers or some locals of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) -- unions that embraced the spirit (and the people) of the civil rights movement. Multiracial public sector unions were able to survive, even thrive, while construction workers belong to some of the most devastated unions in the country. Indeed, when unionization was on the decline, public sector unions increased their membership by 37%.

In other words, given black workers' commitment to organized labor, despite being overrepresented in the unemployment rolls and in occupations that have historically been difficult to unionize, it is ironic that African Americans bear so much of the burden for the decline of "class politics." Black workers, after all, have the highest union participation rate -- in 1994, 21% of the African-American work force was unionized compared to 15% of whites. Furthermore, a 1989 AP/Media survey revealed that people of color had stronger union sympathies than whites. When nonunion workers were asked: "Would you join a union at your place of work?" 56% of African Americans answered yes, as did 46% of Latinos. Among white workers, only 35% responded affirmatively.

If rebuilding class politics is the goal of the neo-Enlightenment left, and the labor movement is one of the vehicles for doing so, I don't understand why they would invoke Enlightenment universalism to promote a version of American nationalism and support for "majoritarian" values which -- it seems to me -- is the very opposite of the cosmopolitanism they claim to be embracing.

Gitlin deplores the fact that the Republicans have seized the symbols of patriotism and that progressives have failed to promote "Democratic Americanism, an Americanism of constitutional faith strong enough to override the racism of American history. . . ." What an incredibly naive

statement; it ignores actual historical context and presumes one can miraculously disentangle the language of "Americanism" from its roots in white supremacy, conquest, and xenophobia. Tomasky's chauvinism is even more strident:

The United States alone, simply because its power and wealth are still so vast, can set the direction for the rest of the advanced world to follow. . . . An America that rises above its own particularisms and ethnic rivalries might be able to posit itself as an example for others, in Bosnia, in Macedonia, in Russia, in the Middle East and, with some credibility, lead a Western coalition that lays down principles that factions there must adhere to. And for the Third World, especially for those people making six dollars a day weaving those designer garments, an America devoted once again to working people will surely bear fruit.

Can labor really afford to rally behind this sort of nationalist rhetoric in the age of global capital? Imagine if the AFL-CIO had been supporting progressive unions across the world rather than U.S. foreign policy driven by Cold War imperialism? It took NAFTA to spur the AFL-CIO to take cross-border organizing more seriously, and though some campaigns are succeeding, labor leaders now have to break through a wall of suspicion and distrust following decades of AFL-CIO-supported Cold War policy. And yet Gitlin lampoons all Third World solidarity movements. The fact is, the South African divestment campaign as well as Central American solidarity movements opened doors to labor that might otherwise have been shut.

RATHER THAN WORRY ABOUT OFFENDING "MAJORITARIAN SENSIBILITIES," the labor movement must make antiracism, antisexism, and anti-homophobia foundational. The absurd argument that minority aggressiveness is responsible for white male backlash at the tail end of the 1960s masks the fact that it has been white racism that has tragically inhibited the growth of most progressive movements in the U.S. As W.E.B. DuBois, Dave Roediger, Alexander Saxton, Ted Allen, Noel Ignatiev, Michael Goldfield, Eric Lott, David Wellman and others have demonstrated, racism has been a noose around white workers' necks since the American Revolution. In the South during Reconstruction, a misguided white majority sided with the wrong class and rejected the black workers and sharecroppers who proposed a Democratic South with massive land redistribution. Despite the fact that the black freedom struggle, in alliance

with the radical wing of the Republican Party, enfranchised poor whites who didn't have the right to vote before the 15th Amendment, the vast majority of exploited white labor still chose color over class. And in California, it was precisely anti-Chinese sentiment that galvanized the multi-ethnic "white" working class and forged a dynamic union movement on the West Coast during the late 19th century. Of course, white workers were never uniformly racist and there are enough stories of interracial working-class solidarity to fill volumes. But we also must recognize the price these men and women had to pay: white workers willing to commit "race suicide" often faced the worst of state repression, ostracism, and sometimes hostility within their own ranks. It's not an accident, for example, that the most militantly anti-racist unions emerging out of the CIO campaigns of the 1930s and 40s were the main targets of McCarthyite witch hunts.

I can't stress enough the importance of the fight against racism right now, especially with a growing backlash against affirmative action under the guise of supporting a "color blind" society. Anyone seriously concerned about the labor movement and building multiracial unity must recognize the fundamental role racism has played in destroying internationalism. Anti-immigrant sentiment, for instance, is not just about class anger, because there really is no mobilization against Canadians or European immigrants taking what are essentially skilled jobs. It's about dark people, whether some invisible Pacific Rim empire run by "sneaky Orientals" or "wetbacks." The history of conquest and, later, repatriation in the Southwest is fundamental to understanding anti-immigrant sentiment, the English-only movement, and pro-Prop 187. Blanket support for "majoritarian" positions simply plays into American nationalism and chauvinism.

So, how might people build class solidarity without suppressing or ignoring differences? How can we build on differences -- by which I mean different kinds of oppression as well as different identities -- rather than in spite of them? One way to conceive of alliances across race and gender is as a set of "affiliations," of building unity by supporting and perhaps even participating in other peoples struggles for social justice. Basically, that old fashioned IWW slogan, "An injury to one is an injury to all!" After all, contrary to the neo-Enlightenment narratives, African-American social movements have been practicing the principle of "an injury to one is an injury to all" for a very long time: black male abolitionists supported women's suffrage when

few white men would; black radicals throughout the early part of the century supported the Irish struggle for self-determination; black soldiers and journalists shed tears at the sight of Nazi death camps; and since Roosevelt, we have been mainstays in the Democratic Party even to our own detriment. Black trade unions were never exclusionary; black labor leaders did not implement Jim Crow locals. And when the Chinese Exclusion Act seemed to have universal support among non-Asian workers, it was a black man, James Ferrell of the Knights of Labor, who told his comrades that they ought to organize the Chinese rather than attack them.

The good news is that most elements of the labor movement understand this, unlike many academics who apparently find the idea of multiple identities too complicated to deal with. Despite their uncritical support of the Democratic Party, the current leadership of the AFL-CIO seems to understand that the labor movement is not about transcending these other social movements derisively labelled "identity politics," but about building alliances and affiliations and learning from them. Across the country, for example, unions have embraced cultural diversity education to reduce white racism, ethnic conflicts, sexism, and homophobia. They've sought assistance from dozens of university-based programs, including those at Indiana University, Division of Labor; University of Iowa's, Labor Center; University of Michigan, Labor Studies Center; University of Minnesota, Labor Education Service.

THE MOST DYNAMIC UNIONS ARE ALSO TURNING INCREASINGLY TO COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZING. In Los Angeles, where Latino and Asian-American garment workers are spread across many small plants and shops, organizing shop by shop would prove costly and time-consuming. The Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) adopted a community-based strategy that has been quite successful.

In Greensboro, North Carolina, UNITE's ability to build a strong base in the black community ensured the success of its boycott of K-Mart last year. Essentially, UNITE launched a campaign to protest racial inequities in wages: K-Mart workers at the nearly all-black facility were making a mere \$4.60 an hour. In addition to filing a complaint with the EEOC, the union enlisted all the key local black community leaders and were able to get over 10,000 signatures on a petition to K-Mart's chairman demanding an end to discrimination. In other words, rather than simply appealing to black workers

as "workers," they appealed to the black community and tapped a deep tradition of resistance to racism and injustice.

Similarly, members of the Labor Party Advocates steering committee recognized that in order to have substantial representation of women and workers of color at the Labor Party's founding convention, they could not rely solely on established union contacts. So they made provisions in the convention rules for "designated workers' organizations -- of women, workers of color and other workers' groups including those facing special discrimination" to have voting power if they endorsed the Labor Party. As a result, groups like the Coalition of Labor Union Women, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, and Black Workers for Justice were able to participate and represent the interests of workers irrespective of union affiliation. Finally, there are organizations, often products of the best elements of Third World, feminist and black Liberation movements, that don't see race, gender, and sexuality as "problems" and are, instead, moving working-class politics in new directions: we can point to the Southern Organizing Committee for Economic Justice, the Labor/Community Strategy Center, New Directions, *Labor Notes*, Solidarity, etc., many of which are led by white radicals (Ann Braden, Jerry Tucker, Eric Mann) who understand that antiracism and antisexism are fundamental to class struggle.

THERE ARE CERTAINLY MANY ISSUES AROUND WHICH PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCES CAN BE BUILT -- a renewed labor movement, environmental justice, racial justice, immigrant rights, anti-poverty, etc. Public transit is a site of struggle that literally touches all these issues -- a lesson Labor/Community Strategy Center organizers understand well. They have consistently made connections between civil rights, environmental justice, labor struggles, privatization, and the problems created by capitalism. Bus Riders Union (BRU) organizers see their constituency in all of its "identities" - as workers, consumers, largely people of color, and city dwellers tired of toxic living. The Union's demands -- more resources devoted to buses, a moratorium on overpriced rail service, lower fares, better service, safety, no-emissions electric buses, MTA policies that create jobs in inner city communities -- genuinely reflect a range of issues beyond the problem of transportation. The BRU is forging a new social movement, not by appeals to color blindness but by re-thinking class politics in a multicultural context.

BRU organizers also recognize the fundamental importance of culture and identity for mobilizing working people. The cultural work of the Strategy Center, from its creative use of graphics to attract members to its "dance-a-thons" and related cultural events, sets an example for political movements that understand that "cultural politics" is more than an analytical category or "political escapism" under a different name. It is a practice. Liann Hurst Mann, founding member of the Strategy Center and editor of its new bilingual publication *Ahora Now!*, is an architect and designer who has drawn on her experience as a political organizer to develop new ways to "visualize" multiracial, working class struggles. *Ahora Now!* consistently carries articles and interviews exploring cultural work, language, and identity that offer important lessons about "art making" in a political context. In collaboration with the L.A.-based Cornerstone Theater, the BRU plans to transform the interiors of buses into spaces for "guerrilla theater." As an extension of the BRU's longstanding and successful organizing campaign, its bilingual performances will address complicated issues of race and ethnic identity, citizenship, gender, immigration, language, and capitalism more broadly, while building a multiracial, multiethnic social movement. What is more, the BRU recently wrested a settlement from the MTA that resulted in a victory for all riders, including transit dependent white workers, the disabled, the elderly, and students.

It's ludicrous to blame so-called identity politics of the 1960s for the collapse of the Left, the derailment of progressive social movements, or our inability to roll back poverty and unbridled corporate wealth. We have others to thank for that: Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Bill Clinton, Cointelpro, white flight, red squads, red-lining, Contra-backed crack dealers, economic restructuring, the NRA, right-wing think tanks, complacent labor leaders. . . and the list goes on. Of course, the Left -- whatever that means now -- is not blameless. The scars of sectarianism run deep and trace their roots to the glorious days when the Old Marxists were supposedly more "universal." Street fights erupted between socialists and anarchists; battles raged between the Trotskyists and Stalinists and a variety of sects claiming to be the true heirs of Lenin. And then China entered the picture, along with Albania. These battles within the Marxist world contributed more to the internal implosion and proliferation of left-wing parties than feminism and black nationalism.

Although identity politics sometimes act as a fetter on genuine multiracial/multicultural alliances, I believe it has also enriched our conception of class. Indeed, there are many serious scholars -- I count myself among them -- trying to understand how various forms of fellowship, racial solidarity, communion, the creation of sexual communities, and nationalism shape class politics and cross-racial alliances. We are grappling with how self-love and solidarity in a hostile context of white supremacy, the embrace of certain vernaculars, can be expressions of racial and class solidarity, and the way class and racial solidarity are gendered. Not to recognize this is to wonder why more West Indian workers participate in Carnival than in the Labor Day Parade, or why District 1199 had the foresight and vision to maintain an 1199 float and/or banner in the West Indian Day parade. Those who pine for the good old days before identity politics, when class struggle meant rough guys who understood that simply fighting the bosses united us, forget that Yiddish was a source of solidarity within the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, to the point where union leaders were offering courses in Yiddish for black and Puerto Rican workers in the late 1950s, to their dismay. Identity politics, in other words, has always been central to working class movements, from minstrelsy on up.

More important, a careful examination of the movements dismissed as particularistic are often "radical humanist" at their core and potentially emancipatory for all of us. We need to seriously re-think some of these movements, shifting our perspective from the margins to the center. We must look beyond wedge issues or "minority issues" and begin to pay attention to what these movements are advocating, imagining, building. After all, the analyses, theories, visions emerging from the black liberation movements, the Chicano and Asian American movements, the gay and lesbian movements, the women's movements, may just free us all. We simply can't afford to abandon the subway, with all of its multicultural messiness to jump on board the Enlightenment train of pure, simple, color- and gender-blind class struggle. Neither Locke nor Jefferson offer a truly emancipatory vision -- not then and certainly not now. Attempts to "transcend" (read: outgrow) our race and sex does not make for a unified working class. What does is recognition of the multiplicity of experiences and perspectives and a willingness to struggle on all fronts -- irrespective of what "the majority" thinks. Recognizing the importance of environmental justice for the inner city; the critical role of antiracism for white workers'

own survival; the necessity for men to fight for women's rights and heterosexuals to raise their voices against homophobia. It's in struggle that one learns about power and how it operates, and that one can imagine a different world. And it's in struggle, not in the resurrection of ideas that have also provided the intellectual justification for modern racism, imperialism, and the traffic of human beings, that we must begin to develop a new vision.

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SOCIALIST FEMINISM

WHAT IS SOCIALIST FEMINISM?

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At some level, perhaps not too well articulated, socialist feminism has been around for a long time. You are a woman in a capitalist society. You get pissed off: about the job, about the bills, about your husband (or ex), about the kids' school, the housework, being pretty, not being pretty, being looked at, not being look at (and either way, not listened to), etc. If you think about all these things and how they fit together and what has to be changed, and then you look around for some words to hold all these thoughts together in abbreviated form, you'd almost have to come up with "socialist feminism."

A lot of us came to socialist feminism in just that kind of way. We were searching for a word/term/phrase which would begin to express all of our concerns, all of our principles, in a way that neither "socialist" nor "feminist" seemed to. I have to admit that most socialist feminists I know are not too happy with the term "socialist feminist" either. On the one hand it is too long (I have no hopes for a hyphenated mass movement); on the other hand it is much too short for what is, after all, really socialist internationalist anti-racist, anti-heterosexist feminism.

The trouble with taking a new label of any kind is that it creates an instant aura of sectarianism. "Socialist feminism" becomes a challenge, a mystery, an issue in and of itself. We have speakers, conferences, articles on "socialist feminism" – though we know perfectly well that both "socialism" and "feminism" are too huge and too inclusive to be subjects for any sensible speech, conference, article, etc. People, including avowed socialist feminists, ask themselves anxiously, "What is socialist feminism?" There is a kind of expectation that it is (or is about to be at any moment, maybe in the next speech, conference, or article) a brilliant synthesis of world historical proportions – an evolutionary leap beyond Marx, Freud, and Wollstonecraft. Or that it will turn out to be a nothing, a fad seized on by a few disgruntled feminists and female socialists, a temporary distraction.

I want to try to cut through some of the mystery which has grown up around socialist feminism. A logical way to start is to look at socialism and feminism

separately. How does a socialist, more precisely, a Marxist, look at the world? How does a feminist? To begin with, Marxism and feminism have an important thing in common: they are critical ways of looking at the world. Both rip away popular mythology and “common sense” wisdom and force us to look at experience in a new way. Both seek to understand the world – not in terms of static balances, symmetries, etc. (as in conventional social science) – but in terms of antagonisms. They lead to conclusions which are jarring and disturbing at the same time that they are liberating. There is no way to have a Marxist or feminist outlook and remain a spectator. To understand the reality laid bare by these analyses is to move into action to change it.

Marxism addresses itself to the class dynamics of capitalist society. Every social scientist knows that capitalist societies are characterized by more or less severe, systemic inequality. Marxism understands this inequality to arise from processes which are intrinsic to capitalism as an economic system. A minority of people (the capitalist class) own all the factories/energy sources/resources, etc. which everyone else depends on in order to live. The great majority (the working class) must work out of sheer necessity, under conditions set by the capitalists, for the wages the capitalists pay. Since the capitalists make their profits by paying less in wages than the value of what the workers actually produce, the relationship between the two classes is necessarily one of irreconcilable antagonism. The capitalist class owes its very existence to the continued exploitation of the working class. What maintains this system of class rule is, in the last analysis, force. The capitalist class controls (directly or indirectly) the means of organized violence represented by the state – police, jails, etc. Only by waging a revolutionary struggle aimed at the seizure of state power can the working class free itself, and, ultimately, all people.

Feminism addresses itself to another familiar inequality. All human societies are marked by some degree of inequality between the sexes. If we survey human societies at a glance, sweeping through history and across continents, we see that they have commonly been characterized by: the subjugation of women to male authority, both with the family and in the community in general; the objectification of women as a form of property; a sexual division of labor in which women are confined to such activities as

child raising, performing personal services for adult males, and specified (usually low prestige) forms of productive labor.

Feminists, struck by the near-universality of these things, have looked for explanations in the biological “givens” which underlie all human social existence. Men are physically stronger than women on the average, especially compared to pregnant women or women who are nursing babies. Furthermore, men have the power to make women pregnant. Thus, the forms that sexual inequality take – however various they may be from culture to culture – rest, in the last analysis, on what is clearly a physical advantage males hold over females. That is to say, they result ultimately on violence, or the threat of violence.

The ancient, biological root of male supremacy – the fact of male violence – is commonly obscured by the laws and conventions which regulate the relations between the sexes in any particular culture. But it is there, according to a feminist analysis. The possibility of male assault stands as a constant warning to “bad” (rebellious, aggressive) women, and drives “good” women into complicity with male supremacy. The reward for being “good” (“pretty,” submissive) is protection from random male violence and, in some cases, economic security.

Marxism rips away the myths about “democracy” and its “pluralism” to reveal a system of class rule that rests on forcible exploitation. Feminism cuts through myths about “instinct” and romantic love to expose male rule as a rule of force. Both analyses compel us to look at a fundamental injustice. The choice is to reach for the comfort of the myths or, as Marx put it, to work for a social order that does not require myths to sustain it.

It is possible to add up Marxism and feminism and call the sum “socialist feminism.” In fact, this is probably how most socialist feminists see it most of the time – as a kind of hybrid, pushing our feminism in socialist circles, our socialism in feminist circles. One trouble with leaving things like that, though, is that it keeps people wondering “Well, what is she really?” or demanding of us “What is the principal contradiction.” These kinds of questions, which sound so compelling and authoritative, often stop us in our tracks: “Make a choice!” “Be one or another!” But we know that there is a political consistency to socialist feminism. We are not hybrids or fencesitters.

To get to that political consistency we have to differentiate ourselves, as feminists, from other kinds of feminists, and, as Marxists, from other kinds of Marxists. We have to stake out a (pardon the terminology here) socialist feminist kind of feminism and a socialist feminist kind of socialism. Only then is there a possibility that things will “add up” to something more than an uneasy juxtaposition.

I think that most radical feminists and socialist feminists would agree with my capsule characterization of feminism as far as it goes. The trouble with radical feminism, from a socialist feminist point of view, is that it doesn’t go any farther. It remains transfixed with the universality of male supremacy – things have never really changed; all social systems are patriarchies; imperialism, militarism, and capitalism are all simply expressions of innate male aggressiveness. And so on.

The problem with this, from a socialist feminist point of view, is not only that it leaves out men (and the possibility of reconciliation with them on a truly human and egalitarian basis) but that it leaves out an awful lot about women. For example, to discount a socialist country such as China as a “patriarchy” – as I have heard radical feminists do – is to ignore the real struggles and achievements of millions of women. Socialist feminists, while agreeing that there is something timeless and universal about women’s oppression, have insisted that it takes different forms in different settings, and that the differences are of vital importance. There is a difference between a society in which sexism is expressed in the form of female infanticide and a society in which sexism takes the form of unequal representation on the Central Committee. And the difference is worth dying for.

One of the historical variations on the theme of sexism which ought to concern all feminists is the set of changes that came with the transition from an agrarian society to industrial capitalism. This is no academic issue. The social system which industrial capitalism replaced was in fact a patriarchal one, and I am using that term now in its original sense, to mean a system in which production is centered in the household and is presided over by the oldest male. The fact is that industrial capitalism came along and tore the rug out from under patriarchy. Production went into the factories and individuals broke off from the family to become “free” wage earners. To say that capitalism disrupted the patriarchal organization of production and

family life is not, of course, to say that capitalism abolished male supremacy! But it is to say that the particular forms of sex oppression we experience today are, to a significant degree, recent developments. A huge historical discontinuity lies between us and true patriarchy. If we are to understand our experience as women today, we must move to a consideration of capitalism as a system.

There are obviously other ways I could have gotten to the same point. I could have simply said that, as feminists, we are most interested in the most oppressed women – poor and working class women, third world women, etc., and for that reason we are led to a need to comprehend and confront capitalism. I could have said that we need to address ourselves to the class system simply because women are members of classes. But I am trying to bring out something else about our perspective as feminists: there is no way to understand sexism as it acts on our lives without putting it in the historical context of capitalism.

I think most socialist feminists would also agree with the capsule summary of Marxist theory as far as it goes. And the trouble again is that there are a lot of people (I'll call them "mechanical Marxists") who do not go any further. To these people, the only "real" and important things that go on in capitalist society are those things that relate to the productive process or the conventional political sphere. From such a point of view, every other part of experience and social existence – things having to do with education, sexuality, recreation, the family, art, music, housework (you name it) – is peripheral to the central dynamics of social change; it is part of the "superstructure" or "culture."

Socialist feminists are in a very different camp from what I am calling "mechanical Marxists." We (along with many, many Marxists who are not feminists) see capitalism as a social and cultural totality. We understand that, in its search for markets, capitalism is driven to penetrate every nook and cranny of social existence. Especially in the phase of monopoly capitalism, the realm of consumption is every bit as important, just from an economic point of view, as the realm of production. So we cannot understand class struggle as something confined to issues of wages and hours, or confined only to workplace issues. Class struggle occurs in every arena where the interests of classes conflict, and that includes education, health,

art, music, etc. We aim to transform not only the ownership of the means of production, but the totality of social existence.

As Marxists, we come to feminism from a completely different place than the mechanical Marxists. Because we see monopoly capitalism as a political/economic/cultural totality, we have room within our Marxist framework for feminist issues which have nothing ostensibly to do with production or “politics,” issues that have to do with the family, health care, “private” life.

Furthermore, in our brand of Marxism, there is no “woman question” because we never compartmentalized women off to the “superstructure” or somewhere in the first place. Marxists of a mechanical bent continually ponder the issue of the unwaged woman (the housewife): Is she really a member of the working class? That is, does she really produce surplus value? We say, of course housewives are members of the working class – not because we have some elaborate proof that they really do produce surplus value – but because we understand a class as being composed of people, and as having a social existence quite apart from the capitalist-dominated realm of production. When we think of class in this way, then we see that in fact the women who seemed most peripheral, the housewives, are at the very heart of their class – raising children, holding together families, maintaining the cultural and social networks of the community.

We are coming out of a kind of feminism and a kind of Marxism whose interests quite naturally flow together. I think we are in a position now to see why it is that socialist feminism has been so mystified: The idea of socialist feminism is a great mystery or paradox, so long as what you mean by socialism is really what I have called “mechanical Marxism” and what you mean by feminism is an ahistorical kind of radical feminism. These things just don’t add up; they have nothing in common.

But if you put together another kind of socialism and another kind of feminism, as I have tried to define them, you do get some common ground and that is one of the most important things about socialist feminism today. It is a space-free from the constrictions of a truncated kind of feminism and a truncated version of Marxism – in which we can develop the kind of politics that addresses the political/economic/cultural totality of monopoly capitalist society. We could only go so far with the available kinds of feminism, the conventional kind of Marxism, and then we had to break out to

something that is not so restrictive and incomplete in its view of the world. We had to take a new name, “socialist feminism,” in order to assert our determination to comprehend the whole of our experience and to forge a politics that reflects the totality of that comprehension.

However, I don’t want to leave socialist feminist theory as a “space” or a common ground. Things are beginning to grow in that “ground.” We are closer to a synthesis in our understanding of sex and class, capitalism and male domination, than we were a few years ago. Here I will indicate only very sketchily one such line of thinking:

1. The Marxist/feminist understanding that class and sex domination rest ultimately on force is correct, and this remains the most devastating critique of sexist/capitalist society. But there is a lot to that “ultimately.” In a day to day sense, most people acquiesce to sex and class domination without being held in line by the threat of violence, and often without even the threat of material deprivation.

2. It is very important, then, to figure out what it is, if not the direct application of force, that keeps things going. In the case of class, a great deal has been written already about why the US working class lacks militant class consciousness. Certainly ethnic divisions, especially the black/white division, are a key part of the answer. But I would argue, in addition to being divided, the working class has been socially atomized. Working class neighborhoods have been destroyed and are allowed to decay; life has become increasingly privatized and inward-looking; skills once possessed by the working class have been expropriated by the capitalist class; and capitalist controlled “mass culture” has edged out almost all indigenous working class culture and institutions. Instead of collectivity and self-reliance as a class, there is mutual isolation and collective dependency on the capitalist class.

3. The subjugation of women, in the ways which are characteristic of late capitalist society, has been key to this process of class atomization. To put it another way, the forces which have atomized working class life and promoted cultural/material dependence on the capitalist class are the same forces which have served to perpetuate the subjugation of women. It is women who are most isolated in what has become an increasingly privatized family existence (even when they work outside the home too). It is, in many

key instances, women's skills (productive skills, healing, midwifery, etc.) which have been discredited or banned to make way for commodities. It is, above all, women who are encouraged to be utterly passive/uncritical/dependent (i.e. "feminine") in the face of the pervasive capitalist penetration of private life. Historically, late capitalist penetration of working class life has singled out women as prime targets of pacification/"feminization" – because women are the culture-bearers of their class.

4. It follows that there is a fundamental interconnection between women's struggle and what is traditionally conceived as class struggle. Not all women's struggles have an inherently anti-capitalist thrust (particularly not those which seek only to advance the power and wealth of special groups of women), but all those which build collectivity and collective confidence among women are vitally important to the building of class consciousness. Conversely, not all class struggles have an inherently anti-sexist thrust (especially not those that cling to pre-industrial patriarchal values) but all those which seek to build the social and cultural autonomy of the working class are necessarily linked to the struggle for women's liberation.

This, in very rough outline, is one direction which socialist feminist analysis is taking. No one is expecting a synthesis to emerge which will collapse socialist and feminist struggle into the same thing. The capsule summaries I gave earlier retain their "ultimate" truth: there are crucial aspects of capitalist domination (such as racial oppression) which a purely feminist perspective simply cannot account for or deal with – without bizarre distortions, that is. There are crucial aspects of sex oppression (such as male violence within the family) which socialist thought has little insight into – again, not without a lot of stretching and distortion. Hence the need to continue to be socialists and feminists. But there is enough of a synthesis, both in what we think and what we do for us to begin to have a self-confident identity as socialist feminists.

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THE APPROACHING OBSOLESCENCE OF HOUSEWORK *A Working-Class Perspective*

ANGELA DAVIS

The countless chores collectively known as “housework” – cooking, washing dishes, doing laundry, making beds, sweeping, shopping etc. – apparently consume some three to four thousand hours of the average housewife’s year.^[1] As startling as this statistic may be, it does not even account for the constant and unquantifiable attention mothers must give to their children. Just as a woman’s maternal duties are always taken for granted, her never-ending toil as a housewife rarely occasions expressions of appreciation within her family. Housework, after all, is virtually invisible: “No one notices it until it isn’t done – we notice the unmade bed, not the scrubbed and polished floor.”^[2] Invisible, repetitive, exhausting, unproductive, uncreative – these are the adjectives which most perfectly capture the nature of housework.

The new consciousness associated with the contemporary women’s movement has encourages increasing numbers of women to demand that their men provide some relief from this drudgery. Already, more men have begun to assist their partners around the house, some of them even devoting equal time to household chores. But how many of these men have liberated themselves from the assumption that housework is women’s work? How many of them would not characterise their housecleaning activities as “helping” their women partners?

If it were at all possible simultaneously to liquidate the idea that housework is women’s work and to redistribute it equally to men and women alike, would this constitute a satisfactory solution? While most women would joyously hail the advent of the “househusband,” the desexualisation of domestic labour would not really alter the oppressive nature of the work

itself. In the final analysis, neither women nor men should waste precious hours of their lives on work that is neither stimulating nor productive.

One of the most closely guarded secrets of advanced capitalist societies involves the possibility – the real possibility – of radically transforming the nature of housework. A substantial portion of the housewife's domestic tasks can actually be incorporated into the industrial economy. In other words, housework need no longer be considered necessarily and unalterably private in character. Teams of trained and well-paid workers, moving from dwelling to dwelling, engineering technologically advanced cleaning machinery, could swiftly and efficiently accomplish what the present-day housewife does so arduously and primitively. Why the shroud of silence surrounding this potential of radically redefining the nature of domestic labour? Because the capitalist economy is structurally hostile to the industrialisation of housework. Socialised housework implies large government subsidies in order to guarantee accessibility to the working-class families whose need for such services is most obvious. Since little in the way of profits would result, industrialised housework – like all unprofitable enterprises – is anathema to the capitalist economy. Nonetheless, the rapid expansion of the female labour force means that more and more women are finding it increasingly difficult to excel as housewives according to the traditional standards. In other words, the industrialisation of housework, along with the socialisation of housework, is becoming an objective social need. Housework as individual women's private responsibility and as a female labour performed under primitive technical conditions, may finally be approaching historical obsolescence.

Although housework as we know it today may eventually become a bygone relic of history, prevailing social attitudes continue to associate the eternal female condition with images of brooms and dustpans, mops and pails, aprons and stoves, pots and pans. And it is true that women's work, from one historical era to another, has been associated in general with the homestead. Yet female domestic labour has not always been what it is today, for like all social phenomena, housework is a fluid product of human history. As economic systems have arisen and faded away, the scope and quality of housework have undergone radical transformations.

As Frederick Engels argued in his classic work on the *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*,^[3] sexual inequality as we know it today did

not exist before the advent of private property. During early eras of human history the sexual division of labour within the system of economic production was complementary as opposed to hierarchical. In societies where men may have been responsible for hunting wild animals and women, in turn, for gathering wild vegetables and fruits, both sexes performed economic tasks that were equally essential to their community's survival. Because the community, during those eras, was essentially an extended family, women's central role in domestic affairs meant that they were accordingly valued and respected members of the community.

The centrality of women's domestic tasks in pre-capitalist cultures was dramatised by a personal experience during a jeep trip I took in 1973 across the Masai Plains. On an isolated dirt road in Tanzania, I noticed six Masai women enigmatically balancing an enormous board on their heads. As my Tanzanian friends explained, these women were probably transporting a house roof to a new village which they were in the process of constructing. Among the Masai, as I learned, women are responsible for all domestic activities, thus also for the construction of their nomadic people's frequently relocated houses. Housework, as far as Masai women are concerned, entails not only cooking cleaning, child-rearing, sewing, etc., but house-building as well. As important as their men's cattle-rearing activities may be, the women's "housework" is no less productive and no less essential than the economic contributions of Masai men.

Within the pre-capitalist, nomadic economy of the Masai, women's domestic labour is as essential to the economy as the cattle-raising jobs performed by their men. As producers, they enjoy a correspondingly important social status. In advanced capitalist societies, on the other hand, the service-oriented domestic labour of housewives, who can seldom produce tangible evidence of their work, diminishes the social status of women in general. When all is said and done, the housewife, according to bourgeois ideology, is, quite simply, her husband's lifelong servant.

The source of the bourgeois notion of woman as man's eternal servant is itself a revealing story. Within the relatively short history of the United States, the "housewife" as a finished historical product is just a little more than a century old. Housework, during the colonial era, was entirely different from the daily work of the housewife in the United States today.

'A woman's work began at sunup and continued by firelight as long as she could hold her eyes open. For two centuries, almost everything that the family used or ate was produced at home under her direction. She spun and dyed the yarn that she wove into cloth and cut and hand-stitched into garments. She grew much of the food her family ate, and preserved enough to last the winter months. She made butter, cheese, bread, candles and soap and knitted her family's stockings.'^[4]

In the agrarian economy of pre-industrialised North America, a woman performing her household chores was thus a spinner, weaver, and seamstress as well as a baker, butter-churner, candle-maker and soap-maker. And et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. As a matter of fact,

'... the pressures of home production left very little time for the tasks that we would recognise today as housework. By all accounts pre-industrial revolution women were sloppy housekeepers by today's standards. Instead of the daily cleaning or the weekly cleaning there was the spring cleaning. Meals were simple and repetitive; clothes were changed infrequently; and the household wash was allowed to accumulate, and the washing done once a month, or in some households once in three months. And, of course, since each wash required the carting and heating of many buckets of water, higher standards of cleanliness were easily discouraged.'^[5]

Colonial women were not "house-cleaners" or "housekeepers" but rather full-fledged and accomplished workers within the home-based economy. Not only did they manufacture most of the products required by their families, they were also the guardians of their families' and their communities' health.

'It was [the colonial woman's] responsibility to gather and dry wild herbs used... as medicines; she also served as doctor, nurse, and midwife within her own family and in the community.'^[6]

Included in the United States Practical Recipe Book – a popular colonial recipe book – are recipes for foods as well as for household chemicals and medicines. To cure ringworm, for example, "obtain some blood-root... slice it in vinegar, and afterwards wash the place affected with the liquid."^[7]

The economic importance of women's domestic functions in colonial America was complemented by their visible roles in economic activity outside the home. It was entirely acceptable, for example, for a woman to become a tavern keeper.

'Women also ran sawmills and gristmills, caned chairs and built furniture, operated slaughterhouses, printed cotton and other cloth, made lace, and owned and ran dry-goods and clothing stores. They worked in tobacco shops, drug shops, (where they sold concoctions they made themselves), and general stores that sold everything from pins to meat scales. Women ground eye-glasses, made cards for wool carding, and even were housepainters. Often they were the town undertakers...'^[8]

The postrevolutionary surge of industrialisation resulted in a proliferation of factories in the northeastern section of the new country. New England's textile mills were the factory system's successful pioneers. Since spinning and weaving were traditional female domestic occupations, women were the first workers recruited by the mill-owners to operate the new power looms. Considering the subsequent exclusion of women from industrial production in general, it is one of the first industrial workers were women.

As industrialisation advanced, shifting economic production from the home to the factory, the importance of women's domestic work suffered a systematic erosion. Women were the losers in a double sense: as their traditional jobs were usurped by the burgeoning factories, the entire economy moved away from the home, leaving many women largely bereft of significant economic roles. By the middle of the nineteenth century the factory provided textiles, candles and soap. Even butter, bread and other food products began to be mass-produced.

