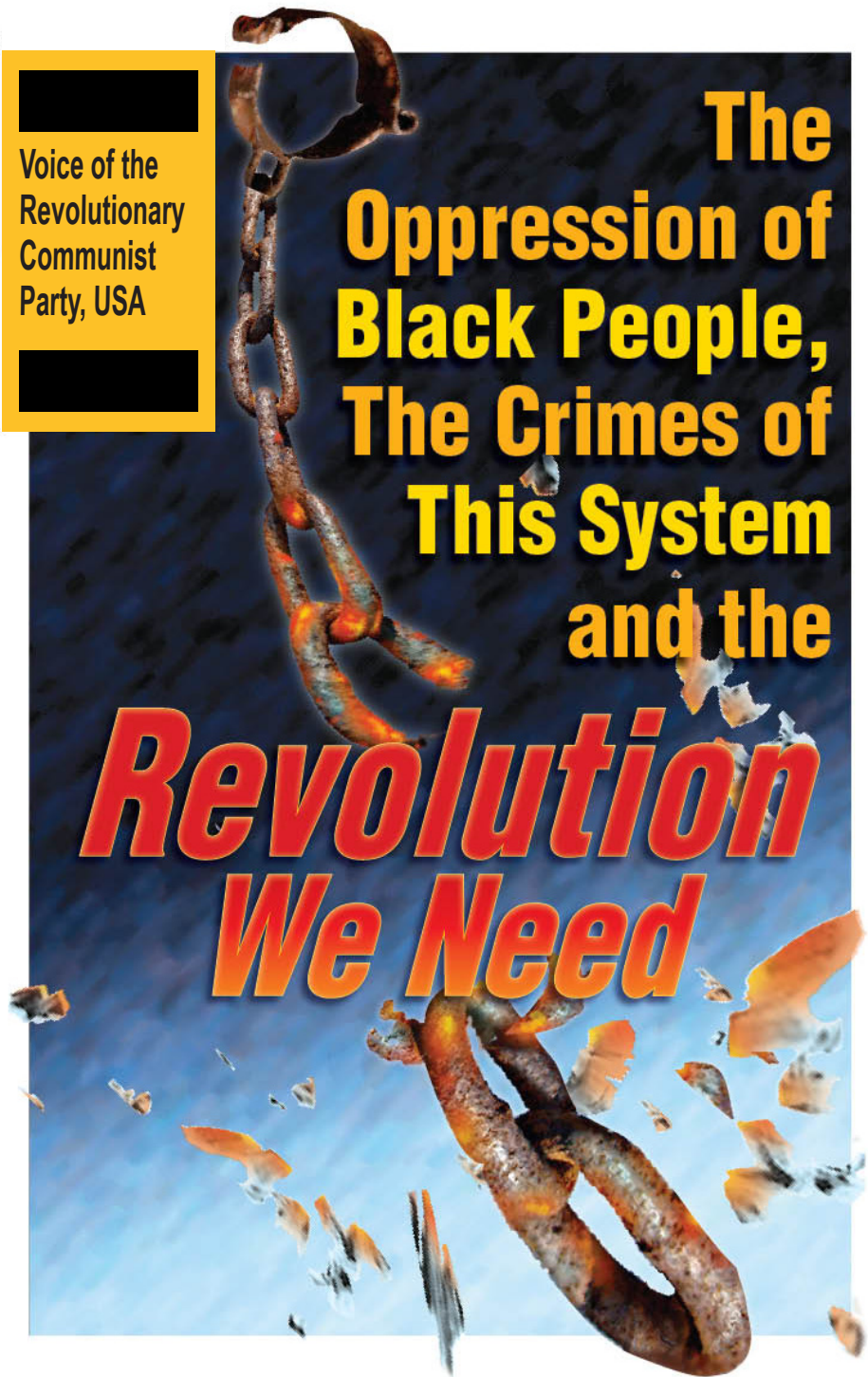


REVOLUTION



Reprinted from #144—October 2008

Voice of the
Revolutionary
Communist
Party, USA



**The
Oppression of
Black People,
The Crimes of
This System
and the**

***Revolution
We Need***



There will never be a revolutionary movement in this country that doesn't fully unleash and give expression to the sometimes openly expressed, sometimes expressed in partial ways, sometimes expressed in wrong ways, but deeply, deeply felt desire to be rid of these long centuries of oppression [of Black people]. There's never gonna be a revolution in this country, and there never should be, that doesn't make that one key foundation of what it's all about.

**Bob Avakian, Chairman of the
Revolutionary Communist Party, USA,
from Question and Answer
Session following the 7 Talks**

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The Oppression of Black People, The Crimes of This System, and the Revolution We Need—REVOLUTION #144—revcom.us

The Oppression of Black People, The Crimes of This System, and the Revolution We Need

“The young man was shot 41 times while reaching for his wallet”...“the 13-year-old was shot dead in mid-afternoon when police mistook his toy gun for a pistol”... “the unarmed young man, shot by police 50 times, died on the morning of his wedding day”... “the young woman, unconscious from having suffered a seizure, was shot 12 times by police standing around her locked car”... “the victim, arrested for disorderly conduct, was tortured and raped with a stick in the back of the station-house by the arresting officers.”

Does it surprise you to know that in each of the above cases the victim was Black?¹

If you live in the USA, it almost certainly doesn't.

Think what that means: that without even being told, you knew these victims of police murder and brutality were Black. Those cases—and the thousands more like them that have occurred just in the past few decades—add rivers of tears to an ocean of pain. And they are symptoms of a larger, still deeper problem.

But some today claim that America is a “post-racial society.” They say the “barriers to Black advancement” have been largely overcome. Many go so far as to put the main blame for the severe problems faced by Black people today on...Black people themselves.

Others claim that better education, or more traditional families, or religion, or elections will solve things.

So the questions must be sharply posed: what really IS the problem? What is the source of it? And what is the solution?

This special issue of *Revolution* newspaper will answer those questions. We'll show how the oppression of Black people has been at the very heart of the fabric and functioning of this country, since its beginning and up to the present time, and what has actually *caused* these centuries of suffering. We'll analyze the massive struggles waged against this oppression, showing why, even when they've won concessions, their powerful call for justice has been betrayed by the system each time—and what lessons can be drawn for a revolutionary struggle that actually *could* win liberation. We'll get into how **a revolution** could deal with and overcome that oppression, bringing in an entirely different, and far better, system as part of getting to a whole new, emancipated world. We'll analyze other programs and show how anything *short* of revolution is a false path and a dead end. And we'll point to why such a revolution is possible—yes, even in the U.S.—and what must be done to actually prepare for and carry out such a revolution. ≈≈

I. The *Real* Situation

Conventional wisdom says that while some disparities remain, things have generally advanced for Black people in America and today they are advancing still. People like Obama and Oprah are held up as proof of this. But have things really moved forward? Is this society actually becoming “post-racial”?

The answer to that question can be found in every corner of U.S. society.

Take employment: Black people remain crowded into the lowest rungs of the ladder...that is, if they can find work at all. While many of the basic industries that once employed Black people have closed down, study after study shows employers to be more likely to hire *a white person with a criminal record* than a Black person without one, and 50% more likely to follow up on a resume with a “white-sounding” name than an identical resume with a “Black-sounding”² name. In New York City, the rate of unemployment for Black men is fully 48%.³

Or housing: Black people face the highest levels of racial residential segregation in the world—shunted into neglected neighborhoods lacking decent parks and grocery stores and often with no hospitals at all. Black people, as well as Latinos, who had achieved home-ownership had their roofs snatched from them. They were the ones hit hardest by the subprime mortgage crisis after having been targeted disproportionately by predatory lenders—resulting in the greatest loss of wealth to people of color in modern U.S. history.⁴

Or healthcare: Black infants face mortality rates comparable to those in the Third World country of Malaysia, and African-Americans generally are infected by HIV at rates that rival those in sub-Saharan Africa. Overall the disparities in healthcare are so great that one former U.S. Surgeon General recently wrote, “If we had eliminated disparities in health in the last century, there would have been 85,000 fewer black deaths overall in 2000.”⁵

Or education: Today the schools are more segregated than they have been since the 1960s⁶ with urban, predominantly Black and Latino schools receiving fewer resources and set up to fail. These schools more and more resemble prisons with metal detectors and kids getting stopped and frisked on their way to class by uniformed police who patrol their halls. Often these schools spend around half as much per pupil as those in the well-to-do suburbs.⁷

Or take imprisonment: The Black population in prison is 900,000⁸—a tenfold increase since 1954!—and the proportion of Black prisoners incarcerated relative to whites has more than doubled in that same period. A recent study pointed out that “a young Black male without a high school degree has a 59 percent chance of being imprisoned before his thirty-fifth birthday.”⁹

On top of all that, and reinforcing it, is an endlessly spouting sewer of racism in the media, culture and politics of this society—racism that takes deadly aim at the dreams and spirit of every African-American child. And who can forget the wave of nooses that sprung up around the country, south and north, in the wake of the 2007 struggle in Jena, Louisiana against the prosecution (and

persecution) of six Black youth who had fought back against a noose being hung to intimidate them from sitting under a “whites only” tree at school?

All this lay beneath the criminal government response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. For reasons directly related to the oppression of Black people throughout the history of this country, and continuing today, African-Americans were disproportionately the ones without the resources to get out of the way of that storm, as well as the ones concentrated in the neighborhoods whose levees had gone unrepaired for years. Far from “mere” incompetence, the government responded with a combination of gun-in-your-face repression and wanton, murderous neglect. People were stuck on rooftops in 100-degree heat for days on end, with nothing to eat or drink. Prisoners were left locked in cells as waters rose to their necks. The protection of private property and social control was placed above human life. The governor of the state ordered cops and soldiers to shoot on sight “looters”—that is, people trying to survive and to help others. On at least one occasion, people trying to escape the worst-hit areas were stopped by police at gunpoint from crossing over to a safer area. When evacuations finally *were* carried out, they were done with the heartlessness of a cruel plantation owner. Families were separated, with children ripped away from parents. Tens of thousands were scattered all over the country with one-way tickets, sometimes not even told their destinations. Back home, bodies were left floating in water, or lying on sidewalks, underneath debris, decomposing and mangled, for months.

Through it all, politicians and commentators spewed out unrelenting racism. Who can forget Barbara Bush herself, the president’s mother, and her remark in a shelter for refugees from Katrina—some separated from their families and having lost everything, including dear ones—that “[S]o many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this is working very well for them.”¹⁰ A 10-term Congressman took the prize for declaring, “We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn’t do it, but God did.”¹¹

Since then, the first...the second...the third anniversary of Katrina passed with many parts of New Orleans still uninhabitable ghost towns. In the mostly Black 9th Ward, blocks of devastated houses have been razed—a vast wasteland now dotted with occasional concrete steps going nowhere. When Black people have fought to stay in the projects which are still habitable, they have been driven out—and when they have protested at City Council, they have been pepper-sprayed and beaten.¹² Oil rigs and tourist areas are long since back up and humming, while rebuilding schools, hospitals, and childcare centers are pushed off the list. Through it all, cops and national guards continue to occupy poor neighborhoods like enemy territory.

