

Barack Obama and the New Afrikan “National Question:” Are We Free Yet?

by Kali Akuno

*In Honor of the 83rd Birthday of Malcolm X and the clarity he brought to the New Afrikan¹ revolutionary movement

¹A New Afrikan is a person of Afrikan descent, particularly those historically enslaved and colonized in the Southeastern portion of the North American continent, that presently live under the colonial subjugation of the United States government. New Afrikan is the connotation of the national identity of this Afrikan people that recognizes their political aspirations for self-determination and independence.

Since the stunning Iowa victory of Senator Barack Obama in January, a great deal has been said and written about the declining or ongoing significance of “race” and “racial prejudice” in US society, and about the prospect of a person of Afrikan descent being its President as proof of its substantive social transformation. While this discussion must be regarded as an advance over the conservative moralistic and race-coded discussions that have dominated political debate in the US since the 1980’s, we must acknowledge its critical limitations.

In the main, these discussions individualize the issues and only engage the behavioral and subjective aspects of inequality and oppression. What is fundamentally missing is a critical discussion of the structural and systemic nature of oppression and exploitation within the US and how the Obama campaign “phenomenon” relates to these structures and dynamics.

This paper seeks to investigate the strategic relationship of the Obama campaign to the structural dynamics of oppression and exploitation within the US. In particular, it will focus on the question of New Afrikan or Black national oppression within the US and how the Obama campaign addresses this oppression. It also seeks to address certain strategic questions that progressive forces within the national liberation and multi-national working class movements must struggle with over the course of the next six months in order to ensure that our demands and interests are advanced – regardless of whether Obama wins in November.

Some of the strategic questions this paper seeks to address are:

1. What is Obama’s organic relationship to the New Afrikan or Black nation?
2. What class position, alignment and program does Obama represent?
3. How do Obama’s campaign strategy and program relate to the historic interests and demands of the Black nation?

What is the “National Question”?

In summary, from a dialectical materialist framework, the “national question” refers to a) the unequal structural relationship of colonized and oppressed peoples to international capital, oppressor nations, imperialism, and white supremacy and b) to the historic struggles of colonized and oppressed peoples to liberate themselves from these oppressive systems and forces, either in whole or in part (as not all of these “people’s” or “national liberation” struggles have sought to remove themselves from capitalist relations of production).

The inequalities between peoples produced by capitalism are historic. They are rooted in the development of the capitalist world system through the colonization and/or subjugation of the globe and its non-European peoples by the ruling classes of the western European states (i.e. Portugal, Spain, France, England, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, and Italy) beginning in the 15th century.

In order to facilitate the process of capital accumulation they initiated on a world scale, the ruling classes of Europe developed a social system and ideology that divided world production along several lines, some of which predated capitalism, some of which developed specifically to suite capitals historic needs. The pre-capitalist social divisions that were exploited were religion, ethnicity, nationality and patriarchy. The new and fundamentally principal divisions developed by and with capitalism are race and state-bound nationality.

The purpose of exploiting and/or developing these inequalities is a) to facilitate the control of the land, labor, and (material and non-material) resources of the subject and oppressed peoples and b) to foster competition between and among these peoples for the material and social rewards conferred by this exploitative and alienating system.

In the United States the “national question” specifically addresses the structural relationship of colonized, oppressed, and subject peoples to the European settler-colonial project and the imperial national-state apparatus that reinforces it. This project is premised on the genocide and dispossession of indigenous peoples (the First Nations); the enslavement and colonial subjugation of Afrikan peoples and their descendents; and the dispossession and colonial subjugation of Xicanas/os.

The New Afrikan National Question

Throughout the history of the US settler-colonial project New Afrikans have fundamentally been concentrated in the southeastern portion of the project’s possessions. The foundation of this concentration was historically premised on the utilization of enslaved Afrikan labor to produce cash crops like tobacco, cotton, rice, dyes, and sugar, for international consumption. During the

early mercantile stages of capitalist development the climatic conditions, soil quality, and strategic location of these possessions facilitated them being incorporated into the world-capitalist system as a zone of mono-crop commodity production. This population concentration and the relations of production exercised in this zone facilitated the formation of the New Afrikan people as a colonized diasporic Afrikan nation subject to will of the European settler-colonial project and its capitalist-imperialist regime between 1619 and 1865.

The mechanization of agriculture in the southeastern portion of the settler-colonial state in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, combined with an intense program of labor control and repression during this period, displaced millions of New Afrikans. In the search for refuge and jobs, displaced New Afrikans reconcentrated in the urban industrial centers of the East Coast, Mid-West, and West Coast between the 1910s – 1960s. In the process of this resettlement, millions of New Afrikans joined the ranks of the industrial working class. However, they did so fundamentally on an unequal structural basis. Exploiting the subject status of New Afrikan people, capital, the labor bureaucracy, and the various European settler communities relegated New Afrikans to the lowest strata’s of the working class, where they were concentrated in the lowest paid and most hazardous occupations that restricted their ability to earn and accumulate. This process of development established the social and economic terms of New Afrikan national oppression throughout the entire expanse of the US settler-colonial project.

Simultaneously, the vast majority of New Afrikans who remained in the New Afrikan national territory (i.e. the southeastern portion of the settler-colonial project) became subject to a new regime of accumulation and distorted national development. Reacting to the gains made in the industrial “north” by the multinational working class movement between the 1930’s – 50’s, industrial capital “outsourced” production to New Afrika to exploit the subjugated status of the New Afrikan working class. Although the New Afrikan working class was kept from effectively organizing itself into labor unions, this development did expand the overall circuit of capital within the New Afrikan nation, which helped stimulate the rise of the civil rights movement and its petit bourgeois program of civil inclusion within the legalistic confines of the settler-colonial project.

The limited social and economic gains of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements set the present terms of national development for the New Afrikan nation. New Afrika, like all nations and nationalities, is a class stratified social formation. Like all the peoples and nations subjugated and colonized by the European colonial powers, capital and capitalist social relations have articulated New Afrika’s social development. Throughout its nearly 400 years of development, the overwhelming majority of New Afrikans have been and are members of the working classes (either as chattel slaves, peasants, or proletarians). However, a very limited New Afrikan bourgeoisie has existed since at least the mid-19th century. Throughout much of New Afrikan history, this extremely small, typically service based petit-bourgeoisie has tended politically to be more progressive than reactionary in its political outlook and program. In the main this bourgeois class has provided leadership to and support for the primary

historical demands of the New Afrikan national liberation movement.

In summary these demands have been and are:

1. Land for self-determining or autonomous development and accumulation.
2. Equal treatment before the law of the settler-colonial state.
3. Equitable distribution of the social surplus distributed throughout the settler-colonial state.
4. Self-determining political power.
5. Self-reliant and self-sustaining economic development.
6. Reparations.

However, the accumulation gains (meager as they were) of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements combined with major shifts in the relations of production on a worldwide scale, transformed the relationship of the New Afrikan bourgeoisie to the whole of the New Afrikan nation from the 1970’s to the present. The two dominant features of this process of transformation are a) the phenomenal rise of the comprador bourgeoisie in the 1970’s and 80’s, and b) the rapid transformation of this comprador bourgeoisie into a transnational bourgeoisie from the 1980’s to the present. As will be argued throughout this paper, this transformation not only changed the overall structural composition of the New Afrikan bourgeoisie, it has forever altered its political worldview and program.

Part 1 – The Interrogations Interrogating the “National” Question

Barack Obama has asserted on several occasions a) that race doesn’t matter and b) that there is only “one” America.