'By the end of the century, hardly anyone made their own starch or boiled their laundry in a kettle. In the cities, women bought their bread and at least their underwear ready-made, sent their children out to school and probably some clothes out to be laundered, and were debating the merits of canned foods... The flow of industry had passed on and had left idle the loom in the attic and the soap kettle in the shed.'^[9]

As industrial capitalism approached consolidation, the cleavage between the new economic sphere and the old home economy became ever more

rigorous. The physical relocation of economic production caused by the spread of the factory system was undoubtedly a drastic transformation. But even more radical was the generalised revaluation of production necessitated by the new economic system. While home-manufactured goods were valuable primarily because they fulfilled basic family needs, the importance of factory-produced commodities resided overwhelmingly in their exchange value – in their ability to fulfill employers' demands for profit. This revaluation of economic production revealed – beyond the physical separation of home and factory – a fundamental *structural* separation between the domestic home economy and the profit-oriented economy of capitalism. Since housework does not generate profit, domestic labour was naturally defined as an inferior form of work as compared to capitalist wage labour.

An important ideological by-product of this radical economic transformation was the birth of the “housewife.” Women began to be ideologically redefined as the guardians of a devalued domestic life. As ideology, however, this redefinition of women's place was boldly contradicted by the vast numbers of immigrant women flooding the ranks of the working class in the Northeast. These white immigrant women were wage earners first and only secondarily housewives. And there were other women – millions of women – who toiled away from home as the unwilling producers of the slave economy in the South. The reality of women's place in nineteenth-century U.S. society involved white women, whose days were spent operating factory machines for wages that were a pittance, as surely as it involved Black women, who laboured under the coercion of slavery. The “housewife” reflected a partial reality, for she was really a symbol of the economic prosperity enjoyed by the emerging middle classes.

Although the “housewife” was rooted in the social conditions of the bourgeoisie and the middle classes, nineteenth-century ideology established the housewife and the mother as universal models of womanhood. Since popular propaganda represented the vocation of all women as a function of their roles in the home, women compelled to work for wages came to be treated as alien visitors within the masculine world of the public economy. Having stepped outside their “natural” sphere, women were not to be treated as full-fledged wage workers. The price they paid involved long hours, substandard working conditions and grossly inadequate wages. Their

exploitation was even more intense than the exploitation suffered by their male counterparts. Needless to say, sexism emerged as a source of outrageous super-profits for the capitalists.

The structural separation of the public economy of capitalism and the private economy of the home has been continually reinforced by the obstinate primitiveness of household labour. Despite the proliferation of gadgets for the home, domestic work has remained qualitatively unaffected by the technological advances brought on by industrial capitalism. Housework still consumes thousands of hours of the average housewife's year. In 1903 Charlotte Perkins Gilman proposed a definition of domestic labour which reflected the upheavals which had changed the structure and content of housework in the United States:

'... The phrase "domestic work" does not apply to a special kind of work, but to a certain grade of work, a state of development through which all kinds pass. All industries were once "domestic," that is were performed at home and in the interests of the family. All industries have since that remote period risen to higher stages, except one or two which have never left their primal stage.'^[10]

"The home," Gilman maintains, "has not developed in proportion to our other institutions." The home economy reveals

'... the maintenance of primitive industries in a modern industrial community and the confinement of women to these industries and their limited area of expression.'^[11]

Housework, Gilman insists, vitiates women's humanity:

'She is feminine, more than enough, as man is masculine, more than enough; but she is not human as he is human. The house-life does not bring out our humanness, for all the distinctive lines of human progress lie outside.'^[12]

The truth of Gilman's statement is corroborated by the historical experience of Black women in the United States. Throughout this country's history, the majority of Black women have worked outside their homes. During slavery, women toiled alongside their men in the cotton and tobacco fields, and when industry moved into the South, they could be seen in tobacco factories,

sugar refineries and even in lumber mills and on crews pounding steel for the railroads. In labour, slave women were the equals of their men. Because they suffered a grueling sexual equality at work, they enjoyed a greater sexual equality at home in the slave quarters than did their white sisters who were “housewives.”

As a direct consequence of their outside work – as “free” women no less than as slaves – housework has never been the central focus of Black women’s lives. They have largely escaped the psychological damage industrial capitalism inflicted on white middle-class housewives, whose alleged virtues were feminine weakness and wifely submissiveness. Black women could hardly strive for weakness; they had to become strong, for their families and their communities needed their strength to survive. Evidence of the accumulated strengths Black women have forged through work, work and more work can be discovered in the contributions of the many outstanding female leaders who have emerged within the Black community. Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida Wells and Rosa Parks are not exceptional Black women as much as they are epitomes of Black womanhood.

Black women, however, have paid a heavy price for the strengths they have acquired and the relative independence they have enjoyed. While they have seldom been “just housewives” they have always done their housework. They have thus carried the double burden of wage labour and housework – a double burden which always demands that working women possess the persevering powers of Sisyphus. As W. E. B. DuBois observed in 1920:

‘... some few women are born free, and some amid insult and scarlet letters achieve freedom; but our women in black had freedom thrust contemptuously upon them. With that freedom they are buying an untrammelled independence and dear as is the price they pay for it, it will in the end be worth every taunt and groan.’^[13]

Like their men, Black women have worked until they could work no more. Like their men, they have assumed the responsibilities of family providers. The unorthodox feminine qualities of assertiveness and self-reliance – for which Black women have been frequently praised but more often rebuked – are reflections of their labour and their struggles outside the home. But like their white sisters called “housewives,” they have cooked and cleaned and

have nurtured and reared untold numbers of children. But unlike the white housewives, who learned to lean on their husbands for economic security, Black wives and mothers, usually workers as well, have rarely been offered the time and energy to become experts at domesticity. Like their white working-class sisters, who also carry the double burden of working for a living and servicing husbands and children, Black women have needed relief from this oppressive predicament for a long, long time.

The shortage, if not the absence, of public discussion about the feasibility of transforming housework into a social possibility bears witness to the blinding powers of bourgeois ideology. It is not even the case that women's domestic role has received no attention at all. On the contrary, the contemporary women's movement has represented housework as an essential ingredient of women's oppression. There is even a movement in a number of capitalist countries, whose main concern is the plight of the housewife. Having reached the conclusion that housework is degrading and oppressive primarily because it is *unpaid* labour, this movement has raised the demand for wages. A weekly government paycheck, its activists argue, is the key to improving the housewife's status and the social position of women in general.

The Wages for Housework Movement originated in Italy, where its first public demonstration took place in March, 1974.

Addressing the crowd assembled in the city of Mestre, one of the speakers proclaimed:

*'Half the world's population is unpaid – this is the biggest class contradiction of all! And this is our struggle for wages for housework. It is **the** strategic demand; at this moment it is the most revolutionary demand for the whole working class. If we win, the class wins, if we lose, the class loses.'*^[14]

According to this movement's strategy, wages contain the key to the emancipation of housewives, and the demand itself is represented as the central focus of the campaign for women's liberation in general. Moreover, the housewife's struggle for wages is projected as the pivotal issue of the entire working-class movement.

The theoretical origins of the Wages for Housework Movement can be found in an essay by Mariarosa Dalla Costa entitled “Women and the Subversion of the Community.”^[15] In this paper, Dalla Costa argues for a redefinition of housework based on her thesis that the private character of household services is actually an illusion. The housewife, she insists, only appears to be ministering to the private needs of her husband and children, for the real beneficiaries of her services are her husband’s present employer and the future employers of her children.

‘(The woman) has been isolated in the home, forced to carry out work that is considered unskilled, the work of giving birth to, raising, disciplining, and servicing the worker for production. Her role in the cycle of production remained invisible because only the product of her labour, the labourer, was visible.’^[16]

The demand that housewives be paid is based on the assumption that they produce a commodity as important and as valuable as the commodities their husbands produce on the job. Adopting Dalla Costa’s logic, the Wages for Housework Movement defines housewives as creators of the labour-power sold by their family members as commodities on the capitalist market.

Dalla Costa was not the first theorist to propose such an analysis of women’s oppression. Both Mary Inman’s *In Women’s Defence* (1940)^[17] and Margaret Benston’s “The Political Economy of Women’s Liberation” (1969)^[18] define housework in such a way as to establish women as a special class of workers exploited by capitalism called “housewives.” That women’s procreative, child-rearing and housekeeping roles make it possible for their family members to work – to exchange their labour-power for wages – can hardly be denied. But does it automatically follow that women in general, regardless of their class and race, can be fundamentally defined by their domestic functions? Does it automatically follow that the housewife is actually a secret worker inside the capitalist production process?

If the industrial revolution resulted in the structural separation of the home economy from the public economy, then housework cannot be defined as an integral component of capitalist production. It is, rather, related to production as a precondition. The employer is not concerned in the least about the way labour-power is produced and sustained, he is only concerned about its availability and its ability to generate profit. In other

words, the capitalist production process presupposes the existence of a body of exploitable workers.

'The replenishment of (workers') labour-power is not a part of the process of social production but a prerequisite to it. It occurs outside of the labour process. Its function is the maintenance of human existence which is the ultimate purpose of production in all societies.'^[19]

In South African society, where racism has led economic exploitation to its most brutal limits, the capitalist economy betrays its structural separation from domestic life in a characteristically violent fashion. The social architects of apartheid have simply determined that Black labour yields higher profits when domestic life is all but entirely discarded. Black men are viewed as labour units whose productive potential renders them valuable to the capitalist class. But their wives and children

'... are superfluous appendages – non-productive, the women being nothing more than adjuncts to the procreative capacity of the black male labour unit.'^[20]

This characterisation of African women as “superfluous appendages” is hardly a metaphor. In accordance with South African law, unemployed Black women are banned from the white areas (87 percent of the country!), even, in most cases, from the cities where their husbands live and work.

Black domestic life in South Africa's industrial centres is viewed by Apartheid supporters as superfluous and unprofitable. But it is also seen as a threat.

'Government officials recognise the homemaking role of the women and fear their presence in the cities will lead to the establishment of a stable black population.'^[21]

The consolidation of African families in the industrialised cities is perceived as a menace because domestic life might become a base for a heightened level of resistance to Apartheid. This is undoubtedly the reason why large numbers of women holding residence permits for white areas are assigned to live in sex-segregated hostels. Married as well as single women end up living in these projects. In such hostels, family life is rigorously prohibited –

husbands and wives are unable to visit one another and neither mother nor father can receive visits from their children.^[22]

This intense assault on Black women in South Africa has already taken its toll, for only 28.2 percent are currently opting for marriage.^[23] For reasons of economic expediency and political security, Apartheid is eroding – with the apparent goal of destroying – the very fabric of Black domestic life. South African capitalism thus blatantly demonstrates the extent to which the capitalist economy is utterly dependent on domestic labour.

The deliberate dissolution of family life in South Africa could not have been undertaken by the government if it were truly the case that the services performed by women in the home are an essential constituent of wage labour under capitalism. That domestic life can be dispensed with by the South African version of capitalism is a consequence of the private home economy and the public production process which characterises capitalist society in general. It seems futile to argue that on the basis of capitalism's internal logic, women ought to be paid wages for housework.

Assuming that the theory underlying the demand for wages is hopelessly flawed, might it not be nonetheless politically desirable to insist that housewives be paid? Couldn't one invoke a moral imperative for women's right to be paid for the hours they devote to housework? The idea of a paycheck for housewives would probably sound quite attractive to many women. But the attraction would probably be short-lived. For how many of those women would actually be willing to reconcile themselves to deadening, never-ending household tasks, all for the sake of a wage? Would a wage alter the fact, as Lenin said, that

'... petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades (the woman), chains her to the kitchen and to the nursery, and wastes her labour on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-wracking, stultifying and crushing drudgery.'^[24]

It would seem that government paychecks for housewives would further legitimise this domestic slavery.

Is it not an implicit critique of the Wages for Housework Movement that women on welfare have rarely demanded compensation for keeping house?

Not “wages for housework” but rather “a guaranteed annual income for all” is the slogan articulating the immediate alternative they have most frequently proposed to the dehumanising welfare system. What they want in the long run, however, is jobs and affordable public child care. The guaranteed annual income functions, therefore, as unemployment insurance pending the creation of more jobs with adequate wages along with subsidised systems of child care.

The experiences of yet another group of women reveal the problematic nature of the “wages for housework” strategy. Cleaning women, domestic workers, maids – these are the women who know better than anyone else what it means to receive wages for housework. Their tragic predicament is brilliantly captured in the film by Ousman Sembene entitled *La Noire de...*^[25] The main character is a young Senegalese woman who, after a search for work, becomes a governess for a French family living in Dakar. When the family returns to France, she enthusiastically accompanies them. Once in France, however, she discovers she is responsible not only for the children, but for cooking, cleaning, washing, and all the other household chores. It is not long before her initial enthusiasm gives way to depression – a depression so profound that she refuses the pay offered her by her employers. Wages cannot compensate for her slavlike situation. Lacking the means to return to Senegal, she is so overwhelmed by her despair that she chooses suicide over an indefinite destiny of cooking, sweeping, dusting, scrubbing...

In the United States, women of colour – and especially Black women – have been receiving wages for housework for untold decades. In 1910, when over half of all Black females were working outside their homes, one-third of them were employed as paid domestic workers. By 1920 over one-half were domestic servants, and in 1930 the proportion had risen to three out of five.^[26] One of the consequences of the enormous female employment shifts during World War II was a much-welcomed decline in the number of Black domestic workers. Yet in 1960 one-third of all Black women holding jobs were still confined to their traditional occupations.^[27] It was not until clerical jobs became more accessible to Black women that the proportion of Black women domestics headed in a definitely downward direction. Today the figure hovers around 13 percent.^[28]

The enervating domestic obligations of women in general provide flagrant evidence of the power of sexism. Because of the added intrusion of racism, vast numbers of Black women have had to do their own housekeeping and other women's home chores as well. And frequently, the demands of the job in a white woman's home have forced the domestic worker to neglect her own home and even her own children. As paid housekeepers, they have been called upon to be surrogate wives and mothers in millions of white homes.

During their more than fifty years of organising efforts, domestic workers have tried to redefine their work by rejecting the role of the surrogate housewife. The housewife's chores are unending and undefined. Household workers have demanded in the first place a clear delineation of the jobs they are expected to perform. The name itself of one of the houseworkers' major unions today – Household Technicians of America – emphasises their refusal to function as surrogate housewives whose job is “just housework.” As long as household workers stand in the shadow of the housewife, they will continue to receive wages which are more closely related to the housewife's “allowance” than to a worker's paycheck. According to the National Committee on Household Employment, the average, full-time household technician earned only \$2,732 in 1976, two-thirds of them earning under \$2,000.^[29] Although household workers had been extended the protection of the minimum wage law several years previously, in 1976 an astounding 40 percent still received grossly substandard wages. The Wages for Housework Movement assumes that if women were paid for being housewives, they would accordingly enjoy a higher social status. Quite a different story is told by the age-old struggles of the paid household worker, whose condition is more miserable than any other group of workers under capitalism.

Over 50 percent of all U.S. women work for a living today, and they constitute 41 percent of the country's labour force. Yet countless numbers of women are currently unable to find decent jobs. Like racism, sexism is one of the great justifications for high female unemployment rates. Many women are “just housewives” because in reality they are unemployed workers. Cannot, therefore, the “just housewife” role be most effectively challenged by demanding jobs for women on a level of equality with men and by pressing for social services (child care, for example) and job benefits

(maternity leaves, etc.) which will allow more women to work outside the home?

The Wages for Housework Movement discourages women from seeking outside jobs, arguing that “slavery to an assembly line is not liberation from slavery to the kitchen sink.”^[30] The campaign’s spokeswomen insist, nonetheless, that they don’t advocate the continued imprisonment of women within the isolated environment of their homes. They claim that while they refuse to work on the capitalist market per se, they do not wish to assign to women the permanent responsibility for housework. As a U.S. representative of this movement says:

‘... we are not interested in making our work more efficient or more productive for capital. We are interested in reducing our work, and ultimately refusing it altogether. But as long as we work in the home for nothing, no one really cares how long or how hard we work. For capital only introduces advanced technology to cut the costs of production after wages gains by the working class. Only if we make our work cost (i.e. only if we make it uneconomical) will capital “discover” the technology to reduce it. At present, we often have to go out for a second shift of work to afford the dishwasher that should cut down our housework.’^[31]

Once women have received the right to be paid for their work, they can raise demands for higher wages, thus compelling the capitalists to undertake the industrialisation of housework. Is this a concrete strategy for women’s liberation or is it an unrealisable dream?

How are women supposed to conduct the initial struggle for wages? Dalla Costa advocates the *housewives strike*:

‘We must reject the home, because we want to unite with other women, to struggle against all situations which presume that women will stay at home... To abandon the home is already a form of struggle, since the social services we perform there would then cease to be carried out in those conditions.’^[32]

But if women are to leave the home, where are they to go? How will they unite with other women? Will they really leave their homes motivated by no other desire than to protest their housework? Is it not much more realistic to call upon women to “leave home” in search of outside jobs – or at least to

participate in a massive campaign for decent jobs for women? Granted, work under conditions of capitalism is brutalising work. Granted, it is uncreative and alienating. Yet with all this, the fact remains that on the job, women can unite with their sisters – and indeed with their brothers – in order to challenge the capitalists at the point of production. As workers, as militant activists in the labour movement, women can generate the real power to fight the mainstay and beneficiary of sexism which is the monopoly capitalist system.

If the wages-for-housework strategy does little in the way of providing a long-range solution to the problem of women's oppression, neither does it substantively address the profound discontent of contemporary housewives. Recent sociological studies have revealed that housewives today are more frustrated by their lives than ever before. When Ann Oakley conducted interviews for her book *The Sociology of Housework*,^[33] she discovered that even the housewives who initially seemed unbothered by their housework eventually expressed a very deep dissatisfaction. These comments came from a woman who held an outside factory job:

'... (Do you like housework?) I don't mind it... I suppose I don't mind housework because I'm not at it all day. I go to work and I'm only on housework half a day. If I did it all day I wouldn't like it – woman's work is never done, she's on the go all the time – even before you go to bed you've still got something to do – emptying ashtrays, wash a few cups up. You're still working. It's the same thing every day; you can't sort of say you're not going to do it, because you've got to do it – like preparing a meal: it's got to be done because if you don't do it, the children won't eat... I suppose you get used to it, you just do it automatically... I'm happier at work than I am at home.

'(What would you say are the worst things about being a housewife?) I suppose you get days when you feel you get up and you've got to do the same old things – you get bored, you're stuck in the same routine. I think if you ask any housewife, if they're honest, they'll turn around and say they feel like a drudge half the time – everybody thinks when they get up in the morning "Oh no, I've got the same old things to do today, till I go to bed tonight." It's doing the same things – boredom.'^[34]

Would wages diminish this boredom? This woman would certainly say no. A full-time housewife told Oakley about the compulsive nature of housework:

'The worst thing is I suppose that you've got to do the work because you are at home. Even though I've got the option of not doing it, I don't really feel I could not do it because I feel I ought to do it.'^[35]

In all likelihood, receiving wages for doing this work would aggravate this woman's obsession.

Oakley reached the conclusion that housework – particularly when it is a full-time job – so thoroughly invades the female personality that the housewife becomes indistinguishable from her job.

'The Housewife, in an important sense, is her job: separation between subjective and objective elements in the situation is therefore intrinsically more difficult.'^[36]

The psychological consequence is frequently a tragically stunted personality haunted by feelings of inferiority. Psychological liberation can hardly be achieved simply by paying the housewife a wage.

Other sociological studies have confirmed the acute disillusionment suffered by contemporary housewives. When Myra Ferree^[37] interviewed over a hundred women in a working community near Boston, "almost twice as many housewives as employed wives said they were dissatisfied with their lives." Needless to say, most of the working women did not have inherently fulfilling jobs: they were waitresses, factory workers, typists, supermarket and department store clerks, etc. Yet their ability to leave the isolation of their homes, "getting out and seeing other people," was as important to them as their earnings. Would the housewives who felt they were "going crazy staying at home" welcome the idea of being paid for driving themselves crazy? One woman complained that "staying at home all day is like being in jail" – would wages tear down the walls of her jail? The only realistic escape path from this jail is the search for work outside the home.

Each one of the more than 50 percent of all U.S. women who work today is a powerful argument for the alleviation of the burden of housework. As a matter of fact, enterprising capitalists have already begun to exploit women's new historical need to emancipate themselves from their roles as housewives. Endless profit-making fast-food chains like McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken bear witness to the fact that more women at work

means fewer daily meals prepared at home. However unsavory and unnutritious the food, however exploitative of their workers, these fast-food operations call attention to the approaching obsolescence of housework. What is needed, of course, are new social institutions to assume a good portion of the housewife's old duties. This is the challenge emanating from the swelling ranks of women in the working class. The demand for universal and subsidised child care is a direct consequence of the rising number of working mothers. And as more women organise around the demand for more jobs – for jobs on the basis of full equality with men – serious questions will increasingly be raised about the future viability of women's housewife duties. It may well be true that “slavery to an assembly line” is not in itself “liberation from the kitchen sink,” but the assembly line is doubtlessly the most powerful incentive for women to press for the elimination of their age-old domestic slavery.

The abolition of housework as the private responsibility of individual women is clearly a strategic goal of women's liberation. But the socialisation of housework – including meal preparation and child care – presupposes an end to the profit-motive's reign over the economy. The only significant steps toward ending domestic slavery have in fact been taken in the existing socialist countries. Working women, therefore, have a special and vital interest in the struggle for socialism. Moreover, under capitalism, campaigns for jobs on an equal basis with men, combined with movements for institutions such as subsidised public health care, contain an explosive revolutionary potential. This strategy calls into question the validity of monopoly capitalism and must ultimately point in the direction of socialism.

FOOTNOTES

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21. Elizabeth Landis, "Apartheid and the Disabilities of Black Women in South Africa," *Objective: Justice*, Vol. VII, No. 1 (January-March, 1975), p. 6. Excerpts from this paper were published in *Freedomways*, Vol XV, No. 4., 1975.
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26. Jackson, *op. cit.*, pp. 236-237.
27. Victor Perlo, *Economics of Racism U.S.A., Roots of Black Inequality* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 24.
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29. *Daily World*, July 26, 1977, p. 9.
30. Dalla Costa and James, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
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Chapter 13 of Women, Race and Class, Angela Davis 1981

THE COMBAHEE RIVER COLLECTIVE STATEMENT

COMBAHEE RIVER COLLECTIVE

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

We will discuss four major topics in the paper that follows: (1) the genesis of contemporary Black feminism; (2) what we believe, i.e., the specific province of our politics; (3) the problems in organizing Black feminists, including a brief herstory of our collective; and (4) Black feminist issues and practice.

1. THE GENESIS OF CONTEMPORARY BLACK FEMINISM

Before looking at the recent development of Black feminism we would like to affirm that we find our origins in the historical reality of Afro-American women's continuous life-and-death struggle for survival and liberation. Black women's extremely negative relationship to the American political system (a system of white male rule) has always been determined by our membership in two oppressed racial and sexual castes. As Angela Davis points out in "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," Black women have always embodied, if only in their physical manifestation, an adversary stance to white male rule and have actively resisted its inroads upon them and their communities in both dramatic and subtle ways. There have always been Black women activists—some known,

like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frances E. W. Harper, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell, and thousands upon thousands unknown—who have had a shared awareness of how their sexual identity combined with their racial identity to make their whole life situation and the focus of their political struggles unique. Contemporary Black feminism is the outgrowth of countless generations of personal sacrifice, militancy, and work by our mothers and sisters.

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

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

There is also undeniably a personal genesis for Black Feminism, that is, the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual Black women's lives. Black feminists and many more Black women who do not define themselves as feminists have all experienced sexual oppression as a constant factor in our day-to-day existence. As children we realized that we were different from boys and that we were treated differently. For example, we were told in the same breath to be quiet both for the sake of being "ladylike" and to make us less objectionable in the eyes of white people. As we grew older we became aware of the threat of physical and sexual abuse by men. However, we had no way of conceptualizing what was so apparent to us, what we knew was really happening.

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

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

2. WHAT WE BELIEVE

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

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

We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously. We know that there is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual, e.g., the history of rape of Black women by white men as a weapon of political repression.

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

We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe that work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of the bosses. Material resources must be equally distributed among those who create these resources. We are not convinced, however, that a socialist revolution that is not also a feminist and anti-racist revolution will guarantee our liberation. We have arrived at the necessity for developing an understanding of class relationships that takes into account the specific class position of Black women who are generally marginal in the labor force, while at this particular time some of us are temporarily viewed as doubly desirable tokens at white-collar and professional levels. We need to articulate the real class situation of persons

who are not merely raceless, sexless workers, but for whom racial and sexual oppression are significant determinants in their working/economic lives. Although we are in essential agreement with Marx's theory as it applied to the very specific economic relationships he analyzed, we know that his analysis must be extended further in order for us to understand our specific economic situation as Black women.

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

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

since it so completely denies any but the sexual sources of women's oppression, negating the facts of class and race.

3. PROBLEMS IN ORGANIZING BLACK FEMINISTS

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

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

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

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

Wallace is pessimistic but realistic in her assessment of Black feminists' position, particularly in her allusion to the nearly classic isolation most of us

face. We might use our position at the bottom, however, to make a clear leap into revolutionary action. If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.

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

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

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

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

feminism divides the Black struggle are powerful deterrents to the growth of an autonomous Black women's movement.

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

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

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

In the fall, when some members returned, we experienced several months of comparative inactivity and internal disagreements which were first conceptualized as a Lesbian-straight split but which were also the result of class and political differences. During the summer those of us who were still meeting had determined the need to do political work and to move beyond consciousness-raising and serving exclusively as an emotional support

group. At the beginning of 1976, when some of the women who had not wanted to do political work and who also had voiced disagreements stopped attending of their own accord, we again looked for a focus. We decided at that time, with the addition of new members, to become a study group. We had always shared our reading with each other, and some of us had written papers on Black feminism for group discussion a few months before this decision was made. We began functioning as a study group and also began discussing the possibility of starting a Black feminist publication. We had a retreat in the late spring which provided a time for both political discussion and working out interpersonal issues. Currently we are planning to gather together a collection of Black feminist writing. We feel that it is absolutely essential to demonstrate the reality of our politics to other Black women and believe that we can do this through writing and distributing our work. The fact that individual Black feminists are living in isolation all over the country, that our own numbers are small, and that we have some skills in writing, printing, and publishing makes us want to carry out these kinds of projects as a means of organizing Black feminists as we **continue to do political work in coalition with other groups.**

4. BLACK FEMINIST ISSUES AND PROJECTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

[1] This statement is dated April 1977.

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

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

ONE IS NOT BORN A WOMAN

MONIQUE WITTIG

A materialist feminist¹ approach to women's oppression destroys the idea that women are a "natural group": "a racial group of a special kind, a group perceived as natural, a group of men considered as materially specific in their bodies."² What the analysis accomplishes on the level of ideas, practice makes actual at the level of facts: by its very existence, lesbian society destroys the artificial (social) fact constituting women as a "natural group." A lesbian society³ pragmatically reveals that the division from men of which women have been the object is a political one and shows that we have been ideologically rebuilt into a "natural group." In the case of women, ideology goes far since our bodies as well as our minds are the product of this manipulation. We have been compelled in our bodies and in our minds to correspond, feature by feature, with the idea of nature that has been established for us. Distorted to such an extent that our deformed body is what they call "natural," what is supposed to exist as such before oppression. Distorted to such an extent that in the end oppression seems to be a consequence of this "nature" within ourselves (a nature which is only an idea). What a materialist analysis does by reasoning, a lesbian society accomplishes practically: not only is there no natural group "women" (we lesbians are living proof of it), but as individuals as well we question "woman," which for us, as for Simone de Beauvoir, is only a myth. She said: "One is not born, but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine."⁴

However, most of the feminists and lesbian-feminists in America and elsewhere still believe that the basis of women's oppression is biological as well as historical. Some of them even claim to find their sources in Simone de Beauvoir.⁵ The belief in mother right and in a "prehistory" when women created civilization (because of a biological predisposition) while the coarse and brutal men hunted (because of a biological predisposition) is symmetrical with the biologizing interpretation of history produced up to now by the class of men. It is still the same method of finding in women and

men a biological explanation of their division, outside of social facts. For me this could never constitute a lesbian approach to women's oppression, since it assumes that the basis of society or the beginning of society lies in heterosexuality. Matriarchy is no less heterosexual than patriarchy: it is only the sex of the oppressor that changes. Furthermore, not only is this conception still imprisoned in the categories of sex (woman and man), but it holds onto the idea that the capacity to give birth (biology) is what defines a woman. Although practical facts and ways of living contradict this theory in lesbian society, there are lesbians who affirm that "women and men are different species or races (the words are used interchangeably): men are biologically inferior to women; male violence is a biological inevitability..."⁶ By doing this, by admitting that there is a "natural" division between women and men, we naturalize history, we assume that "men" and "women" have always existed and will always exist. Not only do we naturalize history, but also consequently we naturalize the social phenomena which express our oppression, making change impossible. For example, instead of seeing giving birth as a forced production, we see it as a "natural," "biological" process, forgetting that in our societies births are planned (demography), forgetting that we ourselves are programmed to produce children, while this is the only social activity "short of war"⁷ that presents such a great danger of death. Thus, as long as we will be "unable to abandon by will or impulse a lifelong and centuries-old commitment to childbearing as the female creative act,"⁸ gaining control of the production of children will mean much more than the mere control of the material means of this production: women will have to abstract themselves from the definition "woman" which is imposed upon them.

A materialist feminist approach shows that what we take for the cause or origin of oppression is in fact only the mark⁹ imposed by the oppressor: the "myth of woman,"¹⁰ plus its material effects and manifestations in the appropriated consciousness and bodies of women. Thus, this mark does not predate oppression: Colette Guillaumin has shown that before the socioeconomic reality of black slavery, the concept of race did not exist, at least not in its modern meaning, since it was applied to the lineage of families. However, now, race, exactly like sex, is taken as an "immediate given," a "sensible given," "physical features," belonging to a natural order. But what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, an "imaginary for- mation,"¹¹ which

reinterprets physical features (in themselves as neutral as any others but marked by the social system) through the network of relationships in which they are perceived. (They are seen as black, therefore they are black; they are seen as women, therefore, they are women. But before being seen that way, they first had to be made that way.) Lesbians should always remember and acknowledge how “unnatural,” compelling, totally oppressive, and destructive being “woman” was for us in the old days before the women’s liberation movement. It was a political constraint, and those who resisted it were accused of not being “real” women. But then we were proud of it, since in the accusation there was already something like a shadow of victory: the avowal by the oppressor that “woman” is not something that goes without saying, since to be one, one has to be a “real” one. We were at the same time accused of wanting to be men. Today this double accusation has been taken up again with enthusiasm in the context of the women’s liberation movement by some feminists and also, alas, by some lesbians whose political goal seems somehow to be becoming more and more “feminine.” To refuse to be a woman, however, does not mean that one has to become a man. Besides, if we take as an example the perfect “butch,” the classic example which provokes the most horror, whom Proust would have called a woman/man, how is her alienation different from that of someone who wants to become a woman? Tweedledum and Tweedledee. At least for a woman, wanting to become a man proves that she has escaped her initial programming. But even if she would like to, with all her strength, she cannot become a man. For becoming a man would demand from a woman not only a man’s external appearance but his consciousness as well, that is, the consciousness of one who disposes by right of at least two “natural” slaves during his life span. This is impossible, and one feature of lesbian oppression consists precisely of making women out of reach for us, since women belong to men. Thus a lesbian has to be something else, a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature, for there is no nature in society.

The refusal to become (or to remain) heterosexual always meant to refuse to become a man or a woman, consciously or not. For a lesbian this goes further than the refusal of the role “woman.” It is the refusal of the economic, ideological, and political power of a man. This, we lesbians, and nonlesbians as well, knew before the beginning of the lesbian and feminist movement. However, as Andrea Dworkin emphasizes, many lesbians recently

“have increasingly tried to transform the very ideology that has enslaved us into a dynamic, religious, psychologically compelling celebration of female biological potential.”¹² Thus, some avenues of the feminist and lesbian movement lead us back to the myth of woman which was created by men especially for us, and with it we sink back into a natural group. Having stood up to fight for a sexless society,¹³ we now find ourselves entrapped in the familiar deadlock of “woman is wonderful.” Simone de Beauvoir underlined particularly the false consciousness which consists of selecting among the features of the myth (that women are different from men) those which look good and using them as a definition for women. What the concept “woman is wonderful” accomplishes is that it retains for defining women the best features (best according to whom?) which oppression has granted us, and it does not radically question the categories “man” and “woman,” which are political categories and not natural givens. It puts us in a position of fighting within the class “women” not as the other classes do, for the disappearance of our class, but for the defense of “woman” and its reenforcement. It leads us to develop with complacency “new” theories about our specificity: thus, we call our passivity “nonviolence,” when the main and emergent point for us is to fight our passivity (our fear, rather, a justified one). The ambiguity of the term “feminist” sums up the whole situation. What does “feminist” mean? Feminist is formed with the word “femme,” “woman,” and means: someone who fights for women. For many of us it means someone who fights for women as a class and for the disappearance of this class. For many others it means someone who fights for woman and her defense—for the myth, then, and its reenforcement. But why was the word “feminist” chosen if it retains the least ambiguity? We chose to call ourselves “feminists” ten years ago, not in order to support or reenforce the myth of woman, nor to identify ourselves with the oppressor’s definition of us, but rather to affirm that our movement had a history and to emphasize the political link with the old feminist movement.

It is, then, this movement that we can put in question for the meaning that it gave to feminism. It so happens that feminism in the last century could never resolve its contradictions on the subject of nature/culture, woman/society. Women started to fight for themselves as a group and rightly considered that they shared common features as a result of oppression. But for them these features were natural and biological rather than social. They went so far as to adopt the Darwinist theory of evolution.

They did not believe like Darwin, however, “that women were less evolved than men, but they did believe that male and female natures had diverged in the course of evolutionary development and that society at large reflected this polarization.”¹⁴ “The failure of early feminism was that it only attacked the Darwinist charge of female inferiority, while accepting the foundations of this charge—namely, the view of woman as ‘unique.’”¹⁵ And finally it was women scholars—and not feminists—who scientifically destroyed this theory. But the early feminists had failed to regard history as a dynamic process which develops from conflicts of interests. Furthermore, they still believed as men do that the cause (origin) of their oppression lay within themselves. And therefore after some astonishing victories the feminists of this first front found themselves at an impasse out of a lack of reasons to fight. They upheld the illogical principle of “equality in difference,” an idea now being born again. They fell back into the trap which threatens us once again: the myth of woman.