Does all this look like a “post-racial” society to you?

The answer is clear. And while more Black people than ever before have been allowed to “make it” into the middle class, two things must be said.

First, even for these people their situation is still tenuous. To take one stark example: In opposition to the widespread notions of

the “American dream,” where each successive generation “does better” than the previous one, *the majority of the children of middle-class Black families* have been cast, by the workings of this system, onto a *downwardly mobile* path.¹³ And every Black person—no matter how high they rise—still faces the insults and the dangers concentrated in the all-too-familiar experience of being stopped for “driving while Black.” As Malcolm X said over 40 years ago, and as is still true today: What do they call somebody Black with a Ph.D.? A “nigger.”

Second, and even more profoundly, for millions and millions of Black people things have gotten WORSE.

It will not help—in fact it will do real harm—to believe in this “post-racial” fantasy, or even the “less ambitious” lie of steady improvement. The cold truth of the oppression of African-American people must be squarely confronted and deeply understood, if it is ever to be transformed.

II. Shining a Light on the Past to Understand the Present—and Transform the Future

If you go to the doctor with a painful condition, she’ll ask you to describe the symptoms. If she’s any good, she won’t just prescribe a few pills and send you on your way—she’ll try to figure out the cause of your problem, where it came from. She’ll order some tests, and then she’ll do more. She’ll ask you when the symptoms arose. She’ll take your family history, asking about your parents, and even your grandparents. And that’s what we’re going to do—go through the history of America to discover the source of the profound problems we have sketched out here.

The Rise of Capital— on a Foundation of Slavery and Genocide

This country was founded on the twin crimes of the genocidal dispossession of its Native American (Indian) inhabitants, and the kidnapping and enslavement of millions of Africans. But this essential and undeniable truth is constantly suppressed, blurred over, distorted and excused—all too often treated as “ancient history,” if admitted at all. But let’s look at its implications.

Modern capitalism arose in Europe, when the merchant class in the cities—the newly arising capitalists, or *bourgeoisie*—began to set up workshops in which they exploited peasants who had been driven off their land, as well as others who could not make a living any longer other than by working for, and being exploited by, these capitalists. This was the embryo of the modern *proletariat*—a class of people who have no means to live except to work for someone else, and that works for wages in processes that require a collectivity of people working together. The early capitalists, like their descendants, would take possession of and sell the goods thus produced, paying the proletarians only enough to live on, and thereby accumulating profit. They did this in competition with other capitalists, and those who could not sell cheaper were driven under; this generated a drive to gain any possible advantage, either through lowering wages and more thoroughly exploiting the proletariat, or through investing in more productive machinery, or both.

False Paths & Dead Ends Why Education Is Not the Answer

People say: “We need to get educated, that’s the problem. Yes, we don’t get the resources the white schools get. But if our children would only study harder—and if we would do better at turning off the television more often—then they could learn and get ahead.”

This mixes up some important truths with some very wrong conclusions. The truth is that this system has consistently denied a good education to Black children and continues to do so today, beginning with the execution of slaves who taught other slaves to read. Today, most African-American children are confined to prison-like inner city schools which get much fewer resources and in which the true history and dynamics of society and the world are covered up, and there is little if any attempt to instill critical or creative thinking. These schools send African-American children the message, in ways spoken and unspoken, that there is no real future for them in this society. And it is a further crime of this system that many Black youth then end up “buying into” the system’s lies that they are inferior, “turn off” to their own potential to learn and, in so doing, turn away from the wider world of knowledge and science.

But suppose every single Black child somehow DID get an education that enabled them to think critically and to master the skills involved in different kinds of mental labor. Would millions of today’s poor then be able to get good jobs and climb out of poverty? No. Even if you could somehow eliminate discrimination short of revolution—which in fact cannot be done—so long as the system of capitalism is in effect, people are employed *only* if some capitalist can make money off their employment. By that standard, there is not a “demand” for that many technical jobs and even many of those jobs are being shifted to parts of the world where people are forced to work for even lower wages. The capitalists know this, of course, and that is one big reason that they are NOT providing a good education for the youth in the inner cities in particular—they do not want to raise the expectations of Black people “too high.” They fear a situation in which millions of people have knowledge and skills and therefore expect to get a decent job and a better life, and then are STILL denied—many political operatives of the ruling class recall very well the experience of the 1960s, when Black people’s hopes and expectations were raised, and then largely dashed, and the result was a massive explosion of righteous anger and rebellion among Black people, particularly the youth, and today the ruling class harbors a deep fear that again raising expectations would be far too socially explosive.

There is a further problem still: that unless and until there is a concerted effort, backed up by state power, to actually overcome inequality and white supremacy in every sphere of society, not only will educational systems themselves continue to reinforce this but no amount of education will avail to overcome and eradicate it. Even today, when someone succeeds against all odds in getting a good education, the discrimination

continued on page 7

This twin dynamic of exploitation and competition drove forward the accumulation of capital in a relentless and ever-widening cycle.

But this was not some linear or self-contained process. In fact, capitalism in Europe “took off” with the development of the world market, and that in turn was fed and driven forward by the *slave trade*. Ships would sail from London and Liverpool, in England, filled with the goods sold by the capitalists. They would unload these goods for sale or trade in the coastal cities of Africa, and fill their holds with human beings who had been captured in raids in the African countryside. They would then take this human cargo to the Americas and the Caribbean, to be sold as slaves. Then the ships would take the sugar, cotton, rice and other goods produced by the slaves in these colonies back to Europe, to be sold for use as raw materials or food. And so on, every day, year in, year out—for centuries. This slave trade and the slave economy that went with it—along with the extermination of the Native peoples of the Americas (the Indians) through deliberate slaughter, disease, and working them to death in silver mines—formed what Karl Marx called the “rosy dawn of the primitive accumulation of capital.”

The crime was enormous. Between 9.4 and 12 million Africans were kidnapped, sold and sent to the Americas as slaves. Over two million more died in the voyage from Africa, and enormous numbers perished in Africa itself, through the slave-taking raids and wars, followed by forced marches in chains to the coastal African cities to feed this market. At least 800,000 more died in the port cities of Africa, locked down in prison (the barracoons) awaiting shipment. Once in the Americas, slaves were sent to “seasoning camps” to “break” them—where an estimated 1/3 of the Africans died in that first hellish year.¹⁴

Take a few seconds to think about the reality behind those numbers. **THOSE WERE HUMAN BEINGS!** Numbers alone cannot hope to capture the agony and suffering all this meant for over three centuries; the best these numbers can do is give a sense of the sheer scale and scope of the barbarity. But even today this is very little known, and what went into the foundation of American history is barely taught, if at all, in the schools, or recognized in the media and culture.

Those Africans who survived this hell were then forced to toil as slaves, doing the work to “tame” the Americas—to develop the agriculture that would form the basis for the new European colonies. A respected historian put it this way: “Much of the New World, then, came to resemble the death furnace of the ancient god Moloch—consuming African slaves so increasing numbers of Europeans (and later, white Americans) could consume sugar, coffee, rice, and tobacco.”¹⁵ Within Africa itself, the slave trade caused tremendous distortions in the development of Africa and gave rise to the major African slave-trading states in west Africa, as these states traded slaves to the Europeans for commodities that included guns.

Slavery existed in every part of the world and many societies before the transatlantic slave trade that began in the 1500s—but it had never before been carried out on this scale and with this nearly industrial-style inhumanity. That was the product not of uniquely evil men—but of men who *became* monsters by serving the demands of a monstrous new system whose only commandment was “Expand or Die.” This slave trade was so integral to the rise of capitalism that the sugar and tea produced by slaves not only turned huge profits, but also served as a very cheap way to feed empty calories and stimulants to severely exploited proletarians in Europe. And the labor organization of the sugar cane fields of Jamaica was adapted to the factory floors of London.¹⁶

To justify this, the capitalists and slave owners drew on the Bible—which yes, does in fact justify slavery, in both old testament and new—and then later on pseudo-scientific ideologies of racism that claimed that Africans and Native Americans (Indians) were a “lower species,” inherently inferior. The fact that Africans had been kidnaped, tortured, enslaved, killed if they tried to educate themselves, forced to watch as their children or spouses were sold off to other parts of the country, and generally kept in an inferior position—this CRIME by the *rulers* was pointed to as “proof” that Blacks were inferior. Incredibly enough, these slaves were denounced as “lazy” by the parasitical slave masters whose great wealth the slaves created through their back-breaking labor! These lies served both to “justify” the horrors of slavery and formed a crucial element in the “social glue” that held society together. This pattern, and this lie and its social use, have continued in different forms up to today.

The fact that these supposedly “inherently inferior” people had played a crucial part in building up highly developed societies and cultures in both Africa and the Americas, long before Europeans came to dominate these places, was an “inconvenient truth” written out of the official histories and textbooks. And the fact that all human beings are all one species, with only relatively superficial differences in some characteristics, was also written out, with spurious racist pseudo-science substituted instead—lies that also come up in new forms today.

The Civil War represented in a sense a completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in the U.S., but this did not mean it established, or that the northern capitalists and their political representatives meant to establish, freedom and equality for Black people in relation to white America. Lincoln, like Jefferson, and other representatives of the bourgeoisie before and since, considered everything from the point of view of his nation above all, and in the concrete conditions of America in the nineteenth (and twentieth) century that has meant maintaining Black people as a subjugated nation.

**Bob Avakian,
Democracy: Can't We Do Better than That?, Chapter 4:
“The USA As Democratic Example ...Leader of the Pack,”
Chicago: Banner Press, 1986**

There was nothing inherent in Europeans that led to capitalism taking root there first—there were a number of areas in the world where capitalism might have taken off slightly earlier or slightly later if things had come together a little differently. But Europe is where capitalism did take off, and the dominance of the capitalist nations of Europe and then the U.S. (and Japan, which developed in a different set of circumstances) over the past five centuries is inconceivable without slavery.

“There Would Be No United States as We Now Know It Today Without Slavery”

Slavery fueled the foundation and rise of not just capitalism in general, but the U.S. in particular. This is not just a “stain” that can eventually be washed, or even scrubbed, away within the confines of this system; it is embedded in the very fabric of this society—indeed, the U.S. Constitution itself legally institutionalized slavery and deemed African-Americans to count as only 3/5 of a white person for census purposes.

In the recently published work, *Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy*, Bob Avakian wrote:

There is a semi-official narrative about the history and the “greatness” of America, which says that this greatness of America lies in the freedom and ingenuity of its people, and above all in a system that gives encouragement and reward to these qualities. Now, in opposition to this semi-official narrative about the greatness of America, the reality is that—to return to one fundamental aspect of all this—slavery has been an indispensable part of the foundation for the “freedom and prosperity” of the USA. The combination of freedom and prosperity is, as we know, still today, and in some ways today more than ever, proclaimed as the unique quality and the special destiny and mission of the United States and its role in the world. And this stands in stark contradiction to the fact that without slavery, none of this—not even the bourgeois-democratic freedoms, let alone the prosperity—would have been possible, not only in the southern United States but in the North as well, in the country as a whole and in its development and emergence as a world economic and military power.