The implication of these statements, even if only stated for strategic affect, is that the national contradictions within the US settler-colonial project have been negated and resolved. Even a cursory glance at the socio-economic inequalities between the various nationalities in the US reveals that these assertions are blatantly false. However, the unprecedented success of Obama’s campaign and the ground it has broke as it relates to a “Black” candidate appealing to white voters on a national level reveals that something qualitative has changed in this country. The question is what is it?

I argue that the source of the qualitative change lies in the changing composition of class throughout the US settler-colonial project. The advance of global capital and its transformation of production and accumulation throughout the capitalist world-system generated this compositional shift. I posit that the process of transformation popularly called “globalization” has created a transnational bourgeoisie and growing multi-national or “cosmopolitan” transnational service and working classes. It is my position that Barack Obama is a member of and represents the political and economic interests of the transnational bourgeoisie and the social interests of the growing transnational classes. More specifically, Barack Obama is a product of the New Afrikan transnational bourgeoisie, which emerged in the main from the comprador or neo-colonial sector of the New Afrikan bourgeois class between the 1970’s to the present.

The fundamental question regarding this new class composition for progressive and revolutionary forces within the New Afrikan national liberation movement is how to strategically relate to Barack Obama and this transnational bourgeois class? Is this class (or class fraction) a friend or a foe of the New Afrikan national liberation movement? I argue three things:

1. That the material basis for the traditional class collaboration theory of the united and/or national liberation front strategy of oppressed peoples and nations in general, and of its historic application to the New Afrikan national liberation movement in particular, no longer applies.
2. That the left has not developed a general or particular theory of how to strategically relate to these new class forces

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3. As a result, we are presently ill equipped theoretically and programmatically to address the Obama phenomenon and seize the historic opportunities it presents to advance the interests of the national liberation and multi-national working class movements.

How does the transnational bourgeoisie differ from other bourgeoisie classes, particularly amongst oppressed nations like the New Afrikan nation? The general theory of national liberation maintains that there are two primary fractions of the capitalist or bourgeois class (that is the class that owns and controls the means of production). These are 1) the national, progressive, or “anti-imperialist” bourgeoisie and 2) the comprador or “sell-out”, “Uncle Tom”, or neo-colonial bourgeoisie.

The national or anti-imperialist bourgeoisie is theoretically a progressive force drawn from the organic, inner driven life of the oppressed nation that is materially compelled to promote the development of the productive forces of the nation for its own self-interests, and to resist the incursion of imperialism and its suppression of this autonomous national development for these selfsame interests.

The comprador or sell-out bourgeoisie is theoretically a reactionary force also drawn from the organic, inner driven life of the oppressed nation, which is conversely compelled to collaborate with imperialism to retard the autonomous or self-determining development of the oppressed nation.

The fundamental difference between these two bourgeois fractions and the transnational fraction is their organic relationship to the oppressed nation. The national and comprador bourgeoisies are dependent upon relations of production within the social and political life of the oppressed nation. Meaning they are both dependent on the working masses of the oppressed nation for their very existence, and hence can be held accountable to the working classes within it in various ways. The transnational bourgeoisie on the other hand, even though it emerged primarily from the comprador fraction in New Afrika and elsewhere, is not dependent for its existence upon the oppressed nation and its relations of production. The transnational bourgeoisie, as its name implies, is not a national or national-state bound entity. Its basis for existence lies in exploiting the peoples and working classes of the globe. It is generally only accountable to or held in check by its fractional partners and rivals (largely through their financial control of various capital markets as exhibited by their deflation of various national-state markets like Mexico in the early-1990s; Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Korea in the late 1990s; and Brazil and Argentina at the turn of this century).

Now, while I posit that this understanding of Obama’s positioning helps us to understand his relationship with the New Afrikan nation and its historic demands, I argue that we still do not completely understand at this point, how it relates to his mass appeal to white voters in many instances who are not part of this transnational formation. This I argue, we as progressives and revolutionaries, have to interrogate further to gain a deeper understanding of its strategic potential.

Interrogating the Campaign

Despite what one may personally think of Obama and the principle merits of his campaign, what we have to acknowledge is that his actions and his campaign are deeply rooted in a particular analysis of how to address national oppression in the US. This analysis is rooted in the “integrationist” and “beloved community” narratives of the New Afrikan petit bourgeois leadership of the Civil Rights Movement and its white liberal bourgeois patrons. The strategy behind this narrative appeal is to highlight the commonalities between the oppressor and oppressed peoples, rather than address their contradictions and differences.

This strategy is rooted in the reality that the road to victory goes through the white electorate and its sheer numerical strength. Based on this reality, I argue there are two historical dynamics that have fundamentally shaped the Obama campaign and its strategy.

1. No Democratic candidate has won a majority of white voters since 1964. For a Democratic candidate to win, they are going to have to win a sizeable portion of, if not the majority of, the white settler vote.
2. The Jesse Jackson campaigns of 1984 and 1988. These two campaigns serve as the primary negative examples for the Obama campaign. They illustrate what NOT to do as an Afrikan candidate running for President, which

has determined key aspects of his strategy, particularly his methods of appeal to white and Jewish voters in particular. Based on these realities, the Obama campaign made a deliberate and strategic choice NOT to base his candidacy in the institutions (like the Black church, civic organizations, unions, and the media) or historic demands of the New Afrikan nation. In order to give himself the opportunity to win, Obama must avoid being viewed as a “Black” candidate by any and all means. This explains in part, why he has distanced himself from the likes of Jesse Jackson, Louis Farrakhan, and Jeremiah Wright – the “traditional” representatives of the “progressive” New Afrikan bourgeoisie.

However, his campaign has also relied upon the staunch support of the Democratic Party by New Afrikan people. New Afrikans have been the most consistent base of support for the Democratic Party since the 1964 election of Lyndon B. Johnson. In fact, New Afrikans have voted consistently for Democratic Presidential candidates in the range of 80 – 90% since 1956. This fact however, should not be surprising. Democratic candidates can and do take the New Afrikan vote for granted because in the main, New Afrikans have no other genuine political option to represent their interests. Knowing this, Obama and his campaign know that they have to make few special appeals to New Afrikans and most of the other oppressed peoples within the “traditional” Democratic Party coalition to garner their votes (certain “Latino” populations it can be argued might constitute exceptions).

Interrogating the Popular Forces

Regardless of how marginalized New Afrikan demands and institutions are to the Obama campaign, the fact is that since Obama’s Iowa victory in January, New Afrikans have turned out in near record numbers to support his campaign for the Democratic nomination. How do we explain this outpouring of support despite his lack of engagement with New Afrikan demands and institutions?

Further, how do we explain his victories in states like Iowa, Kansas, Oregon, Colorado, Connecticut, Nebraska, Vermont, and Wyoming where the vast majority of the electorate are white settlers who are not substantively incorporated into the transnational nexus of production?

Part of the answer I believe lies in the transnational class developments spoken of earlier. The other part of the answer I believe lies in the popular response to the last 7 years of the Bush regime. As a direct result of the failed occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, the accumulation of unprecedented debt, the partisan management of the economy, the exposed lies and deceit, and the hostile, belligerent, and dictatorial “style” of management, this election is in many ways serving as a popular anti-Bush referendum.

The popular, multi-national, multi-class forces engaging the Obama campaign are clearly clamoring for a change of management. This was first evidenced in the elections of 2006 and has been further illustrated in several off-term Congressional elections in Illinois, Louisiana, and Mississippi where Democrats took elections in long-held Republican districts. Barack Obama, for reasons of personal history (including his newness to Capital Hill), style (particularly his cultivated charisma and flair for the optimal, however programmatically empty it may be), and strategy (including a tacit exploitation of cultural stereotypes about New Afrikan people being good listeners and empathizers) has thus far demonstrated that he would be a profoundly different manager than either of his remaining Democrat or Republican rivals.