Thus it is our historical task, and only ours, to define what we call oppression in materialist terms, to make it evident that women are a class, which is to say that the category “woman” as well as the category “man” are political and economic categories not eternal ones. Our fight aims to suppress men as a class, not through a genocidal, but a political struggle. Once the class “men” disappears, “women” as a class will disappear as well, for there are no slaves without masters. Our first task, it seems, is to always thoroughly dissociate “women” (the class within which we fight) and “woman,” the myth. For “woman” does not exist for us: it is only an imaginary formation, while “women” is the product of a social relationship. We felt this strongly when everywhere we refused to be called a “woman’s liberation movement.” Furthermore, we have to destroy the myth inside and outside ourselves. “Woman” is not each one of us, but the political and ideological formation which negates “women” (the product of a relation of exploitation). “Woman” is there to confuse us, to hide the reality “women.” In order to be aware of being a class and to become a class we first have to kill the myth of “woman” including its most seductive aspects (I think about Virginia Woolf when she said the first task of a woman writer is to kill “the angel in the house”). But to become a class we do not have to suppress our individual selves, and since no individual can be reduced to her/his oppression we are also confronted with the historical necessity of constituting ourselves as the individual subjects of our history as well. I believe this is the reason why all

these attempts at “new” definitions of woman are blossoming now. What is at stake (and of course not only for women) is an individual definition as well as a class definition. For once one has acknowledged oppression, one needs to know and experience the fact that one can constitute oneself as a subject (as opposed to an object of oppression), that one can become someone in spite of oppression, that one has one’s own identity. There is no possible fight for someone deprived of an identity, no internal motivation for fighting, since, although I can fight only with others, first I fight for myself.

The question of the individual subject is historically a difficult one for everybody. Marxism, the last avatar of materialism, the science which has politically formed us, does not want to hear anything about a “subject.” Marxism has rejected the transcendental subject, the subject as constitutive of knowledge, the “pure” consciousness. All that thinks per se, before all experience, has ended up in the garbage can of history, because it claimed to exist outside matter, prior to matter, and needed God, spirit, or soul to exist in such a way. This is what is called “idealism.” As for individuals, they are only the product of social relations, therefore their consciousness can only be “alienated.” (Marx, in *The German Ideology*, says precisely that individuals of the dominating class are also alienated, although they are the direct producers of the ideas that alienate the classes oppressed by them. But since they draw visible advantages from their own alienation they can bear it without too much suffering.) There exists such a thing as class consciousness, but a consciousness which does not refer to a particular subject, except as participating in general conditions of exploitation at the same time as the other subjects of their class, all sharing the same consciousness. As for the practical class problems—outside of the class problems as traditionally defined—that one could encounter (for example, sexual problems), they were considered “bourgeois” problems that would disappear with the final victory of the class struggle. “Individualistic,” “subjectivist,” “petit bourgeois,” these were the labels given to any person who had shown problems which could not be reduced to the “class struggle” itself.

Thus Marxism has denied the members of oppressed classes the attribute of being a subject. In doing this, Marxism, because of the ideological and political power this “revolutionary science” immediately exercised upon the workers’ movement and all other political groups, has prevented all

categories of oppressed peoples from constituting themselves historically as subjects (subjects of their struggle, for example). This means that the “masses” did not fight for themselves but for the party or its organizations. And when an economic transformation took place (end of private property, constitution of the socialist state), no revolutionary change took place within the new society, because the people themselves did not change.

For women, Marxism had two results. It prevented them from being aware that they are a class and therefore from constituting themselves as a class for a very long time, by leaving the relation “women/men” outside of the social order, by turning it into a natural relation, doubtless for Marxists the only one, along with the relation of mothers to children, to be seen this way, and by hiding the class conflict between men and women behind a natural division of labor (The German Ideology). This concerns the theoretical (ideological) level. On the practical level, Lenin, the party, all the communist parties up to now, including all the most radical political groups, have always reacted to any attempt on the part of women to reflect and form groups based on their own class problem with an accusation of divisiveness. By uniting, we women are dividing the strength of the people. This means that for the Marxists women belong either to the bourgeois class or to the proletariat class, in other words, to the men of these classes. In addition, Marxist theory does not allow women any more than other classes of oppressed people to constitute themselves as historical subjects, because Marxism does not take into account the fact that a class also consists of individuals one by one. Class consciousness is not enough. We must try to understand philosophically (politically) these concepts of “subject” and “class consciousness” and how they work in relation to our history. When we discover that women are the objects of oppression and appropriation, at the very moment that we become able to perceive this, we become subjects in the sense of cognitive subjects, through an operation of abstraction. Consciousness of oppression is not only a reaction to (fight against) oppression. It is also the whole conceptual reevaluation of the social world, its whole reorganization with new concepts, from the point of view of oppression. It is what I would call the science of oppression created by the oppressed. This operation of understanding reality has to be undertaken by every one of us: call it a subjective, cognitive practice. The movement back and forth between the levels of reality (the conceptual reality and the

material reality of oppression, which are both social realities) is accomplished through language.

It is we who historically must undertake the task of defining the individual subject in materialist terms. This certainly seems to be an impossibility since materialism and subjectivity have always been mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, and rather than despairing of ever understanding, we must recognize the need to reach subjectivity in the abandonment by many of us to the myth "woman" (the myth of woman being only a snare that holds us up). This real necessity for everyone to exist as an individual, as well as a member of a class, is perhaps the first condition for the accomplishment of a revolution, without which there can be no real fight or transformation. But the opposite is also true; without class and class consciousness there are no real subjects, only alienated individuals. For women to answer the question of the individual subject in materialist terms is first to show, as the lesbians and feminists did, that supposedly "subjective," "individual," "private" problems are in fact social problems, class problems; that sexuality is not for women an individual and subjective expression, but a social institution of violence. But once we have shown that all so-called personal problems are in fact class problems, we will still be left with the question of the subject of each singular woman—not the myth, but each one of us. At this point, let us say that a new personal and subjective definition for all humankind can only be found beyond the categories of sex (woman and man) and that the advent of individual subjects demands first destroying the categories of sex, ending the use of them, and rejecting all sciences which still use these categories as their fundamentals (practically all social sciences).

To destroy "woman" does not mean that we aim, short of physical destruction, to destroy lesbianism simultaneously with the categories of sex, because lesbianism provides for the moment the only social form in which we can live freely. Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is not a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude,¹⁶ a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation ("forced residence,"¹⁷ domestic corv'ée, conjugal duties, unlimited production of children, etc.), a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay

heterosexual. We are escapees from our class in the same way as the American runaway slaves were when escaping slavery and becoming free. For us this is an absolute necessity; our survival demands that we contribute all our strength to the destruction of the class of women within which men appropriate women. This can be accomplished only by the destruction of heterosexuality as a social system which is based on the oppression of women by men and which produces the doctrine of the difference between the sexes to justify this oppression.

NOTES

¹Christine Delphy, "Pour un féminisme matérialiste," *L'Arc* 61 (1975). Translated as "For a Materialist Feminism," *Feminist Issues* 1, no. 2, Winter 1981.

²Colette Guillaumin, "Race et Nature: Système des marques, idée de groupe naturel et rapports sociaux," *Pluriel*, no. 11, 1977. Translated as "Race and Nature: The System of Marks, the Idea of a Natural Group and Social Relationships," *Feminist Issues* 8, no. 2, Fall 1988.

³I use the word society with an extended anthropological meaning; strictly speaking, it does not refer to societies, in that lesbian societies do not exist completely autonomously from heterosexual social systems.

⁴Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. New York: Bantam, 1952, p. 249.

⁵Redstockings, *Feminist Revolution*. New York: Random House, 1978, p. 18.

⁶Andrea Dworkin, "Biological Superiority: The World's Most Dangerous and Deadly Idea," *Heresies* 6:46.

⁷Ti-Grace Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey*. New York: Links Books, 1974, p. 15.

⁸Dworkin, op. cit.

⁹Guillaumin, op. cit.

¹⁰de Beauvoir, op. cit.

¹¹Guillaumin, op. cit.

¹²Dworkin, op. cit.

¹³Atkinson, p. 6: "If feminism has any logic at all, it must be working for a sexless society."

¹⁴Rosalind Rosenberg, "In Search of Woman's Nature," *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 1/2, 1975:144.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 146.

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WHY SEXUALITY IS WORK

SILVIA FEDERICI

Sexuality is the release we are given from the discipline of the work process. It is the necessary complement to the routine and regimentation of the workweek. It is a license to “go natural,” to “let go,” so that we can return more refreshed on Monday to our job. “Saturday night” is the irruption of the “spontaneous,” the irrational in the rationality of the capitalist discipline of our life. It is supposed to be the compensation for work and is ideologically sold to us as the “other” of work: a space of freedom in which we can presumably be our true selves—a possibility for intimate, “genuine” connections in a universe of social relations in which we are constantly forced to repress, defer, postpone, hide, even from ourselves, what we desire.

This being the promise, what we actually get is far from our expectations. As we cannot go back to nature by simply taking off our clothes, so cannot become “ourselves” simply because it is time to make love. Little spontaneity is possible when the timing, conditions, and the amount of energy available for love, are out of our control. After a week of work our bodies and feelings are numb, and we cannot turn them on like machines. But what comes out when we “let go” is more often our repressed frustration and violence than our hidden self ready to be reborn in bed.

Among other things, we are always aware of the falseness of this spontaneity. No matter how many screams, sighs, and erotic exercises we make in bed, we know that it is a parenthesis and tomorrow both of us will be back in our civilized clothes (we will have coffee together as we get ready for work). The more we know that this is a parenthesis which the rest of the day or the week will deny, the more difficult it becomes for us to try to turn into “savages” and “forget everything.” And we cannot avoid feeling ill at ease. It is the same embarrassment that we experience when we undress knowing that we will be making love; the embarrassment of the morning after, when we are already busy reestablishing distances; the embarrassment (finally) of pretending to be completely different from what we are during the rest of the day. This transition is painful particularly for

women; men seem to be experts at it, possibly because they have been subjected to a more strict regimentation in their work. Women have always wondered how it was possible that after a nightly display of passion, “he” could get up already in a different world, so distant at times that it would be difficult to reestablish even a physical connection with him. In any case, it is always women who suffer most from the schizophrenic character of sexual relations, not only because we arrive at the end of the day with more work and more worries on our shoulders, but additionally because we have the responsibility of making the sexual experience pleasurable for the man. This is why women are usually less sexually responsive than men. Sex is work for us, it is a duty. The duty to please is so built into our sexuality that we have learned to get pleasure out of giving pleasure, out of getting men aroused and excited.

Since we are expected to provide a release, we inevitably become the object onto which men discharge their repressed violence. We are raped, both in our beds and in the streets, precisely because we have been set up to be the providers of sexual satisfaction, the safety valves for everything that goes wrong in a man’s life, and men have always been allowed to turn their anger against us if we do not measure up to the role, particularly when we refuse to perform.

Compartmentalization is only one aspect of the mutilation of our sexuality. The subordination of our sexuality to the reproduction of labor power has meant that heterosexuality has been imposed on us as the only acceptable sexual behavior. In reality, every genuine communication has a sexual component, for our bodies and emotions are indivisible and we communicate at all levels all the time. But sexual contact with women is forbidden because, in bourgeois morality, anything that is unproductive is obscene, unnatural, perverted. This has meant the imposition of a true schizophrenic condition upon us, as early in our lives we must learn to draw a line between the people we can love and the people we just talk to, those to whom we can open our body and those to whom we can only open our “souls,” our lovers and our friends. The result is that we are bodiless souls for our female friends, and soulless flesh for our male lovers. And this division separates us not only from other women, but from ourselves as well, in term of what we do or do not accept in our bodies and feelings, the “clean” parts that are

there for display, and the “dirty,” “secret” parts which can only be disclosed (and thereby become clean) in the conjugal bed, at the point of production.

The same concern for production has demanded that sexuality, especially in women, be confined to certain periods of our lives. Sexuality is repressed in children and adolescents as well as in older women. Thus, the years in which we are allowed to be sexually active are the very years in which we are most burdened with work, when enjoying our sexual encounters becomes a feat.

But the main reason why we cannot enjoy the pleasure that sexuality may provide is that for women sex is work. Giving pleasure to man is an essential part of what is expected of every woman. Sexual freedom does not help. Certainly it is important that we are not stoned to death if we are “unfaithful,” or if it is found that we are not “virgins.” But “sexual liberation” has intensified our work. In the past, we were just expected to raise children. Now we are expected to have a waged job, still clean the house and have children and, at the end of a double workday, be ready to hop in bed and be sexually enticing. For women the right to have sex is the duty to have sex and to enjoy it (something which is not expected of most jobs), which is why there have been so many investigations, in recent years, concerning which parts of our body—whether the vagina or the clitoris—are more sexually productive. But whether in its liberalized or its more repressive form, our sexuality is still under control.

The law, medicine, and our economic dependence on men, all guarantee that, although the rules are loosened, spontaneity is ruled out of our sexual life. Sexual repression within the family is a function of that control. In this respect, fathers, brothers, husbands, pimps all have acted as agents of the state, to supervise our sexual work, to ensure that we would provide sexual services according to the established, socially sanctioned productivity norms.

Economic dependence is the ultimate form of control over our sexuality. This is why sexual work is still one of the main occupations for women and prostitution underlines every sexual encounter. Under these conditions there cannot be any spontaneity for us in sex, and this is why pleasure is so ephemeral in our sexual life.

Precisely because of the exchange involved, sexuality for us is always accompanied by anxiety and it is undoubtedly the part of housework most responsible for our self-hatred. In addition, the commercialization of the female body makes it impossible for us to feel comfortable with our body regardless of its shape or form. No woman can happily undress in front of a man knowing that not only she is being evaluated, but there are standards of performance for female bodies to be reckoned with, that everyone, male or female, is aware of, as they are splashed all around us, on every wall in our cities and TV screen. Knowing that, in some way, we are selling ourselves has destroyed our confidence and our pleasure in our bodies. This is why, whether we are skinny or plump, long or short nosed, tall or small, we all hate our bodies. We hate it because we are accustomed to looking at it from the outside, with the eyes of the men we meet, and with the body-market in mind. We hate it because we are used to thinking of it as something to sell, something that has become alienated from us and is always on the counter. We hate it because we know that so much depends on it. On how our body looks depends whether we can get a good or bad job (in marriage or out of the home), whether we can gain some social power, some company to defeat the loneliness that awaits us in our old age and often in our youth as well. And we always fear our body may turn against us, we may get fat, get wrinkles, age fast, make people indifferent to us, lose our right to intimacy, lose our chance of being touched or hugged.

In sum, we are too busy performing, too busy pleasing, too afraid of failing, to enjoy making love. The sense of our value is at stake in every sexual relation. If a man says we make love well, we excite him, whether or not we like making love with him, we feel great, it boosts our sense of power, even if we know that afterwards we still have to do the dishes. But we are never allowed to forget the exchange involved, because we never transcend the value-relation in our love relation with a man. "How much?" is the question that always governs our experience of sexuality. Most of our sexual encounters are spent in calculations. We sigh, sob, gasp, pant, jump up and down in bed, but in the meantime our mind keeps calculating "how much"—how much of ourselves can we give before we lose or undersell ourselves, how much will we get in return? If it is our first date, it is how much can we allow him to get: can he go up our skirt, open our blouse, put his fingers under our brassiere? At what point should we tell him "stop!"? How strongly

should we refuse? How soon can we tell him that we like him before he starts thinking that we are “cheap”?

Keep the price up—that’s the rule, at least the one we are taught. If we are already in bed the calculations become even more complicated, because we also have to calculate our chances of getting pregnant, which means that throughout the sighing and gasping and other shows of passion we also have to quickly run down the schedule of our period. But faking excitement during the sexual act, in the absence of an orgasm, is extra work and a hard one, because when you’re faking it, you never know how far you should go, and you always end up doing more for fear of not doing enough.

Indeed, it has taken a lot of struggle and a leap of power on our side to finally begin to admit that nothing was happening.

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ECOSOCIALISM

ALIVE IN THE SUNSHINE

ALYSSA BATTISTONI

For as long as the environment has existed, it's been in crisis. Nature has always been a focus of human thought and action, of course, but it wasn't until pesticides and pollution started clouding the horizon that something called "the environment" emerged as a matter of public concern.

In 1960s and 1970s America, dystopian images provoked anxiety about the costs of unprecedented prosperity: smog thick enough to hide skylines from view, waste seeping into suburban backyards, rivers so polluted they burst into flames, cars lined up at gas stations amid shortages, chemical weapons that could defoliate entire forests. Economists and ecologists alike forecasted doom, warning that humanity was running up against natural limits to growth, extinction crises, and population explosions.

But the apocalypse didn't happen. The threat that the environment seemingly posed to economic growth and human well-being faded from view; relieved to have vanquished the environmental foe, many rushed to declare themselves its friends instead.

Four decades later, everyone's an environmentalist— and yet the environment appears to be in worse shape than ever. The problems of the seventies are back with a vengeance, often transposed into new landscapes, and new ones have joined them. Species we hardly knew existed are dying off en masse; oceans are acidifying in what sounds like the plot of a second-rate horror movie; numerous fisheries have collapsed or are on the brink; freshwater supplies are scarce in regions home to half the world's population; agricultural land is exhausted of nutrients; forests are being leveled at staggering rates; and, of course, climate change looms over all.

These aren't issues that can be fixed by slapping a filter on a smokestack. They're certainly not about hugging trees or hating people. To put it bluntly, we're confronted with the fact that human activity has transformed the entire planet in ways that are now threatening the way we inhabit it— some of us far more than others. And it's not particularly helpful to talk in

generalities: the idea that The Environment is some entity that can be fixed with A Solution is part of the problem.

The category “environmental problems” contains multitudes, and their solutions don’t always line up: water shortages in Phoenix are a different matter than air pollution in Los Angeles, disappearing wetlands in Louisiana, or growing accumulations of atmospheric carbon. So instead of laying out some kind of template for a sustainable future, I argue that there’s no way to get there without tackling environmentalism’s old stumbling blocks: consumption and jobs. And the way to do that is through a universal basic income.

Environmentalists have long lectured Americans about overuse of natural resources. By now, the talking points on overconsumption are familiar: 5 percent of the world’s population uses 25 percent of its resources, and emits about the same percentage of its greenhouse gases; if the whole world lived like Americans, we’d need four planets, or maybe five. We eat too much meat, drive too many miles, live in houses that are too big and too far apart, shop too much for stuff we don’t need. When it comes to climate change, it’s even worse than the numbers suggest: Western nations outsource a huge percentage of emissions to the places that increasingly produce our goods.

Such international disparities have, of course, long presented a challenge to those concerned with both domestic and global justice: how to acknowledge that America’s poor are wealthier than most of the world without simply concluding that they’re part of the problem? But while discussions of consumption tends to focus on a universal “we,” as epitomized by the famous Pogo Earth Day cartoon – “we have met the enemy, and he is us” – it’s important to look more closely within the rich world rather than simply heaping scorn on national averages.

Depictions of American consumerism tend to focus on the likes of Walmart and McDonald’s, suggesting that blame lies with the ravenous, grasping masses. Meanwhile it’s trendy for the wealthy to appear virtuous as they drive Priuses, live in homes that tout “green design,” and eat organic kale. But whether you “care about the environment,” believe in climate change, or agonize over your coffee’s origins doesn’t matter as much as your tax bracket and the consumption habits that go with it.

Consumption doesn't correspond perfectly to income – in large part because of public programs like SNAP that supplement low-income households – but the two are closely linked. The US Congressional Budget Office estimates that the carbon footprint of the top quintile is over three times that of the bottom. Even in relatively egalitarian Canada, the top income decile has a mobility footprint nine times that of the lowest, a consumer goods footprint four times greater, and an overall ecological footprint two-and-a-half times larger. Air travel is frequently pegged as one of the most rapidly growing sources of carbon emissions, but it's not simply because budget airlines have "democratized the skies" – rather, flying has truly exploded among the hyper-mobile affluent. Thus in Western Europe, the transportation footprint of the top income earners is 250 percent of that of the poor. And global carbon emissions are particularly uneven: the top five hundred million people by income, comprising about 8 percent of global population, are responsible for 50 percent of all emissions. It's a truly global elite, with high emitters present in all countries of the world.

But that doesn't mean America is off the hook altogether. The global wealthy may consume far more than the rest, but global consumption can't be leveled out by bringing everyone up to even Western median levels; consumption in rich nations, even at relatively low levels of income, has to decline if we're to achieve some measure of global equality.

For those in rich countries, this sounds suspiciously close to an argument for austerity: we've been profligate, and now the bill is coming due. That may be easily reconciled with more ascetic strains of environmentalism and anti-consumerist left currents. But for those who aren't bothered by decadent consumption so much as by the fact that so few are able to enjoy it – and who are wary of recalling Soviet bread lines – the prospect of limiting consumption is deeply worrisome.

It's hard to talk about consumption without a whiff of moralizing disapproval, as if there was something inherently wrong with having nice things. So the condemnations of consumer culture that once occupied social critics have largely fallen out of fashion, seen as too Puritan, too patronizing, too snobbish – and maybe even too boring. We get it already.

But it's important to distinguish between different types of consumption. For all the resonances in the rhetoric of anti-consumerist environmentalism and

austerity, reducing public consumption would actually be an environmental disaster. Reductions in public goods tend to produce increases in private consumption: people drive cars instead of taking the bus, move to a house with a yard instead of going to the park, buy books and home entertainment systems instead of going to libraries and museums, drink bottled water instead of tap – if they can afford to. Those who can't just have to go without.

It's hard to think of many things more disingenuous than arguing that addressing environmental issues will impose unacceptable restrictions on the American standard of living while simultaneously promoting austerity measures – yet that attitude is pervasive in mainstream political discourse.

And while having stuff doesn't make you a miserable soulless materialist, as some of the shriller anti-consumerist rhetoric would suggest, it doesn't necessarily make you happier, either. Rather, the “status treadmill” frequently does the opposite: fueling anxiety, inadequacy, and debt under the banner of democracy and freedom. Meanwhile, consumer guilt has led to an explosion in “green” products – recycled toilet paper, organic T-shirts, all-natural detergents – but most do little more than greenwash the same old stuff, bestowing a sheen of virtue on their users, suggesting personal choices will save the planet. But the individual agonizing that constitutes consumer politics isn't going to get around the fact that the global economy depends on more or less indefinitely expanding consumption. In fact, consumption has come full circle and become virtuous: protesting sweatshops and ranting about exploitation is passé; buying gadgets is the new way to lift people out of poverty. And so it's not just workers who are threatened with jobs blackmail – we're all threatened with consumption blackmail, wherein consuming less will put millions out of work worldwide and crash the global economy. Even our trash is creating jobs somewhere.

Indeed, you can't talk about consumption without talking about production – which brings us to jobs, which environmentalists have long been accused of killing. To be sure, the history of environmentalism is littered with projects aimed at keeping patches of nature free from human impact, often demonizing workers in the process. And industry has long taken advantage of the popular stereotype of job-killing tree-huggers to resist improving safety and pollution standards, threatening that forced installation of sulfur

scrubbers or proper ventilation of workspaces will put thousands out of work.

Such estimates of job loss tend to be wildly exaggerated scare tactics, while the jobs that dirty industry projects claim to create are usually vastly overhyped. TransCanada, for example, has claimed that building the Keystone XL tar-sands pipeline would create twenty thousand jobs, while the State Department projects something more on the order of five thousand, most of them temporary. But regulations sometimes do kill jobs within industries, even if on balance they often create more – and sometimes they destroy industries altogether. And while nakedly extractive occupations like coal mining and oil drilling are the standard examples of practices that the shining eco-future will render obsolete, a closer look implicates less obvious industries and kinds of work.

A “green economy” can’t just be one that makes “green” versions of the same stuff, or one that makes solar panels in addition to SUVs. Eco-Keynesianism in the form of public works projects can be temporarily helpful in building light rail systems and efficient infrastructure, weatherizing homes, and restoring ecosystems – and to be sure, there’s a lot of work to be done in those areas. But a spike in green jobs doesn’t tell us much about how to provide for everyone without creating jobs by perpetually expanding production. The problem isn’t that every detail of the green-jobs economy isn’t laid out in full – calls for green jobs are meant to recognize the fraught history of labor-environmentalist relations, and to signify a commitment to ensuring that sustainability doesn’t come at the expense of working communities. The problem is that the vision they call forth isn’t a projection of the future so much as a reflection of the past – most visions of a “new economy” look a whole lot like the same old one. Such visions reveal a hope that climate change will be our generation’s New Deal or World War II, vaulting us out of hard times into a new era of widespread prosperity.

But the Keynesianism underpinning that vision was the answer to a problem that was identified as underconsumption rather than overproduction: it was intended to jump-start demand rather than reduce supply. If overconsumption is actually the problem, we can’t fix it by consuming more, however eco-certified the products. Indeed, the very idea that green jobs will drive economic recovery is closely tied to notions of continued American hegemony: green tech is the next big thing, the rhetoric goes, and America

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needs to get ahead in the global race to innovate. But nearly every country in the world harbors similar hopes. That the wealthiest country in the world is so panicked at the prospect that others might catch up reveals the fallacy of the notion that continued growth will somehow reach an endpoint in which everyone enjoys a decent standard of living.

Continued growth isn't the only way to get there. The mythology surrounding the New Deal often obscures the fact that labor's response to the Depression was not to make more work, but to share existing work more broadly by shifting to a thirty-hour workweek; Keynes himself famously predicted we'd be down to a fifteen-hour workweek by the end of the century. The decision to use fiscal policy to stimulate consumption instead was a way of avoiding deeper structural changes – to grow the pie rather than ask who was eating most of it. Since then, instead of increasing leisure time, productivity gains have largely increased private consumption for an increasingly small number of people. These days, of course, people are having leisure forced on them – it's employers who are cutting hours and workers who are desperate for more. It's clear that we can meet needs with vastly less labor than will support a population dependent on stagnating wages. While neoclassical economists pose the consumption-leisure tradeoff as a choice made by individuals, whether or not people work in the first place is clearly determined by decisions made at a society-wide level.

It's beginning to look like we should have taken the other New Deal. We need to explicitly shift toward working less – to reorient the consumption-leisure tradeoff towards the latter on a social level – and share the work that remains more evenly. The sociologist Juliet Schor says we could work four-hour days without any decline in the standard of living; similarly, the New Economics Foundation proposes we could get by on a twenty-one-hour workweek. Meanwhile, David Rosnick and Mark Weisbrot suggest that the US could cut energy consumption by 20 percent by shifting to a schedule more like Western Europe's, with thirty-five hour workweeks and six weeks of vacation – certainly not a panacea, but hardly impoverishing for a start. In a study of industrialized nations over the past fifty years, Schor, Kyle Knight, and Gene Rosa find that shorter working hours are correlated with smaller ecological footprints.

While making people work shitty jobs to “earn” a living has always been spiteful, it's now starting to seem suicidal. So perhaps it's time to reclaim

job-killing environmentalism, this time not as a project that demonizes workers, or even work – but rather, as one that rejects work done for its own sake. Instead of stigmatizing, criminalizing, and imprisoning the unemployed and “non-industrious poor,” perhaps we should see them, as David Graeber suggests, as the “pioneers of a new economic order” – one where we all work and consume less, and have more time for other pursuits.

In fact, addressing environmental issues suggests the need not only for new kinds of jobs but for new approaches to work altogether. No work or human activity, however removed from “the land,” is without environmental impact – but some work is less material-intensive than others. An ecologically viable future will rely on many kinds of work that are typically undervalued, or not considered work at all – caring for people and ecosystems; building communities; learning and educating. This emphatically doesn’t mean we should all become artisans engaged in small-scale production; to the contrary, there are dangers in romanticizing supposedly “natural” and unalienated forms of labor. Rejecting fast food in favor of gardening and canning, for example, might just reinstitute a toilsome regime for women; acknowledging the problems of certain maximalist projects can’t mean ceding liberatory goals. But done right, a reevaluation of work from an ecological perspective could elevate the unpaid work of making a social, livable world.

Proposals to shorten the workweek are often defended on the basis of giving people more time for what they will – to spend time with friends, family, and loved ones, start a band, write a novel, cook a meal, and so on. But calling those activities “leisure” diminishes their importance in making a life with less stuff a worthwhile and fulfilling one. Likewise, the word “leisure” doesn’t credit the fact that strong communities are as important for surviving natural disasters as strong seawalls. If we’re paying people to build the latter, shouldn’t we also pay them to build the former?

As it turns out, some of the most interesting efforts to rethink the relationship between work, production, and nature are thus far taking place in unlikely places: namely, in the payment-for-ecosystem-services (PES) framework that now dominates mainstream environmental economics. The general idea is to identify different ecological processes – pollination, say, or soil fertility – and put a price on them. It sounds like a quintessentially

neoliberal strategy – and indeed, that’s often how it’s been deployed. But the ideas originally motivating payment for ecosystem services in many ways recall those of the radical feminist Wages for Housework movement of the 1970s. Wages for Housework pointed out that capitalism depends on the socially reproductive labor of the household, and by calling that work an act of love, makes it free. By demanding recognition of and payment for household labor, the Wages for Housework movement sought to unsettle assumptions about “women’s work,” force recognition of undervalued work, and force a reconsideration of the relationship between reproductive labor and traditional notions of the productive economy. Forced to pay the costs of reproducing life, capitalism would no longer be viable.

As with Wages for Housework, in which the concrete demand for payment acted as a provocative starting point, the demand for payment for work done to and by ecosystems was originally meant as an unsettling metaphor: the first step in a broader project of changing the way we think about the relationship between human society and the natural world. Concocted not by political radicals but by largely apolitical ecologists desperate to protect the systems they studied from destruction, payment for ecosystem services began as an attempt to value the work that we call nature and make free: it sought to recognize the ecological functions that are taken for granted, to acknowledge that livelihoods don’t exist separately from environments, and to reject old, often racialized ideas of conservation that emphasize keeping humans out of pristine environments. While it was never anticapitalist in intent, there was always an element of destabilizing absurdity in the prospect of pricing the entire planet.

In practice, however, while the ecosystem-services framework has been deeply uneven in its implementation, it has often served to advance privatization and commodification of the services it claims to protect. The monetary value produced by ecosystems is frequently captured and consolidated by powerful local actors, or translated into tradable commodities like credits for carbon markets, which have been wildly volatile and largely failed to achieve goals of either environmental protection or poverty alleviation. PES programs that assign value to ecosystems without attention to equity and ownership often incentivize states or speculators to take over suddenly-profitable natural assets, dispossessing people of access to subsistence holdings and delivering benefits solely to investors.

Meanwhile, dividing ecosystems into packages of services to be traded and sold loses sight of the complexity and interdependence of what's supposedly being preserved. In short, like so many ideas, payment for ecosystem services has largely been captured by neoliberalism.

But the underlying principles may still be salvageable – recognizing the use value of ecosystems, that so-called environmental issues can't be separated from questions of livelihood and broader society, and that the world we live in is constituted by human and “natural” work alike. Those principles gesture toward an economy that recognizes the value of the care given to ecosystems, and the value of the work necessary to sustain life – the work of reproducing the very world in which we live. And they recognize the value of *not* working, of *not* producing, as in programs that pay people not to cut down trees – compensating them for income lost in the name of global sustainability.

We need to think seriously and expansively about these kinds of work and value – and about the real costs that “sustainability” will impose on individuals and communities. And we need to recognize that this is a truly collective project – that individualized, atomized systems of work and reward are increasingly untenable in the face of the interdependent tangle in which we're enmeshed.

How might we do that? To begin with, by divorcing income from conventional notions of production, and by instituting a social wage in the form of universal basic income. Basic income won't, in and of itself, solve environmental problems; it won't replace coal plants with solar panels or ease pressure on depleted aquifers. If instituted as a justification for cuts to other social programs, it would be disastrous both socially and environmentally; robust public services are necessary if we're to live on less. But it marks a critical starting point in rethinking the relationship between labor, production, and consumption, without which environmental hand-wringing will go nowhere.

More pragmatically, in providing an alternative to dependence on destructive industries and removing the threat of job blackmail from communities desperate for livelihoods, it makes change a real option, giving workers and communities more power to demand protections against environmental

harms. It can start to reorient social focus away from an eternal game of consumption catch-up toward the good life.

It admittedly won't do much to curb the upper bounds of consumption, at least not right away. But it might point in that direction. Environmentalists like to point to World War II for evidence that people will accept restrictions on consumption for the sake of a shared cause, but the so-called Greatest Generation didn't exactly accept rations with a patriotic grin. What that experience does demonstrate, however, is that while people don't like limiting consumption under any circumstances, what they really don't like is cutting back if everyone else isn't doing the same. That sentiment is typically mobilized in service of anti-welfare politics: why should I have to work if someone else just gets a check? But during the war, it went the other way: over 60 percent of the population supported capping incomes at \$25,000 a year, a relatively paltry \$315,000 today.

Of course, the post-work future has long been over the horizon; to propose it as a solution to such time-sensitive problems may seem wildly, even irresponsibly utopian. The revolution might happen in time to avoid environmental catastrophe, but we probably shouldn't count on it, though some African climate activists have put basic income grants, financed by wealthy nations' payment of ecological debt, at the centerpiece of their demands.

Even the US presents some interesting opportunities. One prominent alternative to a straight carbon tax or cap-and-trade system is a policy known as tax-and-dividend, in which the proceeds from a carbon tax would be distributed unconditionally to all citizens – similar to the oil dividend paid to every Alaskan resident. It's defended as a compensatory mechanism for the higher energy prices that would result from a carbon tax; in more bluntly political terms, it functions as a bribe to garner support for a tax that would otherwise be unpopular. There are plenty of criticisms to be leveled against the plan as currently designed, particularly if it's considered a stand-alone climate solution – individual dividends won't maintain levees, support public transportation systems, or build affordable urban housing. But it's also a potential wedge into new obligations and relationships: the first suggestion of an unconditional guaranteed income, financed mostly by a tax on the environmentally destructive consumption habits of the wealthy. It's an

assertion of public ownership of the atmosphere, and the staking of a new claim to public resources.

Viewed as a bulwark linking unconditional livelihood provision to environmental sustainability, it could be the beginning of a much larger project of ensuring decent standards of living for all regardless of productive input, while reclaiming environmental commons from the false yet persistent narrative of tragedy.

That may seem overly hopeful about dim prospects. To be sure, it must be emphasized that this is meant as a suggestion for a general direction rather than a precise solution. While we can draw ideas from past efforts to cope with environmental problems, there are no real precedents for what we now face. We're going to have to figure some of this out as we go – which is another argument in basic income's favor. Addressing environmental problems will entail significant and widespread changes, yet without a commitment to unconditional social provision, talk of resilience, flexibility, and adaptation are all too easily collapsed into justifications of perpetual precarity.

Observing the protests outside the Copenhagen climate summit in 2009, reflecting on the apparent tension between the recognition of limits cautioned by those claiming “there is no planet B” and the limitlessness implied by chants of “everything for everyone,” Michael Hardt suggested the need to “develop a politics of the common that both recognizes the real limits of the earth and fosters our unlimited creative capacities – building unlimited worlds on our limited earth.” Virginia Woolf might seem an odd place to turn in response, but her essay *A Room of One's Own*, while best known as a classic piece of feminist polemic, could serve just as well as a manifesto for such a politics. In it, she reflects on the “instinct for possession, the rage for acquisition” which keeps “the stockbroker and the great barrister going indoors to make money and more money and more money when it is a fact that five hundred pounds a year will keep one alive in the sunshine.” With that five hundred pounds, she wrote, came the freedom to think and write as she pleased. We should add a few more things to the list – universal healthcare, a bus pass – but figuring out what it takes to keep all seven-billion-plus people on the planet alive in the sunshine will be the fundamental task of the twenty-first century.