Obviously, the way in which agriculture in the South developed was directly related to, indeed founded on, the system of slavery. But, beyond that, the way in which the U.S. related to the world market, and built up its prosperity and economic base in that way, was to a very large degree dependent on slave-based production. The interchange between the development of manufacture in the North and the development of agriculture in the South, for example—even when, before the Civil War, that interchange went to a large degree through the world market and through England in particular, where for example cotton would be sold to the textile mills in England and other products would be sold from England to the northern manufacturers in the U.S.—even that would not have happened in the way it did, on the kind of scale it did and with the prosperity that it led to, without slavery. Of course, this process—where, for example, cotton from the southern U.S. was to a large degree sold to England, rather than to New England—contributed over time to sharpening the contradiction between the slave system in the South and the developing capitalist system in the North of the U.S. But the

point to emphasize here is that, in an overall and fundamental sense, the slave-grown products of the southern U.S. constituted a major factor in the development of the U.S. economy, in the North as well as the South. And the development of that economy, in turn, has been the essential underlying basis for the massive military machinery which is the ultimate enforcer of the role of the U.S. as a major world power.

In short: **There would be no United States as we now know it today without slavery.** That is a simple and basic truth.¹⁷

Avakian then goes on to discuss and analyze the importance of slavery to the mind-set and outlook of American society, and its political life in particular. To justify slavery and the theft of native lands, the lies and myths we described above were used to deem Black people and Indians as less than human, as social pariahs, or outcasts, not deserving of the “natural rights” due to all white men. The masses of white people of all classes, including the most exploited among them, were appealed to on the basis that by virtue of not being slaves they were in fact part of the master class (whether they actually owned slaves or not). This poisonous master-class mentality did not die with the abolition of slavery—it continued, in new forms. In particular, each wave of immigrants that came over from Europe had to “fit itself into” the dominant relations of American society—they had to find an “economic niche” (usually toward the bottom rungs of the working class, at least at first) and they had to work out a relation to the dominant political and cultural superstructure of society. In doing so, these white immigrants often tried to distinguish themselves from Black people—and this often exploded into the open antagonism of

Why Education Is Not the Answer

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remains. Education alone is not sufficient; it will take a revolution, in which the rule of the exploiters and oppressors is broken and state power is put into the hands of the masses, to get rid of the capitalist fetters and to thoroughly uproot the white supremacy it has fed on. A socialist society needs the creative and critical thinking of people throughout society, including those whose creativity and critical thinking has been stifled and suffocated under this oppressive system. One of the key features, and necessities, of this new society will be to encourage and foster this creativity and critical thinking among the people broadly—developing their potential and enabling them to increasingly contribute, in many diverse ways, to the development of society, and the emancipation of humanity, as part of the great collective effort to bring into being a new society, a completely new world, without exploitation or oppression.

As part of building the revolutionary movement, we certainly unite with people’s struggles and efforts to fight against the savage inequalities of today’s education system. And the revolutionary movement itself must educate people in the real history and dynamics of society, in science, and in the scientific method more generally. But education alone, of whatever kind, cannot solve the problem.

Education as “the way out” turns people’s eyes away from the real problem and even leads them to blame themselves when it turns out to be yet another false hope. ≈

white mobs rampaging against Black people and even lynching them—yes, in the northern cities as well as the South, as these immigrant communities defined themselves as “full-blooded” white Americans in *violent opposition* to Black people. This system reinforced the master-class mentality among northern whites with petty, but not insignificant, privileges in jobs and housing. And this became a major double-barreled shotgun for the capitalist ruling class: it blinded these white people and immigrants to their most fundamental interests as members of the proletariat, turning their anger away from the system that actually exploited and oppressed them, and turning it against the most oppressed and exploited people in society. And it gave them an “identity” as *white* Americans, with a set of expectations and entitlements to go with it—and to defend. A minority of whites opposed this madness, and took up revolutionary or radical or even just decently humane positions; but while very important—and we’ll return to its significance later—this sort of stand was far too uncommon. (A secondary, but important, effect of this master-class mentality among whites of all classes was to partly obscure the class character of the oppression of the masses of Black people—their position and role as viciously exploited *proletarians*, within the overall working class of the U.S.—and the many and close links between this *class exploitation* of large numbers of Black people, as part of the proletariat, and the *national oppression* of Black people as a people.)

Self-Determination for the African-American Nation

For Black people in particular, forged as they were into a distinct and oppressed nation within the dominant U.S. nation, there is the right to self-determination – up to and including the right to set up a separate state. The new revolutionary power will uphold the right of Black people to establish autonomous rule in the Black Belt South, as well as other areas in which they form large concentrations. And the right to self-determination includes the right to establish a separate African-American Republic in the Black Belt South.

All other things being equal, the separation of one nationality off into a separate state of its own is not something which will strengthen, but in fact could weaken, the new socialist state. But that is just the point: the union of people of different nationalities, in a radically new, socialist society must in fact be on the basis of equality; and that equality cannot be realized without upholding the right of oppressed nations, such as the African-American people, to self-determination, up to and including the right to secede from the larger society and form their own separate country. If the goal of a unified socialist state is to be realized, over the largest possible territory, this must truly be a union in which no nation is forced to remain within the larger state but instead the people of that nation consciously and voluntarily form part of the larger socialist state and actively and energetically take part in carrying forward the revolutionization of that socialist society as a whole and contribute to the overall revolution whose final aim is the achievement of a communist world, and a whole new era for humanity, free of exploitation and oppression. ≈≈

To return again to the period of slavery, it is important to be clear on an essential truth: the slaves fiercely resisted this. In the U.S. alone there were over 200 slave revolts, and the slaves of Haiti stunned the world when they successfully waged a 15-year revolution against first their colonial masters, then the British, and finally Napoleon’s armies. Even with these heroic revolts, it was only with the Civil War that the resistance finally bore fruit in the U.S., and the emancipation of Black people from outright slavery was achieved. Here too the masses of Black people—both runaway slaves and “freedmen”—played a crucial role. When finally allowed to join the Union Army, they died at twice the rate of white soldiers (while being paid lower wages for most of the Civil War)!

THE CIVIL WAR

As pointed to in the passage cited from Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy, the Civil War itself came about because of the clash between two different economic and social systems: slavery, based on plantation farming in the South; and capitalism, based on factory and other wage-labor centered in the North. The slave owners needed more land because their plantation system of farming used up the land so fast, while the northern capitalists wanted to control the country as a whole, both for resources and to further develop their control of the national market. By the time of the Civil War, these two forces—these two social systems—were clashing on virtually every major question of economics. For example, factory production was just getting going in the North, and these northern capitalists wanted to erect high tariffs (in effect, taxes on imported goods) to secure the U.S. national market and “protect” their industries against the English capitalists, who could produce things much more cheaply; but the slave-holders insisted on low tariffs to enable them to easily trade with those same English manufacturers. And these basic economic conflicts found expression in politics, culture, and even religion—the Baptist and Methodist churches, among others, split into northern and southern branches over the “godliness” (or “ungodliness”) of slavery!

Why? Simply because people in the North had become enlightened? No. While there *was* a surge of more radical thinking in the North in the decades prior to the Civil War, and militant opponents of slavery such as Frederick Douglass and John Brown began to get a hearing and gain a following, this was ultimately an expression of more fundamental changes going on in the economic base of society—that is, the relations that people enter into to carry out production—and the intensifying contradictions within that economic base, and between that economic base and the political structure which had arisen on top of it.

In short, slavery had changed from being the stimulus that it was in the early days of capitalism into a fetter on the development of capitalism. The constitution that served the economic base of 1789—a constitution which legalized and institutionalized slavery—could no longer contain the intensified contradictions of 1860. Abraham Lincoln himself, the president of the United States during the time of the Civil War, was the political representative of the bourgeoisie—the factory-owners, railroad-owners, and other capitalists centered in the North—and he fought the war in their interests. In the view of Lincoln, the power of the slave states had to be at minimum sharply curtailed; and it was only when he was convinced that there was no other way forward that he went to

war. Similarly, Lincoln delayed emancipating the slaves and then delayed allowing the slaves to enlist in the Union army until he was convinced that there was no other way to carry out his basic aim of “saving the Union.” Lincoln himself said:

My paramount object in this struggle *is* to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or destroy Slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves, I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that.¹⁸

The First Betrayal, After Slavery

The aftermath of the Civil War presented the now predominant capitalist class with an opportunity to truly integrate the freed slaves into the larger society. The slaves had poured generations of labor into the foundation of the society and then died way out of proportion to their numbers in the Civil War. Northern generals during the war had promised the freed slaves “40 acres and a mule.” As a matter of simple, basic justice it would have been right to divide the land that they had worked for generations among the former slaves, as well as the non-slaveholding whites; and as a matter of having a basis for political freedom, doing this was imperative. And it was imperative as well that these former slaves have the full political rights they had fought and died for—including the right to suppress the bitter, unrepentant ex-Confederate soldiers who, already in the waning days of the Civil War, were forming into secret paramilitary societies to violently attack the freed slaves and “preserve the southern way of life.”

But this was not done. Indeed, the true interests of the northern capitalists came out with their betrayal of Reconstruction. During this all too brief period of Reconstruction, in the 10 years or so after the end of the Civil War, the U.S. government had kept some of its promises and stationed troops in the South. These troops were there to prevent wholesale slaughters of Black people, and poor whites, who were striving to gain land and exercise political rights promised to them. But the capitalist class which now dominated the national government did this in large part in order to fully subordinate the former plantation owners; and when the ex-slaves and their allies fought “too hard” for their rights these same troops would be used against them.

Above all the northern capitalists wanted order and stability to carry out the further consolidation of their rule, as well as further expansion on the North American continent and internationally. The ferment and upheaval that would have gone along with everything that would have been involved in the former slaves playing a significant role in the political process or even exercising basic rights might have “sent the wrong message” to other oppressed people within the U.S.; and in fact, when in 1877 the U.S. troops were pulled out of the South, signaling the end of Reconstruction, they were immediately sent west—to fully crush the resistance of the Indians—and into the cities of the North—to violently suppress revolts of immigrant workers. Further, real freedom for the former slaves would have enabled them to resist the severe exploitation that was visited upon them, and thus would have made the re-integration of the southern economy into the larger society much less profitable for the ruling capitalists. So the Ku Klux Klan was unleashed in full force and played a brutal role in defeating

False Paths & Dead Ends The Religion Trap

People say: “Our problem is that we have to ‘get right with God.’ ‘The Lord’ will provide—he won’t let us down.”

If praying to Jesus, or Allah, did any good, then the past 20 years would have been decades of great advance for African-American people—because Black people have been praying like never before! But instead, these have been two decades of horror and despair: the pumping of crack into the ghettos and the promotion of the fratricidal drug trade as the way out for the youth and, with that, the nightmare imprisonment of huge numbers of African-American youth, along with the pervasive, never-ending harassment and brutality, and the constant threat of murder, at the hands of the police; the further rotting out of the inner cities, drained of jobs and resources; the heightening oppression and degradation of women, in thousands of ways; the demonization of Black people in the dominant culture; and so on. All this praying has done *nothing* to prevent these horrors.