What I think progressives and revolutionaries have to be clear on in relating to these popular forces is that a clamoring for a change of management does not equate to a clamoring for a fundamental change of program. It is on the question of program that I would argue that the national question strongly reenters the fray and could perhaps fracture the broad multi-national, multi-class alliance thus far mobilized by the Obama campaign.

For instance, the historic demands of New Afrikan people are not going to go away without a revolutionary transformation of the US settler-colonial state. In fact, as the mortgage crisis deepens over the course of the next 2 to 4 years, some of the demands, like economic development and reparations perhaps, are only going to become stronger.

Likewise, the transnational capital interests supporting Obama’s campaign have no intentions of stopping their accumulation mission. Rather, they are trying to expand it through the application of a friendlier management approach of their primary regulating

instruments – namely the US military, treasury, and Federal Reserve Bank. And further, many of the white service and working class voters who are supporting Obama are not demanding an end to imperialism and globalization, but a return to the high standards of living they are accustomed and feel entitled to as settlers, i.e. “Americans”.

Interrogating the Moment

This is an extremely unique moment in human history, one that should not be slept on by progressives and revolutionaries anywhere, let alone in the US.

There are three general things that make this moment particularly unique:

1. The rapid collapse of the ecological systems that support human civilization as a direct consequence of the capitalist world-systems need for constant growth and expansion and its dependence on a petrochemical driven system of mass industrial production to stimulate and sustain this growth.
2. The declining hegemony (in both its geo-political and Gramscian connotations) of the US imperial state and the shift to a multi-polar geopolitical world order.
3. The comparative weakening of the US national economy and the deepening of transnational production and accumulation.

In order to be properly contextualized, the Obama campaign and corresponding “phenomenon” must be situated as a direct response to this unique moment in history. As has been argued earlier, his campaign is clearly a factional response, one fundamentally serving the interests of the transnational bourgeoisie and its means and instruments of accumulation and rule.

The two fundamental questions stemming from this assessment are, 1) is this class and the alliance of forces it has amassed strong enough to contain the contradictions it has unleashed and 2) can it continue its accumulation program and political project without a major transformation away from petrochemical dependent production?

I argue that the answer to both questions is emphatically, NO. Returning to our focus of analyzing the Obama campaign in relation to the New Afrikan national question, there are several examples that clearly illustrate why.

The transnational program of accumulation is fundamentally driven by a finance driven post-Fordist, intelligence dominated system of production. The intense mechanization of this production regime is rapidly dislocating millions, if not billions, of workers, worldwide. The New Afrikan working class was one of the first and most devastated sectors of the international proletariat hit by this accumulation regime. Since the 1970’s, millions of New Afrikans have been economically dislocated and physically displaced by this transformation, which is only set to worsen with the crisis of finance (witnessed with the mortgage crisis that robbed millions of New Afrikans of their merge capital equity) and the deepening of global production. What is also clear is that the options of absorbing this surplus labor into the low-wage service economy or warehousing (i.e. incarcerating) it, is reaching its political and financial limits.

The likely outcomes of the escalating crisis are:

1. More intense economic dislocation
2. More intense physical displacement and forced relocation (New Orleans being a clear precedent)
3. More intense and concentrated New Afrikan resistance
4. An escalation of the demands made on the state and capital by New Afrikans.

As a representative of the transnational bourgeoisie, its production regime, and the US imperial state, how would Obama be compelled to address these contradictions? I argue that he would fundamentally have to exercise the Nixon option as it related to the New Afrikan nation (and other oppressed nations within and beyond US national-state borders). Plainly stated the Nixon option is the calculated employment of “carrot and the stick” stratagems. Obama’s carrot would be to ameliorate or buy off a sectors of the New Afrikan bourgeoisie and working class by offering a set of concessions, primarily in the realm of loan forgiveness (for the mortgage crisis) and job training programs (more than likely for “Green Jobs” and the like). The stick would be the strategic application of state repression against resistant and non-compliant forces within the New Afrikan working class.

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Southern California Urban Network: Fighting Gentrification, Gang Injunctions and Police Violence

by Vik Chaubey

Los Angeles-area inner city communities in the past two years have been facing a growing number of interconnected problems like gentrification, gang injunctions, sellout politicians, attacks against the residents of housing authority projects, and an ongoing lack of opportunities and jobs. L.A. is facing a particularly tough time with the California housing crisis and the state's large, structural budget deficit.

The inner city has been hit hard by the neglect of the L.A. political and economic elite, and now the elites are proposing to attack the problems by attacking the community! They are pushing development strategies that have no benefit for inner city communities. New schools, new police facilities and jails, new rail lines are being used as part of a strategy of population removal, replacement and control. Mayor Villaraigosa, in announcing an "austerity" budget for the city in which most programs and staffing were cut, insisted that increased funding for and hiring of new police officers would go forward even as other social services were slashed.

In June 2006 I formed the Southern California Urban Network to deal with problems of the L.A. inner city and the inner cities close to the L.A. inner city, like Compton, Carson, Inglewood, Hawthorne, and Long Beach. The focus would be on issues important to the inner cities, especially issues like gentrification,

police violence, gang injunctions, access to meaningful education, prisoner rights, and creating inner city development based on the inner city culture, not on white mainstream culture.

We are 100% committed to grass-roots organizing and we are trying to come up with new grass-roots approaches to organizing in the inner city. We started organizing in the Imperial Courts housing project in Compton (we were formed there) in summer 2006. Our formation in one respect was a response to the police violence that was becoming a big problem in the L.A. inner city and especially in Compton in 2006. We helped to organize rallies in summer 2006 and passed out informational flyers on a weekly basis during the summer. We were effective in our message and people rallied to our support of inner city culture.

It was a joint effort with other people that wanted to help the people in Compton. We produced flyers stressing the importance of everybody working together -- gangs, young, elderly and everybody else. In the final analysis we had successes but we did not change the dynamics of what was taking place in Compton or the L.A. inner city. But we showed the potential of what grass roots organizing can do and the potential of uplifting people.

Compton was our starting point and in 2007 in Boyle Heights, a historically Chicano community in East Los Angeles, we made anti-gentrification and opposition to gang injunctions the main issues in our organizing. Unlike most of East L.A., which historically has been unincorporated territory outside the Los Angeles city limits, Boyle Heights is inside L.A. proper politically. It is a prime real estate market adjacent to downtown, and like the mostly African communities of poor and homeless people downtown, has been targeted for gentrification.

As in Compton, we employed similar grass roots organizing strategies but our cause was different here. Police violence was the main issue in Compton; but in Boyle Heights, the main cause was opposing gentrification. We employed a strategy of anti-gentrification and opposition to gang injunctions because both are similar in understanding the development strategy for Boyle Heights. Boyle Heights was a much tougher place to organize especially with the changes taking place. In Compton people are more organized and rooted in a sense of their own community history. With so much of Boyle Heights, the historic Chicano population has left in recent years, and the newer people, including many more recent Mexicano migrants, do not have the same level of interest in local politics or know the history

of Boyle Heights and the Chicano resistance.

We have found a certain number of people who understand what Boyle Heights has meant and means. I have organized in Boyle Heights over the last 12 months with a person who grew up in the Hazard projects in Ramona Gardens. Together we have gone through entire Boyle Heights area, talking with young people, elders, students and community groups. Boyle Heights is facing gentrification and the housing projects are under attack. For some time, Mayor Villaraigosa and Supervisor Gloria Molina have been pushing a medical research 'industrial park' connected to USC for the area. The city has been building a new police station and lock-up in the area, with multi-million dollar cost overruns, to contain and control the poor residents. The MTA Gold Line is being extended through the area, to cement the connection to the downtown business district. The rail line is being used to anchor up-scale shops, housing and corporate chains to replace local businesses and residents. The area's City Council member, Jose Huizar, formerly the president of the LA Unified School Board, is a part of the pro-business east-side political machine. He has been promoting gentrification and supporting gang injunctions. This is a tactic that has been used in several neighborhoods by City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo, who also works closely with developer-dominated "neighborhood councils" to promote gentrification. We did struggle to get people to understand the gang injunctions and what they mean in relation to gentrification.