The post-work future is often characterized as a vision of a post-scarcity society. But the dream of freedom from waged labor and self-realization beyond work suddenly looks less like utopia than necessity.

Finding ways to live luxuriously but also lightly, adequately but not ascetically, won't always be easy. But perhaps in the post-post-scarcity society, somewhere between fears of generalized scarcity and dreams of generalized decadence, we can have the things we never managed to have in the time of supposed abundance: enough for everyone, and time for what we will.

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CLIMATE CHANGE IS A PEOPLE'S SHOCK

NAOMI KLEIN

About a year ago, I was having dinner with some newfound friends in Athens. I had an interview scheduled for the next morning with Alexis Tsipras, the leader of Greece's official opposition party and one of the few sources of hope in a Europe ravaged by austerity. I asked the group for ideas about what questions I should put to the young politician. Someone suggested: "History knocked on your door—did you answer?"

At the time, Tsipras's party, Syriza, was putting up a fine fight against austerity. Yet it was struggling to articulate a positive economic vision of its own. I was particularly struck that the party did not oppose the governing coalition's embrace of new oil and gas exploration, a threat to Greece's beautiful seas as well as to the climate as a whole. Instead, it argued that any funds raised by the effort should be spent on pensions, not used to pay back creditors. In other words, the party was not providing an alternative to extractivism; it simply had more equitable plans for distributing the spoils—something that can be said of most left-governed countries in Latin America.

When we met the next day, Tsipras was frank that concerns about the environmental crisis had been entirely upstaged by more immediate ones. "We were a party that had the environment and climate change in the center of our interest," he told me. "But after these years of depression in Greece, we forgot climate change."

This is, of course, entirely understandable. It is also a terrible missed opportunity—and not just for one party in one country in the world. The research I've done over the past five years has convinced me that climate change represents a historic opening for progressive transformation. As part of the project of getting our emissions down to the levels so many climate scientists recommend, we have the chance to advance policies that dramatically improve lives, close the gap between rich and poor, create huge

numbers of good jobs, and reinvigorate democracy from the ground up. Rather than the ultimate expression of the shock doctrine I wrote about in my last book—a frenzy of new resource grabs and repression by the 1 percent—climate change can be a “People’s Shock,” a blow from below. It can disperse power into the hands of the many, rather than consolidating it in the hands of a few, and it can radically expand the commons, rather than auctioning it off in pieces. Getting to the root of why we are facing serial crises in the first place would leave us with both a more habitable climate than the one we are headed for and a far more just economy than the one we have now.

But none of this will happen if we let history’s knock go unanswered—because we know where the current system, left unchecked, is headed. We also know how that system will deal with serial climate-related disasters: with profiteering and escalating barbarism to segregate the losers from the winners. To arrive at that dystopia, all we need to do is keep barreling down the road we are on.

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When I despair at the prospects for change, I think back on some of what I witnessed in the process of writing my book about climate change. Admittedly, much of it is painful: from the young climate activist breaking down and weeping on my shoulder at the Copenhagen summit, to the climate-change deniers at the Heartland Institute literally laughing at the prospect of extinction; from the country manor in England where mad scientists plotted to blot out the sun, to the stillness of the blackened marshes during the BP oil disaster; from the roar of the earth being ripped up to scrape out the Alberta tar sands, to the shock of discovering that the largest green group in the world was itself drilling for oil.

But that’s not all I think about. When I started this journey, most of the movements standing in the way of the fossil-fuel frenzy either did not exist or were a fraction of their current size. All were significantly more isolated from one another than they are today. North Americans, overwhelmingly, did not know what the tar sands are. Most of us had never heard of fracking. There had never been a truly mass march against climate change in North America, let alone thousands willing to engage together in civil disobedience. There was no mass movement to divest from fossil fuels. Hundreds of cities

and towns in Germany had not yet voted to take back control over their electricity grids to be part of a renewable energy revolution. My own province did not have a green-energy program that was bold enough to land us in trade court. China was not in the midst of a boisterous debate about the wrenching health costs of frenetic, coal-based economic growth. There was far less top-level research proving that economies powered by 100 percent renewable energy were within our grasp. And few climate scientists were willing to speak bluntly about the political implications of their work for our frenzied consumer culture. All of this has changed so rapidly as I have been writing that I have had to race to keep up.

Yes, ice sheets are melting faster than the models projected, but resistance is beginning to boil. In these existing and nascent movements, we now have clear glimpses of the kind of dedication and imagination demanded of everyone who is alive and breathing during climate change's "decade zero."

This is because the carbon record doesn't lie. And what that record tells us is that emissions are still rising: every year we release more greenhouse gases than the year before, the growth rate increasing from one decade to the next—gases that will trap heat for generations to come, creating a world that is hotter, colder, wetter, thirstier, hungrier, angrier. So if there is any hope of reversing these trends, glimpses won't cut it; we will need the climate revolution playing on repeat, all day every day, everywhere.

Mass resistance movements have grabbed the wheel before and could very well do so again. At the same time, we must reckon with the fact that lowering global emissions in line with the urgent warnings of climate scientists will demand change of a truly daunting speed and scale. Meeting science-based targets will mean forcing some of the most profitable companies on the planet to forfeit trillions of dollars of future earnings by leaving the vast majority of proven fossil-fuel reserves in the ground. It will also require coming up with trillions more to pay for zero-carbon, disaster-ready societal transformations. And let's take for granted that we want to do these radical things democratically and without a bloodbath, so violent vanguardist revolutions don't have much to offer in the way of road maps.

The crucial question we are left with, then, is this: Has an economic shift of this kind ever happened before in history? We know it can happen during wartime, when presidents and prime ministers are the ones commanding the

transformation from above. But has it ever been demanded from below, by regular people, when their leaders have wholly abdicated their responsibilities? The answer to that question is predictably complex, filled with “sort ofs” and “almosts”—but also at least one “yes.”

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In the West, the most common precedents invoked to show that social movements really can be a disruptive historical force are the celebrated human-rights movements of the past century—most prominently the movements for civil rights, women’s rights, and gay and lesbian rights. These movements unquestionably transformed the face and texture of the dominant culture. But given that the challenge for the climate movement hinges on pulling off a profound and radical economic transformation, it must be noted that in the case of these earlier movements, the legal and cultural battles were always more successful than the economic ones. While these movements won huge battles against institutional discrimination, the victories that remained elusive were those that, in Martin Luther King Jr.’s words, could not be purchased “at bargain rates.” There would be no massive investment in jobs, schools and decent homes for African-Americans in the wake of the civil-rights movement of the 1960s, just as the 1970s women’s movement would not win its demand for “wages for housework” (indeed, paid maternity leave remains a battle in large parts of the world). Sharing legal status is one thing, sharing resources quite another.

There have been social movements, however, that have had more success in challenging entrenched wealth and forcing redistribution as well as massive public-sector investments. The labor and populist movements of the 1930s and 1940s are the most obvious examples. Two more are the movements for the abolition of slavery and for Third World independence from colonial powers. Both of these transformative movements forced ruling elites to relinquish practices that were still extraordinarily profitable, much as fossil-fuel extraction is today.

The movement for the abolition of slavery in particular shows us that a transition as large as the one confronting us today has happened before—indeed, it is remembered as one of the greatest moments in human history. The economic impacts of abolition in the mid-nineteenth century have some striking parallels with the impacts of radical emission reduction, as several

historians and commentators have observed. As Chris Hayes argued in his essay "[The New Abolitionism](#)" in these pages last spring, "It is impossible to point to any precedent other than abolition" for the climate-justice movement's demand that "an existing set of political and economic interests be forced to say goodbye to trillions of dollars of wealth."

There is no question that for a large sector of the ruling class at the time, losing the legal right to exploit men and women in bondage represented a major economic blow. In the eighteenth century, Caribbean sugar plantations, which were wholly dependent on slave labor, were by far the most profitable outposts of the British Empire, generating revenues that far outstripped the other colonies.

While not equivalent, the dependence of the US economy on slave labor—particularly in the Southern states—is certainly comparable to the modern global economy's reliance on fossil fuels. But the analogy, as all acknowledge, is far from perfect. Burning fossil fuels is of course not the moral equivalent of owning slaves or occupying countries. (Though heading an oil company that actively sabotages climate science and lobbies aggressively against emission controls, while laying claim to enough interred carbon to drown populous nations like Bangladesh and boil sub-Saharan Africa, is indeed a heinous moral crime.) Nor were the movements that ended slavery and defeated colonial rule in any way bloodless: nonviolent tactics like boycotts and protests played major roles, but slavery in the Caribbean was outlawed only after numerous slave rebellions were brutally suppressed. And, of course, abolition in the United States came only after the carnage of the Civil War.

Another problem with the analogy is that, though the liberation of millions of slaves in this period—some 800,000 in the British colonies and 4 million in the United States—represents the greatest human-rights victory of its time (or, arguably, any time), the economic side of the struggle was far less successful. Local and international elites often managed to extract steep payoffs to compensate themselves for their "loss" of human property, while offering little or nothing to former slaves. Washington broke its promise, made near the end of the Civil War, to grant freed slaves ownership of large swaths of land in the South (a pledge colloquially known as "forty acres and a mule"). Instead, the lands were returned to former slave owners, who proceeded to staff them through the indentured servitude of sharecropping.

Britain awarded massive paydays to its slave owners at the time of abolition, which many used to invest in the coal-fired machinery of industrialization. And France, most shockingly, sent a flotilla of warships to demand that the newly liberated nation of Haiti pay a huge sum to the French crown for the loss of its bonded workforce—or face attack. Reparations, but in reverse.

The true costs of these and so many other gruesomely unjust extortions are still being paid in lives, from Haiti to Mozambique to Ferguson. The reverse reparations saddled newly liberated nations and people with odious debts that deprived them of true independence while helping to accelerate the Industrial Revolution in Europe and North America, the extreme profitability of which most certainly cushioned the economic blow of abolition. A real end to the fossil-fuel age offers no equivalent consolation prize to the major players in the oil, gas and coal industries. Solar and wind can make money, sure. But by nature of their decentralization, they will never supply the kind of concentrated super-profits to which the fossil-fuel titans have become all too accustomed. In other words, if climate justice carries the day, the economic costs to our elites will be real—not only because of the carbon left in the ground, but also because of the regulations, taxes and social programs needed to make the required transformation. Indeed, these new demands on the ultra-rich could effectively bring the era of the footloose Davos oligarch to a close.

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On one level, the inability of many great social movements to fully realize those parts of their vision that carried the highest price tag can be seen as a cause for inertia or even despair. If they failed in their plans to usher in an equitable economic system, how can the climate movement hope to succeed?

There is, however, another way of looking at this track record: the economic demands at the core of so many past struggles—for basic public services that work, for decent housing, for dignified work, for land redistribution—represent nothing less than the unfinished business of the most powerful liberation movements of the past two centuries, from civil rights to feminism to indigenous sovereignty. The transformation we need to make to respond to the climate threat—to adapt humanely and equitably to the heavy weather we have already locked in, and to avert the truly catastrophic

warming we can still avoid—is a chance to change all that, and to get it right this time. It could deliver the equitable redistribution of agricultural lands that was supposed to follow independence from colonial rule and dictatorship; it could bring the jobs and homes that Martin Luther King dreamed of; it could bring jobs and clean water to native communities. Such is the promise of what some have called “a Marshall Plan for the Earth.”

The fact that our most heroic social-justice movements won on the legal front but suffered big losses on the economic front is precisely why our world is as fundamentally unequal and unfair as it remains. Those losses have left a legacy of continued discrimination, racism, police violence, rampant criminalization and entrenched poverty—poverty that deepens with each new crisis. But at the same time, the economic battles these movements did win are the reason we still have a few institutions left—from libraries to mass transit to public hospitals—based on the wild idea that real equality means equal access to the basic services that create a dignified life. Most critically, all these past movements, in one form or another, are still fighting today—for full human rights and equality regardless of ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation; for real decolonization and reparations; for food security and farmers’ rights; against oligarchic rule; and to defend and expand the public sphere.

So climate change does not need some shiny new movement that will magically succeed where others have failed. Rather, as the furthest-reaching crisis created by the extractivist worldview, and one that puts humanity on a firm and unyielding deadline, climate change can be the force—the grand push—that will bring together all of these still-living movements: a rushing river fed by countless streams, gathering collective force to finally reach the sea. “The basic confrontation which seemed to be colonialism versus anti-colonialism, indeed capitalism versus socialism, is already losing its importance,” Frantz Fanon wrote in his 1961 masterwork, *The Wretched of the Earth*. “What matters today, the issue which blocks the horizon, is the need for a redistribution of wealth. Humanity will have to address this question, no matter how devastating the consequences may be.” Climate change—precisely because it demands so much public investment and planning—is our chance to right those festering wrongs at last: the unfinished business of liberation.

Winning will certainly require the convergence of diverse constituencies on a scale previously unknown. Because, although there is no perfect historical analogy for the challenge of climate change, there are lessons to learn from the transformative movements of the past. One such lesson is that when major shifts in the economic balance of power take place, they are invariably the result of extraordinary levels of social mobilization. At those junctures, activism becomes not something performed by a small tribe within a culture, whether a vanguard of radicals or a subcategory of slick professionals (though each plays a part), but an entirely normal activity throughout society—its rent-payers’ associations, women’s auxiliaries, gardening clubs, neighborhood assemblies, trade unions, professional groups, sports teams, youth leagues, and on and on. During extraordinary historical moments—both world wars, the aftermath of the Great Depression, the peak of the civil-rights era—the usual categories dividing “activists” from “regular people” became meaningless because the project of changing society was so deeply woven into the project of life. Activists were, quite simply, everyone.

* * *

It must always be remembered that the greatest barrier to humanity rising to meet the climate crisis is not that it is too late or that we don’t know what to do. There is just enough time, and we are swamped with green tech and green plans. And yet the reason so many of us are greeting this threat with grim resignation is that our political class appears wholly incapable of seizing those tools and implementing those plans. And it’s not just the people we vote into office and then complain about—it’s us. For most of us living in postindustrial societies, when we see the crackling black-and-white footage of general strikes in the 1930s, victory gardens in the 1940s, and Freedom Rides in the 1960s, we simply cannot imagine being part of any mobilization of that depth and scale. That kind of thing was fine for them, but surely not us—with our eyes glued to our smartphones, our attention spans scattered by click bait, our loyalties split by the burdens of debt and the insecurities of contract work. Where would we organize? Who would we trust enough to lead us? Who, moreover, is “we”?

In other words, we are products of our age and of a dominant ideological project—one that has too often taught us to see ourselves as little more than singular, gratification-seeking units out to maximize our narrow advantage. This project has also led our governments to stand by helplessly for more

than two decades as the climate crisis morphed from a “grandchildren” problem to a banging-down-the-door problem.

All of this is why any attempt to rise to the climate challenge will be fruitless unless it is understood as part of a much broader battle of worldviews—a process of rebuilding and reinventing the very idea of the collective, the communal, the commons, the civil, and the civic after so many decades of attack and neglect. Because what is overwhelming about the climate challenge is that it requires breaking so many rules at once—rules written into national laws and trade agreements, as well as powerful unwritten rules that tell us that no government can increase taxes and stay in power, or say no to major investments no matter how damaging, or plan to gradually contract those parts of our economy that endanger us all.

And yet each of those rules emerged out of the same coherent worldview. If that worldview is delegitimized, then all of the rules within it become much weaker and more vulnerable. This is another lesson from social-movement history across the political spectrum: when fundamental change does come, it’s generally not in legislative dribs and drabs spread out evenly over decades. Rather, it comes in spasms of rapid-fire lawmaking, with one breakthrough after another. The right calls this “shock therapy”; the left calls it “populism” because it requires so much popular support and mobilization to occur. (Think of the regulatory architecture that emerged in the New Deal period or, for that matter, the environmental legislation of the 1960s and 1970s.)

So how do you change a worldview, an unquestioned ideology? Part of it involves choosing the right early policy battles—game-changing ones that don’t merely aim to change laws but also patterns of thought. This means a fight for a minimal carbon tax might do a lot less good than, for instance, forming a grand coalition to demand a guaranteed minimum income. That’s not only because a minimum income makes it possible for workers to say no to dirty-energy jobs, but also because the very process of arguing for a universal social safety net opens up a space for a full-throated debate about values—about what we owe to one another based on our shared humanity, and what it is that we collectively value more than economic growth and corporate profits.

Indeed, a great deal of the work of deep social change involves having debates during which new stories can be told to replace the ones that have failed us. Because if we are to have any hope of making the kind of civilizational leap required of this fateful decade, we will need to start believing, once again, that humanity is not hopelessly selfish and greedy: the image ceaselessly sold to us by everything from reality shows to neoclassical economics.

Fundamentally, the task is to articulate not just an alternative set of policy proposals, but an alternative worldview to rival the one at the heart of the ecological crisis—embedded in interdependence rather than hyperindividualism, reciprocity rather than dominance, and cooperation rather than hierarchy. This is required not only to create a political context to dramatically lower emissions, but also to help us cope with the disasters we can no longer avoid. Because in the hot and stormy future we have already made inevitable through our past emissions, an unshakable belief in the equal rights of all people and a capacity for deep compassion will be the only things standing between civilization and barbarism.

This is another lesson from the transformative movements of the past: all of them understood that the process of shifting cultural values—though somewhat ephemeral and difficult to quantify—was central to their work. And so they dreamed in public, showed humanity a better version of itself, modeled different values in their own behavior, and in the process liberated the political imagination and rapidly altered the sense of what was possible. They were also unafraid of the language of morality—to give the pragmatic cost/benefit arguments a rest and speak of right and wrong, of love and indignation.

There are plenty of solid economic arguments for moving beyond fossil fuels, as more and more patient investors are realizing. And that's worth pointing out. But we will not win the battle for a stable climate by trying to beat the bean counters at their own game—arguing, for instance, that it is more cost-effective to invest in emission reduction now than disaster response later. We will win by asserting that such calculations are morally monstrous, since they imply that there is an acceptable price for allowing entire countries to disappear, for leaving untold millions to die on parched land, for depriving today's children of their right to live in a world teeming with the wonders and beauties of creation.

The climate movement has yet to find its full moral voice on the world stage, but it is most certainly clearing its throat—beginning to put the very real thefts and torments that ineluctably flow from the decision to mock international climate commitments alongside history’s most damned crimes.

Some of the voices of moral clarity are coming from the very young, who are calling on the streets—and, increasingly, in the courts—for intergenerational justice. Some are coming from great social-justice movements of the past, like Nobel laureate Desmond Tutu, the former archbishop of Cape Town, who has joined the fossil-fuel divestment movement with enthusiasm, declaring that “to serve as custodians of creation is not an empty title; it requires that we act, and with all the urgency this dire situation demands.” Most of all, those clarion voices are coming from the front lines of the movement some have taken to calling “Blockadia”: from communities directly impacted by high-risk fossil-fuel extraction, transportation and combustion—as well as from those parts of the world already coping with the impacts of early climate destabilization.

* * *

Recent years have been filled with moments when societies suddenly decide they have had enough, defying all of the experts and forecasters—from the Arab Spring (tragedies, betrayals and all), to Europe’s “squares movement” that saw city centers taken over by demonstrators for months, to Occupy Wall Street, to the student movements of Chile and Quebec. The Mexican journalist Luis Hernández Navarro describes these rare political moments that seem to melt cynicism on contact as the “effervescence of rebellion.”

What is most striking about these upwellings, when societies become consumed with the demand for transformational change, is that they so often come as a surprise—most of all to the movements’ own organizers. I’ve heard the story many times: “One day it was just me and my friends dreaming up impossible schemes; the next day the entire country seemed to be out in the plaza alongside us.” And the real surprise, for all involved, is that we are so much more than we have been told we are; that we long for more and—in that longing—have more company than we ever imagined.

No one knows when the next such effervescent moment will open, or whether it will be precipitated by an economic crisis, another natural

disaster or some kind of political scandal. We do know that a warming world will, sadly, provide no shortage of potential sparks. Sivan Kartha, senior scientist at the Stockholm Environment Institute, puts it like this: “What’s politically realistic today may have very little to do with what’s politically realistic after another few Hurricane Katrinas and another few Superstorm Sandys and another few Typhoon Bophas hit us.” It’s true: the world tends to look a little different when the objects we have worked our whole lives to accumulate are suddenly floating down the street, smashed to pieces, turned to garbage.

The world also doesn’t look much as it did in the late 1980s. Climate change landed on the public agenda at the peak of free-market, end-of-history triumphalism, which was very bad timing indeed. Its do-or-die moment, however, comes to us at a very different historical juncture. Many of the barriers that paralyzed a serious response to the crisis are today significantly eroded. Free-market ideology has been discredited by decades of deepening inequality and corruption, stripping it of much of its persuasive (if not yet its political and economic) power. And the various forms of magical thinking that have diverted precious energy—from blind faith in technological miracles to the worship of benevolent billionaires—are also fast losing their grip. It is slowly dawning on a great many of us that no one is going to step in and fix this crisis; that if change is to take place, it will be only because leadership bubbled up from below.

We are also significantly less isolated than many of us were even a decade ago: the new structures built in the rubble of neoliberalism—everything from social media to worker co-ops to farmers’ markets to neighborhood sharing banks—have helped us to find community despite the fragmentation of postmodern life. Indeed, thanks in particular to social media, a great many of us are continually engaged in a cacophonous global conversation that, however maddening at times, is unprecedented in its reach and power.

Given these factors, there is little doubt that another crisis will see us in the streets and squares once again, taking us all by surprise. The real question is what progressive forces will make of that moment, the power and confidence with which it is seized. Because these moments when the impossible suddenly seems possible are excruciatingly precious and rare. That means more must be made of them. The next time one arises, it must be harnessed not only to denounce the world as it is and build fleeting

pockets of liberated space; it must be the catalyst to actually build the world that will keep us all safe. The stakes are simply too high, and time too short, to settle for anything less.

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HOUSING

THE PERMANENT CRISIS OF HOUSING

DAVID MADDEN AND PETER MARCUSE

The symptoms of housing crisis are everywhere in evidence today. Households are being squeezed by the cost of living. Homelessness is on the rise. Evictions and foreclosures are commonplace. Segregation and poverty, along with displacement and unaffordability, have become the hallmarks of today's cities. Urban and suburban neighborhoods are being transformed by speculative development, shaped by decisions made in boardrooms half a world away. Small towns and older industrial cities are struggling to survive.

In America, the housing crisis is especially acute in [New York City](#). The city has more homeless residents now than at any time since the Great Depression. More than half of all households cannot afford the rent. Displacement, gentrification, and eviction are [rampant](#). Two pillars of New York's distinctive housing system – public housing and rent regulation – are both under threat.

But housing problems are not unique to New York. [Shelter poverty](#) is a problem throughout the United States. According to the standard measures of affordability, there is no US state where a full-time minimum-wage worker can afford to rent or own a one-bedroom dwelling.

Nationwide, nearly half of all renting households spend an [unsustainable amount](#) of their income on rent, a figure that is only expected to rise. This is not only a big-city issue. Around 30 percent of rural households cannot afford their housing, including nearly half of all rural renters.

In fact, the housing crisis is [global in scope](#). London, Shanghai, São Paulo, Mumbai, Lagos, indeed nearly every major city faces its own residential struggles. Land grabs, forced evictions, expulsions, and displacement are rampant. According to the United Nations, the homeless population across the planet may be anywhere between one hundred million and one billion people, depending on how homelessness is defined.

It has been estimated that globally there are currently 330 million households – more than a billion people – that are unable to find a decent or affordable home. Some research suggests that in recent decades, residential displacement due to development, extraction, and construction has occurred on a scale that rivals displacement caused by disasters and armed conflicts. In China and India alone in the past fifty years, an estimated one hundred million people have been displaced by development projects.

And yet if there is broad recognition of the existence of a housing crisis, there is no deep understanding of why it occurs, much less what to do about it. The dominant view today is that if the housing system is broken, it is a temporary crisis that can be resolved through targeted, isolated measures. In mainstream debates, housing tends to be understood in narrow terms.

The provision of adequate housing is seen as a technical problem and technocratic means are sought to solve it: better construction technology, smarter physical planning, new techniques for management, more homeownership, different zoning laws, and fewer land use regulations. Housing is seen as the domain of experts like developers, architects, or economists. Certainly, technical improvements in the housing system are possible, and some are much needed. But the crisis is deeper than that.

We see housing in a wider perspective: as a political-economic problem. The residential is political – which is to say that the shape of the housing system is always the outcome of struggles between different groups and classes. Housing necessarily raises questions about state action and the broader economic system. But the ways in which social antagonisms shape housing are too often obscured.

Housing is under attack today. It is caught within a number of simultaneous social conflicts. Most immediately, there is a conflict between housing as lived, social space and housing as an instrument for profit-making – a conflict between housing as home and as real estate. More broadly, housing is the subject of contestation between different ideologies, economic interests, and political projects. More broadly still, the housing crisis stems from the inequalities and antagonisms of class society.

REPOSING THE HOUSING QUESTION

The classic statement on the political-economic aspects of housing was written by [Friedrich Engels](#) in 1872. At the time, few disputed the fact that housing conditions for the industrial proletariat were unbearable. What Engels called “the housing question” was the question of why working-class housing appeared in the condition as it did, and what should be done about it.

Engels was generally pessimistic about the prospects for housing struggles per se. Criticizing bourgeois attempts at housing reform, he argued that housing problems should be understood as some of “the numerous, smaller, secondary evils which result from the present-day capitalist mode of production.”

He concluded, “As long as the capitalist mode of production continues to exist, it is folly to hope for an isolated solution to the housing question or of any other social question affecting the fate of the workers.” For Engels, housing struggles were derivative of class struggle. Housing problems, then, could only be addressed through social revolution.

We take from Engels the idea that the housing question is embedded within the structures of class society. Posing the housing question today means uncovering the connections between societal power and the residential experience. It means asking who and what housing is for, who controls it, who it empowers, who it oppresses. It means questioning the function of housing within globalized neoliberal capitalism.

However, residential struggles today are not simply derivative of other conflicts. Housing movements are significant political actors in their own right. The housing question may not be resolvable under capitalism. But the shape of the housing system can be acted upon, modified, and changed.

The social theorist [Henri Lefebvre](#) helps us understand the political role of housing and the potential for changing it. In his 1968 book *The Right to the City*, Lefebvre argued that industrial insurrection was not the only force for social transformation. An “urban strategy” for revolutionizing society was possible.

Given changes to the nature of work and of urban development, the industrial proletariat was no longer the only agent of revolutionary change, or even the predominant one. Lefebvre claimed that there was a new political subject: the city dweller. More generally, Lefebvre invokes the politics of “the inhabitant,” a category that includes any worker, in the broadest sense, seen from the perspective of everyday social and residential life.

Lefebvre is vague about what exactly the inhabitant as a political subject will accomplish with the urban revolution. But he does point to a different way of inhabiting. He imagines a future where social needs would not be subordinated to economic necessity, where disalienated dwelling space would be universally available, where both equality and difference would be the basic principles of social and political life.

Whether or not anything like Lefebvre’s urban revolution is on the horizon, we can use his ideas to understand a basic point: the politics of housing involve a bigger set of actors and interests than is recognized either by mainstream debates or by conventional political-economic analyses such as that offered by Engels.

In the orthodox account, the only conflicts that matter are those surrounding exploitation and value. But the ruling class also needs to solidify its rule, and preserving the ability to exploit is only one aspect of this. There are also political, social, and ideological imperatives that significantly affect residential conditions.

In the financialized global economy – which was only beginning to emerge when Lefebvre was writing – real estate has come to have new prominence in relation to industrial capital. Housing and urban development today are not secondary phenomena. Rather, they are becoming some of the main processes driving contemporary global capitalism.

If Lefebvre is right, housing is becoming an ever more important site for the reproduction of the system – a change that might open new strategic possibilities for housing movements to achieve social change.

IN DEFENSE OF HOUSING

We do not seek to defend the housing system as it currently stands, which is in many ways indefensible. What needs defending is the use of housing as home, not as real estate. We are interested in the defense of housing as a resource that should be available to all.

Housing means many things to different groups. It is home for its residents and the site of social reproduction. It is the largest economic burden for many, and for others a source of wealth, status, profit, or control. It means work for those who construct, manage, and maintain it; speculative profit for those buying and selling it; and income for those financing it. It is a source of tax revenue and a subject of tax expenditures for the state, and a key component of the structure and functioning of cities.

Our concern is squarely with those who reside in and use housing – the people for whom home provides use values rather than exchange value. From the perspective of those who inhabit it, housing unlocks a whole range of social, cultural, and political goods. It is a universal necessity of life, in some ways an extension of the human body. Without it, participation in most of social, political, and economic life is impossible.

Housing is more than shelter; it can provide personal safety and ontological security. While the domestic environment can be the site of oppression and injustice, it also has the potential to serve as a confirmation of one's agency, cultural identity, individuality, and creative powers.

The built form of housing has always been seen as a tangible, visual reflection of the organization of society. It reveals the existing class structure and power relationships. But it has also long been a vehicle for imagining alternative social orders. Every emancipatory movement must deal with the housing question in one form or another. This capacity to spur the political imagination is part of housing's social value as well.

Housing is the precondition both for work and for leisure. Controlling one's housing is a way to control one's labor as well as one's free time, which is why struggles over housing are always, in part, struggles over autonomy. More than any other item of consumption, housing structures the way that individuals interact with others, with communities, and with wider collectives. Where and how one lives decisively shapes the treatment one

receives by the state and can facilitate relations with other citizens and with social movements.

No other modern commodity is as important for organizing citizenship, work, identities, solidarities, and politics.

It is this side of housing – its lived, universally necessary, social dimension, and its identity as home – that needs defending. Our challenge as analysts, as residents, and as participants in housing struggles is to understand the causes and consequences of the multidimensional attack on housing. Our goal is to provide a critical understanding of the political-economic nature of housing, such that we may develop a greater sense of the actions needed to address housing's crises today and in the future.

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THE CASE FOR PUBLIC HOUSING

KAREN NAREFSKY

When people on the left think about solutions to the housing crisis, few of us think about public housing. Faced with the twin problems of overinvestment, leading to gentrification and displacement, and underinvestment, leading to substandard housing and foreclosures, we tend to think about locally based solutions, which makes sense. Many of these problems are caused by the state in collusion with the real estate industry, and it seems impossible to imagine a future in which the government plays a different role. But I'd like to imagine a future in which many of us live in, and thrive in, public housing.

Any discussion of the future of public housing must begin by understanding its origins. Public housing in the United States first emerged in the 1930s as part of the New Deal, when there was an enormous shortage of housing following the Great Depression. The federal government began by making loans to nonprofit corporations to build housing. This program produced very few housing units, due both to the lack of qualified builders and to the inefficiency of channeling public funds through the limited-dividend corporations. As a result, under the Public Works Administration, led by Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, the government decided to enter the housing business: rather than paying companies to build government-subsidized housing, the state would build and maintain housing through local housing authorities.

As soldiers returned from World War II, their expanding families created a boom in demand for housing, both private and public. The vast public housing programs undertaken in the postwar period, however, suffered from the racism and disinvestment that would become endemic to government housing, and to nearly every other public institution through the present day. Like other provisions of the G.I. Bill, public housing location and construction were left in the hands of local officials all too eager to keep African Americans out of their communities. Meanwhile, families with resources were encouraged by low-interest mortgage loans to leave urban public housing and move to the suburbs. Of the 67,000 mortgages issued under the G.I. Bill, fewer than 100 were taken out by black veterans.

In its relatively short history, public housing has suffered from rampant corruption in some cities, and from the failure of many local housing authorities to maintain and repair housing projects. But this doesn't mean public housing is a flawed concept, just as "underperforming" public schools whose students are burdened by poverty don't serve as proof that public education is a failed endeavor. Public disinvestment is the first step in a now-familiar playbook that leads to privatization.

Since the 1970s, privately funded affordable housing has largely supplanted government-funded public housing. HUD (Department of Housing and Urban Development) programs like Hope VI and Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) exemplify this increasing reliance on the private market. Many of the units in RAD housing or affordable housing build by community development corporations are paid for with Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), with higher income limits than traditional public housing. These higher income limits, along with the overall need for more affordable housing units, pushes many struggling households into overcrowding, homelessness, and public housing waitlists.

In line with this shift toward private ownership of subsidized housing, U.S. public housing authorities have become increasingly reliant on Housing Choice Vouchers, or Section 8. While possession of a mobile Section 8 voucher guarantees subsidized rent, the units where the voucher can be used are privately owned. This allows landlords to discriminate against tenants, whether through outright exclusion or by charging rents that exceed HUD's fair market cap. Section 8 tenants can easily be forced out by property value increases and rising rents, one facet of the cycle of gentrification and displacement currently affecting many U.S. cities.

In a process partially justified by these many challenges, public housing is currently either being killed by neglect or aggressively privatized. Take Chicago's "Plan for Transformation"—a scheme to demolish the city's public housing projects and rebuild them as "mixed-income" developments. Economically diverse neighborhoods are a laudable goal. But most of the mixed-income developments built under Mayors Richard Daley and Rahm Emanuel are segregated by class, with low-income residents subject to increased surveillance and discrimination. Those who were allowed to return—that is, thousands of the public housing residents who were

displaced by the Plan for Transformation—do not have a place available for them in the new developments.

The vision of public housing I want to put forward requires a major shift in the way that we think about the role of government and the public sector. The role of the state is to provide fundamental services and goods to the people without concern for profit. One of those must be safe, quality affordable housing. Currently, speculative pressures on land deny the right of housing to those unable to pay exorbitant costs. If you own land, you can raise the price of it as much as the overheated market will bear. If you don't own land and can't afford the rent, then you are shut out of housing altogether.

What is to be done? Take land off the speculative market, build housing on it, and keep it permanently affordable for anyone who might want to live there. This is being done or attempted in many cities by the community land trust movement, which puts forward a vision of community-controlled affordable housing. I wholeheartedly support that vision. I also imagine a future in which the government, instead of capitulating to the demands of real estate developers, assumes the responsibility of providing shelter itself.

The public housing I envision would not be the public housing most of us know. It would be resident-controlled, with democratically elected tenant leaders who make decisions about programming and problem-solving along with government workers. It would be available to residents of all incomes, so as to avoid the stigma that comes with means-tested programs. It would be well-designed and attractive, designed through architecture competitions like many public housing developments in Europe. And its maintenance—not just its construction—would be fully and adequately subsidized by the state.

For any of this to work, it would have to be built at a large scale, beyond that at which local community land trusts can operate. But I hope that the community land trust movement can provide an example of the kind of housing we need. Vienna, Austria, where nearly half of all residents live in government-subsidized housing, provides another instructive example. The prevalence of public housing imposes de facto rent controls on private landlords, who cannot raise rents far beyond what the government charges if they want to attract tenants. Public housing complexes include childcare programming, community centers, swimming pools, and other facilities.