But it cuts way deeper than that. Religion is just wrong. It tells people to seek make-believe causes (“straying from the path of God”) for the real problems people face and to fight make-believe enemies (“the devil”) instead of the real-live ones who must be defeated. It tells people to put their faith in make-believe non-existent saviors—instead of understanding the world as it is, struggling to change it, and building unity on that basis. Religion, even the most “progressive” type of religion which includes a call to people to stand up against oppression, nevertheless in the end preaches to people that they cannot really understand reality and overcome oppression and win liberation on their own, but must ultimately rely on some non-existent god (or gods) to lead them to salvation, if not in this world, then in the next. In short, religion is a *chain* on people’s thinking.

Ask yourself this: Why have the oppressors, since slavery days, not only allowed but overall encouraged and supported the Black Church, helping to build it up as a key institution in Black communities, working with it and promoting it as a “refuge” for Black people? And why, today, are the churches being given all kinds of money to set up “prison ministries”—while the educational opportunities in prison are being cut?

On top of all that, today the ruling class of imperialists is building up a core of reactionary fundamentalist preachers, including among African-American clergy, as part of a Christian-fascist movement designed to get people to support all kinds of reactionary and oppressive actions and relations, to fight in, or to actively and aggressively support, wars against oppressed people in other countries, in the service of the U.S. empire, to clamp down further on resistance to all this within the U.S. and make this already heavily repressive society qualitatively more repressive.

Of course, many religious people do stand up against oppression, and the revolutionary movement should unite with such people. But religious thinking cannot set the terms for the struggle, and those who do understand the importance of taking a scientific approach to the causes and cures for this oppression need to step up and help people get emancipated from these mental chains. It’s time to get rid of this poisonous nonsense about “God will provide” and “Thank you Jesus” or “God willing”—time to quit saying “I’m blessed,” look reality in the eye, and recognize instead: “We’re oppressed!” And then set about joining together in the here and now to do something about it. ≈≈

and subjugating the freed slaves and progressive whites, often in bloody battles. Then the Supreme Court “made it all legal,” with the *Cruikshank* decision—which upheld the state of Louisiana’s decision to not prosecute the white perpetrators of the massacre of over 100 Black and white supporters of Reconstruction in Colfax, Louisiana—and *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which enabled states to legally segregate Black people.

In short, when the opportunity for integration on an equal footing into this society arose in the period after the Civil War, the “demands” of the economic base of the capitalist system, and the political superstructure that arises on and serves that base, overrode that opportunity...and the answer was NO. Equality was denied—and this denial was enforced through the most bloodthirsty means.

The new social order that came with the betrayal of Reconstruction forced most Black people into the position of working the land for white plantation owners in relations that were barely better than slavery. And some forms of the actual, literal enslavement of Black people continued, particularly in the South, long after slavery had been legally abolished. The masses of Black people were kept chained to the land by debt, by legal discrimination... and by violence. Through all this, rather than being integrated on an equal basis into U.S. life, Black people were forged into an oppressed nation within the Black Belt South during this period—denied all democratic rights, including the right to self-determination as a nation. (For further discussion of the right of self-determination, see box page 8.)

Shortly after the Civil War, the capitalist system made a leap to a new stage—to a worldwide system of imperialism, which divided up the entire globe among a handful of powers. The re-entrenchment of white supremacy in a new form, after the Civil War, formed an important element in the U.S.’s rise to major power status among these imperialists. The cotton and tobacco produced by the bitterly exploited Black sharecroppers were the top cash crops of the U.S. from 1850 to 1890, and Black men who were arrested by southern sheriffs on the flimsiest of charges and literally sold as slave labor built the industrial infrastructure of the South. (Recently, Douglas A. Blackmon, in *Slavery By Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, documented the use of over 100,000 Black people in slave labor industrial projects, and the actual number is undoubtedly far higher than the 100,000 he has been able to document. Conditions in these camps, including widespread disease, systematic degradation, torture, including “waterboarding,” and a high death rate, call to mind the concentration camps of Nazi Germany.)¹⁹ At the same time, the reinforcement of the master-class mentality among large sections of whites strengthened their identification with the

ruling class. And the reintegration of the southern ruling class elements into the larger capitalist class—with the southerners getting particular power in the Congress and being a major force in the military—reinforced the ruling class as a whole in its cohesiveness.

The Rise of the Lynch Mob

The white American tradition of lynching—where mobs of people drag someone out of their homes, or even out of jail, and hang them for some real or, more often, imagined crime without benefit of a trial—played a very important role in all this. Nearly 5,000 people were lynched between 1882 and 1964, with over 70% of them Black.²⁰ Sometimes these lynchings were carried out under cover of darkness—but often these were “community affairs,” attended by thousands of whites, in a carnival atmosphere, who would then have pictures taken of themselves posing with the often burnt and mutilated body of the victim, sometimes making these photographs into postcards to send to friends. The *Cruikshank* decision, mentioned earlier, gave a legal green light to this kind of barbaric terror; and for decades the U.S. Senate refused to pass laws calling for federal action against lynching. In short, the ruling class backed these lynchings to the hilt.

Usually, the victims were poorer Blacks—but often the lynchers went after the small minority of Blacks who owned land. In 1916, Anthony Crawford of Abbeville, S.C., a Black cotton farmer who owned 427 acres of prime land and had started a Black school in

In the first part of the nineteenth century de Tocqueville wrote volumes, which have been made famous, upholding the USA as a model democracy. Such a society, he said, with its extensive opportunity for individual enrichment and its large, prosperous, stable middle class, would be very resistant to revolution. But, he warned, if revolution ever did come to the USA, it would be in connection with the Black people. Today, 150 years or so after de Tocqueville wrote this, the masses of Black people are still enslaved, but that slavery has taken new forms—and the Black masses are in a different position too. They are now concentrated in the strategic urban cores in the U.S. and concentrated in the most exploited sections of the working class, with the least stake in upholding the system and preserving the present order. And they are joined in this position by millions of proletarians of other oppressed nationalities. In short, these special victims of U.S. imperialism are in a tremendously powerful position to play a decisive role in making de Tocqueville’s warning a reality—with world-historic consequences far beyond anything de Tocqueville could have imagined.

From BULLETS...From the Writings, Speeches and Interviews of Bob Avakian, Chairman of the RCP, RCP Publications, 1985, pp. 171-172

the area and a union for Black people, was lynched after a dispute with a white man over the price of Crawford's cotton crop. He was hanged from a pine tree and shot over 200 times, and whites drove his family from the area and divided up his land. In fact, a few years ago the Associated Press documented over 57 violent land-takings by whites.²¹

But the hellish social function served by lynchings was larger than sheer greed, larger than reinforcing racist feelings (and intimidating any who might resist) through grisly barbaric rituals. It was to enforce a social system in which Blacks were to be chained to the land through terror—and, as shown by the lynching of Anthony Crawford, one part of that was to crush any Blacks who might form the makings of a “national bourgeoisie” among Black people which might not be as pliant as the Booker T. Washingtons of the era and which might, therefore, upset the established order of things by demanding the rights associated with being a nation. (Booker T. Washington was the founder and head of the Black college Tuskegee Institute, and preached that while there were “problems” in the South, Blacks should advance by learning trades and working hard, while submitting to oppression, and in THAT way they could improve their position within the system in this country; he was promoted by the ruling class as the spokesman for Black people and became the prototype of the “responsible Negro leader,” and echoes of his line can be heard today in Bill Cosby—and Barack Obama.)²²

It is a bitter irony that many of the whites who today cling to the “grand narrative” criticized by Bob Avakian above—that people in America, or rather *white* people, have made it due to their ingenuity and hard work, taking advantage of the “freedom” offered by this society—and who complain about things like affirmative action—conveniently forget that at the very time that most Black people were being forced onto the land as sharecroppers (essentially a form of semi-slavery), with those who did own property often having it violently ripped from them, including through murder...at that very time, the ancestors of these whites were being given land that had been forcibly stolen from the Native Americans, and these whites were sending their children to “land grant” colleges set up by the government to teach them advanced farming techniques, or else getting help from “agricultural agents” also sent out by the government. This opportunity to get a farm, and to get government support in getting that farm up and running, not only served as a “steam valve” for the discontent of many exploited white people, it also further fed into the master-class mind-set and assumptions prevalent among white people about “what it means to be an American.”

The “Promised Land”— And Rising Expectations

It was only with World War 2—nearly 100 years after the Civil War—that a major change began to be brought about in the situation of Black people in the U.S. Around the time of World War 1, there was a big demand for workers in the defense plants and other factories, at the same time as the war cut off the flow of immigrant labor from Europe. Capital needed workers—and so some Black people were drawn from the South and allowed in—on the bottom floor. This flow was delayed by the economic depression of the 1930s, but with the outbreak of World War 2 there was once again

False Paths & Dead Ends Why “Stop the Violence” Can’t Work

People say: “*You can’t talk of fundamental change while the people are all caught up in killing each other. First we have to stop this violence among the people, and then we can talk about making bigger change.*”

The violent situation in many Black and Latino neighborhoods all over the country—where parents watch young children shot down in crossfires and kids grow up haunted by nightmares of gunfire, sure they won’t make it past 18—is a horror for the people. But the logic that the people must first somehow “fix themselves” as the necessary first step, before they can change the larger conditions people find themselves in, reverses cause and effect and, regardless of intent, directs people’s attention away from the source of the violence among the people—the capitalist-imperialist system which has created these conditions in the first place. The violence people commit against each other is not at root due to “bad choices” that need to be “solved first” but is due to the ways in which this system has confined people in a position where they are set against each other to survive.

People like Bill Cosby—as well as Bill Clinton and Barack Obama—not only go so far as to *blame* Black people for the horrendous situation into which this system has shoved them, with its dead-end set of “choices,” they do so with a phony pose of concern for Black people. These snakes do tremendous damage to Black people’s ability to understand the problem and to change the world accordingly, and they also justify all those racist lies in the minds of white people.

Yes, people *do* need to change—but they’re only going to transform themselves, fundamentally and in a liberating way, in the process of confronting the actual source of the problem and radically changing their conditions. This happened in large numbers in the revolutionary movement of the 1960s, when many former gangbangers and prisoners got *out* of that life and *into* making revolution and serving the people, making the rupture from “criminal-minded” to “revolutionary-minded.”

The factors that especially young people are responding to today—the fact that these youth really have nothing to lose under this system—are the very same driving forces that could impel them in a whole other direction if they could be ruptured with that “gangsta” outlook and if their anger, alienation, and rebelliousness could instead be channeled at the source of the problem, and tempered and transformed with revolutionary science and a morality of liberation. But this will only happen based on FIGHTING the power, and not “working with it” or “within the system” to somehow keep a lid on things. We have to abolish the system that causes and enforces these conditions, bring into being a new society and new conditions in which such violence among the people will no longer have any basis, and will no longer take place. And it is in this process—of making revolution to change the larger circumstances while learning about the underlying dynamics that give rise to those circumstances—that people can, and must, transform themselves.