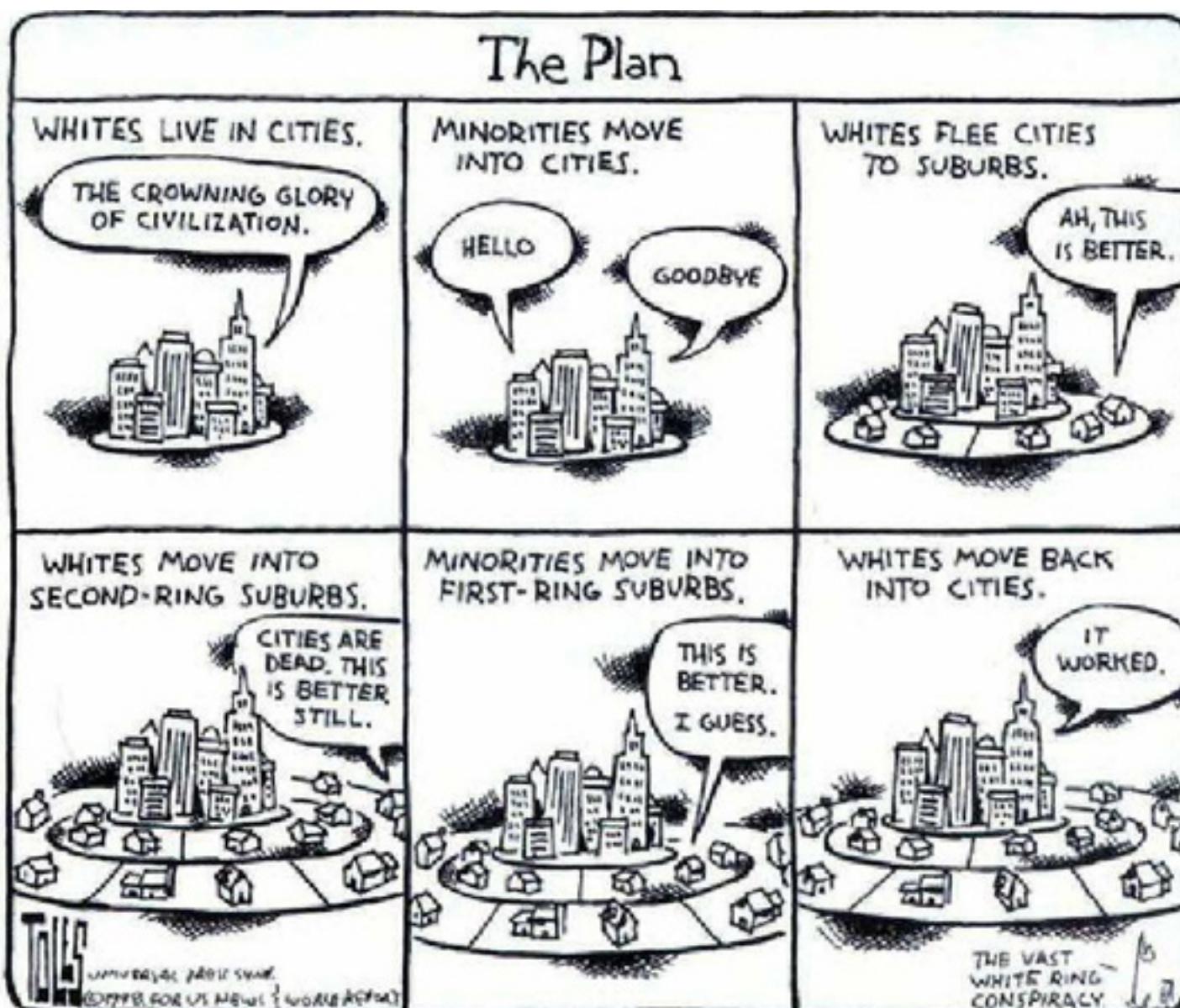
Another obstacle has been non-profits, which have come increasingly to substitute themselves for grass-roots community groups. They operate based on priorities set by their funding sources, under strict limits of their activities set by the tax laws, and with an undemocratic "board-and-staff" method of organization under which community people, even if they nominally "members," have no real say. These groups now have a lot of influence in Boyle Heights, and are not willing to work with people who have different strategies from them.

We put a lot of effort organizing in the projects and areas of Boyle Heights that we feel we can reach through different approaches to grass roots community-based organizing. We have used informational flyers, person

to person organizing, and we have also gone to the streets and talk to all types of people. We have done rallies, protests, and community meetings and hope to do more events in relation to anti-gentrification organizing. Both in Compton and Boyle Heights we showed the people that we should be proud of our inner city culture that has been our trademark. In a period when the media and the establishment, as well as right-wing forces like the Minutemen are trying to foment Black-Brown rivalry, we have been bringing people from Compton and Boyle Heights together. We have organized in the projects both in Compton and Boyle Heights and are reaching low-income oppressed people that most non-profits and so-called left groups seem to ignore. These poor people are important to any strategy of real change because of the attacks they face every day. We are coming up with new grass roots approaches to organizing and we hope to organize in other places with a strong emphasis on inner city solidarity. Our approaches are rooted in L.A. inner city history, particularly the inter-related struggles of Blacks and Chicanos. That history of solidarity and unity is important in how we organize.

Vik Chaubey has worked with People Against Racist Terror and is a founder of Southern California Urban Network. For more information, contact him at:

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ANTI-RACIST ACTION NETWORK FOUR POINTS OF UNITY

- 1) **WE GO WHERE THEY GO:** Whenever fascists are organizing or active in public, we're there. We don't believe in ignoring them or staying away from them. Never let the nazis have the street!
- 2) **WE DON'T RELY ON THE COPS OR THE COURTS TO DO OUR WORK FOR US:** This doesn't mean we never go to court. But we must rely on ourselves to protect ourselves and stop the fascists.
- 3) **NON-SECTARIAN DEFENSE OF OTHER ANTI-FASCISTS:** In ARA, we have lots of different groups and individuals. We don't agree about everything and we have a right to differ openly. But in this movement an attack on one is an attack on us all. We stand behind each other.
- 4) **We support abortion rights and reproductive freedom.** ARA intends to do the hard work necessary to build a broad, strong movement against racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, class exploitation and discrimination against the disabled, the oldest, the youngest and the most oppressed people. **WE INTEND TO WIN!**
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The purpose of the Nixon option now, as during his Presidency in the late 60's and early 70's, would be to fracture the political unity of the New Afrikan nation against the transnational bourgeoisie and its program.

Staying with our analysis, it is also clear that the Green transformation option is a dead end for the transnational bourgeoisie and its program. Although elements of the transnational bourgeoisie are clearly leading the charge for the development of "green" capitalism, it is not, and in fact cannot, advocate for the transformation of scale needed to curb the production of greenhouse gases to stall or reverse climate change without bankrupting itself. As a result, it cannot and will not generate enough "Green Jobs" to reincorporate the millions of New Afrikans that have been economically dislocated by transnational production.

Yet and still, what we can posit with confidence at this moment is that capital is going to go to extreme lengths to extend its life and barbaric domination over human civilization. Conversely, as the events of the last 7 years have illustrated, we should also expect to see an escalation and diversification of resistance.