While U.S. public housing is constantly threatened by cuts in federal funding, the entire HUD budget amounts to just over half of the revenue lost annually on mortgage-interest tax deductions for disproportionately wealthy homeowners. In addition to reducing the mortgage-interest deduction, large-scale public housing could be indirectly subsidized by a redistributive tax policy, full employment, or a universal basic income, so that all tenants could afford their rent.

Conceiving of community-controlled public housing as the norm amounts to what Kathi Weeks terms a “utopian demand”—one that, while it may not be immediately winnable, causes us to think differently about the future we want. Housing justice groups across the country, as part of the Right to the City Alliance, are asserting the right to preserve, reclaim, and rebuild working-class communities. Let’s demand that they are rebuilt as a public good.

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IN DEFENSE OF THE HIGH-RISE

OWEN HATHERLEY

According to London mayor Sadiq Khan, [one of the consequences](#) of the appalling fire at Grenfell Tower in North Kensington may be that “the worst mistakes of the 1960s and 1970s are torn down.”

This taps into a widespread view that emerges whenever high-rise apartments are discussed in the United Kingdom, and which was [expressed with stunning opportunism](#) after the fire by veteran conservative journalist Simon Jenkins and the campaign group [Create Streets](#), which is closely linked to the Tory think tank [Policy Exchange](#).

It is perennially demanded that 1960s and '70s era buildings are torn down, but in the case of Grenfell Tower this overlooked two important facts. The first is that increasingly, London's skyline is as dominated by new towers – “luxury flats” and student dormitories – that are often steps backwards to their predecessors in terms of space, air, light, and design.

The second, most crucial of all, is that if nothing had happened to the tower since the early 1970s when it was completed, barring basic maintenance and care, this fire would have been impossible, with all accounts so far agreeing that the main cause was almost certainly botched and cheap recent work on the building.

This is not Britain's first tower block disaster – the country's record is poor, from the [Ronan Point collapse](#) of 1968 to the [Lakanal House fire](#) of 2009. Towers are uniquely emotive here, either concrete eyesores concentrating poverty, or a Dubai-on-Thames owned by unknown foreigners – without an opportunity to be treated as what they usually are, a normal form of housing that is standard on much of the planet, that has flaws and virtues just like houses do.

There is an enduring association between high-rise housing and social democracy in Britain, which is sometimes seen positively – as an example of the futuristic “white heat of technology” of [Harold Wilson](#)'s reforming 1960s

government – and more often, negatively, as a form of totalitarian social engineering with architects devising machines for living in that they would never dare live in themselves. Neither of these is strictly true.

Britain's first multi-story buildings are mansion blocks, street-facing apartments built in the late Victorian years in affluent areas like South Kensington and Maida Vale, not so much for the middle as for the upper class. The first towers to be based on the ideas of the [Modern Movement](#) about egalitarian social buildings standing in green public space were for a very similar clientele, beginning with the Soviet emigre and devout communist Berthold Lubetkin's Highpoint flats, in North London. Lubetkin himself moved into the top floor of the second block, Highpoint 2, in 1938.

A handful of others followed before the war, like Wells Coates's Embassy Court in Brighton, which housed actors and celebrities. It bears repeating that if high-rise living was an experiment on the part of middle-class socialist architects, it was one that they first carried out on themselves. The wave of council blocks that followed were based on these principles.

High-rise construction progressed tentatively after Labour's landslide victory in 1945, though towers appeared in many ideal town planning projects, as images of what the socialist future might be like – everyone with an equal view, of the sort usually enjoyed only by aesthetes with penthouses, of a new landscape of publicly owned, free open space. The most influential tall projects built under [Clement Attlee's](#) government's watch were the Churchill Gardens estate on a bomb site in Pimlico, not far from Parliament, and The Lawn, a lone tower in parkland in the New Town of Harlow.

Unlike any of the interwar high-rises, these were for council tenants, publicly owned flats let at low rents to locals in a given borough – analogous to American public housing, but unlike it, with better facilities than the private housing of the same period, at least at first.

Aesthetically, these two defined the types of high-rise that would come to dominate British skylines in the 1950s and 1960s – the long, linear, unsentimental “slabs” of Pimlico, and the thin, elegant “point” of Harlow. The way they were planned, too, showed two possible paths – a dense, urban

site filled with flats on the one hand, or spacious towers in thickly planted greenery on the other.

At their Alton Estate in the mid-'50s, the Labour-controlled London County Council combined both, in a rolling landscape expropriated from the grounds of country houses. An American observer called it “the best low-cost housing development in the world.” Estates like Chamberlain Gardens in Birmingham and Gleadless Valley in Sheffield maintained this quality.

These buildings, widely praised and shared as images of a confident future, were seductive – but they were not easy to build, relying on new technologies and unfamiliar skills. The most left-wing local authorities didn't just commission their own housing – they built it, too, through direct labor organizations run by the municipality, practically circumventing the construction and house-building industry, historically close to the Conservative Party.

But these organizations were not equipped to build high. In the estate where I live, in Woolwich, southeast London, built in the 1950s, the first phase was straightforward frame and infill construction, built on-site – but the enthusiasm for towers meant that the second phase was planned as a series of dramatic point blocks stepping down a hilltop – well beyond the direct labor organization's abilities.

When big construction firms, with their large budgets and access to new technologies, became aware of councils' interest in high-rises, they acted swiftly, offering them package deals of high towers that could be erected quickly, solving the housing crises that beset most working-class districts – aftereffects of war damage and of Victorian slum-building. Noticing that there was apparently a short and simple solution to rebuilding, central government under Harold Wilson offered subsidies for tall buildings.

Towers in these package deals were pieced together from factory-made parts, rather than built from the ground up. The first examples of this were stark. At Morris Walk in Charlton, the London County Council adopted the [Larsen-Nielsen system](#), a Danish method of building from large concrete panels. The resulting assemblage of towers and low-rise maisonettes still looks strikingly machine-made, fresh off the production line – as it was, with a continuous Fordist line being used on the site.

Larsen-Nielsen would become notorious when it was adopted en masse all over the country, with large panels forming the basis of thousands of towers, and Birmingham, Glasgow, and East London in particular transformed in just a few years in the mid-'60s by the lucrative alliance of local authorities keen to clear their waiting lists fast, and building firms equally keen to sell their building kits. Architects, usually blamed for the results, were some distance away at this point, their role often limited to the placing of towers rather than their design.

At first, councils had self-imposed limits on who they would house in towers, with single people without children preferred, but the incentives to build high and fast meant these were often abandoned. This brief moment of high-rise mass production ended with the first of Britain's high-rise disasters – the partial collapse of Ronan Point, a Larsen-Nielsen block in Canning Town in the London Borough of Newham, in May 1968. A gas explosion destroyed the structure of the tower, with the panels falling on top of each other like a house of cards. Four people were killed, and many thousands more were terrified, as they began to wonder if their new homes, at first so obviously superior to the old, were even safe to live in.

The investigation at Ronan Point revealed that underneath the modern facade, high-rise building in Britain was a dubious business, with endemic cost-cutting and poor workmanship. The blocks built by Ronan Point's contractor, Taylor Woodrow, were revealed to be kept together by the weight of the panels, with the bolts and joints specified in the drawings left out by the builders. Old newspapers were used as insulation. This wasn't the white heat of technology, but jerry-building on a Victorian scale.

Larsen-Nielsen, which has never led to any problems whatsoever in Denmark, was designed for buildings of no more than eight stories – Ronan Point went up to twenty-two. Politicians both local and national, and in the case of Birmingham, city architects, were convicted of taking bribes from big firms such as the notorious John Poulson. Much of the impetus of the post-1968 New Left in Britain came from revulsion at the tower boom of the 1960s, seen as the result of top-down Tammany hall politics and corruption.

This was a simplification, ignoring the many high-quality towers built when councils had the confidence (and the cash) to avoid the system-builders – from Erno Goldfinger's Trellick and Balfron Towers to one-offs like

Anniesland Court in Glasgow or Point Royal in Bracknell New Town – and the fact that some were being explicitly aimed at a luxury clientele, such as the City of London’s monumental Barbican Estate.

Looked at today, some of the anti-tower rhetoric of the ’70s and ’80s sounds hysterical, extrapolating from wholly contingent problems into sweeping generalizations about totalitarianism and sinister architects using council tenants as guinea pigs.

Towers were built less and less from the early 1970s on, only returning in the early 2000s. What was most damaging about this debate was the fact that the really guilty parties of Ronan Point and its ilk – Taylor Woodrow, and companies like it – were not only exonerated, but almost totally ignored. They continued to profit and thrive, and began to maintain lengthy blacklists of trade unionists who might blow the whistle on their dubious practices.

The history of towers since then is one of consolidation and gentrification. Towers had become unpopular compared with low-rise stock when council housing was incrementally privatized through the “[Right to Buy](#)” brought in by [Thatcher](#) in 1981. Councils spent much of the 1980s and 1990s demolishing the towers (never the majority) that were proven to be unsafe in the post-Ronan Point investigations, and when Labour were re-elected there was a publicly funded program of renovations, “Decent Homes.”

One result of this was that towers looked better on a superficial level – shinier, often clad with indistinct new materials on top of the original concrete, mostly for reasons of thermal insulation; another was that the strings attached to the program – the imperative for elected councils to either offload their housing onto charitable housing associations, or to housing quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations known as Arms-Length Management Organizations (ALMOs) – made who actually owns and runs what was now called “social housing” increasingly opaque and unaccountable.

The first of the towers for the new rich that Thatcherism created was built at the end of the 1980s as part of the Docklands development, an immensely successful boondoggle based on the tearing up of planning regulations on a post-industrial site, the opposite of the careful modernist planning dreamed of after the war. Cascades, designed by the postmodernist architects CZWG,

was meant to look unique, exclusive, and to use the New Labour parlance, “aspirational,” defined not by structural concrete and flat roofs but by “quirky” roofs and multicolored cladding.

Beginning in 1997, hundreds of towers like this were built, to the point where they dominate boom cities like Leeds, Manchester, and Reading as much as ’60s towers once did Birmingham and Glasgow. The realization that towers, with their epic city views, could be sold as “luxury” meant that some councils balanced their books by “decanting” selected high-rises of their working-class residents and selling them to property developers. Such has been the fate of several high-rises in London, Leeds, Sheffield, and perhaps grossest of all, Manchester, where three “hard-to-let” towers were re-clad by the “creative” developers Urban Splash, and named (in neon lights) after the women’s suffrage activists, the Pankhursts – Christabel, Emmeline, and the passionate communist Sylvia. Dispossession under New Labour often went hand in hand with radical chic.

Occasionally, concerns were raised about the new wave of towers. With his usual blithe hypocrisy, then-London mayor [Boris Johnson](#), personally responsible for some of the worst receiving planning permission, derisively called them “Dubai-on-Thames.” Some pointed out that their small rooms, poor light, and cramped layout often made them inferior on architectural grounds to those of the 1960s. But unlike towers of the 1960s, most had sprinkler systems, properly tested alarm systems, and, in a telling innovation, separate doors for private and “affordable” tenants. (A percentage is often mandated as “affordable,” currently defined as eighty percent of market rates, much higher than council rents.)

But few worried they would be unsafe – though one of the most widely built types of new towers, student housing blocks, have been built to standards as poor as those of the 1960s. Again, the debate has been largely aesthetic, as height became a signifier of power and affluence, rather than of being condemned to live in a dated architect’s dream. The results of the latter could, after all, be privatized into the former.

The 2009 fire in Lakanal House, a slab block on the pleasant Sceaux Gardens estate in Southwark, revealed that a new danger to the residents of 1960s towers was poor improvement work, with suspended ceilings and faulty power installations contributing to the unexpectedly fast and deadly spread

of a routine flat fire. Investigators recommended the fitting of sprinkler systems on “social” towers, and were ignored. But this isn’t why the Grenfell tower fire was so drastic and so lethal.

Investigations will take years, but what seems clear is that the ALMO charged with looking after the tower had, as the residents’ blog tirelessly pointed out, a record of hazardous practices in the block’s communal spaces – and shockingly, that the cladding, installed in a recent renovation by the contractor Rydon, was flammable. It would have cost an extra five thousand pounds to install non-flammable cladding panels instead, but the budgets of councils and ALMOs are low and deliberately handicapped by arcane rules about “value engineering” and a culture of institutionalized meanness.

It may be a minor issue in the face of the horror of the Grenfell fire, but it is depressing to see the clichés of the 1970s being repeated in its aftermath. Not just because of the irrelevance of the architects versus the masses narrative – one of the seventy-nine people killed in the fire was an Italian architect who had moved into a Right to Buy-privatized flat for the view – but also because of what it might mean for the tenants of council towers, especially those in expensive, gentrifying areas like North Kensington, whose working-class, multinational residents already feel like they’re treated as substandard citizens.

It is easy to imagine a shock doctrine response to this massacre. Councils are already evacuating blocks clad with flammable material by Rydon. They have little money, crippled both by New Labour’s suspicion of local government and by Tory austerity. Many may opt to demolish, or to sell up to developers who can promise to properly refurbish the blocks – at a price, of course.

Contrary to what Sadiq Khan argues, the consequence of the fire might be not that the “mistakes” of the 1960s and 1970s are demolished, but that the mistakes of the 2000s and 2010s are continued, as ’60s “mistakes” are transformed into aspirational “solutions” for a better class of resident. Then, the people who once had, for all their poverty, commanding views over Western Europe’s most unequal city, will be moved far out of it, to distant towns and cities where the rich won’t have to look up at them.

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EVICT THE LANDLORDS

JOSEPH G. RAMSEY

Milwaukee's North Side rose up last month, following the police killing of Sylville Smith. State officials like Democratic Wisconsin county sheriff David Clarke blamed the riots on "black cultural dysfunction" while Donald Trump called for "more cops on the street," ignoring the fact that police violence provoked the riot in the first place. But as Matthew Desmond makes clear in his book *Evicted*, the police are but one part of a complex landscape of inequality in Milwaukee.

In *Evicted* Desmond uses the lens of real estate to bring the struggles of Milwaukeeans to life. Drawing on years of ethnographic research in some of Milwaukee's poorest neighborhoods – including both the predominantly black ghetto on the North Side and a mostly white trailer park south of the Menomonee River – he shows how chronically unaffordable, inadequate, and insecure housing produces myriad social ills, running the gamut from unemployment to malnutrition, from psychological trauma to substance abuse, from failing schools to conflicts with police. "Without stable shelter," he writes, "everything else falls apart."

Desmond blends rich dialogue, vivid descriptions, and intimate character portraits with extensive statistical evidence, underscoring the national scope of the housing crisis. As working-class incomes stagnate and housing costs soar, millions of Americans now spend most of their income on rent, sometimes leaving only a few dollars a day for other expenses.

Hundreds of thousands are evicted each year: forced from their homes, their belongings stacked on the curb or carted away, lives uprooted, neighborhoods disturbed, children traumatized.

Eviction and shoddy housing, Desmond vividly shows, afflict the poor across racial lines. But like so many other social ills, poor black people – and in particular black women – experience it disproportionately.

Desmond sees eviction as the equivalent of mass incarceration for poor black women. “Poor black men were locked up,” he writes. “Poor black women were locked out.” Like mass incarceration – itself an epidemic in Milwaukee – eviction subjects the poor to often permanently stigmatizing punishment for minor violations. It further segregates the already marginalized, making it exponentially harder for people to overcome the difficulties that brought trouble their way in the first place.

But *Evicted* wants to do more than document suffering. Desmond presents eviction as a social process that reveals structures of power and exploitation. In keeping with its subtitle – *Poverty and Profit in the American City* – *Evicted* insists that we understand these terms as deeply entwined.

Huge profits are made on the backs of the poor – not only by landlords, but also by pawnshops, loan sharks, and moving and storage companies. This drive for wealth exacerbates poverty, as the evicted become even more vulnerable to predation. “There are losers and winners,” Desmond writes, “There are losers because there are winners.”

Or, to put it differently, poor people aren’t simply excluded from American prosperity: prosperity comes at their expense. Exploitation, Desmond stresses, is a word that “has been scrubbed out of the poverty debate.” His book seeks to restore it.

TWO DIFFERENT HEADACHES

While researching the book Desmond spent equal time with the landlords and the tenants, earning the trust of evictor and evictee alike. In *Evicted* he relates their views and experiences respectfully, refusing moralism or sentimentality. But a sense of irony and injustice comes through nonetheless.

In one scene he describes a North Side landlord, Sherrena, and her tenant, Arleen, as the landlord gives tenant a lift home from housing court on Christmas Day. (Milwaukee’s housing courts work through religious holidays.) Sherrena has just successfully arranged to evict Arleen, who fell behind on rent after paying for the funeral of a woman she considered a sister.

“Both women had splitting headaches,” Desmond writes. “Sherrena attributed hers to how court had gone”: while she had won the right to evict

Arleen, she'd hoped for a larger money judgment against her as well. The tenant's headache, on the other hand, "was from hunger. She hadn't eaten all day."

Two months later, a different apartment Sherrena owns goes up in flames, taking the life of a baby and leaving a dozen people homeless. Despite her close personal connection to the young mother, Kamala – Sherrena taught her in fourth grade – the landlord asks the firemen about her business first. Is she liable for the inadequate smoke alarms? (No, she is not.) Is she obligated to return Kamala's rent money for the month since the apartment no longer exists? (No, she is not.)

"The only positive thing I can say is happening out of all of this," Sherrena reflects, "is that I may get a huge chunk of money" in the form of an insurance payout.

Sherrena may even care about Kamala and the tragic loss of her baby, but her number one priority is her own financial worries. The mortgage bills are relentless; at one point, after completing some expensive repairs, Sherrena reportedly has only a few dollars in her checking account to sustain her until the next round of rents roll in.

Nonetheless, Kamala's loss becomes Sherrena's gain, and cash grows from the ruins.

This is no aberration. As Desmond points out, often a landlord's "worst properties yielded her best returns." Sherrena brings in hundreds of thousands of dollars a year in rent from a small empire of properties worth over \$2 million. Her white counterpart south of the river, second-generation landlord Tobin Charney, rakes in close to half a million per year from trailer park rents. (How much money flows from these local landlords to banks and their investors is a question *Evicted* leaves mostly unexplored.)

The fatal February fire dramatizes the life-and-death stakes of America's housing system, reminding us that Milwaukee has been burning for years. Mostly, though, *Evicted* does not focus on the spectacular blazes but on the slow smoldering, the everyday suffocation of people stuck in the lowest sectors of American society.

Even those whose homes do not go up in flames often end up losing their belongings, as the rates charged by storage companies exceed their ability to pay. Their stuff gets left curbside, or worse, locked in storage for a few months, until the payments lapse. Then it gets junked, or else, sold.

Of course, local landlords and storage companies aren't the only ones exacerbating poverty in pursuit of profit. Business interests have been working to produce poverty in Milwaukee for a long time. As Desmond writes:

Milwaukee used to be flush with good jobs. But throughout the second half of the twentieth century, bosses in search of cheap labor moved plants overseas or to Sunbelt communities, where unions were weaker or didn't exist. Between 1979 and 1983, Milwaukee's manufacturing sector lost more jobs than during the Great Depression – about fifty-six thousand of them.

The city where virtually everyone had a job in the postwar years saw its unemployment rate climb into the double digits. Those who found new work in the emerging service sector took a pay cut. As one historian observed, "Machinists in the old Allis-Chalmers plant earned at least \$11.60 an hour; clerks in the shopping center that replaced much of that plant in 1987 earned \$5.23."

These massive job losses and slashed wages were compounded by "the end of welfare as we know it," which cut assistance to the poor just when they needed it most, further stigmatizing those dependent on government aid to survive.

Deindustrialization not only spread poverty, it also deepened long-standing racial divisions in "America's most segregated city." As Desmond continues:

When plants closed, they tended to close in the inner city, where black Milwaukeeans lived. The black poverty rate rose to 28 percent in 1980. By 1990, it had climbed to 42 percent ... Today in Milwaukee ... one in two working-age African American men doesn't have a job.

TRAILER PARK PRIVILEGE

The impact of racial discrimination on housing is of central interest for Desmond. He highlights the significantly steeper eviction rates and the

higher rates of poverty and violence African American inner-city residents face relative to poor whites. In the wake of the recent protests, this important aspect has been much discussed.

Yet most critics' frame the problem in a limited way. For example, in her review of *Evicted* Katha Pollit argues.

Desmond lays out the crucial role housing plays in creating and reinforcing white privilege. In Milwaukee, one of the most segregated cities in the United States, all black people suffer from housing discrimination and all white people benefit at least a little from the racial dividend.

Desmond himself goes further, confronting readers with the open expressions of white supremacy that remain all too easy to find among poor white Milwaukeeans. But if we push Desmond even further, we can see how this "racial dividend" for white people also isolates and punishes them, ultimately distorting and undercutting white working-class political agency and making all poor people more vulnerable to exploitation. The existence of a super-exploited, predominantly black ghetto combines with working-class whites' racist attitudes to shore up an exploitative system, particularly during moments of crisis.

Thus, when local politicians and media turn Tobin Charney's ill-maintained – but very profitable – trailer park into a matter of public scandal, his tenants rally to defend him. The fear of being pushed out of their current homes and into the "black ghetto" of the North Side makes Charney appear as an ally. As Desmond puts it:

That was the heart of it, what trailer park residents feared the most. When Mary and Tina and Mrs. Meyers and the whole trailer park talked about having to leave, what they were talking about was the possibility of having to move into the black ghetto.

Susie was one of several residents who had previously lived on the North Side, where her adult son had had a gun stuck in his face. "The alderman said this is a ghetto slum," she vented. "I'll show you a ghetto!" The situation twisted Susie's stomach so much that her son hid her pain pills, fearing she'd swallow a handful.

Junk-collector Rufus also rallies to Charney's cause, declaring in a speech for the media that "this is no slumlord. This is not a bad man."

The existence of the North Side – both as material fact and as racist mystification – allows Charney to become, by comparison, "not a bad man." It allows an overcrowded, rundown, poverty-stricken, and sewage-seeping trailer park to appear as "not a ghetto."

Rather than seizing on public attention to press for much-needed improvements or for other meaningful reforms, the park residents cling to their existing conditions, rallying to the defense of a man whose six-figure annual income comes directly from their meager paychecks. Milwaukee's white poor don't benefit from a racial dividend here, they are trapped by it.

Liberal accounts of white privilege like Pollit's tend to ignore this social control aspect, reinforcing a zero-sum game that pits white poor against black, while obscuring their common class interest in eliminating racial disparities and ideologies alike.

Part of the problem may lie in how Charney encourages his residents to see themselves as owners. As Desmond notes, "all but twenty trailers [out of well over one hundred] in the park were owner-occupied." And yet, he points out, "The only benefit to owning your trailer was psychological."

Indeed, far from protecting them from exploitation or eviction, ownership renders them all the more vulnerable, obscuring their landlord's predation. Desmond discerns that residents feel a pervasive tolerance for – and, in some cases, admiration of – Charney's millions, which speaks to the psychological power of "ownership society." After all, aren't many of them "owners" just like him?

ISOLATED RESISTANCE

Back on the North Side, Desmond reports several residents' fitful attempts to resist the power of landlords, but they remain dispersed, individual, ineffective – and meet with swift repression.

At one point, Patrice and Doreen, two of Sherrena's tenants, separately decide to withhold rent to pressure their landlord for much-needed repairs. All they get are eviction notices. As Desmond points out, though housing law

recognizes a tenant's right to withhold rent in response to landlord neglect, in Wisconsin this does not apply to tenants already in arrears, which low-income renters often are. Economic inequality undercuts the law's formal fairness.

The justice system clamps down even more brutally in the case of Vanetta, a single mother (and domestic violence survivor) who we meet in a homeless shelter. After having her hours at work slashed from five days to one, she takes desperate action to pay her electricity bill and thus keep Child Protective Services from taking her kids away.

She agrees to a friend's plan to hold up two female shoppers. Police pick them up within hours. If they'd run, they might have been killed in the street like Sylville Smith.

In her confession, Vanetta explains that she "was desperate to pay my bills and I was nervous and scared and did not want to see my kids in the dark or out in the street." The presiding judge recognizes the persistent poverty that motivated Vanetta's crime, but nonetheless sentences her to "eighty-one months in the state prison system," broken into "fifteen months of extended confinement" and "sixty-six months of extended supervision." Her children watch as she is led away in handcuffs.

This moment brings out some of Desmond's most impassioned prose, as he renders explicit the ruling's subtext:

What the judge was saying, in essence, was: We all agree that you were poor and scared when you did this violent, hurtful thing, and if you had been allowed to go on working five days a week at Old Country Buffet ... none of us would be here right now. You might have been able to save up enough to move to an apartment that was de-leaded and live in a neighborhood without drug dealers and with safe schools ... But that's not what happened.

What happened was that your hours were cut, and your electricity was about to be shut off, and you and your children were about to be thrown out of your home and you snatched somebody's purse as your friend pointed a gun at her face. And if it was poverty that caused this crime, who's to say you won't do it again? Because you were poor then and you are poor now. We all see the underlying cause, we see it every day in this court, but the

justice system is no charity, no jobs program, no Housing Authority. If we cannot pull the weed up by the roots, then at least we can cut it low at the stem.

At such moments, Desmond helps us understand the criminal justice system's logic, even as he rails against it. It controls and punishes those who can't find work, cutting them down and tearing them away from their families, even as it knows that the real problem lies elsewhere.

OPPOSING INTERESTS

Right up until the end of *Evicted*, Desmond foregrounds systemic class antagonism:

Regardless of how landlords came to own property – sweat, intelligence, or ingenuity for some; inheritance, luck, or fraud for others – rising rents mean more money for landlords and less for tenants. Their fates are bound and their interests opposed.

This, Desmond argues, confronts us with a genuine contradiction: “There are two freedoms at odds with each other: the freedom to profit from rents and the freedom to live in a safe and affordable home.”

Readers might expect the author to side with the latter, but in the very next paragraph he tries to smooth the opposition over. “There is a way we can rebalance these two freedoms,” he writes, by “significantly expanding our housing voucher program so that all low-income families could benefit from it A universal housing voucher program,” he explains, “would carve a middle path between the landlord’s desire to make a living and the tenant’s desire, simply, to live.”

Desmond’s proposal is deeply problematic. While it would give some housing protection to the poor, it would also “transfer [a state subsidy] directly to landlords.” Unlike rent control, or the publicly financed construction of nonprofit housing, the vouchers Desmond champions do not challenge the financial interests of real estate owners. Rather they promise to steady – and indeed to dramatically increase – the flow of rent to private landlords (not to mention the bankers above them).

Most immediately, pumping public money into the private housing market does nothing to bring down rapidly increasing rents. Indeed, as Desmond himself admits (in an endnote):

There is some evidence . . . that our current voucher program might be driving up everybody's rent: not only voucher holders' but unassisted renters' too. The main reason is simple. If millions of poor people opt out of the private market for public housing, that will lower demand and, thus, rent at the bottom of the market. If those people are reintroduced to the private market, voucher in hand, that will increase demand and, with it, rent.

Thus, while Desmond's "universal" voucher program might provide some temporary breathing room to millions of our poorest, it threatens to do so at the expense of millions of other middle-income and working-class people.

One can defend the proposal in humanitarian terms, but strategically speaking, it plays into the hands of those who would pit the working poor against the reserve army of the unemployed. Desmond makes no proposal that might unite these sectors around their common interests as renters. (His second proposal, to grant court-appointed representation to those facing eviction, is less problematic.)

Furthermore, Desmond's proposed voucher would funnel billions in taxpayer dollars right back into the pockets of landlords, a class whose interests remain – as Desmond reminds us – “fundamentally opposed” to those of renters. This plan does not just postpone the fight for public housing or rent control, it strengthens those forces committed to making sure such proposals never happen.

As Desmond points out elsewhere, the idea of rental vouchers originated with the private real estate industry, which promoted them as an alternative to public housing after World War II. “Landlords and Realtors saw government-built and -managed buildings offered at cut-rate rents as a direct threat to their legitimacy and bottom line.” They called for “rent certificates” instead, denouncing public housing as “the cutting edge of the Communist front.” Senator Joseph McCarthy (of Wisconsin, it's worth noting) cut his teeth in this fight.

The industry could not eliminate public housing from the 1949 Housing Act, but it has since worked to defund and delegitimize the idea – a huge win for real estate circles.

How can Desmond’s powerful account of contemporary tenants end with a call to enact policies preferred by their exploiters?

It makes sense that Desmond would ground his closing call for “establishing the basic right to housing in America” in a certain pragmatic logic, considering austerity’s decades-long hold over social services. But while framing his proposal as a “universal” solution sounds bold, it leaves us enmeshed in structures of class exploitation.

THE LANDLORD CLASS

Making the call for vouchers all the more puzzling, *Evicted* shows a deep awareness of the growing class power of landlords. Desmond takes us to two different landlord-organizing sessions – one with Sherrena Tarver, and one with Tobin Charney, both south of the river.

Meeting in local hotels and function halls, property owners encourage one another, swap tips and legal insights, form social bonds, and consolidate a collective identity opposed to those they refer to as the “dregs of society” – their tenants. Desmond underlines the novelty of these events:

A couple generations ago, a gathering like this would have been virtually unheard of. Many landlords were part-timers: machinists or preachers or police officers who came to own property almost by accident (through inheritance, say) and saw real estate as a side gig. But the last forty years had witnessed the professionalization of property management. Since 1970, the number of people primarily employed as property managers had more than quadrupled.

As more landlords began buying more property and thinking of themselves primarily as landlords (instead of people who happened to own the unit downstairs), professional associations proliferated, and with them support services, accreditations, training materials, and financial instruments.

According to the Library of Congress, only three books offering apartment-management advice were published between 1951 and 1975. Between 1976

and 2014, the number rose to 215. Even if most landlords in a given city did not consider themselves “professionals,” housing had become a business.

Later on, Desmond provides an extended glimpse into Milwaukee’s Landlord Training Program, a state-funded program Charney is required to attend after his property’s decrepit conditions become public. Far from a lesson in respecting tenants’ rights or improving conditions, the session focuses on how landlords can maximize control over their tenants. It ends with a speaker leading attendees in a call-and-response chant, “This is my property . . . This is my property! . . . This is my property! Myyyy property!”

These landlords may compete with one another, but together they affirm their class identity, unapologetic owners of the places where other people live.

Charney’s tenants, on the other hand, appear isolated, discouraged, and divided from one another – not to mention from their fellow renters across the river. At one point, Scott, a former nurse and recovering heroin addict, lands a job to help him avoid eviction – cleaning out the homes of the recently evicted. While Scott works, his own trailer gets raided, this time not by the landlord but by another park resident; his neighbor looks on and lets it happen. On the North Side as well, under intense stress, friendships dissolve or even turn violent.

That said, a certain culture of mutual aid persists on both sides of the river. “All over the city,” Desmond writes, “people who lived in distressed neighborhoods were more likely to help their neighbors pay bills, buy groceries, fix their car, or lend a hand in other ways, compared to their peers in better-off areas.” But this ethic of mutual aid does not translate into political solidarity.

Indeed, in some ways it might even work against it. Desmond suggests that the public exposure of residents’ acute need undercuts their belief in collective power. “A community that saw so clearly its own pain had a difficult time also sensing its potential.” That is, people’s sense of shame – and their shaming of others – bars the development of solidarity.

Desmond’s housing voucher proposal might take some of the pressure off of these people, giving social bonds among them more of a chance. But it

would do so by enlisting taxpayers in the cause of further enriching landlords. Moreover, as a program targeted only at the very poorest, it risks further stigmatizing and shaming those it aims to help.

SHIFTING VISION

Desmond struggles to see a way out of this impasse, and draws on Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward's 1979 book, *Poor People's Movements* for guidance. Piven and Cloward argue that "for a protest movement to arise out of [the] traumas of daily life, the social arrangements that are ordinarily perceived as just and immutable must come to seem both unjust and mutable."

"It was not enough simply to perceive injustice," Desmond adds, "Mass resistance was possible only when people believed they had the collective capacity to change things. For poor people, this required identifying with the oppressed, and counting yourself among them – which was something most trailer park residents were absolutely unwilling to do."

In the place of solidarity, Desmond finds widespread disidentification:

For most [trailer park] residents . . . the goal was to leave, not to plant roots and change things. Some residents described themselves as "just passing through," even if they had been passing through nearly all their life.

Lacking a sense of potential – and eager to identify with lives lived elsewhere – the poor tenants that Desmond lived with show a high tolerance for the status quo.

And yet, Desmond reminds us, things once looked very different. Evictions "used to draw crowds." He nostalgically references a New York Times story from 1932 about community resistance: "Probably because of the cold," he quotes, "the crowd numbered only 1,000." Throwing the present into stark relief, Desmond recalls a prior era of renter rebellion:

In years past, renters opposed landlords and saw themselves as a "class" with shared interests and a unified purpose. During the early twentieth century, tenants organized against evictions and unsanitary conditions.

When landlords raised rents too often or too steeply, tenants went so far as to stage rent strikes. Strikers joined together to withhold rent and form picket lines, risking eviction, arrest, and beatings by hired thugs.

Desmond offers a paradoxical assessment of the rebel renters. On the one hand, he emphasizes their fundamental difference from the people he observes today. But he also emphasizes their similarity: “They were not an especially radical bunch, these strikers,” he writes, “Most were ordinary mothers and fathers who believed landlords were entitled to modest rent increases and fair profits, but not ‘price-gouging.’”

We should credit Desmond for bringing this history into view. After all, he could easily have confined *Evicted* to what he personally observed in Milwaukee. Nonetheless he misleads his readers when he downplays – in fact, suppresses – a crucial element of past tenant resistance: the role played by radical ideas and organization.

At least according to the landlords, politicians, and newspapers of the time, the Bronx rent strikers were radicals. The Bronx Home News described the same strike Desmond alludes to above: “When news of the [strike] settlement reached the crowd, they promptly began chanting the Internationale and waving copies of the Daily Worker as though they were banners of triumph.” Democratic politician Benjamin Antin reportedly told Bronx landlords that “this is a peculiar neighborhood . . . the hot bed of Communism and radicalism.”

Max Kaimowitz, one of the Bronx rent strike leaders, summarized his position:

When times were good, the landlords didn’t offer to share their profits with us. The landlords made enough money off us when we had it. Now that we haven’t got it, the landlords must be satisfied with less.

No doubt, the people who participated in such actions were “ordinary mothers and fathers.” But they came to see themselves as a class in part because of the radical organizers in their midst.

Desmond avoids mentioning this basic historical fact. He understates – or altogether ignores – the important role consciously anticapitalist forces played in these working-class communities.

It is quite an irony to discover that a text which repeatedly laments the loss of militant class-conscious tenant organizing steers clear of such a key element – especially one that unlike, say, mass industrial employment, we might bring back ourselves.

This suppression matters because it affects how we see the present.

This is not to suggest that embedding a few hundred radical organizers among today's exploited renters would spark a new wave of rent strikes and tenant unions. Nor is it to argue that such mobilizations would force rent control measures or a massive investment in public housing – let alone the outright socializing of existing private housing stock – onto the political agenda. (Although it might not hurt.)

But without some sort of organized and class-conscious group, committed to helping poor and working-class people seize the social meaning and political power latent in their conditions, such actions are unlikely to occur.