Fight the Power, and Transform the People, for Revolution! ≈≈

a huge demand for labor. Then, on top of that, the years directly after World War 2 brought the mechanization of agriculture in the South—so now Black people were not only being drawn to the northern factories, they were being *driven off* the land that they had farmed for generations under conditions of extreme exploitation.

The forms of oppression differed in the North, but the fact of oppression remained the same. African-American workers were brought into the workforce, but on the basis of their oppression as a people they were put into the dirtiest, most dangerous and lowest-paying jobs. They were “last hired and first fired.” Black people were refused the subsidies that white people received to buy houses, and even when Blacks had the money they were prevented, either by unspoken agreements, government policy, or straight-up violence by white mobs and/or vigilantes (usually assisted by the police), from buying homes in “white” neighborhoods. Instead they were shunted—by government policy—into poorly built highrise housing projects in the inner cities. African-Americans faced segregation and discrimination everywhere they turned, North and South.

But the changes in the South, in the context of major political changes internationally, had given rise to a civil rights movement. Black people were marching, demanding very basic and fundamental rights—the right to vote, to equal education, to not be humiliated when they tried to use public facilities. They were met with police dogs, bombs and Ku Klux Klan terror. Indeed, over 25 civil rights workers were murdered in the South.²³

This time, however, a different dynamic came into play: once things reached a certain point, the more that the power structure came at them, the more the masses fought back. And this interacted with the international challenges facing the U.S. ruling class at the time. The oppressed nations and colonies were rising up and fighting for national liberation in the “Third World” of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Revolutionary China, under the leadership of Mao Tsetung, was exerting a galvanic pole of attraction within that situation, powerfully reviving the goal and ideology of communism and inspiring people all over the world to seek out the ways to make revolution—against an imperialist order headed by the U.S. The U.S. rulers were also contending with the formerly socialist Soviet Union (which had become imperialist but had not yet dropped its socialist cover) and old-line colonial powers, particularly Britain and France, for influence in the Third World. In the face of all this, the struggle against the continuing barbarity of the oppression of the Black people in the South—and the way that struggle kept forcing this question onto the world’s front pages—was compelling the American ruling class to scramble, and to make adjustments in how it dealt with Black people.

So all this—the indomitable growth of the southern-based civil rights movement in the 1950s and early ’60s and the ways in which it was becoming not just a nationwide but a worldwide “force of attraction,” along with the migrations to the “promised land” of the North, raised expectations.

But the reality of this system once again dashed these heightened hopes. African-Americans in the North continued to be subject to blatant oppression and discrimination. And the southern lynch mobs found their cowardly counterpart in northern mobs that would burn out Black people who would dare to buy houses in “white neighborhoods,” or would attack Black children who dared to go to “white schools.”

“What happens to a dream deferred?” asked Langston Hughes in a famous poem.²⁴

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore –
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over –
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

The Black Liberation Struggle: What Really Happened Off the ’60s —And What Did Not

The masses answered this question, unmistakably. People rebelled in hundreds of American cities,²⁵ and the revolutionary stance of leaders like Malcolm X and forces like the Black Panther Party resonated with millions in the streets and campuses of the U.S. Many things fed into this—including, again, the international situation which, as pointed out earlier, was marked by a great upsurge in national liberation struggles and the influence of a socialist China under the leadership of Mao.

With this powerful upsurge hammering the walls of the social order, some barriers to Black people did fall. Some African-Americans were given opportunities to enter college and professional careers, and social programs like welfare, community clinics, and early education programs were expanded. Government spending for training and jobs that would employ Black people increased. Some discrimination was lifted in credit for housing and small businesses. Most of this was in the form of small concessions—not only did this not begin to touch the real scars of hundreds of years of terrible oppression, but discrimination *continued* in all of

Determination decides who makes it out of the ghetto—now there is a tired old cliché, at its worst, on every level. This is like looking at millions of people being put through a meat-grinder and instead of focusing on the fact that the great majority are chewed to pieces, concentrating instead on the few who slip through in one piece and then on top of it all, using this to say that “the meatgrinder works”!

**Bob Avakian, “The City Game—
And the City, No Game,”
Revolutionary Worker, #201, April 15, 1983**

these arenas. Nonetheless, these advances were hardly insignificant.

Even more important than these particular concessions, in some ways, were the “intangibles.” The consciousness of not just African-Americans but other minorities, and many millions of white people as well, radically changed. People sharply challenged the lies that for decades had been taught in American schools and had been driven home in American culture through works like *Gone With the Wind* and *Birth of a Nation*. The REAL history of slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the whole period of the 20th century began to be unearthed and brought forward.

The '60s showed that a movement that had Black people as its most solid base of support and the struggle for their emancipation as its leading edge, and that drew connections to other outrages of the system and other struggles against that system, could also inspire and draw forward people of other oppressed nationalities within the U.S., students of all nationalities, and then spread as well to women, to white proletarians (“poor whites”), soldiers and beyond. All kinds of people began to look at everything about this society with fresh eyes—and with the blinders suddenly taken off, they didn't like what they saw and decided to question it and fight it!

To put it another way, the '60s showed that when masses rose up in rebellion against the powers-that-be, and when that was coupled with a political stance that called out the system as the problem, and when a growing section of that movement linked itself to and learned from the revolutionary movement worldwide...well, when all that happened, you could radically change the political polarization in society. What could hardly be imagined yesterday suddenly became a real possibility for tomorrow, which demanded action today. (Some of these same phenomena, in microcosm, also occurred in the Los Angeles Rebellion of 1992, over the acquittal of the police who had beaten Rodney King. While the initial spark came from the Black masses, significant numbers of Latinos and whites, especially the youth, either joined in or politically supported it, and many, many people were at least temporarily drawn into political life and some to a much more radical and even revolutionary political outlook.)

The '60s also dramatically showed that the rulers of this system, for all their power and viciousness, are not *all*-powerful—not when the people whom they rule over rise up and rebel in their hundreds of thousands and then millions. Seriously challenged and battered by the Vietnam war and the struggle “at home,” these rulers actually fell into serious disarray, and sharp battles broke out within their ranks, which provided further “oxygen” for upsurge from below. In many respects, the ruling class was put on the political defensive, and even lost its “legitimacy” in the eyes of millions. This whole upsurge within the U.S. also had a tremendous effect internationally—both exposing America's lying pretensions about its “free society” and giving inspiration to the masses in countries all over the world.

But while this tremendous struggle brought down some barriers to formal equality, and while the rulers were challenged and the system shaken to its foundations, the people were not able to make revolution. And here we have to make an important point: revolu-

False Paths & Dead Ends Why “Strong Families” Are Not the Answer

People say: “*The basic reason for the problems of Black people has been the breakdown of the Black family. That's why these kids get into the gang life. We have to bring back the traditional family as the first step to solving these problems.*”

While there *has* been a tremendous breakdown of Black families in the last several decades, that too has stemmed from the workings of this system, which has cast many Black men to the margins of society, with nearly *a million* of them in prison as you read this. The economic basis for “stable, two-parent” families has been undercut. You could have every Black father actively involved in the care of every Black child, and the fact would still remain: *this system has no future for millions and millions of these youth*, with or without fathers present.

If you really think that the “stable, two-parent” family will solve the problem, take a look back to the years of KKK terror, lynchings and Jim Crow segregation in the South. Back then the great majority of Black families were traditional two-parent families. But that did not and could not prevent the devastating effects of white supremacy and capitalist exploitation and oppression.

But there is an even deeper problem with this non-explanation: *it directs oppressed people towards an outlook that will strengthen the chains of oppression and lead away from liberation.* The traditional family has its origins in the original division of society into oppressor and oppressed. You can get a clue to this by looking at the root word of “family,” which is from the Latin “familia”—which actually means the number of slaves owned by one master! “Restoring the man to the head of the family” covers over the reality of what that means for *the woman*—which is exactly being treated like a slave, whether a “favored” one or one who is beaten, abused, betrayed, molested, and raped within the “holy confines” of the family (which is all too often how it really goes down). When you get right down to it, this “rightful role of the man” bullshit is just the talk and mentality of a wannabe slave master. And all this other talk from the street of “ho's and bitches”...all this hatred of gay people, with the talk of “faggots,” the persecution, and the actual beat-downs and even killings of anyone whose sexual feelings differ from “the norm”...all that stuff, too, is the same messed-up, destructive mentality.

We don't need this—and **it will never lead to liberation and a better world!!** While the communist revolution will immediately remove the obstacles that society has placed in the way of forming Black families, it will NOT do this on the basis of the traditional relations and ideas that dominate families in capitalist society, but on the basis of equality and mutual love and respect—and of looking outward toward transforming all of society, including unleashing the full participation of women in every sphere. Black men, and other men, don't need to “get in” on their “right” to assert domination in the family over women and children—they need to rise up together with women in equality as part of emancipating all of humanity.

And Black children don't need “male role models”—they need an end to the crippling conditions that hem them in at every point. **They need revolution, and they need revolutionary role models, women no less than men.** They need to see men and women who model the mutual respect and equality that reflects the world we are fighting for: a whole new liberated world where girls grow up strong and without fear of being raped, degraded or abused, where no child is ever deemed “illegitimate,” and where men—like everyone else—find their worth in contributing to the betterment of all of humanity through the revolutionary transformation of all society rather than by getting in on even a little of the oppression of this nightmare world. ≈

tion is not just a cool word that means “lots of change”; revolution has a very specific meaning. It means that the people overthrow the system and deprive its rulers of their political power and, as the essence of that power, the ability to wield armies and police against the people. Revolution further means that a new power is then established, with new aims and objectives and the means to enforce those aims and objectives. There WAS a revolutionary movement in the '60s—and that is something of monumental significance. But there was NOT a revolution—and that too has monumental significance, in understanding what did happen... what didn't happen...and what must yet happen.

The elimination of some formal discrimination, the expansion of a middle stratum of Black people, and the emergence of a few “Black faces in high places” did not and could not tear up the deep roots of white supremacy (nor still less bring about the broader emancipation that was needed). And the elimination of formal discrimination also could not deal with the class position of the masses of Black people—as members of the proletariat, the propertyless class that is either directly exploited by capitalists or kept as part of the desperately impoverished “reserve army of the unemployed” which can be more readily and ruthlessly exploited when it serves the capitalists' purposes, and which the capitalists seek to use to depress the conditions and fighting spirit of the proletariat overall. The struggle of the African-American people for liberation is tied by a thousand threads to the struggle of the proletariat for the full emancipation of all humanity. There is no brick wall between these forms of oppression—they are constantly intertwining and interpenetrating, as was seen in Hurricane Katrina. Indeed, there is a common enemy at the root of both these forms of oppression—the capitalist-imperialist system. There is a common solution to both—communist revolution—and the proletariat, as a class, has no interest in maintaining any form of oppression and every interest in wiping out all forms of oppression.

Aftermath of the '60s: The Second Betrayal

Because there was no revolution in the U.S. in the 1960s and, along with that, because the revolutionary struggle internationally ultimately suffered serious setbacks, the decades since have been a nightmare. The power of the ruling class had been shaken, but not overthrown; and they came back with a vengeance.