Part 2 -Outlining a Framework to Seize the Moment

So, how should the New Afrikan and multi-national liberation and working class movements strategically engage this historic campaign and critical moment?

One of the first priorities of engagement is theoretical development. One of the principle things the New Afrikan and multi-national left movements must figure out is how to engage to the transnational bourgeoisie. As stated earlier, as of now, our movements do not have a general, let alone united, perspective on this question. In fact, I would argue that most of our forces are still utilizing the traditional united or national liberation front theory to determine their positions and courses of action.

I argue that because the transnational bourgeoisie cannot be easily pressured by the national liberation and working class movements within the US settler-colonial project, these movements should not invest the majority of their time and energy engaging an "inside" strategy of critical engagement with the Obama campaign. I argue that thinking strategically, these forces should concentrate their energy on building autonomous political movements and institutions (like the Reconstruction Party) within the US national-state that seek to build a broad multi-national united front of oppressed peoples and workers that makes a principle of building strategic links and alliances with the autonomous national liberation, international working class, global justice, and environmental movements throughout the world. As the transnational bourgeoisie thinks and acts globally, we must also think and act globally to advance our own interests.

However, as the vast majority of our peoples and forces are going to support the Obama campaign and potential Presidency, in the short-term we tactically have to invest a critical degree of time and energy engaging them, if only to try and win a considerable portion of these forces to a left perspective and program.

And it is here that we need theoretical clarity. How do we offer a radical critique of Obama, his class position, interests, and program without alienating ourselves from the popular masses? How do we move these forces to engage in autonomous self-determining action outside of the Democratic Party? How do we educate and move the white settler forces mobilized by Obama to actively engage an anti-racist-determining action outside of the Democratic Party? How do we educate and move the white settler forces mobilized by Obama to actively engage an anti-racist, anti-imperialist perspective and program?

To these ends, a hard-pressed counter campaign against Obama I would argue is not the most effective or productive way to engage these popular forces from this point forward. Rather, I think the multi-national left must seek to highlight the contradictions of Obama's campaign and program through a combined "outside-inside" strategy that seeks to advance a coherent set of principle demands and push him and the forces he has mobilized sharply to the left. Again, I think the formation of an autonomous "outside" political force should be primary. However, what is perhaps most tactically critical is that both the "outside" and "inside" forces aggressively promote and propagate these common demands; vigorously dialogue and debate in a principled, non-sectarian manner; and openly communicate and collaborate whenever and wherever possible.

Some of the primary strategic demands that must be raised are drawn from the historic demands of oppressed peoples, particularly New Afrikans, combined with the demands of the multi-national working class, women's, and environmental justice movements. The combination of these demands will expose not only the limits of the transnational bourgeoisie and its production regime, but of US imperialism itself and its inability to make good on its democratic promises, either at "home" or abroad. Some of the most critical of these demands include:

1. The full and immediately ending of the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.
2. The full and unqualified support for Palestinian self-determination and the Right to Return.
3. The full and immediate Right of Return for the more than 250,000 New Afrikans displaced from their homelands in New Orleans and Mississippi Gulf Coast.
4. The repeal of the "war on drugs" and mandatory minimum sentencing that has resulted in the imprisonment of more than 2.5 million people, the vast majority of whom are New Afrikans.
5. The full support for the rights of women and the LGBTQ communities, including full support for initiatives like the Equal Rights Amendment and "gay" marriage.
6. The full and immediate repeal of the various Patriot Acts and other undemocratic anti-terror laws and Executive Orders.
7. The full, complete, and unconditional amnesty for the millions of migrant and displaced workers in the US.
8. The full and unqualified commitment to reduce the carbon imprint of the US by 80% or more by 2016 to

stem the production of climate changing greenhouse gases.

9. The commitment to the public financing of alternative solar, wind, aquatic, and organic energy to sustain the economy, and the elimination of all nuclear energy and hard metal extraction.

10. Reparations for Indigenous, New Afrikan, Xicano, Puerto Rican, Hawaiian and other peoples and nations colonized by the US (including Guam, Alaskan natives, etc.).

(See also the demands articulated in the "Draft Manifesto for a Reconstruction Party" by the National Organizing Committee for a Reconstruction Party.)

By Way of Conclusion

Although the road ahead may not be clear, and the outcome of our actions far from certain, the New Afrikan national liberation movement, and the movements of all oppressed and exploited peoples, must seize this critical moment. The survival of humanity demands that we must act, and act in our own interests. Barack Obama nor any other bourgeois messiah is going to liberate us. We must liberate ourselves.

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For a full list of references and resources, and to give feedback and commentary, write to:

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WHY THE EMPHASIS ON WHITE-SKIN PRIVILEGE IS WHITE CHAUVINIST: The Problematic Of "Race" Needs To Be Replaced By The Restoration Of the National Questions

Speech by Fred Ho, June 5, 2008, State University of New York-Stony Brook, Conference on Class in America and Tribute to Ted Allen, organized by Michael Zweig

This address shall vigorously critique the emphasis given to "white-skin privilege" as the dominant characteristic in the conceptualizing of the oppression of so-called "peoples of color" in the U.S., and for its odious contribution to reinforcing white chauvinism within the U.S. left and working-class by delimiting the struggle of "oppressed nationalities" (what I prefer to call so-called "peoples of color") to the goal of integration (with the white oppressor nation).

Indeed, ironically and paradoxically, I shall reveal the major problems of "white blind spot" in the "race" analysis framework that promotes a mistaken historical account of the development of the U.S. nation-state, the failure to apprehend how the genocide and conquest of the Native Indigenous nations, the importation of African and Asian laboring populations, the annexation of Mexico, Hawaii and transfer or purchase of colonial spoils has created the ascendancy of U.S. capitalism into the premiere global imperialist power by the mid-20th century, a process through which a white oppressor nation attains social, cultural and political supremacy, thereby "racializing" every aspect of American society.

I shall argue for the replacement of the "race" formulation and the over-emphasis upon "white-skin privilege" with a "return" to the national question(s) framework and argue that no separate politics or forms of organizing that focus upon whites is correct or efficacious, but arguably, harmful and hurtful to the cause of building working class unity and power within the U.S.

A fresh and creative analysis of the stratification and division of the U.S. working class will be offered that rejects the dominance and leading role of "white workers", heretofore the assumed project of a white chauvinist-plagued U.S. labor and left. Rectifying political strategies and organizing approaches will be proposed which emphasize the central and essential importance of re-conceptualizing the struggle to end white supremacy, white racism and inequality to be that one of building a multiplicity of national liberation struggles which require the leadership and organization of the multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-national U.S. working class and allies.

The U.S.A. has a peculiar historical development. Founded by European settler colonization, the U.S.A. grew to its present borders through military force, the purchasing of vast land territories that were the spoils from former colonial powers (viz., the Louisiana purchase from France and the \$7.2 million purchase of Alaska from Russia), the military annexation of northern Mexico and the Hawaiian islands, and the expansion of settlements and industries to the Pacific Ocean, and the acquisition of islands and territories throughout the Caribbean, central America (eg., the Panama Canal) and the Pacific Islands (eg., Guam, America Samoa, etc.). Concurrently, via the manipulation of immigration laws, a concerted campaign to repopulate the continent of North America in favor of European-descended peoples and disfavoring all others, continues to the present.

Before the consolidation of the United States of America could occur, the Native peoples who inhabited the land that we now call "the lower 48", with a rough estimated population range at the beginning of the 16th century to be between one to 10 million, had to be driven off their lands to make way for the new settlers, and ultimately, given the resistance by the Natives, nearly annihilated.