Moreover, by scrubbing the role played by communists and socialists from his text, Desmond misses the powerful role of anticommunism and the Cold War in diminishing the political power of the American working class.

Anticommunism rendered the politics of anticapitalist working-class struggle “un-American,” intolerable, and hence even unthinkable, thereby helping repress the possibility of addressing the systemic exploitation that is *Evicted's* central theme. Desmond suggests as much when he cites the redbaiting that helped to sink public housing.

Yet he passes a version of housing struggle history scrubbed free of reds onto his readers, reproducing the sense of impossibility liberal discourse confines us to. He suggests that working people are, ultimately, the products of their time – not the shapers of it. Even worse: that poor people are capable of feelings but not of ideas.

“A community that saw so clearly its own pain,” Desmond writes, “had a difficult time sensing its potential.” No doubt. But radical educators and organizers can help people see that what they’ve long understood as matters of individual or personal failings in fact represent social matters, produced by political decisions and subject to historical change.

Doing so helps people to see that they are not alone in their suffering, and, moreover, that deprivation is not a necessary state of affairs, but rather the result of actions and institutions that have been deliberately set up by those who aim to exploit them.

Of course, Desmond knows that dramatizing suffering is not enough. How we see the suffering matters. Yet he suppresses the conscious political effort that helped renters of the thirties to see – and to fight – their landlords in class terms. In doing so, he obscures one of the key tasks of today.

Nonetheless, Desmond’s powerful book is worthy of serious attention. By so poignantly tracing the causes and effects of profiteering, *Evicted* has the potential to call forth political desires and discussions that transcend the author’s own prescriptions, aiming instead at something more radical: a society that truly puts human need before profit.

IMMIGRATION

HOW CENTRISTS FAILED IMMIGRANTS

DANIEL DENVIR

In November 2009, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano laid out President Barack Obama's immigration agenda at the Center for American Progress, a liberal Washington think tank with close ties to the White House. After eight years of George W. Bush, voters seemed to expect change. But on immigration, Napolitano pledged to achieve reform through more of the same.

Comprehensive reform comprised a "three-legged stool," she said, echoing centrist conventional wisdom: legal status for undocumented immigrants, greater opportunities for authorized immigration, and an enforcement crackdown. As usual, the crackdown would come first.

"It's an affront to every law-abiding citizen and every employer who plays by the rules," said Napolitano, referring to the presence of an estimated 11.1 million unauthorized immigrants. "We are both a nation of immigrants and a nation of laws."

Napolitano's insistence on enforcement measures like mass deportations as a precondition for legalization mirrors the recent political history of immigration reform in this country. Under Obama and Bush, business-aligned "establishment" wings of both major parties have tried to use tough enforcement policies in an effort to gain the cooperation of the virulently xenophobic right wing for the other two legs of the stool. But that cooperation never came.

Reformers failed to advance legalization — they could never bring the right to the table. But they did succeed in dramatically expanding punitive immigration enforcement.

The enforcement-first strategy has resulted in hundreds of miles of border fencing, a dramatically enlarged Border Patrol, a brutally efficient

deportation pipeline – and a hard right that is more insistent on mass deportations and border walls than ever. Legalization efforts collapsed along with the political center that championed it.

The three-legged stool was supposed to protect “hardworking” immigrants and deport those who were undesirable criminals. In reality, centrists deployed just one leg – and it was used to relentlessly beat up on immigrants of all sorts.

Finally, under pressure from immigrant rights groups, Obama took executive action to shield many from deportation. But his administration had already spent years orchestrating mass deportations, deepening the links between immigration enforcement and the criminal justice system, and pledging to secure an already-militarized border – thus lending credence to right-wing sentiment that immigrants are criminals or hostile foreign agents.

Seeking to placate the right wing, the bipartisan establishment ended up angering everyone: Obama prompted the anti-deportation movement to mobilize against him and fed into a false narrative about unsecured borders and criminal aliens that helped lead to the rise of Donald Trump.

Trump made his way to the top of the Republican Party by calling immigrants criminals and rapists. But he wasn’t the first to use such rhetoric on his own – Democrats and moderate Republicans had endorsed such ideas for years. Immigrants were caught in the crossfire. And there they remain.

OBAMA'S DEPORTATION PIPELINE

The centerpiece of Obama’s deportation efforts, and the best window into the Democrats’ lurch toward the right on immigration, was the Secure Communities program, initiated under Bush in October 2008.

Secure Communities gave the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) access to an FBI database of fingerprints entered by local law enforcement after an arrest. As a result, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) received a flood of positive identifications on deportable immigrants.

ICE then issued a cascade of “detainers,” asking that immigrants be held for forty-eight hours past their release time – or far longer, given that

detainers blocked people from getting released on bail – for pickup and, ultimately, deportation proceedings. By 2013, according to testimony from a Migration Policy Institute analyst before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Secure Communities was responsible for a majority of all deportations.

Secure Communities initially received little media attention even as grassroots immigrant rights groups saw people in their communities being deported and began to mobilize against it. In November 2009, when DHS announced that Secure Communities had “identified more than 111,000 criminal aliens in local custody during its first year,” the program was still little known.

That changed in April 2010 when Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer signed the virulently anti-immigrant law SB 1070, which among other things directed local law enforcement to search out people suspected of being undocumented immigrants even if they had committed no crime. The “show me your papers” law energized immigrant activists and liberals wary of the Tea Party’s rise nationwide, and drew a successful legal challenge from the Obama Administration.

SB 1070 drew a successful legal challenge from the Obama Administration. Immigrant rights activists, however, seized the opportunity to point out that Obama’s Secure Communities wasn’t altogether unlike SB 1070: both turned local law enforcement into immigration agents and created an automated deportation pipeline that began in local jails.

“Any mundane encounter with police officers could quickly become a life-changing problem for many migrants, whether they were in the United States with the federal government’s permission or not,” said César Cuauhtémoc García Hernández, a professor at University of Denver Sturm College of Law.

Unlike Arizona’s unabashedly right-wing law, Obama’s soft-spoken and sanitized mass deportation program was implemented with little scrutiny. Immigrant rights activists, however, were determined to link the two and turned to city halls nationwide in an effort to thwart Secure Communities at its entry point.

Advocates charged that the program made local police a de facto arm of ICE and that immigrants would be afraid to report common crimes. The program could also, they warned, incentivize local police to make racially biased stops, using common offenses like traffic violations as a pretext to hand people over to ICE.

A growing number of elected officials and law enforcement leaders echoed this criticism. In May 2010, the Washington, D.C., City Council unanimously announced their support for a resolution calling on the city to boycott Arizona—part of a nationwide movement—alongside a bill instructing police to not share arrest data with DHS. Other cities, like Arlington, Virginia, and Santa Clara, California, tried to block Secure Communities as well. In 2011, Illinois, New York, and Massachusetts announced that they were pulling out of the program.

But it turned out that it would be nearly impossible to do so. That August, DHS tore up their agreements with localities and asserted that the program was essentially mandatory.

All along, ICE had sent mixed messages about whether localities could actually opt out, suggesting at some points that it was voluntary, at other times that it was compulsory. Now, ICE was on the defensive. The National Day Laborer Organizing Network and others filed a major public records lawsuit, revealing internal discussions about how to handle the rebellion. One takeaway, according to the federal judge handling the case, was that there was “ample evidence that ICE and DHS have gone out of their way to mislead the public about Secure Communities.”

Activists had forced the federal government to reveal that its mass deportation campaign had always been premised on a lie: it wasn't federal cooperation with localities but rather a negotiation-free imposition. ICE was happy for localities to believe Secure Communities was voluntary only so long as everyone volunteered.

By the end of 2010, the percentage of individuals targeted by detainers who were actually taken into ICE custody fell to 57.7 percent, down from 71.8 percent in October 2008, according to data analyzed by Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, or TRAC. In December 2012, it fell to just 54.6 percent. In part, that might have been due

to ICE lacking the capacity to deport the huge number of undocumented immigrants flagged by the new system. It also likely reflected the spreading resistance to the program.

Obama was pushing hard on deportations in an effort to appease the Right. Instead, he provoked the Latino communities that formed a critical part of the Democratic coalition to mobilize against him – while the Right remained unsatisfied.

CRIMMIGRATION

Obama's criminalization of immigrant communities, however intensive, isn't new. It built on policies dating back to the Reagan Administration. For decades, immigration enforcement, long primarily a civil matter, has become entangled with the criminal justice system. Experts call it "crimmigration."

The term applies to programs like Secure Communities, which use the criminal justice system to enforce immigration laws, and also to the fact that immigration enforcement became a driver of mass incarceration. Tens of thousands of border crossers are now behind bars at any given moment – not only in civil detention centers pending deportation but also in federal penitentiaries serving hard time.

Federal prosecutions of immigrants charged with illegally reentering the country, a felony, rose steadily under Presidents Clinton and Bush, then skyrocketed under Obama. Prosecutions for illegally entering the country, a misdemeanor, have jumped as well. Today, people convicted of immigration-related offenses make up roughly 9 percent of the federal prison population, or 15,702 inmates.

Obama certainly didn't invent crimmigration. That distinction belongs to politicians waging the war on drugs during the 1980s and 1990s, who tied the narcotic threat to immigrants. As has become clear this election, the Right can easily link distinct sources of perceived external threat to one another in Americans' minds.

It was a key early drug-war law, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, which made the first statutory reference to detainers, says Christopher Lasch, a professor at the University of Denver's Sturm College of Law. Later, those

detainers would become the key tool under Secure Communities to transfer immigrants from local to federal custody.

“Often, those dealing drugs have entered this country illegally and show absolutely no fear of United States law,” Rep. Gary Ackerman, a Democrat from New York, said at the time. If a suspect in local custody “is determined to be an illegal alien the INS must take the necessary actions to detain the suspect and process the case.”

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 also tied immigrants to the narcotic threat, subjecting noncitizens convicted of the newly coined category of “aggravated felonies,” defined as murder, drug trafficking and firearms trafficking, to mandatory detention, said García Hernández.

But the nativist right wasn’t yet setting the agenda because establishment figures like President Ronald Reagan, who opposed restrictionist policies in part because of his alliance with business, were firmly in control. In 1986, Reagan signed the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which legalized nearly 2.7 million immigrants, increased the size of the Border Patrol and, in a move that prompted opposition from Latino civil rights groups, included a crackdown on employers who hired unauthorized immigrants.

Just as today, establishment centrists paired enforcement with legalization. Ultimately, however, the country’s last major legalization program was a big success. But the employer sanctions failed to have much impact, and unauthorized migration from Mexico grew.

Still, nativists had not yet gained traction and centrists maintained the upper hand. In 1990 President George H.W. Bush signed a law that actually expanded authorized immigration. The nativists, however, would soon come off the fringe.

The contemporary nativist movement dates to the late 1970s and was rooted in hysterical concerns over population growth’s purported effect on the environment. And, of course, racism: a 1965 law abolished a long-standing and unabashedly discriminatory system favoring Europeans, causing immigration from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean to soar, in addition to the influx of refugees from Communist nations. Legal pathways for Mexican workers, however, had narrowed over the years. Unauthorized

flows of Mexican migrants, largely dictated by economic conditions on the both sides of the border, rose dramatically.

In the early 1990s, the movement exploded as an anti-immigrant earthquake shook American politics. California was its epicenter. A recession had taken hold, and the number of immigrants, authorized and not, was growing. In 1990, the estimated number of undocumented immigrants living in the United States stood at 3.5 million, and would rise to 5.7 million five years later.

For decades, hostility toward immigration has risen and fallen alongside the unemployment rate. In California, the nativist right seized the opportunity with the 1994 passage of Proposition 187.

Prop 187 denied public services to undocumented immigrants and required localities to report them to Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS, the federal immigration agency before the post-9/11 reorganization creating DHS). It asserted that people in California, which at the time was home to more than one-third of all foreign-born people nationwide, “suffered” not only “economic hardship” but also “personal injury and damage caused by the criminal conduct of illegal immigrants in this state.”

Republican Gov. Pete Wilson made the proposition a centerpiece of his reelection campaign and rode it to victory.

According to Frank Sharry, a longtime advocate and the executive director of the major immigrant rights organization America’s Voice, “The anti-immigrant groups were trying to figure out how to catch fire. And they were really effective at using the media, particularly newsmagazine shows,” said Sharry.

Demagogues, as they would continue to do over the following decades, took advantage of economic anxiety and security concerns to foment xenophobic sentiment. After the 1992 Los Angeles riots, far-right Republican presidential contender Pat Buchanan charged that “foreigners are coming into this country illegally and helping to burn down one of the greatest cities in America.”

“I can’t understand why this Administration fails to enforce the laws and close that border,” Buchanan told a crowd of senior citizens. “If I were President, I would have the Corps of Engineers build a double-barrier fence that would keep out 95 percent of the illegal traffic. I think it can be done.”

In 1994, Newt Gingrich’s Republicans won control of Congress and the nativist tide rolled into Washington. But they rolled in with President Bill Clinton’s assistance.

Clinton merged his wars on crime and drugs with an immigration crackdown, signing the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, or IIRIRA, which harshly punished immigrants who had committed crimes. The law transformed immigration policy by making it easier to deport immigrants (undocumented and permanent residents alike) for a growing number of criminal offenses, made those individuals’ detentions mandatory and foreclosed most opportunities for relief. It also authorized a program called 287(g), which allowed the federal government to authorize local law enforcement to enforce immigration law.

“There certainly were things that the administration did not like in the bill,” said Doris Meissner, INS Commissioner under Bill Clinton and currently a senior fellow at the Migration Policy Institute. “And there were things that when it came to implementation, the way we went about implementing it was not necessarily what was pleasing to a lot people in the Congress. But [Clinton] was not about to be vetoing an immigration enforcement bill in ‘96 given the law enforcement agenda that he was pursuing, of which immigration enforcement was a part.”

Meissner said the administration slow-walked implementation, failing to sign a single 287(g) agreement to deputize local law enforcement and jails to enforce immigration law and only narrowly implementing “expedited removal” (which allows authorities to deport some migrants with little recourse to any judicial review).

At the time, the debate consuming centrist Democrats and Republicans was over how much to push back against the anti-immigrant right. There wasn’t so much a discussion over legalizing undocumented immigrants so much as whether to cut the number of authorized immigrants allowed into the

country. When it came to enforcement, the question was not whether the policy should be harsh, but just how harsh it should be.

“The mid-nineties was when the anti-immigrant crowd really gained a lot of momentum,” said Sharry. They “made significant headway in their desire to characterize immigrants as welfare cheats, as criminals, as threats to the economy” and, after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, “as security threats . . . The combined effect was to criminalize immigration in a dramatically new way.”

Unlike the centrists who would follow, Clinton wasn’t preoccupied with immigration reform’s three-legged stool. For Clinton, it was just about enforcement, which he tried to use to ward off Republican attacks. Clinton spent heavily on the INS, and to increase the size of the Border Patrol. His chief of staff, Leon Panetta, boasted of the administration’s “comprehensive anti-illegal immigration policy that beefs up our border and workplace enforcement inspections and has used the criminal justice system to deport a record number of criminals and other illegal aliens.”

Clinton laid the groundwork for a deportation pipeline that operationalized a rapidly-growing criminal justice system to remove millions from the country, militarized the border, and nurtured a paranoiac far-right narrative about a criminal alien invasion. This was all in an attempt to outflank the Republicans. But Clinton ended up just capitulating to the Right’s punitive demands. The pattern would repeat itself again and again over the following two decades. During the Clinton years, the parameters of the debate over immigration, much as with welfare and crime, were set by conservatives.

“He saw law enforcement as an issue that he wanted Democrats to basically take back from Republicans,” said Meissner. “Illegal immigration was increasing and increasing and that was politically an initiative that Clinton felt – in the same way that he felt with welfare reform – that was part of a new Democratic-centrist set of ideas and commitments.”

The goal was to strike a tough pose, tacking to the right in an effort to capture the center while staying just to Republicans’ left.

Staying to Republicans’ left, of course, was easy. During the 1996 presidential campaign, Republican candidate Bob Dole went so far as to

support a proposal that would allow states to deny undocumented children access to public schools. He even attacked Clinton for making it so that “illegal aliens afflicted with AIDS cannot be denied taxpayer-funded medical treatment, no matter how high the cost.”

One terror-inducing Dole attack ad slammed Clinton for opposing California’s Prop 187 and accused him of giving “citizenship to aliens with criminal records” against a stark backdrop of prisoners and young and ostensibly Chicano men walking down the street.

“Twenty thousand in our prisons; four hundred thousand crowd our schools. Every year they cost us \$3 billion tax dollars,” the narrator intoned. “We pay the taxes. We are the victims. Our children get shortchanged. If Clinton wins, we lose.”

Clinton, who responded to Dole’s attacks with an ad that boasted of signing “a tough anti-illegal immigration law protecting US workers,” won big in part by simultaneously cracking down on immigrants and casting Republicans as extremists.

Republicans, said University of Oregon political scientist Daniel Tichenor, were “trying to crack down on a problem that their base perceived as critical” while Clinton was “trying to be reactive and I think quite skilled at . . . casting Republicans as broadly anti-immigrant.” The president won a greater share of Latino and Asian voters in 1996 than he had in 1992.

While Clinton may have scored a short-term political victory, the real advantage would accrue to the Right. The myriad problems perceived to be caused by immigrants were becoming inseparable in American politics.

Criminality was mentioned alongside concerns over government spending and labor competition, and the criminal justice system was becoming a key enforcement tool. The war on crime shaped Clinton’s approach not only to traditional law and order matters but to immigration as well. It helped to craft a legal and political template – and a fundamentally punitive and criminological way of thinking about immigration – that would shape policy from then on.

THE POST-9/11 BACKLASH

By the end of his second term, Clinton had done so much to outflank his right-wing critics that further crackdowns or restrictionist measures landed on the back burner.

“A couple of years ago people were advocating to build a wall around the country,” Senator Spencer Abraham, a Michigan Republican, said in 1998. “That’s no longer the case. Before, we had heard only one side of the immigration issue. Now, we get to talk about some of the positive contributions immigrants have made.”

As the economy boomed and more virulent xenophobia declined, a push to legalize unauthorized immigrants, who numbered an estimated 8.6 million in 2000, took shape. That year, the AFL-CIO, thanks to new, progressive leadership, announced a historic shift to embrace legalizing undocumented workers.

But mostly, the subject went unmentioned. A New York Times story on presidential candidates Al Gore and George W. Bush’s aggressive courtship of the Hispanic vote only mentioned immigrants once in passing. Unemployment was down, so unsurprisingly, immigration was not discussed in any of the presidential debates.

With nativist anger at a nadir, after Bush took office in 2001, his aides discussed a legalization program. The president was negotiating with his Mexican counterpart and friend, Vicente Fox. Bush had won just over one-third of the Latino vote. But his pollsters predicted he would have to do even better to win reelection in 2004. Conservative states like Utah, North Carolina and Tennessee were issuing drivers licenses to undocumented immigrants. The rise of Bush, who liked to break into Spanish at campaign events and touted a “compassionate conservative” agenda, suggested that the Republican pendulum had swung away from Gov. Wilson’s harsh rhetoric of the mid-1990s.

But after the September 11 attacks, everything about immigration, like so many political issues, was transformed. The discussion shifted sharply back to enforcement.

Hundreds of immigrants, often from majority-Muslim countries, were quickly jailed and held on immigration charges – often in what the Justice Department inspector general found to be physically and verbally abusive conditions – and then deported. Tens of thousands of noncitizens from a list of almost exclusively Muslim and Arab nations were forced to register with authorities.

"If a loophole can be exploited by an immigrant, it can also be exploited by a terrorist," said one DHS official, summarizing the new conventional wisdom linking national security and immigration.

The national security scare spiraled into a nationwide panic over immigration. Using tools signed into law by Clinton, Bush increasingly relied on the criminal justice system to crack down. This time, the goal wasn't so much to placate or outflank the right. Rather, it was one piece of the domestic War on Terror's new national security state, indifferent to civil liberties, that rose from the World Trade Center's ashes.

"People start to see immigration as a real national security issue," said Juliet Stumpf, a professor at Lewis & Clark Law School. "After September 11, there is a real emphasis on using the crimmigration deportation grounds and mandatory detention."

After the attacks, local police began to play a major role in enforcement. The first agreement deputizing local cops or jails to conduct immigration enforcement was signed in 2002, even though they had been authorized since Clinton signed them into law in 1996, according to the Center for Immigration Studies, the leading anti-immigrant think tank. Thanks to the terrorist attack, an issue that hadn't interested many Americans just a few years prior was now a preeminent domestic policy concern.

By 2004, presidential debate moderator Bob Schieffer told Bush and John Kerry that he had received "more email this week on" immigration "than any other question." Bush, who had just that year proposed a legalization program, responded by attacking his opponent for backing "amnesty." Kerry, while defending legalization, falsely asserted that "the borders are more leaking today than they were before 9/11," adding that "we now have people from the Middle East, allegedly, coming across the border."

Once again, the right wing had set the parameters of debate over immigration with Democrats' eager acquiescence. Supposed centrists from both parties stood by proposals to legalize undocumented immigrants but conveyed outright lies about border security in an effort to win credibility. Predictably, that effort not only failed but actually backfired, further stoking post-9/11 nativist public sentiment.

"Perhaps people feel like that is the politically necessary thing to say in order to gain Republican support to move forward with other things that we truly need to do, like immigration reform," said Democratic US Rep. Beto O'Rourke of El Paso, Texas, asked about the bipartisan track record of demonizing the border. "But it only adds to the impression that the average American has that the border is out of control, that it's lawless, that it's a security concern that must be contained – a complete departure from reality."

In 2005, the undocumented population reached an estimated 11.1 million, and right-wing anti-immigrant politics increasingly set the tone. Volunteer members of an anti-immigrant militia called the Minuteman Project were patrolling the border, and Arizona and New Mexico declared states of emergency. That December, Wisconsin Republican Rep. James Sensenbrenner's harsh enforcement bill passed the House, prompting millions of immigrants to protest in the streets in historic demonstrations the following year.

Xenophobic measures began to spring up locally as well: The mayor of Danbury, Connecticut, asked that state troopers to enforce immigration laws. In 2006, Hazleton, Pennsylvania, barred landlords from renting to undocumented immigrants.

Large-scale immigration from Mexico had made its way far beyond California, Texas, and New York and into bastions of white conservatism like Kansas, Nebraska, North Carolina, and Georgia. Working-class people had been in long-term crisis and were about to be hit by the largest economic catastrophe since the Great Depression. Unauthorized immigration had skyrocketed and the country was heading toward becoming minority-majority. Demagogues had a field day.

"This is a function of the economy," said Meissner, referring to migrant flows. "But of course, immigration is more than the economy – it's social

issues, cultural issues, and ultimately issues of identity. And the country is changing under people's noses, and a great deal of it is people coming illegally. That was more and more a set of contradictions and set of political tensions."

Sensenbrenner's bill failed to pass the Senate, and he accused Bush, who supported comprehensive reform legislation in the Senate, of shying away from his proposed crackdown. But the president, like his successor, would engage in a crackdown of his own. Quixotically, the goal of this iron-fisted policy was, as it would be under Obama, to make the case for reform.

"I've made no secret about the fact we need a comprehensive program," said DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff at the time. An enforcement crackdown "clarifies the choices we have . . . The choices are clear, and the consequences of the choices are clear."

The Bush administration orchestrated massive workplace raids. In one case, nearly 1,300 immigrants were rounded up Swift & Company meatpacking plants nationwide. A number were prosecuted and sentenced to federal prison for identity theft because they had used fraudulent Social Security cards to gain employment.

In a recent interview, Chertoff confirmed that crackdown was intended in part "to establish credibility with respect to enforcement, which would then enable reforms in a more comprehensive way." Obviously, that didn't happen.

Bush had backed repeated Congressional efforts to pass comprehensive reform. In 2007, they failed spectacularly when liberal critics opposed to guest-worker programs and right-wing anti-immigrant legislators blocked a measure crafted by Senators Ted Kennedy and Republicans. Expanding guest worker programs has long been a priority for business-aligned legislators. The undocumented labor force provides employers with a second-class labor market that is easy to exploit: for business, reform was worthwhile if it maintained that system in a legalized form. When the effort fell apart, however, the crackdown continued.

"It was pretty clear there wasn't going to be legislation, but we still felt it was important to establish that, one way or the other, the government was

going to apply the law,” said Chertoff. “And we’re not going to back down on enforcement. Because there had been a sense that somehow enforcement in the past had been relaxed because of political pressure.”

In other words, the Bush Administration, frustrated at right-wing opposition to legalization, engaged in a massive deportation campaign to please the Right. The Right accepted the gift and offered nothing in return.

The nuances of this failed political wheeling and dealing were likely not appreciated by many immigrants. Their reality, courtesy of ostensible reform allies in the Bush Administration, was persecution.

Meanwhile, local police and jails were playing a growing role on the frontlines of enforcement. By 2008, sixty-seven 287(g) agreements in total were in place nationwide, according to CIS. In Arizona, ICE signed an agreement with Gov. Napolitano’s Department of Public Safety. So did Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio, notorious for running an abusive desert jail camp and for using his deputies and posses to hunt down undocumented immigrants in Phoenix, arrest critical journalists, persecute political enemies, and even investigate Obama’s place of birth.

In the mid-2000s, harsh immigration enforcement became Arpaio’s calling card and made him a right-wing folk hero. First, however, he had made a political pact with Napolitano.

The two had long been close, according to former Arizona Republic reporter Tom Zoellner. In *Slate*, Zoellner writes that as US Attorney during the mid-1990s, Napolitano protected Arpaio during a Justice Department investigation into abuse at his Tent City Jail. During Napolitano’s 2002 run for governor, Arpaio paid her back by appearing in a commercial that may have proved decisive in a contest that she won by fewer than twelve thousand votes.

After taking office as governor, Napolitano looked the other way as complaints of Arpaio’s abusive and racist practices mushroomed. Then, she moved to Washington to take over at DHS and left Jan Brewer and the Republicans’ unabashedly anti-immigrant agenda in control.

Napolitano had tapped right-wing anti-immigrant sentiment to consolidate her power in Arizona. Taking a similar tack under Obama, she would orchestrate mass deportations in an effort to convince Republicans that the administration was serious about enforcement. Once again, establishment Democrats, like their Republican counterparts, would do the Right's work for them in an effort to win a business-friendly reform. Immigration enforcement, and its ever-tightening linkage with the criminal justice system, increasingly took on a life of its own independent of any realistic political program.

OBAMA'S FAILED STRATEGY

In 2008, Barack Obama defeated John McCain who, under right-wing pressure, had backed away from the very comprehensive reform legislation he had once championed. On immigration, the Republican business-friendly center had been consumed by the far right. It was Obama who, pledging reform, adopted Bush's centrist mantle – and, along with it, the principle that harsh enforcement was the way to secure right-wing support.

Obama embraced Secure Communities rather than workplace raids as his enforcement tool of choice. The program, developed under Bush, was seen as a cost-effective force multiplier, employing local law enforcement to detain immigrants rather than an expensive army of federal agents. It also promised better public relations, deporting not sympathetic low-wage workers but the “apprehension and removal of dangerous criminal aliens.”

The result was an unprecedented computerized deportation machinery linking local police to ICE.

“The scale in just the number of people who were being checked against these databases increased tremendously. And what that led to was a lot of removals,” said Migration Policy Institute analyst Faye Hipsman. “It became essentially the main pipeline into the removal process, into the deportation process.”

But it soon became clear that many of those being deported had either no criminal record at all or had only been convicted of minor crimes. The centrist approach to enforcement, prioritizing the removal of supposedly “bad” immigrants, created an automated deportation pipeline as voracious

and sweeping as anything their right-wing detractors could have have proposed.

Under Obama, the conversation was “revolving around this good immigrant/bad immigrant binary,” said García Hernández. Immigration moderates, he said, were “repeatedly willing to sacrifice the so-called criminal aliens in order to move the CIR [Comprehensive Immigration Reform] ball forward.”

Obama, however, could not placate a party where congressmen like Tom Tancredo, who suggested bombing Mecca and impeaching the president, held sway. But instead of fighting the Right, Obama let them dictate policy. Obama’s crackdown, like Bush’s, succeeded in deporting large numbers of immigrants. And it once again failed to bring right-wing legislators to the table while mobilizing immigrant rights activists in opposition.

In December 2010, the DREAM Act, which would have legalized undocumented immigrants who came to the country as children, failed to clear the Senate. If a bill targeting the group of undocumented immigrants most immediately sympathetic to the public couldn’t make it through Congress, it seemed increasingly clear that nothing would. Rather than sating right-wing demands for harsh enforcement, Obama’s strategy had made them even more fervent.

The next month, Republicans riding the mid-term Tea Party wave took control of the House and gained ground in the Senate. They were more hostile than ever to anything smelling of “amnesty.”

On the Right, it had not only become conventional wisdom that the United States was being invaded by “illegal immigrants” but also, thanks to the conspiracy theory that Obama was born outside the United States, that the White House was as well. Economic crisis has traditionally bolstered anti-immigrant sentiment. But the Great Recession helped usher in a novel trend: Democrats, increasingly liberals and non-white people, were adopting more favorable views toward immigration while Republicans not only remained hostile but became more emboldened and vitriolic.

The president had orchestrated record deportations to win over right-wing support for a reform bill that was going nowhere and paying a heavy price

with his base as a result. In the lead-up to the 2012 presidential election, Democrats worried about turning out the Latino vote.

In June 2012, with an eye on his re-election fight, Obama announced a new program to protect the DREAMers, hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants who had arrived as children, from deportation. The program, known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, was an acknowledgement that Obama had been waiting on Republican partners who might never show up. It also reflected the growing power of the Latino vote and of organized immigrant groups.

But activists still believed that the administration was balancing deportation protections for some with crackdowns on others. That year, activists gathered at the White House to strategize over the coming Supreme Court decision on the legality of Arizona's anti-immigrant law. Napolitano, according to National Day Labor Organizing Network Legal Director Chris Newman, said "that DACA was essentially an extension of the Secure Communities policy" and that "felons get deported so DREAMers can stay."

Representatives for Napolitano, now president of the University of California system, declined an interview request.

In 2012, Obama won reelection, beating Mitt Romney with nearly three-quarters of the Latino vote. Romney, a one-time avatar of the cleancut and soft-spoken business establishment, lost in part, many believed, because he had picked up harsh anti-immigrant rhetoric to appease his party's right wing.

"NI UNO MÁS"

With Secure Communities, Obama took a page from the playbook Clinton used to decimate welfare, orchestrate the war on crime and, of course, crack down on immigration: he endeavored to negotiate with the Right by taking up its cause. In doing so, it undermined the principles he purportedly stood for.

Both parties' positions were becoming untenable. For Republicans, caught between the hard right and a general electorate put off by extremism, there was no easy way out. For Obama and Democrats, however, the political downsides of enforcement had risen, costing them credibility with large

numbers of Latinos, while the upsides, in the form of Republican cooperation, remained illusory. Increasingly militant immigrant activism in the face of the Right's recalcitrance meant that the only solution was to move, in fits and starts, leftward.

That December, the shift continued when the administration moved to end 287(g) task force agreements that deputized local police as enforcement agents (while leaving agreements authorizing inspections in local jails in place). But Secure Communities, which the administration continued to defend, was more efficient at accomplishing much the same thing. In 2013, Obama deported his second millionth immigrant – many of them through Secure Communities.

"It was a conscious effort on the part of the administration," said Hipsman, "as a down payment on immigration reform."

The political costs, however, were rising. Emboldened immigrant rights activists, standing between the Democratic Party and a critical slice of the electorate, were less and less willing to settle for half measures.

In November 2013, comprehensive reform legislation that had passed the Senate, the effort's great last gasp, died in the House as Speaker John Boehner capitulated to right-wing legislators unimpressed with the bill's enforcement and border militarization measures. For grassroots activists, two things were clearer than ever: Republicans were hopeless and that it was Obama who, presiding over the deportations that were tearing families and communities apart, was the problem to focus their energies on.

Inside the immigrant rights movement, a fissure had opened between well-funded inside-the-Beltway groups that had backed the Senate bill, like the National Council of La Raza, and grassroots groups frustrated at their closeness to the White House. Cecilia Muñoz, a onetime La Raza official who had sharply criticized Bill Clinton in the 1990s, was directing Obama's Domestic Policy Council.

"The advocates who are not based in Washington, D.C., and are not very closely aligned with the Democratic Party and with the mainstream political circles were irked, and were seeing that their members . . . were suffering the brunt of this for years with very little concern resonating in the

conversations about comprehensive immigration reform,” said García Hernández.

Grassroots groups believed that Washington-based organizations mistook access for influence – and in doing so offered Obama political cover for mass deportations. The grassroots strategy, said veteran DREAMer activist Mohammad Abdollahi, was to put a face on individual immigrants and “show who Obama is actually deporting even though he says he’s not deporting them.” The DREAMers joined groups like NDLOM to demand “Not 1 More” deportation.

“It’s becoming something that you can’t control,” Rep. Luis Guterrez (D-III.) said at the time, referring to grassroots-level pressure on Obama. “People have tried to control it. This administration has put inordinate pressure on people not to criticize the president on his immigration policy and not to talk about prosecutorial discretion.”

The Obama Administration, however, still insisted that it could not act to halt deportations on its own. With reform dead in Congress, National Council of La Raza President Janet Murguía in March 2014, under pressure from militant grassroots groups, declared Obama to be “deporter in chief,” a term seemingly cribbed from NDLOM. Grassroots radicals, mobilizing on the ground in immigrant communities, had outflanked and overtaken the establishment camp in Washington.

The united opposition from radical and mainstream immigrant rights groups had put Obama in an incredibly difficult position. Sharry said that he and other immigrant rights activists met with Obama in March 2014, just after Murguía had condemned Obama.

“When Janet spoke up,” he said, “it was the most intense silence you can imagine. It was clear [Obama] was composing himself . . . to not express how thoroughly pissed off he was.”

On the ground, Secure Communities was under unprecedented stress. In March 2014, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit ruled that detainers were not mandatory. The next month, a federal judge in Oregon ruled the same, finding that Clackamas County had violated a woman’s Fourth Amendment rights by detaining her without probable cause.

The rulings gave activists extraordinary leverage. Cooperating with ICE wasn't just bad policy, as they had argued, but could also make localities subject to heavy civil damages. Almost immediately, counties across Oregon announced that they would no longer honor ICE detainers. In California, Gov. Jerry Brown signed the TRUST ACT, limiting local law enforcement's cooperation with ICE detainers in October 2013 – a far cry from the state's brutal nativist measures in the mid-1990s.

Obama's deportation pipeline was under heavy political and legal duress. But the deportations would continue. And so would the narrative about dangerous, murdering, raping, and drug-dealing criminal aliens that underpinned it.

In 2013, the Remembrance Project, highlighting the stories of "families whose loved ones were killed by illegal aliens," began to receive media attention not only in far-right publications but mainstream outlets as well. Increasingly, the dominant right-wing message was that immigrants were not only taking jobs and threatening cultural norms but killing Americans.