Major transformations went on in the international political and economic structure of imperialism during these past decades. Here we can only indicate, in basic terms, some of the main aspects of all this, which include:²⁶

- the strategic rivalry, up through the 1980s, between the U.S. and the Soviet Union (which contained the real danger of nuclear war);
- the subsequent fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, and the heightening globalization of capital that followed in its wake. Among other things, this accelerated the uprooting of hundreds of millions of peasants, who were driven into the cities of the Third World, as well as the imperialist countries, as sources of low-wage labor;
- the U.S.'s strategic decision to launch the “war on terror”—which is in fact a war to construct an unchallenged and unchallengeable empire, and which also draws on and unleashes the most backward and reactionary forces in this society as its base of support.

All these developments have been decisive in setting the context in which the ruling class of this country has moved to deal with the still unresolved role of Black people within U.S. society, in the aftermath of the great upsurge of the 1960s, which, as we have spoken to here, shook this system and its ruling class to their foundations but which was not able to bring about a fundamental change through an actual revolution.

As the '60s ended, concessions had barely been given before, in every sphere, they began to be snatched away. The ruling class brought in Nixon as president, and he pursued dual tactics. On the one hand, he declared himself in favor of “Black power” and built up some Black businesses in an effort to pacify a section of the middle class. But his overwhelmingly principal edge was repression. The sharpest blade of this was brought down against the Black Panther Party: hundreds of its members—including key leaders—were framed up and imprisoned, and over 20 of its members—again, including key leaders like Fred Hampton and George Jackson—were assassinated. The Nixon regime also brutally repressed other rebellious sections of society—as seen in the murders of antiwar students at Kent State and the all-Black Jackson State in Mississippi.

Nixon also developed the “southern strategy” of the Republican Party, which nakedly appealed to the racism of unrepentant reactionary southern whites and gave these, and other reactionary forces, political legitimacy and initiative. Meanwhile, the Democratic Party made moves to bring a whole section of Black activists from the '60s into the arena of bourgeois electoral politics. Both parties worked to develop “fronters”—“Black faces in high places” who purported to act as brokers between the masses and the powers, but in actual fact weighed down the people's ability to resist through misleadership and lies.

The upheaval of the '60s had once again powerfully presented a clear challenge to the ruling class to eliminate white supremacy and integrate Black people into society on an equal footing. Once again, this was **NOT** done. The promise of equality was once more betrayed—as it had been after the Civil War. And once again, two things were at work: the needs of capital, which continued to gain advantage from racist discrimination and ghettoization of millions of African-Americans; and the necessity of the capitalists to not disrupt—and in fact to reassert and reinforce with a vengeance—the social glue of white supremacy—the ways in which the lie of the “master class” were so integral to so many people's understanding of “being American.” This was important for the ruling class, particularly going into a volatile period when the U.S. was both coming off defeat in Vietnam and facing potentially far greater challenges abroad.

Meanwhile, major changes were developing in the ways in which Black people were “inserted into” the economic relations of society. The search for the highest possible profit, along with the increasing ability to invest capital all over the globe, resulted in the disappearance of many industrial jobs in the inner cities of the U.S. Some were shifted to the suburbs—where capitalists moved their facilities, in part to keep African-Americans out of their work force, since they considered them too rebellious—and some overseas. Between 1967 and 1987, the four cities of Philadelphia, Chicago, New York and Detroit together lost over *one million*

factory jobs—and this trend has only accelerated in the decades since!²⁷ At the same time, the radical transformations and plundering of the economies of the Third World drove new workers to the U.S. (and other imperialist countries)—with today an estimated 12 million of these workers in the U.S. lacking any legal papers, and hence living at the mercy of the capitalist ruling class.²⁸ Black people had, ever since the 1950s, made up a disproportionate section of the reserve army of the unemployed, in and out of work, often having to hustle to get by; today this has expanded and intensified to a whole other level.

The “War on Drugs,” the Gutting of Welfare and the Buildup of Religion

In 1969, H.R. Haldeman, Nixon’s top assistant, wrote in his diary that “[President Nixon] emphasized that you have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to.” Thus was born the “war on drugs.”²⁹

Launched by Nixon, this “war on drugs” was taken to a whole other level by Reagan, who became president in 1980. It marked a strategic decision by the ruling class to maintain inner-city Black youth in desolate hyper-segregated neighborhoods which lacked jobs, and where education and health care resources had been severely cut. Even with the jobs that remained, discrimination was stepped up, as employers sought to avoid the “defiance” of Black youth who, in the words of Bob Avakian, were “not so pliant for capitalist exploitation.” Instead of providing better education and the promise of new opportunities for these youth, drugs would be allowed to flood the inner city (including with the connivance of the CIA), and many inner-city youth would be funneled into the drug trade—where they would then be vulnerable to constant harassment, arrest, imprisonment and social isolation. The rate of imprisonment exploded drastically³⁰ to the point where shuttling between the hard hustle of the streets and the harder times in prison became the dominant mode of life in many oppressed inner-city communities—a lifetime of lockdowns. Beginning at that time and continuing and intensifying up through today, whenever jobs open up in a major city, people will line up for blocks to even get a chance to apply. But for most of the time—and, in some areas, for most of the people—there is little choice other than the illegal economy.

On that basis, the “code of the streets” took significantly deeper root: that is, the rules of survival borne of the shark-like competition of the illegal economy set terms for inner-city youth more broadly, with the resulting horrific “Black-on-Black” violence and violence between Black and Latino youth that the mainstream, bourgeois commentators deplore, or pretend to deplore. And the bourgeoisie launched an incredible campaign of demonization of Black youth in particular, right down to inventing a category of “feral super-predators” to justify the massive wave of criminalization.

During this same period, the bourgeoisie launched a truly vicious campaign of demonization and humiliation against Black women on welfare. No insult was out of bounds for these racist bullies. By 1996 the “liberal” Bill Clinton had signed a bill that denied welfare to millions of people, especially women, and thrust mil-

False Paths & Dead Ends The Limits of Nationalism

People say: “Only Black people know what Black people face, and only Black people can figure out how to change it. We have to get our own struggle together first, and go forward from there.”

Many people will come into the revolution out of their direct experience of oppression, and this experience and the insights that arise from it must be deeply drawn on by the revolutionary movement. But that experience alone can not illuminate the deeper sources of this oppression and the potential pathways to eliminate all this. That takes science—the science of communism first brought forward by Marx and deepened and developed since then. Marx showed that human society, like all material phenomena in the universe, can be scientifically understood, and he developed the essential methods for doing that. It is this science that those who oppose oppression must take up, and apply to understanding and transforming reality, if we are to get free. Applying this to the oppression of Black people—and to every burning question of society—is a task for people of *all* nationalities; we need everyone working to get the most correct and deepest possible understanding.

As for Black people having to “get it together” among themselves first, this mis-locates the problem. No matter how hard people have tried, “getting it together” as a people cannot happen under this system. At every stage since its formation during Reconstruction, the development of the Black nation has been deformed and subjugated within the larger U.S. oppressor nation, and the same essential dynamics are at work today, in new forms. At the same time, there are *different classes*—people with different social positions and outlooks—among Black people. While there is a shared oppression among Black people, even this oppression is experienced differently by people occupying different positions within the overall society, and there is, and there can be, no one unified outlook representing all Black people, no “Black” or “African” ideology that represents all Black people in some special and unique way, apart from other oppressed people—and any claim to such an ideology and attempt to put this forward as representing all Black people, will only lead to the outlook of the more *bourgeois* forces holding sway, as this is more in line with and in many ways is reinforced and supported by the functioning of this system and the outlook and the means of molding public opinion that are served and controlled by the dominant bourgeois ruling class.

Still, there is a role in the revolutionary process for organization among Black people, and other oppressed peoples, who are struggling against their oppression—and this will be united with by the revolutionary communist movement. And there will be a role for forms of self-government and autonomy for Black people in the new socialist society, even as integration is carried forward in society as a whole. The revolutionary communist movement also works to build unity with national forms and nationalist groupings among Black people in the struggle today,

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lions of women into the labor market working for the bare minimum, often in health care or the very low-paying retail trade, and forcing many into various hustles and desperate acts, including prostitution, in order to survive and feed their children.^[31] By any measure, this was a massive social change—one which has been extremely underreported and underestimated.

Even the section of African-American people who made it out of the ghetto and into better-paying jobs during these last few decades face a life fraught with uncertainty and danger. Discrimination in every arena—credit, health care, education, and so on—continues, as do the cases of better-off Black people either being killed by the police for “driving while Black” or brought continually into serious danger of meeting that fate.

Going along with all this—and very consciously built up as part of this reactionary counter-offensive by the ruling class—has been the revival of the Black church and religious feeling among Black people. The influence of religion had in fact greatly ebbed during the latter part of the '60s, when people raised their heads to fight for revolution and, as part of doing so, struggled to rationally figure out how the world really worked and how to change it. But with the ebb of the revolutionary struggle at the end of that decade, feelings of disorientation and despair arose among many.

Religious forces raced to fill that void with all kinds of erroneous, objectively harmful, and in some cases outright reactionary and deadly ideas: blaming yourself for being oppressed by this system; seeing capitalism as the way out of a madness that was caused by capitalism; strengthening male domination over women; substituting Bible stories and mythology for the actual truths of science (including evolution) and generally pushing the idea that people can't really understand the world, and therefore can't really go about changing it radically, and so must “leave it to the lord.” Whether these ideas were being run by Creflo Dollar, T.D. Jakes, or Louis Farrakhan (whose militant posing conceals a profoundly conservative—and in many ways outright reactionary—brand of nationalism), they all seriously confused, misled and demoralized people.

Today, *as they did in slavery times*, the capitalist ruling class builds up the church as the MAIN institution in the Black community. Government money that once went to public education and community arts is now channeled through preachers who align themselves with the government and with the Christian fascist movement that has been built up by Bush. Nowhere is this sharper than in the prisons. The struggle of the '60s spurred among prisoners a thirst for knowledge and truth, and they fought for and won the right to take college courses and have access to literature even though they were locked up; today that is increasingly suppressed and flushed away while reactionary fundamentalist “prison ministries” are given total access to the minds of the literally millions of Black youth whom the system shuttles through these hellholes, with large numbers at any given time serving long sentences in degrading prison conditions.

While many religious people and clergy oppose, and can be united in struggle against, the outrages and crimes of this system, and important aspects of the oppression of Black people and others, there must be struggle and debate over the real character of the

problem and solution, and the worldview and method that is necessary to win complete emancipation, and the real role of religion in relation to all that. Religion—both in general and particularly in the more recent period—plays the role of turning people away from seeking a real understanding of the actual causes and dynamics of things, as they really are, and the possibility of changing things in this real world. Even when more “progressive” versions of religion may encourage people to resist oppression (or particular aspects of oppression), it still promotes the idea that, when all is said and done, people themselves cannot change things by consciously seeking out and coming to an understanding of what is the problem—what is the actual cause of people's situation and where oppression actually comes from—and waging a determined struggle on the basis of that understanding, but instead they must ultimately put things “in the hands of god” and rely on this non-existent god to give them the courage and strength to persevere. And things are worse, on a whole other level, with the reactionary religious viewpoints that openly uphold this system and the key pillars of its oppressive relations.