At first, the early European settlers were at the mercy of Native benevolence and assistance. However, as settlers grew in number, their capitalist appetite for land and resources intensified. The Natives were unwilling to participate in the construction of a capitalist economic and social order. Social stratification and private ownership of land and resources was completely alien to them, and once experiencing the cruelties of exploitation and oppression, resisted such incursions and assaults upon their way of life and homeland.

The Christians brought the Devil to the "New World" and the Devil was them. So-called primitive peoples did not subscribe to the monotheism and anthropocentrism of the Europeans. It was not possible for these societies to regard even their enemies as sub-human or without a soul. It was not possible for them to regard nature as not a living being for which they, as humans, came from and belonged to. The Europeans, however, slaughtered and enslaved them as if they were logs to be felled, and their land and ecology nothing more than objects from which money could be made.

Native Americans could not be coerced into American plantation society or indentured servitude. Their completely non-capitalist mode of production, which had proven to be self-sufficient and stable for eons, were devoid of highly developed state repression structures, which could not be appropriated by and made to service the formation, facilitation and social control needs of a capitalist economy. The capitalist mode of production was as inimical to Native peoples as the diseases that the Europeans brought. Not predicated upon nor driven by profits and its concomitant social and cultural precepts of

individualism, private ownership, monotheism, repressive state institutions, patriarchy and the nuclear family, etc. large scale social production was both completely foreign and toxic. Never had the Native peoples experienced such pandemics on the order introduced by Europeans: both biological and sociological.

Once it became clear that Native submission wasn't going to happen, American settler-colonialism proceeded full force with genocide: the destruction of the native mode of production, a horrific "ethnic-ecological cleansing" that cleared natural and human life, which had existed and evolved for tens of thousands of years, an unprecedented ecocide, genocide and matricide waged for a few centuries, all for the purpose of the imposition of a new settler-colonial society that would become the U.S.A.

Once the process of ecocide-genocide-matricide was underway, and settler-colonialist society expanded, endeavoring to build a capitalist mode of production foisted upon a continent that neither needed nor engendered it, the newly expanding U.S.A. proceeded with the importation of a foreign-originated labor force, to at first supplement the already-existing indentured labor force of former Europeans, and then once the cotton gin revolutionized the instruments of mass production, for large scale agrarian labor.

Why were enslaved Africans more suitable? African feudalism and proto-capitalism (the production of commodities for exchange and the social and class relations needed to facilitate that exchange) had similarities to European feudalism and emerging capitalism: Large scale social production, huge surpluses, huge repressive state apparatuses (often used to facilitate slave trading among other Africans, Arabs and Europeans), widespread use of precious metal currency and also non-metal symbolic currency (eg., cowry shells), development of large sectors of production for exchange (textiles and food production), rich resources for luxury items coveted by the European market (precious metals, ivory, etc), elaborate infra-structure from centuries of inter-continental trade with Europe and Asia.

Imported Africans didn't arrive as a ready-amalgamated nationality or people. They were valued precisely because they were so disparate and ethnically-culturally-linguistically so varied, and with the forced splitting of kinship and family ties, made even more conducive to organized exploitation for capitalist plantations. Hence U.S. capitalism necessitated this ironic amalgamation of Africans in the U.S.A., erasing particular African national or tribal identities for the new, amalgamated oppressed nationality identity as African Americans.

During the entire 19th century, the expansion and consolidation of the U.S.A. nation-state included massive land acquisitions that included the 1803 Louisiana Purchase from France battered by the loss of

Haiti and strained from its foreign wars and domestic revolts; the military conquest of 2/3rds Mexico which became incorporated as the U.S. southwest; the ongoing pacification wars against the Native peoples; the acquisition of territorial spoils from the Spanish-American War; and the military annexation of the Hawaiian islands, 3000 miles from the Pacific shores of the U.S.A. In the early 20th century, the vast territory of resource-rich Alaska, purchased from a war-and-revolution-battered Russia for a measly \$7.2 million in 1867, would be conferred U.S. territory status in 1912. By 1959, two lands, completely disconnected from the other 48 states, would become the 49th and 50th states of the U.S.A. (respectively, Alaska on January 3, 1959 and Hawaii on August 21, 1959).

From the 18th to mid-19th centuries, during the consolidation process of the U.S.A. nation-state, the American bourgeoisie had constant external conflicts primarily from England and France, as well as a growing internal conflict between the southern agrarian capitalists with the northern industrial capitalists. The Civil War was the consolidation of a unified nation-state under the political and economic leadership of the northern industrial capitalists, who victorious, and in control over the surplus profits of the internationally-traded southern-produced cash crops (cotton, tobacco, etc.) could now begin the formation of American finance capital and expand throughout the Americas and to the rest of the world (exporting either direct U.S. colonial rule and/or financial domination). As this unprecedented and exponential expansion of capital was occurring, huge labor needs had to be filled with the importation of labor from around the world and this period of the late 19th century is really the emergence of a U.S. multi-national proletariat, tho fitted into a constantly shifting racial matrix. This shift is primarily characterized by the increasing binary categorizing of "race" as "white" and "colored". The price of the ticket to settler-colonial Yankee American society was to become "white."

The myriad forms of national inequality cojoined with white supremacy to consolidate the U.S.A. as a racially defined nation-state in which an American or anything American became synonymously white.

Both for the purposes of social control, detailed in the important work of Ted Allen and others, and for what I've argued as the necessity of nation-state identity and structural formation and consolidation, the separation of peoples into "white" versus "others/foreigners/oppressed" in the U.S.A. was facilitated by the virus of "race" as a bio-social pseudo-scientific/cultural construction, extended from its original applications by European colonization.

The privileges accorded to "whites" (i.e., those accorded the status/identity as Americans) were consequently rooted in the conquest and subjugation of entire peoples, and reproduced and consolidated by a matrix of ideological political and socio-cultural privileges granted to those who were accorded the status and identity of being "American" (which meant white). Those deemed white/American had the benefits of glorification and "manifest destiny", whereas complete dehumanization was the condition for all those deemed "non-white" and excluded from consideration as Americans. White racism and white supremacy thus become normative. That which is American is equated as white. That which is or who is not "white" are NOT American.

Large influxes of Europeans to the U.S.A., including those who suffered national oppression in their homelands, such as the Irish, or faced harsh persecution, such as Jews and other religious-ethnic groups, were accorded the opportunity to join white American society, and share in the spoils of white-settler colonialism and expansionism. Though such European groups encountered initial discrimination, overall, the access and possibility for white assimilation was far preferable as participants in the consolidation of the Yankee nation-

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WHY THE EMPHASIS ON WHITE-SKIN PRIVILEGE IS WHITE CHAUVINIST:

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state than the perpetual wretchedness of exclusion and oppression for non-whites.

The unprecedented opportunities of settlerism, both real and hyped, included such privileges and enticements as the possibility for ownership of small plots of land, relative freedoms including voting rights for white males, small business ownership, and a host of other opportunities. What was required to access these real or propagandized privileges was a dedication to and support for the Yankee American way of life: kill off the Indians and take all of their land, disallow citizenship and competition from formerly enslaved Africans, remove and exterminate the Asiatics, keep the Mexicans subjugated. All "white" immigrants were given relatively unrestricted access to American citizenship. With the Chinese exclusionary immigration laws, tantamount to genocide, the Chinese were the only immigrant group which steadily decreased in number for nearly a century. Racist immigration exclusion and persecution would extend to all Asian/pacific groups until 1964.