Obama's rhetoric was that some immigrants were bad felons while others were law-abiding workers. But the reality was that both president and his right-wing detractors had made immigration enforcement a criminal justice priority.

After weeks of back-and-forth communication, the White House failed to set up an interview for this story.

OBAMA'S FINAL ACT

In the spring and summer of 2014, thousands of unaccompanied minors and families streamed across the border, fleeing accelerating violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Rather than welcoming the immigrants – who, after all, were fleeing countries thrown into chaos by decades of US intervention – the Obama Administration responded harshly, moving to detain them while their asylum claims were pending.

One reason they may have done so, said Stumpf, was out of fear of the Right's pushback. Conservative critics had asserted that the asylum-seekers had been lured to the United States by DACA's deportation protections. (In fact, they were fleeing nightmarish violence.)

“The Obama administration had rolled out DACA, it was extremely controversial, yet it was also the biggest pro-immigrant action that the executive branch had taken,” said Stumpf. “And so I think they felt like they needed to protect it.”

Once again, Obama paired a humanitarian gesture with a draconian one. Pleasing all sides, however, was still impossible.

In November 2014, Republicans took control of the Senate and successfully cut into Democrats’ advantage among Latino voters – who, after all, are a diverse constituency in terms of class, religion, and ideology. But instead of welcoming those voters to the party, incoming Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell responded to a restive base that now clearly set the party’s immigration agenda, warning Obama that unilateral action on immigration would be like “waving a red flag in front of a bull.” The president, however, had a restive base of his own to attend to in the form of a newly unified and militant immigrant rights movement.

After the election, Obama addressed the nation during prime time to announce major executive actions to limit deportations. The centerpiece was a new program to protect millions of undocumented parents of US citizens from deportation, called Deferred Action for Parents of Americans, or DAPA. Though he didn’t mention it during his speech, Secure Communities would, at least in name, come to an end as well. A united immigrant rights had won a major victory, though its extent was far from clear.

“Felons, not families. Criminals, not children. Gang members, not a mom that’s working hard to provide for her kids,” said Obama. “If you meet the criteria, you can come out of the shadows and get right with the law. If you’re a criminal, you’ll be deported.”

In a memo issued the same day as Obama’s speech, DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson explained that Secure Communities would be replaced by the Priority Enforcement Program. Fingerprint sharing would remain in place. But ICE would limit enforcement mostly to people convicted of certain crimes and, by and large, request notification of a prisoner’s release instead of requesting that their detention be extended.

Secure Communities was in crisis politically and operationally, Johnson acknowledged. In September 2014, the percentage of individuals targeted by a detainer who were taken into ICE custody had declined to 41.2 percent while the portion of detainers marked as refused had risen to 10.1 percent – up from zero in 2008.

“The goal of Secure Communities was to more effectively identify and facilitate the removal of criminal aliens,” Johnson wrote. “The reality is the program has attracted a great deal of criticism, is widely misunderstood, and is embroiled in litigation; its very name has become a symbol for general hostility toward the enforcement of our immigration laws. Governors, mayors, and state and local law enforcement officials around the country have increasingly refused to cooperate with the program, and many have issued executive orders or signed laws prohibiting such cooperation.”

PEP’s reforms were substantial, at least on paper.

But activists were wary that the program would be merely a change in name geared to win back local cooperation with ICE and disputed Obama’s continued use of the “good immigrant, bad immigrant” dichotomy. Rhetorically, it played into stereotypes about migrant criminality and in practice failed to recognize that many immigrants who had broken the law were no worse than native-born people who had done the same. In reality, immigrants break the law far less often than native-born Americans.

“If you adopt the opposition’s messaging frame as your own whatever you say within that framework ends up further cementing the opposition’s argument,” said Lindsay Schubiner of the Center for New Community, a research and advocacy group tracking anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim groups. “I think Obama is trying to partially push back against this nativist argument. But by continuing to talk about felons he’s really just giving their narrative additional space.”

The nativist tide had been rising for decades. Democrats consistently failed to take it on. Instead, its rhetoric became even more virulent.

“As Whites see their power and control over their lives declining, will they simply go quietly into the night? Or will there be an explosion?” asked the Federation for American Immigration Reform founder John Tanton, who the

Southern Poverty Law Center calls “the racist architect of the modern anti-immigrant movement,” in 1986.

The right-wing story line was set. All it needed was its orange-hued hero.

TRUMP’S DESCENT

On June 16, 2015, Donald Trump announced his presidential campaign. From the beginning, his rhetoric was drenched in xenophobia. “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best,” he warned. “They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with [them]. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”

For many Americans, the assertions were shocking but also kind of laughable: he was, it seemed, an absurdity. This was reality television star Donald Trump, more a brand name applied to purportedly luxury goods drowning in chintz than a credible aspirant to the White House.

But for others, Trump crystallized a sentiment spreading from the far right to the heart of American fears over demographic change and economic crisis: immigrants were dangerous criminals. As Obama prioritized cracking down on criminal immigrants, the right-wing notion that average immigrants were criminals was taking hold like perhaps never before. Time and again, Democrats and moderate Republicans would underestimate the appeal of nativism to Republican voters. Immigration politics had become a powder keg. The month after Trump’s announcement, an undocumented immigrant shot and killed a young woman named Kathryn Steinle in San Francisco. The fuse was lit.

Juan Francisco Lopez-Sanchez showed signs of mental illness and said that he had found the gun, reported stolen from the vehicle of a Bureau of Land Management ranger, wrapped in a t-shirt. Lopez-Sanchez had a warrant out for a small-time marijuana offense. But there was apparently nothing violent on his record. He had been transferred from prison, where he had been serving a sentence for illegal reentry, to the San Francisco Sheriff who then released him. He would never have been prosecuted for the old, trifling pot bust he was wanted for.

Though many to this day know nothing of this profoundly idiosyncratic tragedy, it became a cause célèbre on the right and was sucked into a new national debate about immigrant criminality that Trump's announcement had inflamed like never before.

Steinle's killing, Trump declared, was a "senseless and totally preventable act of violence" and "yet another example of why we must secure our border." By that month, the Center for Immigration Studies had published a map of so-called sanctuary cities that "protect criminal aliens from deportation." CIS Executive Director Mark Krikorian took to the *National Review* to declare that "San Francisco's refusal to turn over illegal aliens for the feds until they've been convicted of violent felonies (and the Obama administration's support for, and even promotion of such policies) is the only reason this poor woman was killed." He added that Trump's "widely mocked warnings of this very danger have been vindicated."

Breitbart likewise blamed the president, charging that "the only reason sanctuary cities like San Francisco get away with flagrant lawlessness is because the federal government and its degenerate bureaucracy allow them to do so. President Obama could have taken steps to end this 'sanctuary city' garbage long ago."

To put things in perspective: Obama was being blamed for so-called sanctuary city policies that were in fact rebellions against Obama's embrace of Secure Communities – and the result of federal judges' rulings suggesting that it might violate the Constitution in practice. The backwardness of centrist immigration policies pushing harsh enforcement had come to a full and surreal circle. Trump, the most anti-immigrant major party presidential candidate in modern history, had made Obama's anti-immigrant policies a centerpiece of his platform.

ICE, however, seemed to embrace the right-wing narrative and grasped for an opportunity to achieve PEP's major goal of coaxing local law enforcement to renew cooperation. After Steinle's murder, an ICE email to the media lamented that "an individual with a lengthy criminal history, who is now the suspect in a tragic murder case, was released onto the street rather than being turned over to ICE for deportation."

“Bottom line,” ICE continued, is that “if the local authorities had merely notified ICE that they were about to release this individual into the community, ICE could have taken custody of him and had him removed from the country – thus preventing this terrible tragedy . . . ICE desperately wants local law enforcement agencies to work with us so we can work to stop needless violence like these [sic] in our communities.”

ICE told Jacobin that PEP has indeed coaxed localities back into the fold. According to the agency, seventeen of the twenty-five jurisdictions with the highest number of declined detainers under Secure Communities are now participating in PEP.

But ICE refused to provide a list of participating localities. According to Cook County Commissioner Jesús “Chuy” García, ICE and Secretary Johnson have been pressing them hard to renew cooperation in Chicagoland. García recalls that he told Johnson that “PEP seemed to be more of a public relations repackaging of Secure Communities; that many of the worst aspects of Secure Communities could still be found in PEP.”

It’s too early to tell whether PEP has achieved its operational goal of targeting serious criminals with more precision and leaving everyday immigrants alone, according to data analyzed by TRAC. Half of all detainers issued during the first two months of fiscal year 2016 were for people who had no criminal record, and four out of five detainers requested that individuals be detained beyond their release time. The percentage of detainer targets with criminal records actually fell after Johnson’s announcement.

“The heart of Secure Communities, the thing that was different and that rallied all this opposition, was the idea that every single interaction with local law enforcement should lead to an immigration background check,” said NDLOJ Litigation Director Jessica Karp Bansal. “It’s a huge problem because it entangles local police and immigration enforcement in a totally unprecedented way and PEP has changed nothing about that.”

Meanwhile, Trump has turned Obama’s enforcement crackdown against the president and used it to fan his campaign’s nativist flames. At July’s Republican National Convention, Trump slammed Clinton, asserting that “my opponent wants Sanctuary Cities. But where was the sanctuary for Kate

Steinle? . . . Where was the sanctuary for all of the Americans who have been so brutally murdered, and who have suffered so horribly? These wounded American families have been alone. But they are not alone any longer.”

“We will restore the highly successful Secure Communities Program. Good program,” Trump said in August, at a major speech on immigration in Phoenix that he ended surrounded by “angel moms,” parents who spoke of losing children to illegal immigrant violence. “We will expand and revitalize the popular 287(g) partnerships, which will help to identify hundreds of thousands of deportable aliens in local jails that we don’t even know about. Both of these programs have been recklessly gutted by this administration. And those were programs that worked.”

Politicians, Democrat and Republican, have made a lot of big promises to secure the border and deport the bad guys. Yet every crackdown has simply beget calls for something harsher.

The attack on immigrants that launched Trump to the nomination has faded in the face of non-stop October surprise revelations. But it was immigration that made Trump’s rise possible, and that will play a major role in shaping the future of right-wing politics. It’s important to remember that centrist politicians helped lay the groundwork.

On the Democratic side, those centrists are being pushed to move left. DAPA, a major piece of Obama’s deportation protections, is on hold thanks to an evenly-split Supreme Court that reflects longstanding divisions on the issue that, like the Court, have for the first time become neatly partisan. Hillary Clinton, who as a US senator asserted that she was “adamantly against illegal immigrants,” has promised not to deport anyone save for violent criminals and terrorists. Clinton, said Sharry, is “running on the most avowedly pro immigrant platform in modern American history compared to the rhetoric of her husband back in the mid-nineties in the throws of this backlash . . . It’s night and day.”

But Abdollahi, the DREAMer activist, remains skeptical, citing Clinton’s checkered record to make the case that she has “public” and “private”

positions on immigration, echoing recently leaked comments she made to a trade association.

“Clinton publicly talks about her support for immigrants. It just so happens though that any time she has had a chance to make a policy decision on immigration without 20/20 hindsight it has often been a position against immigrants,” said Abdollahi.

Whatever one’s view of Clinton’s changing views, they certainly have changed. The Clintons are the great triangulators of our time, experts at finding the political sweet spot at the center wherever it may have drifted. But now, the center on immigration, like much everything else in politics, has fallen apart. In 1994, roughly a third of Democrats and Republicans had positive views of immigration. Today, 35 percent of Republicans and 78 percent of Democrats do. Within the Democratic coalition, immigrant rights groups hold greater sway than ever while hardcore nativists and white nationalists run the Republican Party.

Mass deportations were intended to sate nativists’ appetite for enforcement. Under Bush and Obama, centrists embraced harsh enforcement as the prerequisite for reform. Clinton did so to outflank Republicans. In reality, they all created a massive deportation machinery and militarized border, and reinforced an ascendant right-wing explanation that helped suffering or anxious people make sense of their problems and the precarious world around them.

Trump has nearly made his way to the top by calling immigrants criminals. It wasn’t an idea he came up with on his own.

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“DEFEND FREE MOVEMENT, WITHOUT ILLUSIONS” *On the Significance of Immigration*

SAM KRISS

Britain is obsessed with immigration; nastily obsessed. The vote to leave the [European Union](#) was, it's now solemnly agreed, really a vote on open borders and freedom of movement. Apocryphal tales of people voting Leave because they thought it meant that all the migrants would be made to leave; more concrete, more harrowing instances of bigotry that have nothing to do with European migration law: [assaults and attacks](#) on black Americans and British [Muslims](#), people who weren't covered by any of the referendum's overt content, but who carried the physical marks that signal migration. What does it actually mean when people talk about free movement, about unrestricted mass migration, about all these foreigners coming in?

This is [racism](#), but [racism](#) doesn't emerge from a void; [it's generated and policed](#) by the general discourses in a society. As everyone knows, the strongest opposition to migration comes from those places that have seen the fewest migrants. Study after study has shown that immigration doesn't actually lead to unemployment, that it doesn't actually drive down wages for British workers, that it doesn't actually lead to spikes in crime, that it doesn't actually put strains on public services, that it doesn't actually tear apart the mythically organic communities that once existed when everyone was happily identical. Which should be obvious – who's more likely to be ruining your life, the state and the capitalist classes, or the Romanian next door? Liberals are anxious to insist that it's perfectly reasonable to have concerns about immigration, but it's not at all reasonable; the demand that these concerns be heard is just a way of forbidding any discussion of what's *actually* causing poverty and immiseration.

But it's still important to listen to people with concerns about immigration, to actually listen. I never asked for it, they say. Nobody ever asked us. I feel like

I'm losing my country. And aren't they? It's not just unemployment and poor government services that have come to be blamed on immigration; it's *everything*. The sheer grey misery of life in twenty-first century Britain, the sense of a world made out of ten million barred and barren cells, an existence that's been set for you from the moment of your birth and from which there's no escape, the crushing powerlessness, stamping down on you from overhead, the knowledge that you have no control over the conditions of your being, the utter hostility of this stagnant little island to all human life – everything sordid and sad that never had a name; the ruling classes gave it one, and they chose 'immigration.' Migrants aren't just a scapegoat for social deficiencies; they've been turned into an empty signifier, a compact expression of everything that's wrong with the world.

In his essay *Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?*, Ernesto Laclau writes that 'politics is possible because the constitutive impossibility of society can only represent itself through empty signifiers.' The empty signifier is a sign that has been hollowed out, drained of its differential content along the lateral chain of signifiers, to negatively define itself against the totality of the signifying system itself. In this way, an empty signifier can represent an 'absent totality' – life as it's experienced, political life in particular, is a series of fractures and fragments, small cruelties and indignities that all seem to add up to something that can't be named or even fully seen; the empty signifier gives a name to that monstrous wholeness by appropriating that of one of its elements, giving the whole a definition, turning it into something that can be struggled against. Empty signifiers need not be revolutionary or even progressive – Laclau names a few: revolution and liberation, but also order and unity. But his essay is arguably inadequate when it comes to the question of *which* signifier is emptied.

For Laclau, the name of the empty signifier results from 'the unevenness of the social,' one singular struggle that gains the power to overdetermine the others by its keening immediacy to one or another class segment, but it doesn't really matter; whatever differential content that name once held is quickly scooped out. Except this isn't really true; signification takes place on multiple levels, all swirling together; a ruling class might choose to empty a signifier by design, and all the while a stubborn referent remains. The signifier 'immigration' has come to stand for all the powerlessness and immiseration experienced by a large segment of the British population, but

rather than embodying the totality of oppression, all this does is ensure that all the anger and fury of a wounded impotence is sent screaming at the migrants themselves.

We have found ourselves in an utterly absurd situation, where strata of signification collide. In its negotiations to exit the European Union, the British government will almost certainly try to end the free movement of people. As various European dignitaries have insisted, this idea is a non-starter; participation in the common market absolutely requires free movement, and if it can't maintain free trade with Europe, Britain is headed for an economic disaster. But aren't we desperate for disaster? The voters spoke very clearly, in their referendum on Europe that wasn't really a referendum on Europe; when they said to leave the EU what they really meant was end free movement, and the public simply won't accept any deal in which it continues. This is the problem with taking policy as a signifier – somewhere along the endless chains of reference you have to halt and actually make policy. Our policy is to end free movement: people were unhappy about the drudgery and uselessness of social life, and the ruling classes encouraged them to call that miserable situation 'immigration'; now, to fix the situation, the same ruling class is proposing to *actually* end immigration. The politicians have decided that Europe means immigration, but immigration only means itself. It'd be hard to imagine a more ridiculous outcome; it's as if someone in a restaurant was unhappy with the food, and the manager tried to fix things by tearing up the menu.

And it's incredibly dangerous. Say we do scrap free movement – what then? When things don't improve, when things get *worse*, when people get poorer and the world bleaker and the sky greyer than ever before, will the papers and the politicians throw their hands up and admit: yeah, OK, we lied, it wasn't migration that was ruining your life, it was us, we did it? When a lie starts to have terrible consequences, the instinct is usually to double down, to keep on insisting on it out of sheer desperate doggedness. Once the borders close, that won't be the end of it, it can only be the first stage in an constantly intensifying war against the migrants who, in their powerlessness, caused everything bad that's ever happened. First an end to free movement, then mandatory registration and identification of all foreign-born individuals, then vast prison camps sitting squat and dismal among the fallow fields of the English countryside.

The left must defend free movement, but without illusions. The free movement of people within the European Union is not a humanitarian gesture, and it's not dissociable from the free movement of goods and the free movement of capital; together these three form a single exploitative apparatus. It's free only insofar as anything in capitalism is free, freedom as an abstract property possessed only by those things that are not human, a free movement of unfree people. And the space in which this free movement takes place is cloistered and barricaded, ringed with death and razor wire. There's no free movement of people for the thousands drowning in the Mediterranean, for the people making the heroic trek from one side of Europe to the other, hounded at every point by cops and fascists, or for those detained, denied, and deported by the countries where they seek refuge. We shouldn't defend free movement as practiced in Europe because it's in any way a good thing, but because in the British political climate affirming free movement is the condition of possibility of any worthwhile socialist project.

The Labour party, much of which has abandoned socialism, is equally keen to wash its hands of free movement. Even while the referendum was still ongoing, the party's deputy leader Tom Watson broke ranks by declaring that if Remain won, he would push for free movement to end anyway, in what he must have thought was a daring Machiavellian gambit. Afterwards, even John McDonnell insisted that free movement would have to end, before backtracking somewhat by saying that he was only describing a 'formal reality' rather than announcing party policy. (In Descartes, formal reality is that level of reality something has simply by being what it is. The fatalism here is unedifying.) But this is something Labour have been doing for years, and something which its right-wing MPs are now stridently proposing every few weeks – pushing mild social-democratic programmes generously seasoned with implicit racism. Social programmes yes, welfare yes, the NHS yes, but only for British citizens, and coupled with the controls on immigration that will save the fragments of socialism we still have from the internationalism we lost a long time ago. A left-wing politics, yes, but one with enough bigotry to make it palatable to an apparently bigoted public.

It's not just that this has historically failed to win Labour votes. It's also a structural impossibility. The elevation of 'immigration' to an empty signifier was a calculated move, a front in the ideological war against the left; caving

in and promising to curb immigration is simply irreconcilable with any minimally left-wing politics. On some semiotic level, determinate qualities are retained: if the problem is immigration, it's one of too many people and too few social goods, of *scarcity*. There's not enough to go round. All people, British or foreign, are presented as a waste of resources; we eat and shit and drain and despoil, and any contributions we make to society serve only to help balance out the debt we owe simply by existing. A population is another name for a plague. You have to make a choice: the native-born plague can be tolerated, just about, but allowed to gnaw at as little as possible; human pests from outside the country must not be given anything. This world is incompatible with any left-wing analysis of society. The position of the left has always been that we have enough, that we have more than enough, that capitalism produces extraordinary surpluses, that the problem is one of ownership and distribution. This is why free movement must be defended – without this first step everything is still trapped in a logic that's reactionary and profoundly inhuman; we can not be free to make a better world unless it's a better world for everyone.

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PRISON ABOLITION

ARE PRISONS OBSOLETE?

(EXCERPTS)

ANGELA DAVIS

INTRODUCTION: PRISON REFORM OR PRISON ABOLITION?

In most parts of the world, it is taken for granted that whoever is convicted of a serious crime will be sent to prison. In some countries—including the United States—where capital punishment has not yet been abolished, a small but significant number of people are sentenced to death for what are considered especially grave crimes. Many people are familiar with the campaign to abolish the death penalty. In fact, it has already been abolished in most countries. Even the staunchest advocates of capital punishment acknowledge the fact that the death penalty faces serious challenges. Few people find life without the death penalty difficult to imagine.

On the other hand, the prison is considered an inevitable and permanent feature of our social lives. Most people are quite surprised to hear that the prison abolition movement also has a long history—one that dates back to the historical appearance of the prison as the main form of punishment. In fact, the most natural reaction is to assume that prison activists—even those who consciously refer to themselves as "antiprison activists"—are simply trying to ameliorate prison conditions or perhaps to reform the prison in more fundamental ways. In most circles prison abolition is simply unthinkable and implausible. Prison abolitionists are dismissed as utopians and idealists whose ideas are at best unrealistic and impracticable, and, at worst, mystifying and foolish. This is a measure of how difficult it is to envision a social order that does not rely on the threat of sequestering people in dreadful places designed to separate them from their communities and families. The prison is considered so "natural" that it is extremely hard to imagine life without it.

It is my hope that this book will encourage readers to question their own assumptions about the prison. Many people have already reached the

conclusion that the death penalty is an outmoded form of punishment that violates basic principles of human rights. It is time, I believe, to encourage similar conversations about the prison. During my own career as an antiprison activist I have seen the population of u.s. prisons increase with such rapidity that many people in black, Latino, and Native American communities now have a far greater chance of going to prison than of getting a decent education. When many young people decide to join the military service in order to avoid the inevitability of a stint in prison, it should cause us to wonder whether we should not try to introduce better alternatives.

The question of whether the prison has become an obsolete institution has become especially urgent in light of the fact that more than two million people (out of a world total of nine million! now inhabit U.S. prisons, jails, youth facilities, and immigrant detention centers. Are we willing to relegate ever larger numbers of people from racially oppressed communities to an isolated existence marked by authoritarian regimes, violence, disease, and technologies of seclusion that produce severe mental instability? According to a recent study, there may be twice as many people suffering from mental illness who are in jails and prisons than there are in all psychiatric hospitals in the United States combined.¹

When I first became involved in antiprison activism during the late 1960s, I was astounded to learn that there were then close to two hundred thousand people in prison. Had anyone told me that in three decades ten times as many people would be locked away in cages, I would have been absolutely incredulous. I imagine that I would have responded something like this: "As racist and undemocratic as this country may be [remember, during that period, the demands of the Civil Rights movement had not yet been consolidated] I do not believe that the U.S. government will be able to lock up so many people without producing powerful public resistance. No, this will never happen, not unless this country plunges into fascism." That might have been my reaction thirty years ago. The reality is that we were called upon to inaugurate the twenty-first century by accepting the fact that two million group larger than the population of many countries—are living their lives in places like Sing Sing, Leavenworth, San Quentin, and Alderson Federal Reformatory for Women. The gravity of these numbers becomes even more apparent when we consider that the U.S. population in general is

less than five percent of the world's total, whereas more than twenty percent of the world's combined prison population can be claimed by the United States. In Elliott Currie's words, "[t]he prison has become a looming presence in our society to an extent unparalleled in our history or that of any other industrial democracy. Short of major wars, mass incarceration has been the most thoroughly implemented government social program of our time."²

In thinking about the possible obsolescence of the prison, we should ask how it is that so many people could end up in prison without major debates regarding the efficacy of incarceration. When the drive to produce more prisons and incarcerate ever larger numbers of people occurred in the 1980s during what is known as the Reagan era, politicians argued that "tough on crime" stances—including certain imprisonment and longer sentences—would keep communities free of crime. However, the practice of mass incarceration during that period had little or no effect on official crime rates. In fact, the most obvious pattern was that larger prison populations led not to safer communities, but, rather, to even larger prison populations. Each new prison spawned yet another new prison. And as the U.S. prison system expanded, so did corporate involvement in construction, provision of goods and services, and use of labor. Because of the extent to which prison building and operation began to attract vast amounts of capital—from the construction industry to food and health care provision—in a way that recalled the emergence of the military industrial complex, we began to refer to a "prison industrial complex."³

Consider the case of California, whose landscape has been thoroughly prisonized over the last twenty years. The first state prison in California was San Quentin, which opened in 1852.⁴ Folsom, another well-known institution, opened in 1880. Between 1880 and 1933, when a facility for women was opened in Tehachapi, there was not a single new prison constructed. In 1952, the California Institution for Women opened and Tehachapi became a new prison for men. In all, between 1852 and 1955, nine prisons were constructed in California. Between 1962 and 1965, two camps were established, along with the California Rehabilitation Center. Not a single prison opened during the second half of the sixties, nor during the entire decade of the 1970s.

However, a massive project of prison construction was initiated during the 1980s—that is, during the years of the Reagan presidency. Nine prisons,

including the Northern California Facility for Women, were opened between 1984 and 1989. Recall that it had taken more than a hundred years to build the first nine California prisons. In less than a single decade, the number of California prisons doubled. And during the 1990s, twelve new prisons were opened, including two more for women. In 1995 the Valley State Prison for Women was opened. According to its mission statement, it "provides 1,980 women's beds for California's overcrowded prison system." However, in 2002, there were 3,570 prisoners⁵ and the other two women's prisons were equally overcrowded.

There are now thirty-three prisons, thirty-eight camps, sixteen community correctional facilities, and five tiny prisoner mother facilities in California. In 2002 there were 157,979 people incarcerated in these institutions, including approximately twenty thousand people whom the state holds for immigration violations. The racial composition of this prison population is revealing. Latinos, who are now in the majority, account for 35.2 percent; African-Americans 30 percent; and white prisoners 29.2 percent.⁶ There are now more women in prison in the state of California than there were in the entire country in the early 1970s. In fact, California can claim the largest women's prison in the world, Valley State Prison for Women, with its more than thirty-five hundred inhabitants. Located in the same town as Valley State and literally across the street is the second-largest women's prison in the world Central California Women's Facility-whose population in 2002 also hovered around thirty-five hundred.⁷

If you look at a map of California depicting the location of the thirty-three state prisons, you will see that the only area that is not heavily populated by prisons is the area north of Sacramento. Still, there are two prisons in the town of Susanville, and Pelican Bay, one of the state's notorious super-maximum security prisons, is near the Oregon border. California artist Sandow Birlle was inspired by the colonizing of the landscape by prisons to produce a series of thirty-three landscape paintings of these institutions and their surroundings. They are collected in his book *Incarcerated: Visions of California in the Twenty-first Century*.⁸

I present this brief narrative of the prisonization of the California landscape in order to allow readers to grasp how easy it was to produce a massive system of incarceration with the implicit consent of the public. Why were people so quick to assume that locking away an increasingly large

proportion of the U.S. population would help those who live in the free world feel safer and more secure? This question can be formulated in more general terms. Why do prisons tend to make people think that their own rights and liberties are more secure than they would be if prisons did not exist? What other reasons might there have been for the rapidity with which prisons began to colonize the California landscape?

Geographer Ruth Gilmore describes the expansion of prisons in California as "a geographical solution to socia-economic problems."⁹ Her analysis of the prison industrial complex in California describes these developments as a response to surpluses of capital, land, labor, and state capacity.

California's new prisons are sited on devalued rural land, most, in fact on formerly irrigated agricultural acres . . . The State bought land sold by big landowners. And the State assured the small, depressed towns now shadowed by prisons that the new, recession-proof, non-polluting industry would jump-start local redevelopment. ¹⁰

But, as Gilmore points out, neither the jobs nor the more general economic revitalization promised by prisons has occurred. At the same time, this promise of progress helps us to understand why the legislature and California's voters decided to approve the construction of all these new prisons. People wanted to believe that prisons would not only reduce crime, they would also provide jobs and stimulate economic development in out-of-the-way places.

At bottom, there is one fundamental question: Why do we take prison for granted? While a relatively small proportion of the population has ever directly experienced life inside prison, this is not true in poor black and Latino communities. Neither is it true for Native Americans or for certain Asian-American communities. But even among those people who must regrettably accept prison sentences-especially young people-as an ordinary dimension of community life, it is hardly acceptable to engage in serious public discussions about prison life or radical alternatives to prison. It is as if prison were an inevitable fact of life, like birth and death.

On the whole, people tend to take prisons for granted. It is difficult to imagine life without them. At the same time, there is reluctance to face the realities hidden within them, a fear of thinking about what happens inside

them. Thus, the prison is present in our lives and, at the same time, it is absent from our lives. To think about this simultaneous presence and absence is to begin to acknowledge the part played by ideology in shaping the way we interact with our social surroundings. We take prisons for granted but are often afraid to face the realities they produce. After all, no one wants to go to prison. Because it would be too agonizing to cope with the possibility that anyone, including ourselves, could become a prisoner, we tend to think of the prison as disconnected from our own lives. This is even true for some of us, women as well as men, who have already experienced imprisonment.

We thus think about imprisonment as a fate reserved for others, a fate reserved for the "evildoers," to use a term recently popularized by George W. Bush. Because of the persistent power of racism, "criminals" and "evildoers" are, in the collective imagination, fantasized as people of color. The prison therefore functions ideologically as an abstract site into which undesirables are deposited, relieving us of the responsibility of thinking about the real issues afflicting those communities from which prisoners are drawn in such disproportionate numbers. This is the ideological work that the prison performs—it relieves us of the responsibility of seriously engaging with the problems of our society, especially those produced by racism and, increasingly, global capitalism.

What, for example, do we miss if we try to think about prison expansion without addressing larger economic developments? We live in an era of migrating corporations. In order to escape organized labor in this country—and thus higher wages, benefits, and so on—corporations roam the world in search of nations providing cheap labor pools. This corporate migration thus leaves entire communities in shambles. Huge numbers of people lose jobs and prospects for future jobs. Because the economic base of these communities is destroyed, education and other surviving social services are profoundly affected. This process turns the men, women, and children who live in these damaged communities into perfect candidates for prison.

In the meantime, corporations associated with the punishment industry reap profits from the system that manages prisoners and acquire a clear stake in the continued growth of prison populations. Put simply, this is the era of the prison industrial complex. The prison has become a black hole into which the detritus of contemporary capitalism is deposited. Mass imprisonment

generates profits as it devours social wealth, and thus it tends to reproduce the very conditions that lead people to prison. There are thus real and often quite complicated connections between the deindustrialization of the economy—a process that reached its peak during the 1980s—and the rise of mass imprisonment, which also began to spiral during the Reagan-Bush era. However, the demand for more prisons was represented to the public in simplistic terms. More prisons were needed because there was more crime. Yet many scholars have demonstrated that by the time the prison construction boom began, official crime statistics were already falling. Moreover, draconian drug laws were being enacted, and "three-strikes" provisions were on the agendas of many states.

In order to understand the proliferation of prisons and the rise of the prison industrial complex, it might be helpful to think further about the reasons we so easily take prisons for granted. In California, as we have seen, almost two-thirds of existing prisons were opened during the eighties and nineties. Why was there no great outcry? Why was there such an obvious level of comfort with the prospect of many new prisons? A partial answer to this question has to do with the way we consume media images of the prison, even as the realities of imprisonment are hidden from almost all who have not had the misfortune of doing time. Cultural critic Gina Dent has pointed out that our sense of familiarity with the prison comes in part from representations of prisons in film and other visual media.

The history of visibility linked to the prison is also a main reinforcement of the institution of the prison as a naturalized part of our social landscape. The history of film has always been wedded to the representation of incarceration. Thomas Edison's first films (dating back to the 1901 reenactment presented as newsreel, Execution of Czolgosz with Panorama of Auburn Prison) included footage of the darkest recesses of the prison. Thus, the prison is wedded to our experience of visibility, creating also a sense of its permanence as an institution. We also have a constant flow of Hollywood prison films, in fact a genre. 11

Some of the most well known prison films are: *I Want to Live*, *Papillon*, *Cool Hand Luke*, and *Escape from Alcatraz*. It also bears mentioning that television programming has become increasingly saturated with images of prisons. Some recent documentaries include the A&E series *The Big House*, which consists of programs on San Quentin, Alcatraz, Leavenworth, and

Alderson Federal Reformatory for Women. The long-running HBO program *Oz* has managed to persuade many viewers that they know exactly what goes on in male maximum-security prisons.

But even those who do not consciously decide to watch a documentary or dramatic program on the topic of prisons inevitably consume prison images, whether they choose to or not, by the simple fact of watching movies or TV. It is virtually impossible to avoid consuming images of prison. In 1997, I was myself quite astonished to find, when I interviewed women in three Cuban prisons, that most of them narrated their prior awareness of prisons—that is, before they were actually incarcerated—as coming from the many Hollywood films they had seen. The prison is one of the most important features of our image environment. This has caused us to take the existence of prisons for granted. The prison has become a key ingredient of our common sense. It is there, all around us. We do not question whether it should exist. It has become so much a part of our lives that it requires a great feat of the imagination to envision life beyond the prison.

This is not to dismiss the profound changes that have occurred in the way public conversations about the prison are conducted. Ten years ago, even as the drive to expand the prison system reached its zenith, there were very few critiques of this process available to the public. In fact most people had no idea about the immensity of this expansion. This was the period during which internal changes—in part through the application of new technologies—led the U.S. prison system in a much more repressive direction. Whereas previous classifications had been confined to low, medium, and maximum security, a new category was invented—that of the super-maximum security prison, or the supermax. The turn toward increased repression in a prison system, distinguished from the beginning of its history by its repressive regimes, caused some journalists, public intellectuals, and progressive agencies to oppose the growing reliance on prisons to solve social problems that are actually exacerbated by mass incarceration.

In 1990, the Washington-based Sentencing Project published a study of U.S. populations in prison and jail, and on parole and probation, which concluded that one in four black men between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine were among these numbers.¹² Five years later, a second study revealed that this percentage had soared to almost one in three (32.2 percent). Moreover, more than one in ten Latino men in this same age range were in jail or

prison, or on probation or parole. The second study also revealed that the group experiencing the greatest increase was black women, whose imprisonment increased by seventy-eight percent.¹³ According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, African Americans as a whole now represent the majority of state and federal prisoners, with a total of 803,400 black inmates—118,600 more than the total number of white inmates.¹⁴ During the late 1990s major articles on prison expansion appeared in *Newsweek*, *Harper's*, *Emergence*, and *Atlantic Monthly*. Even Colin Powell raised the question of the rising number of black men in prison when he spoke at the 2000 Republican National Convention, which declared George W. Bush its presidential candidate.

Over the last few years the previous absence of critical positions on prison expansion in the political arena has given way to proposals for prison reform. While public discourse has become more flexible, the emphasis is almost inevitably on generating the changes that will produce a better prison system. In other words, the increased flexibility that has allowed for critical discussion of the problems associated with the expansion of prisons also restricts this discussion to the question of prison reform.