“Post-racial”? Please. We had better, all of us, face very squarely what has really gone down these past few decades. The hope and optimism of the '60s, founded on the real potential that can be seen when people rise up, fight back and begin to seek out a radical alternative to this monstrous system...this hope has turned to despair in the face of decades of betrayal and brutal repression meted out by these rulers, decades of needless suffering and unforgivable squandering of human potential. Today the situation is even more dangerous. To take one stark example: there is the distinct possibility, and there are already definite trends and developments toward, a whole new era of “neo-slavery,” where a predominantly Black prison population is put to work for pennies a day, either to turn profits for capitalists or bring down costs for the state. And there are those in the ruling class making “policy suggestions” with genocidal implications—people like the prominent Republican (and fundamentalist Christian fascist) Pat Robertson who has advocated executing not only people convicted of murder, but any people who commit crimes that “put a stain” on society.

There is, in other words, a question, and a prospect, of betrayal yet again—on an even more horrific scale!

III. Pointing Forward: Revolution Is the Solution

We began by discussing the need to confront the full scope of the problem and to pinpoint the actual cause of it. We have shown that this oppression arose from and has developed intertwined with the workings of capital, as it consumes millions and millions of lives in blind expansion, and the conscious policies—economic, political and social—of the capitalists themselves. We have outlined the titanic struggles against national oppression (the oppression of Black people and other peoples who are discriminated against and held down, as nations, or national minorities) that this country has witnessed, and we have drawn the most essential lessons from those struggles—including that this system, even when given a chance to reform, has time and again betrayed Black people and

demonstrated that, because of its very nature and essential dynamics, it cannot reform or be reformed. We have shown that far from being “post-racial” or even “improving,” the oppression of Black people continues in many horrendous forms and has been reinforced and intensified over the past period—with real prospects of even worse horror now posing themselves.

Which leads us now to the one solution to this horror, the one way out of this madness: revolution.

We discussed earlier the experience of the 1960s, and how it showed the potential for a revolutionary movement to arise and win tremendous support right here in the U.S. Today the world-weary “been there done that” types like to say, “Revolution? We tried that and it didn’t work.” These people have it upside down. The most amazing thing about the ’60s is that if a few things had broken a little differently...and if there had been a revolutionary leadership, a vanguard party, with both deep ties among the masses and a clearer idea of the goals of the revolution and a correct strategy for making one...well, who is to say that there couldn’t have been a revolution, or at least a serious attempt at one, right here “in the belly of the beast”? The most important thing about the ’60s is not that “it didn’t work” but that it went as far as it did—it left valuable lessons to analyze and absorb, and a standard to surpass in the struggle ahead.

But that gets to an even more important point: the revolution won’t be a simple revival of the movement back then. For one thing, while many things are the same—including the oppression of Black people as a central fact of American life and how that would be reflected in any revolutionary movement—many things, including some of the particular forms in which Black people are

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and will do so at a time when conditions come together for the actual revolution itself—even as struggle is waged over the goals of the revolution, and the outlook and method that must guide it.

The communist outlook, unlike nationalism, approaches everything from the standpoint of emancipating *all* of humanity. Coming just from within the desire to “get it together” among Black people will lead to pitting the interests of Black people against the interests of other national groupings, which would inevitably engender inequality and perpetuate oppression. Nationalism also leaves unaddressed the whole question of the emancipation of women, which can only be achieved together with the eventual abolition of nations and all relations of exploitation and oppression. Ironically, coming just from within the desire to assert the rights of the Black nation is too narrow a framework even from which to break this nation out from under the domination it faces today. It is only coming from the farthest horizons of the communist future that the streams of struggle against all of these forms of oppression can be powerfully linked together in revolutionary struggle, and it is only the revolutionary proletariat, with a solid core that understands that its emancipation as a class requires the abolition of *all* forms of oppression, that can lead such a revolutionary struggle. ≈≈

False Paths & Dead Ends Why “The Dream” Is a Dead End

People say: “*If we could actually realize what Martin Luther King put forward in his ‘I Have a Dream’ speech, then Black people would finally see a new day, America would be a much better place and it could play a much different and better role in the world. So, our efforts should be focused on making that ‘Dream’ a reality.*”

Martin Luther King made many sacrifices—and indeed made the ultimate sacrifice—in seeking to bring about what he put forward in his “I Have a Dream” speech. But, as indicated by that very speech, the outlook of Martin Luther King was precisely one of seeking to make America “live up to its promise,” when that “promise” has always involved, as one of its most essential elements, first the outright enslavement, and then the continuing oppression of Black people in other horrific forms. King’s “dream” can never be realized, for the masses of Black people, under this system—a system which is founded on, and depends on, subjugating Black people and denying them even basic equality. And the fact is that, whatever King’s intent, the realization of this “dream” could, at most, apply only to a small percentage of Black people, and would in reality come at the expense of the masses of Black people—and millions, even billions, of other people, here and around the world, who will continue to be preyed upon and to suffer horribly as a result of the workings of this capitalist-imperialist system and its systematic exploitation and merciless oppression, all enforced by its organized machinery of mass murder and destruction.

Consistent with his outlook, King’s program was straight-up one of reform, directly and explicitly in opposition to revolution, when in fact only revolution, aiming for a communist world as its ultimate goal—and not reform, which leaves this system in effect—can finally end the long nightmare of the oppression of Black people, and all other relations of oppression and exploitation, here and throughout the world. The fact, and the great irony, that, while he sought only to reform this system, King was nevertheless cut down, is itself yet another indictment of this system and its towering crimes and yet another indication of why it cannot in fact be reformed but must be swept aside and abolished through revolution. ≈≈

oppressed, have changed significantly in the four decades since the '60s. For another thing, the movement of that time had real limitations. Even the most radical forces in that movement—including Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party—were not clear on what the aims of a revolution should be, and on how really deeply seated in the *capitalist* system are the oppression of Black people and the other forms of oppression that people were rising up against.

For Malcolm, and to a large extent even the Panthers, the horizons of the struggle did not go beyond the liberation of Black people as a people, there was not a completely clear and correct understanding of how that liberation could actually be achieved, and there was at least a trend of “forcing America to keep its promises.” But there is a reason that America has continually betrayed “its promises”: the oppression of the African-American people forms an *essential* part of the fabric and functioning of U.S. society, and any attempt to uproot it would tear up the whole fabric of this society as it now exists. Further, the emancipation of the African-American people—who not only make up an oppressed nation *within* the larger society but also are, in very large numbers, members of the U.S. proletariat—is bound up with the revolution led by the proletariat for the full emancipation of all humanity, and in the current era can only be achieved as part of that revolution.

There was confusion when some of the formal legal barriers to advancement were removed, and a small section of the oppressed were able to move up, even if in limited ways, while the majority of the masses were ground into even worse conditions. The notions that were brought forward to explain this—that the movement failed or, worse yet, that the *people* failed to take advantage of “their new opportunities”—are wrong and extremely damaging.

The movement did not fail; *it did not go far enough*. And not only were the “doors to opportunity” never really or fully opened, even more fundamentally there were still thousands of steel threads, some visible and some hidden, that were deeply embedded in society and holding the *masses* of Black people down. Something more radical, more thoroughgoing, was and is needed. As we’ll get into shortly, a revolutionary power could quickly begin tearing up these threads, and set about mobilizing people to construct a society based on and heading toward true emancipation; and, as we have emphasized, the reason that the movement of the 1960s did *not* succeed in doing this was essentially because it did not reach the point of actually being able to overthrow the power of the capitalist-imperialist ruling class.

Beyond that, even to the extent that people were clear on the need for revolution and its goals, the revolutionary movement of the 1960s confronted big and complex problems. How to overcome the gap between the conditions faced by the deeply oppressed and those of the “soft middle” of American society, many of whom need to be won over in the course of revolutionary struggle? How to wage a revolutionary struggle, and bring into being a new society, that does not compromise with, but is determined to fully abolish and uproot, white supremacy and the subjugation of Black people and other oppressed peoples within the U.S., while on that basis and with those objectives winning and uniting in this revolution masses of people of all different nationalities, including large numbers of white people? How to actually keep the movement oriented toward making revolution, rather than getting sucked into

just accepting reforms, in a period when the movement cannot yet go directly for revolution? How to go up against, and actually defeat, everything that the U.S. ruling class could and would throw against a revolutionary people?

Before these questions could be fully joined, let alone answered, the powers-that-be came at the movement with ferocious repression. As noted earlier, over 20 members and leaders of the Black Panther Party were outright killed, and hundreds more were imprisoned, some for years and even decades. And while they did this, the powers also brought forward Black politicians who pushed the line that the oppression of Black people, along with the other running sores of this society, could be handled through reform. Last but not least—setting the larger framework for all this—the international situation changed from one where revolution was the main trend in the world into one in which the international communist revolution had suffered a serious, world-historic setback with the reversal of revolutionary rule in China in 1976, when Mao died and his followers were arrested and in many cases executed. This last blow caused tremendous confusion and demoralization, and coupled with the ideological attacks by the powers-that-be on the whole experience in China under Mao’s leadership and on revolution and communism in general, led many to—wrongly—give up on the possibility of revolution.

So the movement of the '60s ebbed. But the essential lesson from that time must not be lost: it showed that revolution was not only necessary *but also possible* in the U.S., and it gave a sense of the key forces in that revolution and the main problems that would have to be solved in order to make that revolution.

Moreover, something extremely important did come out of that whole period. The most important thing, in fact, from a strategic standpoint. And that is a party that has actually developed and is continuing to develop the understanding to lead a successful revolution in this country—a party with a clear understanding of the goal of such a revolution, with a scientific understanding of the dynamics in society that could lead to a revolutionary situation and the forces that could be united to actively take up and in different ways support it, and with the leadership to see it through to victory.

This party—the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA—is led by Bob Avakian, a veteran of the '60s who, as a matter of fact, first got turned toward revolution by working closely with the Black Panther Party. Avakian has gone on since the 1960s to both lead the revolutionary movement in practice over these past decades, and to guide that practice by taking on and answering the biggest questions before the whole revolutionary communist movement. These have involved major questions of science and philosophy, of knowing and changing the world; the meaning and great importance of proletarian, revolutionary internationalism; the whole history of the communist movement and the experience of the socialist revolutions, summing up and firmly upholding their achievements as well as going deeply into their shortcomings, and pointing the way forward to a conception of socialist society that breaks new ground and provides guidance for a whole new stage of communist revolution; and strategic questions involved in actually successfully making revolution in a country like this. A major element in Avakian’s work during this whole period has been a

deep analysis of the history and situation of Black people in the U.S., drawing on and synthesizing the serious work and research of scholars on this crucial question, as well as continually returning to the ideas of the revolutionary leaders of the '60s, grappling with both their insights as well as their limitations and drawing lessons deeply from that whole period.³²

With the leadership of Bob Avakian, this party has developed the understanding of the kind of revolution that would be needed in a country like this...the kinds of forces that would have to be united, and how that could be done—including the ways to bridge the great gulfs between the people in this current society...the kinds of political struggle and activity that would have to be undertaken by the revolutionaries to move the opportunity for revolution closer...and the ways that a revolutionary force would have to take on the imperialists so that they would have a real chance to win. These crucial questions are, of course, extremely complex and we can only touch on them here—but we urge everyone who is grappling with those questions to take up and get deeply into the pamphlet *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*.