The formal history of the U.S. is the narrative of oppressor nation building. The counter-narrative is the history of the oppressed nations and nationalities. The American multi-national proletariat emerges during this historical process, beginning after the Civil War with the unification of American capital, the integration of a common national market (greatly facilitated by the trans-continental railroad for which super-exploited Chinese labor outperformed the higher paying Irish workforce, and for which the Chinese workers were both barred from the ranks of U.S. organized labor as well as the annals of American history), the promotion of a white supremacist American historico-cultural narrative and identity with a full repertoire of Yankee Doodle Dandy mythologies and grand master narratives from song to scholarship.

To conclude my analysis of the historical development of the American nation-state, I want to summarize the concomitant white oppressor nation building process and the process of national oppression as indelible to American society:

1. White skin privileges both are byproducts of and contributors to white settler colonial national construction.
2. White privileges, as partial, tenuous and minor as they may be for poor and exploited whites, exceed the condition of national oppression relegated to those not conferred as white: genocide, terror, extreme restrictions, exclusion and constant brutal oppression.
3. In many cases whites have not been the majority population in "American history", but became dominant both numerically and socio-politically through genocide, unjust

immigration laws, forced exodus, ghettoization and marginalization, all practices aimed at the repopulation of the continent to ensure the hegemony of white supremacy.

The problem of race is that it primarily juxtaposes the political question as one of integration, as one of learning how to get along with one another, and not dealing with the question of returning land and territory and the battle for national equality. So it is about how do we get rid of our racist ideas or how do we deal with white privilege. White privilege is only one phenomenon of national oppression. The privileges happen because of the inequality between peoples, of which the first basis was depriving people of their land, resources and control of the fruits of their labor and innovations. The process of Americanization was the seizure of land and territory and then absorption or assimilation of that territory and those peoples into this mythical white supremacist thing called America. African Americans become Black Yankees when they assimilate the imperialist history and values of the United States, as opposed to seeing themselves as oppressed nationalities. Malcolm X demarcated the difference between identifying as oppressed versus identifying with the oppressor values and narrative: "We [Africans in the U.S.] are not Americans, we are victims of America".

The political logic of "anti-racism" or "fighting white-skin privileges" ironically privileges the target of struggle upon the attitudes and behaviors of whites. It presumes white leadership, the *a priori*-ness of white numerical majority, the sanctity of the current borders and configuration of the 50 states, and even the presumption of white working class inclusion in the revolutionary struggle to end U.S. imperialism, viz., the domination of U.S. monopoly capital in the domestic aspect of such struggle. And hence, the U.S. left since its formal inception, with the exception of such notable energies as the African Blood Brotherhood, the CPUSA adoption of the Comintern position of the Black-belt Nation thesis, and the revolutionary oppressed nationality movements of the 1960s-early 1970s, has been plagued with the fundamental white chauvinist problem of centering and basing the U.S. multinational working class movement upon the white working class, i.e., the focus and concentration upon the workers of the oppressor nation, rather than centering, focusing and basing the leadership and development of forces among the workers of the oppressed nations/nationalities.

The U.S. multinational working class has erroneously been viewed as necessarily being a white majority (and the attendant chauvinist presumption, with majority white leadership). Rather, oppressed nationality workers are not only the numerical majority relative to their populations, but have, both respectively and collectively, it can be argued, greater political inclination towards radical and revolutionary positions due to the intrinsic

nature of their contradiction with imperialism: super-exploitation combined with national oppression and external domination.

Only in the above cited notable exception of focus and concentration upon building the political leadership of the revolutionary national movements have any forces truly respected and grasped the objective reality that the national movements are objectively revolutionary, irregardless of, and with or without, the approval, presence or support of whites and white workers.

Thus the white integrationist-white chauvinist plagued Left has disregarded the importance of building and leading "nationality-in-form" formations, such as oppressed nationality student unions, militant community forces, independent cultural institutions, and the creative labor formations that elevate the role and leadership of oppressed nationality workers. The U.S. left has given scant emphasis upon the struggle to force the U.S. government to honor all treaties made with the Native nations, fighting for national rights, self-government, return of stolen lands and resources, reparations and the dismantling and eradication of all vestiges of white settler-colonialism, including the hegemony of classical music orchestras, white mythologies in education and scholarship, and even the notion of a white identity.

As part of upholding national self-determination, the U.S. left, in engendering the multiplicity of national liberation struggles, would support the dismantling and reconfiguration of the U.S. national borders should the struggle of oppressed nations culminate in forms of independence, autonomy or new federation relations. Asian Americans, for example, in the oppressed nation of Hawaii must choose between siding with the Yankee oppressor nation/identity or with being part of the oppressed Hawaiian nation: electing to identify as "I'm kanaka maoli (Hawaiian) of Japanese descent," for example. A white person must proclaim, "I am a new Afrikan of European descent" or a "Xicano of European descent", should they reside in what is now Mississippi or Texas, respectively.

Whites must recognize that they owe no special allegiance to white anything, including even the privileged view that the primary role of white leftists or white anti-racists is to concentrate in white communities. Whites have no entitlement to monopolize anything, **EVEN THE DRAGS OF ORGANIZING WORK!** The best way to "unlearn" whiteness (and be a true race traitor!) is to for people of European descent in the U.S.A. to give their all in exactly the same way as oppressed nationality freedom fighters: liberate stolen and occupied lands, return of resources and wealth, reparations, and to build a new society that will certainly mean the destruction of the U.S.A. as it has historically been constructed and construed, and the coming-into-being of voluntarily-associated liberated peoples and societies.

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* Black Panther Party in the 70's: workshop by Kwaku Duren, attorney and chair of the New Panther Vanguard Movement.

* Speaker - Shareef Abdullah (Black Panther Party member in the 70's and a social worker).

* A history of the Chicago Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Community Organizing by Michael D. McCarty

* Free the San Francisco 8 workshop by Ray Boudreaux and Henry W. (Hank) Jones. They will be showing a film called: LEGACY OF TORTURE.

* Her-story of the Riot Grrrl - Feminist Punk workshop by Shannon *Militant and Passive Action workshop by Jeff from Base Collective

Workshop on Lessons of SDS and the Weather Underground by Michael Novick (former member of SDS and Prairie Fire and editor of *Turning The Tide*)

Workshop by Mo Nishida of Asians for Jericho & Mumia

Live Hip Hop performance by Sherman Austin

Poetry reading by Yaotl from Aztlan Underground

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“Outreach” or Alliance Building?

by Michael Novick, *Anti-Racist Action-LA/People Against Racist Terror (ARA-LA/PART)*

At the end of June, I participated in the “Los Angeles Social Forum,” an attempt to hold a unifying gathering of people from many different movements and organizations in Los Angeles (and other parts of southern California) on the model of the World Social Forum and the first US Social Forum held last year in Atlanta. Those national and international gatherings have attracted large numbers of grassroots organizers from groups that identify with the concept of “civil society.” The Atlanta gathering was particularly noteworthy for being predominantly people of color and women, and seemed to signal the emergence of a new generation of activists “in the trenches” of community resistance around issues like gentrification, AIDS, violence against women, Hurricane Katrina, and the war.

But the Los Angeles event did not draw large numbers of local activists, and most of those who participated were from the self-identified left and peace movement. The majority of the large number of workshops scheduled were sponsored by an alphabet-soup of socialist and communist organizations (FSP, RCP, PSL, WWP, ISO, etc.) and a smaller number by various solidarity activists around Latin America and the Middle East and peace groups such as Interfaith Communities United for Peace & Justice (ICUJP) and Iraq Veterans Against War (IVAW). A separate set of workshops were held concurrently under the auspices of the LASF at a different venue, associated with the Center for the Study of Political Graphics’ “Prison Nation” poster exhibit. Those workshops, also sparsely attended, focused on criminal justice issues and gang truce work and included organizations such as Homies Unidos, the Youth Justice Coalition, and Families to Amend California’s Three Strikes (FACTS).