As important as some reforms may be—the elimination of sexual abuse and medical neglect in women's prison, for example—frameworks that rely exclusively on reforms help to produce the stultifying idea that nothing lies beyond the prison. Debates about strategies of decarceration, which should be the focal point of our conversations on the prison crisis, tend to be marginalized when reform takes the center stage. The most immediate question today is how to prevent the further expansion of prison populations and how to bring as many imprisoned women and men as possible back into what prisoners call the free world." How can we move to decriminalize drug use and the trade in sexual services? How can we take seriously strategies of restorative rather than exclusively punitive justice? Effective alternatives involve both transformation of the techniques for addressing "crime" and of the social and economic conditions that track so many children from poor communities, and especially communities of color, into the juvenile system and then on to prison. The most difficult and urgent challenge today is that of creatively exploring new terrains of justice, where the prison no longer serves as our major anchor.

ABOLITIONIST ALTERNATIVES (CHAPTER 6)

"Forget about reform; it's time to talk about abolishing jails and prisons in American society ... Still-abolition? Where do you put the prisoners? The 'criminals'? What's the alternative? First, having no alternative at all would create less crime than the present criminal training centers do. Second, the only full alternative is building the kind of society that does not need prisons: A decent redistribution of power and income so as to put out the hidden fire of burning envy that now flames up in crimes of property-both burglary by the poor and embezzlement by the affluent. And a decent sense of community that can support, reintegrate and truly rehabilitate those who suddenly become filled with fury or despair, and that can face them not as objects-'criminals'-but as people who have committed illegal acts, as have almost all of us." -Arthur Waskow, Institute for Policy Studies¹²⁹

If jails and prisons are to be abolished, then what will replace them? This is the puzzling question that often interrupts further consideration of the prospects for abolition. Why should it be so difficult to imagine alternatives to our current system of incarceration? There are a number of reasons why we tend to balk at the idea that it may be possible to eventually create an entirely different-and perhaps more egalitarian-system of justice. First of all, we think of the current system, with its exaggerated dependence on imprisonment, as an unconditional standard and thus have great difficulty envisioning any other way of dealing with the more than two million people who are currently being held in the country's jails, prisons, youth facilities, and immigration detention centers. Ironically, even the anti-death penalty campaign tends to rely on the assumption that life imprisonment is the most rational alternative to capital punishment. As important as it may be to abolish the death penalty, we should be conscious of the way the contemporary campaign against capital punishment has a propensity to recapitulate the very historical patterns that led to the emergence of the prison as the dominant form of punishment. The death penalty has coexisted with the prison, though imprisonment was supposed to serve as an alternative to corporal and capital punishment. This is a major dichotomy. A critical engagement with this dichotomy would involve taking seriously the possibility of linking the goal of death penalty abolitionism with strategies for prison abolition.

It is true that if we focus myopically on the existing system-and perhaps this is the problem that leads to the assumption that imprisonment is the only alternative to death-it is very hard to imagine a structurally similar system capable of handling such a vast population of lawbreakers. If, however, we shift our attention from the prison, perceived as an isolated institution, to the set of relationships that comprise the prison industrial complex, it may be easier to think about alternatives. In other words, a more complicated framework may yield more options than if we simply attempt to discover a single substitute for the prison system. The first step, then, would be to let go of the desire to discover one single alternative system of punishment that would occupy the same footprint as the prison system.

Since the 1980s, the prison system has become increasingly ensconced in the economic, political and ideological life of the United States and the transnational trafficking in U.S. commodities, culture, and ideas. Thus, the prison industrial complex is much more than the sum of all the jails and prisons in this country. It is a set of symbiotic relationships among correctional communities, transnational corporations, media conglomerates, guards' unions, and legislative and court agendas. If it is true that the contemporary meaning of punishment is fashioned through these relationships, then the most effective abolitionist strategies will contest these relationships and propose alternatives that pull them apart. What, then, would it mean to imagine a system in which punishment is not allowed to become the source of corporate profit? How can we imagine a society in which race and class are not primary determinants of punishment? Or one in which punishment itself is no longer the central concern in the making of justice?

An abolitionist approach that seeks to answer questions such as these would require us to imagine a constellation of alternative strategies and institutions, with the ultimate aim of removing the prison from the social and ideological landscapes of our society. In other words, we would not be looking for prisonlike substitutes for the prison, such as house arrest safeguarded by electronic surveillance bracelets. Rather, positing decarceration as our overarching strategy, we would try to envision a continuum of alternatives to imprisonment-demilitarization of schools, revitalization of education at all levels, a health system that provides free

physical and mental care to all, and a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance.

The creation of new institutions that lay claim to the space now occupied by the prison can eventually start to crowd out the prison so that it would inhabit increasingly smaller areas of our social and psychic landscape. Schools can therefore be seen as the most powerful alternative to jails and prisons. Unless the current structures of violence are eliminated from schools in impoverished communities of color—including the presence of armed security guards and police—and unless schools become places that encourage the joy of learning, these schools will remain the major conduits to prisons. The alternative would be to transform schools into vehicles for decarceration. Within the health care system, it is important to emphasize the current scarcity of institutions available to poor people who suffer severe mental and emotional illnesses. There are currently more people with mental and emotional disorders in jails and prisons than in mental institutions. This call for new facilities designed to assist poor people should not be taken as an appeal to reinstitute the old system of mental institutions, which were—and in many cases still are—as repressive as the prisons. It is simply to suggest that the racial and class disparities in care available to the affluent and the deprived need to be eradicated, thus creating another vehicle for decarceration.

To reiterate, rather than try to imagine one single alternative to the existing system of incarceration, we might envision an array of alternatives that will require radical transformations of many aspects of our society. Alternatives that fail to address racism, male dominance, homophobia, class bias, and other structures of domination will not, in the final analysis, lead to decarceration and will not advance the goal of abolition.

It is within this context that it makes sense to consider the decriminalization of drug use as a significant component of a larger strategy to simultaneously oppose structures of racism within the criminal justice system and further the abolitionist agenda of decarceration. Thus, with respect to the project of challenging the role played by the so-called War on Drugs in bringing huge numbers of people of color into the prison system, proposals to decriminalize drug use should be linked to the development of a constellation of free, community-based programs accessible to all people who wish to tackle their drug problems. This is not to suggest that all people

who use drugs—or that only people who use illicit drugs—need such help. However, anyone, regardless of economic status, who wishes to conquer drug addiction should be able to enter treatment programs.

Such institutions are, indeed, available to affluent communities. The most well known program is the Betty Ford Clinic, which, according to its Web site, "accepts patients dependent on alcohol and other mood altering chemicals. Treatment services are open to all men and women eighteen years of age and older regardless of race, creed, sex, national origin, religion or sources of payment for care."¹³⁰ However, the cost for the first six days is \$1,175 per day, and after that \$525 per day. ¹³¹ If a person requires thirty days of treatment, the cost would amount to \$19,000, almost twice the annual salary of a person working a minimum-wage job.

Poor people deserve to have access to effective, voluntary drug treatment programs. Like the Betty Ford program, their operation should not be under the auspices of the criminal justice system. As at the Ford Center, family members also should be permitted to participate. But unlike the Betty Ford program, they should be free of charge. For such programs to count as "abolitionist alternatives," they would not be linked-unlike existing programs, to which individuals are "sentenced"-to imprisonment as a last resort.

The campaign to decriminalize drug use—from marijuana to heroin—is international in scope and has led countries such as the Netherlands to revise their laws, legalizing personal use of such drugs as marijuana and hashish. The Netherlands also has a history of legalized sex work, another area in which there has been extensive campaigning for decriminalization. In the cases of drugs and sex work, decriminalization would simply require repeal of all those laws that penalize individuals who use drugs and who work in the sex industry. The decriminalization of alcohol use serves as a historical example. In both these cases, decriminalization would advance the abolitionist strategy of decarceration—that is, the consistent reduction in the numbers of people who are sent to prison—with the ultimate aim of dismantling the prison system as the dominant mode of punishment. A further challenge for abolitionists is to identify other behaviors that might be appropriately decriminalized as preliminary steps toward abolition.

One obvious and very urgent aspect of the work of decriminalization is associated with the defense of immigrants' rights. The growing numbers of

immigrants—especially since the attacks on September 11, 2001—who are incarcerated in immigrant detention centers, as well as in jails and prisons, can be halted by dismantling the processes that punish people for their failure to enter this country without documents. Current campaigns that call for the decriminalization of undocumented immigrants are making important contributions to the overall struggle against the prison industrial complex and are challenging the expansive reach of racism and male dominance. When women from countries in the southern region are imprisoned because they have entered this country to escape sexual violence, instead of being granted refugee status, this reinforces the generalized tendency to punish people who are persecuted in their intimate lives as a direct consequence of pandemics of violence that continue to be legitimized by ideological and legal structures.

Within the United States, the "battered women's syndrome" legal defense reflects an attempt to argue that a woman who kills an abusive spouse should not be convicted of murder. This defense has been abundantly criticized, both by detractors and proponents of feminism; the former do not want to recognize the pervasiveness and dangers of intimate violence against women and the latter challenge the idea that the legitimacy of this defense resides in the assertion that those who kill their batterers are not responsible for their actions. The point feminist movements attempt to make—regardless of their specific positions on battered women's syndrome—is that violence against women is a pervasive and complicated social problem that cannot be solved by imprisoning women who fight back against their abusers. Thus, a vast range of alternative strategies of minimizing violence against women—within intimate relationships and within relationships to the state should be the focus of our concern.

The alternatives toward which I have gestured thus far and this is only a small selection of examples, which can also include job and living wage programs, alternatives to the disestablished welfare program, community-based recreation, and many more—are associated both directly and indirectly with the existing system of criminal justice. But, however mediated their relation might be to the current system of jails and prisons, these alternatives are attempting to reverse the impact of the prison industrial complex on our world. As they contest racism and other networks of social

domination, their implementation will certainly advance the abolitionist agenda of decarceration.

Creating agendas of decarceration and broadly casting the net of alternatives helps us to do the ideological work of pulling apart the conceptual link between crime and punishment. This more nuanced understanding of the social role of the punishment system requires us to give up our usual way of thinking about punishment as an inevitable consequence of crime. We would recognize that "punishment" does not follow from "crime" in the neat and logical sequence offered by discourses that insist on the justice of imprisonment, but rather punishment-primarily through imprisonment (and sometimes death)-is linked to the agendas of politicians, the profit drive of corporations, and media representations of crime. Imprisonment is associated with the racialization of those most likely to be punished. It is associated with their class and, as we have seen, gender structures the punishment system as well. If we insist that abolitionist alternatives trouble these relationships, that they strive to disarticulate crime and punishment, race and punishment, class and punishment, and gender and punishment, then our focus must not rest only on the prison system as an isolated institution but must also be directed at all the social relations that support the permanence of the prison.

An attempt to create a new conceptual terrain for imagining alternatives to imprisonment involves the ideological work of questioning why "criminals" have been constituted as a class and, indeed, a class of human beings undeserving of the civil and human rights accorded to others. Radical criminologists have long pointed out that the category "lawbreakers" is far greater than the category of individuals who are deemed criminals since, many point out, almost all of us have broken the law at one time or another. Even President Bill Clinton admitted that he had smoked marijuana at one time, insisting, though, that he did not inhale. However, acknowledged disparities in the intensity of police surveillance-as indicated by the present-day currency of the term "racial profiling" which ought to cover far more territory than "driving while black or brown" -account in part for racial and class-based disparities in arrest and imprisonment rates. Thus, if we are willing to take seriously the consequences of a racist and class-biased justice system, we will reach the conclusion that enormous numbers of people are in prison simply because they are, for example, black, Chicano,

Vietnamese, Native American or poor, regardless of their ethnic background. They are sent to prison, not so much because of the crimes they may have indeed committed, but largely because their communities have been criminalized. Thus, programs for decriminalization will not only have to address specific activities that have been criminalized—such as drug use and sex work—but also criminalized populations and communities.

It is against the backdrop of these more broadly conceived abolitionist alternatives that it makes sense to take up the question of radical transformations within the existing justice system. Thus, aside from minimizing, through various strategies, the kinds of behaviors that will bring people into contact with the police and justice systems, there is the question of how to treat those who assault the rights and bodies of others. Many organizations and individuals both in the United States and other countries offer alternative modes of making justice. In limited instances, some governments have attempted to implement alternatives that range from conflict resolution to restorative or reparative justice. Such scholars as Herman Bianchi have suggested that crime needs to be defined in terms of tort and, instead of criminal law, should be reparative law. In his words, "[The lawbreaker] is thus no longer an evil-minded man or woman, but simply a debtor, a liable person whose human duty is to take responsibility for his or her acts, and to assume the duty of repair."¹³²

There is a growing body of literature on reshaping systems of justice around strategies of reparation, rather than retribution, as well as a growing body of experiential evidence of the advantages of these approaches to justice and of the democratic possibilities they promise. Instead of rehearsing the numerous debates that have emerged over the last decades—including the most persistent question, "What will happen to the murderers and rapists?"—I will conclude with a story of one of the most dramatic successes of these experiments in reconciliation. I refer to the case of Amy Biehl, the white Fulbright scholar from Newport Beach, California, who was killed by young South African men in Guguletu, a black township in Capetown, South Africa.

In 1993, when South Africa was on the cusp of its transition, Amy Biehl was devoting a significant amount of her time as a foreign student to the work of rebuilding South Africa. Nelson Mandela had been freed in 1990, but had not yet been elected president. On August 25, Biehl was driving several black friends to their home in Guguletu when a crowd shouting antiwhite slogans

confronted her, and some of them stoned and stabbed her to death. Four of the men participating in the attack were convicted of her murder and sentenced to eighteen years in prison. In 1997, Linda and Peter Biehl-Amy's mother and father-decided to support the amnesty petition the men presented to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The four apologized to the Biehls and were released in July 1998. Two of them-Easy Nofemela and Ntobeko Peni-later met with the Biehls, who, despite much pressure to the contrary, agreed to see them.¹³³ According to Nofemela, he wanted to say more about his own sorrow for killing their daughter than what had been possible during Truth and Reconciliation hearings. "I know you lost a person you love, " he says he told them during that meeting. "I want you to forgive me and take me as your child."¹³⁴

The Biehls, who had established the Amy Biehl Foundation in the aftermath of their daughter's death, asked Nofemela and Peni to work at the Guguletu branch of the foundation. Nofemela became an instructor in an afterschool sports program and Peni an administrator. In June 2002, they accompanied Linda Biehl to New York, where they all spoke before the American Family Therapy Academy on reconciliation and restorative justice. In a Boston Globe interview, Linda Biehl, when asked how she now feels about the men who killed her daughter, said, "I have a lot of love for them." After Peter Biehl died in 2002, she bought two plots of land for them in memory of her husband so that Nofemela and Peni can build their own homes. ¹³⁵ A few days after the September 11 attacks, the Biehls had been asked to speak at a synagogue in their community. According to Peter Biehl, "We tried to explain that sometimes it pays to shut up and listen to what other people have to say, to ask: 'Why do these terrible things happen?' instead of simply reacting." ¹³⁶

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129. Arthur Waskow, resident, Institute for Policy Studies, Saturday Review, 8 January 1972, quoted in Fay Honey Knopp, et al., *Instead of Prisons: A Handbook for Abolitionists* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Prison Research Education Action Project, 1976), 15-16.
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THE ABOLITIONIST TOOLKIT

CRITICAL RESISTANCE

ABOLITIONIST STEPS

HOW DO WE REACH OUR GOAL?

THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF ABOLITION CAN SEEM A LONG WAYS OFF. Considering the obstacles we currently face, how might we imagine reaching abolition? What practical struggles can we take up in the present? Part of the key to answering both of these questions is to view the path towards abolition as one that requires gradual steps rather than instant leaps.

What are these abolitionist steps? Are they reforms? Some reforms help keep oppressive institutions alive. They become tools to keep things as they are. They cause activists to become manipulated or taken over. They lead to harmful compromises that take us away from our goal. Are all reforms, however, necessarily bad?

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

A HELPFUL DISTINCTION TO MAKE is between abolitionism and reformism. In a very clear way, abolitionism and reformism differ in terms of ideals. The abolitionist keeps a constant eye on an alternative vision of the world in which the PIC no longer exists, while the reformist envisions changes that stop short of this. This simple difference often comes from more deeply rooted differences in how the PIC is critically understood. Abolitionist analysis leads to the conclusion that the PIC is fundamentally unjust and must be brought to an end. Reformist analysis typically leads to the conclusion that the PIC can be made just if certain changes are made.

Both the abolitionist and the reformist might be for the same change, but they consider and push for these changes in really different ways because of their different understandings and ideals. As an example, consider the change of trying to get third-party monitors inside prisons.

Reformists might try to get monitors inside mainly because they want to see less brutality by guards against prisoners. Their underlying understanding might be that the brutal conditions of prisons would mostly disappear if it were not for a lack of professional accountability on the part of prison guards and administration.

Abolitionists, on the other hand, would begin with the belief that prisons are brutal and dehumanizing at their core. Participating in a campaign for monitors, however, could still be possible. Abolitionists could push for the campaign to be tailored towards their own ends. Public education could be presented with an approach that demonstrates the fundamental injustices of prisons.

Trying to get monitors inside prisons could also be tied to larger goals that lead more towards the direction of abolitionism. For instance, trying to get monitors could be connected to trying to get other changes inside prisons that guarantee prisoners the right to organize and have greater self-rule. This is exactly what happened during the 1970s at a prison in Massachusetts. The monitors came into the prison while the prisoners organized and governed themselves during a guard strike. Because prisoner organizing is a necessity for getting closer to abolition, such a reform would be a significant advance, even for abolitionists.

Abolitionist steps are about gaining ground in the constant effort to radically transform society. They are about chipping away at oppressive institutions rather than helping them live longer. They are about pushing critical consciousness, gaining more resources, building larger coalitions, and developing more skills for future campaigns. They are about making THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF ABOLITION MORE POSSIBLE.

REFORMISM AT WORK

A highly publicized reform happened in North Carolina where sentencing guidelines were restructured in 1993. These new guidelines increased the cruelty of sentences for "the most serious felonies" while diverting those guilty of "lesser offenses" to non-prison punishments such as community service, electronic monitoring, residential drug treatment, probation, and house arrest. One non-profit agency celebrated the sentencing guidelines for reducing the state's "prison population for much of the 1990's." They also

claimed that after the guidelines went into affect 10,000 to 12,000 people were diverted from prison each year.

To begin with, the non-profit agency's claims are at least partially false. According to statistics provided by the North Carolina Department of Corrections, the prison population actually grew during the 1990s. In the fiscal year of 1993-1994, the prison population was 22,848. In the following year, it leaped to 27,052. During 1998, the prison population reached highs well over 32,000. Clearly, even if the guidelines did redirect particular people who would have gone to prison, they did not lead to a decrease in the overall prison population, which instead increased dramatically.

In many ways, the sentencing restructuring helped make matters worse. The restructuring made life worse for a number of the prisoners by setting them against prisoners convicted of a different class of crimes. Also, the arguments in support of restructuring continued the false explanations used to support the prison industrial complex in general. In other words, they argued that restructuring was needed to punish "violent criminals" and keep them out of society. The reformists never called into question labeling certain prisoners as violent and making them seem evil. They never called into question whether punishment was an appropriate response to the harms committed. They never called into question whether or not prisons make society safer.

ABOLITIONIST STEPS

THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT KINDS OF ABOLITIONIST STEPS. Almost all of them are changes (reforms) that could be used by reformists rather than abolitionists. How we struggle for a change and imagine its ultimate purpose guides what political ends it will serve. Here is a brief outline of some of those changes.

- **Preservation of Life Reforms.** Ending the death penalty and putting appropriate health care in place.
- **Quality of Life Reforms.** New or improved programs that provide better opportunities for education, therapy, drug and alcohol treatment, job training, art, athletics, and structured social activities.

- **Prison Monitoring Reforms.** Oversight bodies that reduce administrative corruption, work to stop guard brutality, and/or allow for greater prisoner control over life inside the prison.
- **Right to Organize Reforms.** Changes in laws and regulations that allow prisoners to organize politically without the threat of punishment. Control units currently represent the number one threat to prisoner organizing.
- **Prison Population Reduction Reforms.** Reforms that reduce the number of prisoners through either decriminalization, reduced sentencing, or increased parole (see Shrinking the Prison Population).
- **Alternative Practice Reforms.** Replacing police, courts and prisons with responses to harm that reduce or eliminate state involvement (see Alternative Practices).

EXERCISE

Divide everyone into two groups. Have one group be "reformists." Have the other group be "abolitionists." Give each group 15 minutes to design a campaign strategy for ending the death penalty. The goal of the reformists is to end death sentences by seeking the alternative of "life" sentences. The goal of the abolitionists is to seek an end to the death penalty without reinforcing the prison system.

At the end of the 15 minutes, each group will send a representative to the front to make an impassioned plea for their campaign. After each group has presented the case, discuss what was learned. How did the arguments of each side differ? Why did they differ?

I am a woman who is a survival of sexual and physical assault both within my family and by strangers... As I questioned the effectiveness of prisons in protecting people from violence I realized that I had never once considered laying charges against any of my perpetrators. I considered why and I realized instinctively I had

protected myself from a process that I assumed would abuse me and my family. I grew up in a low income working class suburb where the police were not liked. We often took drugs and were involved in petty theft as teenagers. Avoiding arrest was a matter of survival and I never considered the police to be my allies. Male friends of mine reported being bashed by police and we were often pulled over in cars and harassed as teenagers.

As a queer teenager from a poor family I never considered reporting a number of rapes that I survived during those years. Looking back I still believe I did the right thing as I had neither the inner resources, the family support or the money to adequately protect myself from the legal process that could have scarred me further and escalated my drug use.

ALTERNATIVE PRACTICES

ALTHOUGH PEOPLE MAY DISAGREE ABOUT THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES for alternative practices, one way to develop a basic level of agreement is to think about what principles directly oppose those of the current punishment system. The PIC defines itself by punishment, authoritarianism, racism, profit-seeking, and state control. Ideal alternative practices would strive for personal and social transformation, accountability, equality, fairness,

understanding, cooperation, sharing, solidarity, forgiveness, popular participation, and self-determination.

In the United States, an increasingly popular set of alternative ideas and practices is known as "restorative justice." At its best, restorative justice reflects the above alternative principles. At its worst, restorative justice represents the wanderings of middle-class whites. These wanderings tend to exoticize and romanticize the aboriginal cultures from which the main restorative justice practices come. They also tend to lack a critical understanding of state and corporate power. This allows the punishment system to take over control of alternative practices. Finally, they don't promote the self-determination of poor communities of color in setting up alternative practices. The title restorative justice by itself often raises suspicion from people from historically oppressed communities. Restore what justice? There never was any justice? For this reason, other titles such as "transformative justice" have sometimes been used instead.

TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE

Transformative justice usually defines crime as harm. With this definition in mind, the main goal of transformative justice is to repair the harm done as much as possible. Ideally, transformative justice seeks the transformation of individuals, communities, and society as a whole. Also, transformative justice at its best places the power to respond to harm back into the hands of the people most affected by harm. In communities of color, for example, transformative justice practices could lead to greater self-determination. The institutions of the state and of white supremacy would no longer control and dictate responses to acts of harm.

CIRCLES

The circle is a well-known and successful transformative justice practice that comes from the aboriginal communities of the Yukon in Canada. At the very least, circles are usually made up of two discussion facilitators, the person who inflicted the harm, the person harmed, family members, and members of the community affected by the harm. In circles conducted under the direction of the state, lawyers and officials in the punishment system are also involved.

Following a set of core principles to which everyone involved agrees the circle goes through a process to think about the problem. First, the circle tries to understand the harm done. What happened? Why did it happen? Next, as much as possible, the circle designs a tailor-made response for repairing the harm and addressing some of its causes. The person who did the harm can volunteer to compensate the person who was harmed if damage to physical property happened. If a history of interpersonal conflict led to the incident, the facilitator can help come up with an understanding between the people involved, disagreements can be mediated, and disputes can be resolved. Neighbors and peers can form support networks for assisting the recovery and transformation of both the person harmed and person who inflicted the harm. If the appropriate resources exist, counseling and drug treatment can also be provided.

ROLE PLAY EXERCISE

Use a circle to address a specific incident. First, think of an example of harm such as an assault that people in your group could possibly experience. Describe the important background information that you will all need to know about the incident. Next, think of the people involved and affected. In addition to the person/s harmed and the person/s who harmed, think of family members, friends, and community people who were somehow affected. From this list of people, assign different roles for people to act out.

Here is one example to help think about how to deal with an incident for which a young person is responsible for committing the act of harm.

INCIDENT: One high school youth has severely beaten another high school youth to the point where the youth who was beaten will have partly deformed facial features for the rest of his life.

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE: The high school youth who committed the act of violence has an alcoholic father who beats him. Add other background details that might reflect your own particular community. Feel free to spontaneously improvise details during the role play.

CAST OF CHARACTERS: If possible, have at least the youth, their parents or guardians, two discussion facilitators, a high school teacher, and a neighbor. Other cast members could include sisters and brothers of the youth or classmates of the youth.

After you have taken the necessary steps to develop a situation and cast of characters, follow this circle process:

Sit in chairs arranged in a circle. Use a talking piece that can be held in your hands and passed from one person to another. This talking piece shows who is speaking. Only one person speaks at a time. The talking piece passes around the circle from one person to another so that all have an opportunity to speak if they want to. The facilitators will then lead the group through a discussion highlighting the following questions:

1. What values or principles should guide our circle as we see discuss both what happened and how we plan to address it?
2. What happened? How were you affected by what occurred?
3. As much as possible, what can we do repair the harm that has been done?
4. What can we do to prevent future forms of harm in our community?

NOTE: For some of these questions, the talking piece may need to go around the circle more than once.

When the circle has arrived at its final resolutions, step out of character and discuss the experience. What did you like? What didn't you like? Do you think circles are a potentially effective way of addressing harm?

SOME TRAPS AND LIMITATIONS

BECAUSE TRANSFORMATNE JUSTICE PRACTICES ARE OFTEN SUGGESTED and set up by people who are not abolitionists, there are some potential traps and limitations for using this from an abolitionist perspective.

- In many cases, current laws regarding sentencing prohibit establishing alternative. But, alternative practices can be instituted by communities on their own without state intervention.
- There is the danger of the practices being co-opted by the state in a way that actually leads to more people becoming entangled in the system. The

state might use alternative practices only for relatively minor harms or conflicts that it would not even address otherwise.

- Transformative justice practices only address certain forms of harm such as those that occur between neighbors. They do not address harm brought on by corporations or the state. For these cases, actions of protest and resistance might be better.
- Transformative justice practices only address the immediate, localized factors that lead to harm such as alcoholism and interpersonal conflicts. They do not address larger societal factors such as deindustrialization and system wide poverty.
- Transformative justice practices are designed to address forms of harm for which responsibility is admitted and for which the harmed person voluntarily agrees to use a circle.
- Transformative justice practices have not yet been fully developed to extend to severe forms of harm such as murder.
- It is still unclear how well certain alternative practices work when major power imbalances exist between the people involved. For example, it is not clear how well circles work when both youth and adults are involved.
- The practices do not change certain parts of the punishment system such as policing or investigation.

Despite these traps and limitations, transformative justice is worth checking out. Some of the limitations such as its local scope in dealing with forms of harm can be overcome if transformative justice is paired with other abolitionist campaigns.

Other limitations such as the lack of proven alternative responses to certain kinds of harm will only be addressed through more opportunities for alternatives to be tested and more involvement of abolitionists in developing transformative justice.

Finally, the trap of getting co-opted can be overcome if transformative justice is suggested from an abolitionist perspective rather than a reformist one (see Abolitionist Steps).

A TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE SUCCESS STORY

In the Yukon, circles have been used for crimes ranging up to manslaughter. The successes of circles are multiple. First, circles typically do not lead to prison sentences. After the initial eight years in which circles were used, the prison population was cut in half. Circles have allowed the aboriginal people in the Yukon a significant measure of self-determination in a racist system. At its highpoint in the late 1990s, aboriginal people were 20% of the general population while they were 77% of those admitted to custody and 97% of those admitted to probation. Third, circles have achieved significantly lower rates of recidivism and have thereby contributed to lower crime rates.

OTHER ALTERNATIVE PRACTICES

COMMUNITY HOLISTIC CIRCLE HEALING PROGRAM

In the Ojibway community of Hollow Water in Canada, a different form of the circle practice has been used to specifically deal with sexual abuse. Community leaders estimate that 75% of the population are survivors of sexual abuse and that 35% are "victimizers." To address this problem, community members took it upon themselves to create an alternative response to abuse. People who plead guilty are sentenced to three years of probation. During this time, trained community members use an intensive program of assessment, preparation, and therapy to bring together those

involved in a circle. As a result of this program, recidivism rates have been dramatically reduced.

CIRCLES OF SUPPORT

In Ontario Canada, "circles of support" have been used to assist in the reintegration of those convicted of sexual offenses into the community. This program involves volunteers forming support groups for individuals re-entering. The support group provides guidance, advocacy, and care for them as they adjust to life on the outside. The support group also assists them in mediating between the police, the media, and the surrounding community.

I am an abolitionist in regard to prison and jail.

I was raped –twice- while I worked as a paid staff for SNCC in 1965 in Arkansas. I was 23 years old at the time. I am white, my rapists were African-American men. Both were young adult community members (college students) who were working with the SNCC. In both cases I knew them slightly...

I could not then or now imagine turning these two individuals over to the police. The racial mix—black attacker-white victim; my understanding of how they would be treated by the police and the criminal justice system; my position as an SNCC staff member and the damage the publicity would do our organization; my expectation of how I would be treated by the criminal justice system and the press for putting myself in this 'dangerous position'

of working in this interracial organization: these and other factors meant it felt both unethical and personally and politically damaging for me to file charges against the two men. No matter how I had been hurt physically, emotionally, psychologically, and socially, I knew that calling the police would only have been much more damaging.

I continue to strongly believe in community-based solutions to violence, even if I am the person who suffers from the violence.

SEVEN EASY STEPS

WHEN WE USE ABOLITION AS AN ORGANIZING TOOL, it can be confusing how exactly to support abolition on a day-to-day level, especially when we work in coalition with people who aren't sold on abolition (yet). These are some guidelines, questions, and ideas to think about as you plan and evaluate your campaigns.

1. LIFE AND SCOPE

THE CRITICAL RESISTANCE MISSION STATEMENT SAYS "Because we seek to abolish the PIC, we cannot support any work that extends its life or scope."

What we mean by not "extending the life" is that the work doesn't try to make the PIC less harmful, or to fix it, but to make it less possible for the PIC to continue.

What we mean by not "extending the scope," is that any work we take up doesn't support cages that aren't clearly prisons like mental hospitals or prison hospices) instead of prisons; it doesn't make it easier to feed people

into prisons (by putting cops in schools, for example); and it doesn't validate any part of the PIC. So even when we interact with state agencies like courts or legislatures, it's done strategically and in a way that weakens those systems, not by appealing to them as potential sources of justice.

2. WHERE ARE YOU WORKING?

We organize in different ways and places, and we have to use different levers of power to undo the PIC. And while we have to work in as many ways and places as possible, we need to give the most emphasis, presence, and support to fighting the most harmful aspects of the PIC-especially within our groups. This can mean things like insisting on leadership from people of color, challenging heterosexism within your group, or highlighting white supremacy in your literature. It can also mean taking the time to work through how a campaign will connect the communities doing the campaign to the communities being targeted, and thinking about how fighting a specific part of the PIC can make the whole system weaker.

EXAMPLE

It can be hard to tell when you're using state agencies strategically and when your appeal to a court or legislature confirms its power. For example, pressuring state legislatures to decrease funding for state corrections departments during budget crunches is a useful way to challenge PIC expansion. However, it's important to make clear that (most) legislators do support prisons and police, and that opposing the PIC isn't just a matter of balanced state budgets, and that while we might be able to force legislatures to support our work sometimes, it is always going to be a matter of political force (instead of a matter of faith in

democracy or the idealism of a representative). Otherwise you might find yourself in some tricky situations (in one instance, activists in California pushing for cuts to the corrections budget recently were told that if they wanted to see a decrease in funding they should support cuts to prisoner education and job training programs). Sometimes you can work against this just by saying it: telling the media and people you're working with that a campaign is appealing to such-and-such state power strategically-not because you have faith in the government-can go a long way toward changing how people inside and outside your campaign understand that work.

3. COALITIONS

As abolitionists, figuring out whom to work with might seem hard when not very many identify as abolitionist. At the same time, abolitionist politics helps you see broad connections throughout the PIC, making coalitions more necessary and more exciting. But in coalition work it can be especially hard to sort out the "life and scope" questions. Some things to think about are:

- Is the coalition's work abolitionist even if the members aren't?
- How do you relate to the non-abolitionists in your coalition? How are you working to shift their goals from reform to abolition?
- Who's indirectly involved in your coalition? Who funds the groups you're working with? What other coalitions are those groups in?

4. NO TO NIMBY

Not-In-My-BackYard (NIMBY) organizing tries to prevent something harmful from happening in one community by directly or indirectly suggesting it should happen somewhere else (someone else's backyard). A good example would be a group that organizes against a prison proposed for their community not by saying the prison shouldn't be built, but that it needs to be built in another place. NIMBY campaigns are sometimes easier to "win," because the project can still be completed, so all it really does is move the problem temporarily out of sight. Effective abolitionist work means saying "no" to the PIC anywhere and everywhere.

5. HEALTHY SOLUTIONS?

Part of building toward abolition is building other institutions and practices to maintain and create self-determination for communities and individuals. This doesn't mean that every campaign against a part of the PIC has to offer an exact alternative, but we should be thinking about those things—if you're fighting a new prison, what do you want done with that money and land instead? If you're fighting against education and health care cuts, where from state funding of the PIC could you get money (e.g. replacing cuts to education with cuts to the prison or police budget).

6. WHOSE WORDS ARE YOU USING?

What are the ways you frame the problem, your work, your demands, and your solutions? Do they rely on the PIC's categories of criminals, fear, and punishment, or do they help us to build a world where we are accountable to each other and address harm by providing for our collective and individual needs? Does your language help broaden people's general vision of fighting the PIC, or does it only spotlight a particular problem?

7. SHORT-TO LONG-TERM.

How does your current project contribute to abolition? Does it offer immediate support to people harmed by the PIC? Is it a movement building or educational tool? Does it connect issues that seem separate? What is it going to make possible down the line?

I think that as we develop prison abolition we also need to build on the visions of communities that

have organized around the basis of identity. By that I'm not saying that we need to go back to this narrow identity politics where we can't work together unless we come from the same racial group, or sexual group, or whatever, but I do think that sometimes the prison abolitionist language begins to erase the language of race and identity and sexuality, and to a lesser extent gender. And if do that it becomes less— it doesn't seem so relevant to communities of color that are very much used to organizing within a framework of anti-racist, African-American, Latino language. So I think we need to develop and abolitionism and an abolitionist statement and language that is totally infused with the cultures of the people who are incarcerated.

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