In the wrap-up discussion, as participants who came to Sunday’s “mini-assemblies” and stayed to discuss what the LA Social Forum had accomplished talked, it became clear why the LASF had fallen far short of organizers and participants hopes and dreams. As they summed up their long months of hard work and the small (and demographically narrow) turnout that resulted, organizers repeatedly talked about the need to do more and better “outreach.” This is a self-defeating conception of what it would take to achieve an authentic forum of the people currently engaged in community activism around diverse issues such as gentrification and housing, health care, police abuse, prisons, education, migrants’ rights and legalization, labor rights and a living wage, and the host of other struggles that are raging in Los Angeles.

The inadequacy of that conception helps explain how so few people would come to a unity-building conference in a city in which hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets on May 1, where recent rallies by families and friends of a few of the 14 or more people killed by the LAPD so far this year have drawn hundreds, where 40,000 teachers and an almost equal number of parents and students took to the streets at every school in the district against budget cuts just 3 weeks prior.

What the peace movement and the self-proclaimed “left” needs is not “more and better outreach,” but a fundamental strategic reorientation to grassroots community-based organizing and base-building, and to alliance-building with other social forces who are in motion in this city. Finding allies requires learning about the different communities within this megalopolis and the issues that are of concern to them.

First and foremost in what is essentially a ‘third world’ city inside the U.S., this means communities of color: people of African descent, Chicano/Mexicano/indigenous people (including migrants and residents from Central America), Asians in all their diversity, (Arabs, Muslims and South Asians as well as Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Khmer and others). Building alliances means paying attention to the intersections of the issues affecting these communities, and the self-organizing that is taking place within them, and the policy issues and protests the (predominantly-‘white’) left has focused its energies on. But building alliances also means bringing some social weight to the table – not the weight of a self-proclaimed ideological vanguard, but the weight of grass-roots base-building of our own.

The kind of unity the organizers of the LA Social Forum were seeking is possible only on the basis of respect and support for self-determination: acknowledging the right of colonized people to define their own struggles, resistance, priorities and timetables. It is possible only on the basis of mutual solidarity, not charity, but fighting –really fighting—side by side against a common enemy. It requires people in the peace movement and those working for ameliorative social reforms, “clean” money elections, or universal health care to recognize that there is a fundamental and irreconcilable contradiction between the needs of the people and those of the Empire.

Failure to recognize this has led to defeat after defeat, and demoralized many activists and community people. After 40 years of environmentalism, the environment is in such distressed condition that the planetary ability to sustain life as we know it is threatened. After 40 years of prisoners’ rights, prison reform, even prison abolitionism, the U.S. now incarcerates 25% of all the prisoners on earth, with no sign of stopping. After decades of peace activism, the U.S. is actively engaged in two land wars in Asia and has a military budget larger than the rest of the planet combined and still growing.

Calls for “peace and justice” and plans for “more and better outreach” are not enough. The only way to overcome this unadorned litany of “progressive” failure is a self-critical transformation of the weaknesses of elitism, racism, acceptance of the empire’s legitimacy and identification with the oppressor that have thwarted our initiatives. What is needed is a commitment to decolonization, and to following the lead of the resistance and liberation struggles of colonized people. Nothing less will do.

SAVE THE DATE: OCTOBER 10-12, 2008
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ACLU Sues Homeland Security over Immigrant Deaths

The American Civil Liberties Union filed a freedom of information lawsuit June 25 against the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for refusing to turn over public documents related to the deaths of dozens of immigrant detainees. Filed in US District Court in Washington D.C., the lawsuit requests that the court order DHS to carry out a reasonable records search and speed up the processing of documents. The ACLU’s legal action arises from alleged government abuses connected to the deaths of immigrants held in various detention facilities in the United States. The deaths were reportedly due to medical neglect.

“We know that medical care provided in many immigration centers is grossly inadequate and has resulted in unnecessary suffering and death,” charged ACLU National Prison Project Director Elizabeth Alexander. “DHS must not be allowed to keep information about in-custody deaths secret..”

Also named in the lawsuit were the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency and the DHS Office of the Inspector General. There was no immediate comment about the lawsuit from the DHS or any of its agencies.

In a statement, the ACLU’s Elizabeth Alexander urged

the DHS and ICE to fulfill their obligation to inform the public why deaths of immigrants in US custody have occurred. “Unless ICE exhibits full transparency by releasing all of the information that we have requested, we are left little choice but to believe that it has something to hide,” Alexander added.

Media reports of allegedly sub-standard healthcare conditions facing immigrant detainees have proliferated in recent months as the number of incarcerated immigrants has soared.

A report from the Transnational Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) of Syracuse University revealed that nearly 11 percent of 200,667 recent federal prisoners were serving time on immigration-related offenses. Although immigration law violations are still generally regarded as civil violations, the Bush Administration is increasingly prosecuting immigrants for fraud, identity theft, false documentation, conspiracy, and illegal re-entry.

According to TRAC, 9,350 immigrants were prosecuted for criminal offenses during the month of March 2008 alone. The prosecution caseload was more than double the one for the month of January.

Besides federally-operated jails, thousands of immigrants are held in private prisons operated by Halliburton and other companies contracted by the DHS. In 2007, the ACLU filed suit against the Corrections Corporation of America-run San Diego Correctional Facility for allegedly neglecting the medical needs of detainees. According to the civil liberties group, denial of medical services and bad healthcare policies resulted in the death of “numerous detainees” at the California prison.

The DHS’s handling of immigrant detainees is also under scrutiny on Capitol Hill. In May, members of the House Committee on the Judiciary requested information from the DHS about reports that upwards of 250 migrants were sedated with psychiatric drugs while being deported in recent years.

Additional sources: La Jornada, June 26, 2007. Article by David Brooks. El Universal, May 15, 2008.

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A Hollow Victory

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As millions ready themselves for the general elections in November, it takes some effort to summon up the elections of 2 years ago. In 2006, mid-term elections brought dramatic change to the Congress, and seemed to presage a change in the nation's direction as well. Those mid-terms centered around the public's demand and hunger for an end to the Iraq war and illegal occupation, and was an electoral expression of that deep national discontent.

Well, it's been two years now, and the Congress has just voted another \$165 billion (that's right, with a b) to fund the Iraq war. It's been two years - and the Iraq mess is still a scar on the national psyche. It's now become the property of both major political parties - Democrats and Republicans.

It's the very nature of politics that politicians regularly betray the interests of those who have voted for them. They'll take the votes, yes; but they don't answer to the people. As the saying goes, 'They answer to a higher power' - the military industrial complex.

If we think back to the primaries, candidates of both parties who ran on genuine anti-war platforms had to contend with waves of media ridicule. Think about how the corporate media treated either Dennis Kucinich (D. OH), or Ron Paul (R. TX), or former congressman, Mike Gravel. All were depicted as little better than boobs, objects of an occasional sidebar, but never seriously presented as candidates of 'presidential timber.'

And, as Marshall McLuhan (1991-1980) said, 'the medium is the message.' The media, hired guns for their corporate bosses, served their interest by coverage which slanted the perceptions of millions, that only those they thought electable were 'serious' candidates. 'Only so-and-so can raise enough money', most reporters opined, selling candidates as surely as they sold soap.

These processes have produced the very hour we now live in; a time of peril and disaster.

What kind of democracy can such a process engender?

And now, 1/2 year from another election, we will hear a plethora of promises, spun with the best commercials that money can buy. We will march into the booth, our eyes shiny with anticipation. In a matter of months, or years, we will look back at the ashes of promises aborted, and wonder how we keep doing it again, and again, and again.

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