A Communist Revolution

One of the questions gone deeply into in that pamphlet is this: the goal of this revolution must be the emancipation of all of humanity.

Many will come into the revolution because they've been denied the ability to fulfill their potential, and have had their hopes and their spirits held down, mocked by the slamming doors of this system. Some will be drawn toward the revolution out of feelings of revenge and a lashing out against the wrongs that have been done to them and their people. That anger can propel people toward revolution—and outrage at oppression must and will be a key part of any revolution—but this must be led, channeled and transformed into a determination to fight against and uproot all oppressive and degrading relations among people, and all forms of exploitation of one part of society by another.

Some will come into the revolution wanting liberation for Black people, or an end to the brutal oppression and degradation of women, or an end to the oppression of immigrants and to the domination of the countries they come from by American imperialism. Some will come to revolution because of desperate concern for the destruction of the planet wrecked by capitalism's wars and savaging of the earth's resources. All these—and many more outrages—are fuel for the revolution. But each of these crimes—as towering as each is in its own right, and as central as solving each is to the revolution—is an expression of something deeper still. Solving any of these requires attacking the problem at its roots—that is, getting at and getting rid of the capitalist system as a whole. And, by looking deeply into the roots of this problem, the solution also emerges.

This same system that arose with and nourished itself on human slavery, and that has continued the legacy of that crime down to today, is a worldwide system that constantly generates brutal wars for the expansion of empire, that consumes and destroys the lives of countless children worldwide, that subjugates women, one half

False Paths & Dead Ends The False Path of Barack Obama

People say: “What about all the progress represented by Obama becoming a viable candidate for president? And isn't electing Black leaders a way to work at overcoming racial oppression?”

First off, let's talk about *what* Obama is seeking to lead. He wants to become the chief administrator—the “commander-in-chief”—of a vicious shark of a system that survives and can only survive by sending its armies around the world to enforce its global exploitation. Obama has said that he is down with this—repeatedly threatening Iran with nuclear weapons, threatening to carry out attacks inside Pakistan, insisting that more U.S. troops be sent into the unjust occupation of Afghanistan, and yammering his support for Israel and its oppression of the Palestinian people and its aggression throughout the Middle East (and around the world). And for all the talk of Obama being opposed to the war in Iraq, he *also opposes* the immediate withdrawal of troops from that war and has said that “he will listen to the generals” before he does anything. Further, as Obama himself has made very clear, he has opposed the U.S. war against Iraq—to the degree that he has opposed it—only because he did not believe it would “work”—and because it was “the wrong war.” Given how the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq has already taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis (along with several thousand U.S. soldiers), and has devastated that country, making it unlivable for a large part of its population, this kind of “opposition” from Obama is like a man who sees another man robbing, raping and preparing to murder a woman, but is worried that the woman will fight back and beat off her attacker, and so he declares that this attack will not “work”—and it is better to find some other woman to assault!

Second, Obama's whole program is to “pull together as one America” and to prepare for sacrifice—NOT in the struggle against oppression, but to preserve the domination of the U.S. around the world! You may not want to believe this, but look at Obama's speeches and listen to what he actually says—and think about what he would have to do as the chief executive of this bloody empire. This is WHY Obama specifically argues *against* taking on the specific ways in which Black people are oppressed—and argues for “understanding” the reactionary racist opposition of some white people to affirmative action. This is WHY Obama refuses to really take on the oppression of women in his campaign—he'll make a few remarks about the “glass ceiling” that enforces discrimination against women, and he will utter a few words about upholding the right to abortion, but he then immediately adds that abortion should be rare, and that the number of abortions should be greatly reduced—when, in fact, the right and the ability to have an abortion is a crucial part of the fight for the emancipation of women and to enable women to play a full role in society, and in the struggle to radically transform society, and abortion is not at all something that women

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of humanity...and all to satisfy the dictates of a system whose overriding concern is the endless drive to accumulate ever more profit, and whose only commandment is “expand or die.” Look at the towering crimes that are carried out over and over again—from the brutal invasions and wars of aggression and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan today, to Vietnam a generation ago, and who knows where tomorrow. This system of worldwide plunder and enforced needless misery must be brought to an end.

But the rise of capitalism brought forward something else as well: the means to end that system of pitiless exploitation and mass murder. For as capitalism developed, so too did the mode of production—that is, the means through which people come together to produce the material requirements of life such as food, shelter, and the ability to raise the next generation. Under capitalism, the means of carrying out this production become *socialized*: instead of being worked by individuals, the means of production (technology, land and raw materials, etc.) can now only be utilized by employing vast collectivities of people to work them, in networks that stretch out over the entire planet. With that, capitalism has also generated the emergence of a new class—the proletariat—the class that collectively works those vast means of production.

For this reason, the proletarian revolution is not about getting a better life for particular individuals, or giving individual proletarians a chance to “get more”—which must inevitably come at the expense of others. The proletariat, as a class, cannot achieve its emancipation by somehow dividing up the means of production among individuals, or even individuals grouped collectively into some apparently autonomous units—for, if this were done, there would once again emerge a situation in which people or groups are thrown into competition and some get ahead at the expense of others, leading, over not so long a time, to new oppressive divisions among the people, and new sets of exploiters and exploited. Instead, the means of production that the proletariat collectively works must become the collective property of all of society.

The tasks of this revolution are many and complex. The revolution must transform society’s underlying and foundational class and production relations (that is, who owns the means of production, how do people relate to each other in carrying out production, and how is the product distributed). The revolution must be carried forward to make the means of production the common property of the people, and this must happen ultimately on a world scale. The revolution must uproot and transform all the institutions that defend and reinforce class distinctions—the armies and police and the ways in which the government is administered, as well as the media and culture. This whole revolutionary process will have to be one in which people increasingly take up the all-round tasks of running society and in which they radically transform their ways of thinking and morality, to rupture with the old capitalist outlooks of “looking out for number one,” “waiting for saviors,” “our nation first,” etc. This revolution has to overcome the distinctions between mental and manual labor and the oppressive character of that division, as well as the oppressive domination of women by men—institutions and relations that arose thousands of years ago, along with the development of class society itself—the division between exploiters and exploited and the rule of the exploiters over the exploited.

This underscores why, while the revolution must address and heal the many scars of the past, it must aim higher than “the first shall be last and the last shall be first,” or higher even than “equality”—it must aim to get past the conditions where there is a “first” and a “last” and where people measure their situation *against* that of other people. This revolution’s aim must be a truly communist society in which a guiding principle would be “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs”—a society in which, as our Party’s *Constitution* puts it:

[P]eople would still have to work together to produce the necessities of life and deal with nature and our obligations to each other. But it would mean that people will be free to do that in a way that does NOT divide us into hostile competing forces... free of the enforced ignorance that is so integral to today’s world...and free, finally, to continually develop a true world society of human beings who increasingly flourish, not only as individuals but most fundamentally in their mutual relations and interactions with each other.³³

This will truly be a global human community, without borders and national divisions but full of human diversity and greatly unleashed creativity and initiative, within an overall cooperative framework.

If the revolution does not set its sights to these goals and these heights, then things will turn back to one form of exploitation or another, and the outmoded and oppressive institutions that go with exploitation will regenerate. The nightmare will continue.

This understanding of its goals has to be at the heart and core of the revolutionary movement. This is the communist revolution. Its first step must be the overthrow of the state machinery of the capitalist-imperialists, once a revolutionary situation has emerged. This overthrow of the old, oppressive system must lead immediately to the establishment of a new state power that serves the revolutionary interests of the proletariat in emancipating all of humanity.

Imagine: The New Revolutionary State Power and the Abolition of the Oppression of Black People

What could this new revolutionary power do? And how in particular would it move in relation to the oppression of Black people?

This new power would from the very beginning introduce and back up a whole different set of economic relations—based on moving forward to eliminating class divisions and other oppressive relations, and the institutions and ideas that flow from and reinforce them. This revolutionary state would take over the major means of production (the factories, land and mines, machinery and other technology, etc.) that were produced by the masses but have been appropriated—owned and controlled—by the imperialists as their private source of wealth and power. It would convert these into socialist state property and use them to meet the needs of the people and to transform the social relations (the relations not only among individuals but among different groupings of people) in line with the goal of communism set out above. This new power would end the domination and parasitic plunder of other nations

by the U.S., and would instead support revolution around the world.

The revolutionary power would lead and unleash the people to wipe out the age-old subjugation of women—moving immediately to prevent rape (with the fundamental aim of finally ending this inhuman outrage altogether), and to end the suppression and stigmatizing of abortion, to challenge and uproot the whole notion of women as the subordinates, or virtual slaves, of men and breeders of their children, and all the abuse and degradation of women, in forms traditional and “modern,” that the capitalist system, and all systems of exploitation, embody and that exploiting classes encourage or allow to run rampant. Breaking the chains of the insane profit-driven logic of capitalist “development,” this new power would promote an appreciation of and would act to preserve the wonderful diversity of nature—rather than destroying it. It would foster—in the media, in the educational system, and through encouraging all sorts of initiatives from the masses themselves in the arts, etc.—an understanding of the different histories of the oppressed peoples in this country and throughout the world and respect for the diverse cultures, while also continually exposing and shining a penetrating light on the common enemy that they have shared and pointing the way forward to a world community of peoples—a world community that encompasses and draws sustenance from great and dynamic cultural diversity.

This new state power would NOT deploy armies of sneering, brutalizing, murdering police in the neighborhoods—police who delight in humiliating people and breaking their spirit, constantly reminding them of their subjugated status. Those police forces would be broken up and the biggest criminals and abusers among them punished for their crimes against the people or otherwise dealt with by the new legal system reflecting and serving the new society. Instead, this new state power would be able to remove the main causes of crime and antagonism between the people, and it would create new security forces that would exist to safeguard the rights and interests of the masses of people and to help resolve contradictions among the people in a non-antagonistic way, without violent and destructive conflicts.

This new power would not be like a machine that you turn on and then passively sit back while “it does its stuff.” This new power would instead depend on, and increasingly draw forward, the active and conscious participation of the people themselves. It would work to break down the distinctions between mental and manual labor, drawing into intellectual life those who had in capitalist society been “locked out of” working with ideas, while also encouraging intellectuals and artists to pursue their work. While the new socialist power would suppress the former capitalist-imperialists and not allow them to organize for their return, and while there would be clear leadership with a clear program, this new power would at the same time unleash an unprecedented diversity of initiatives and views, of dissent and ferment, even of opposition to socialism itself. At times, the new power would risk going to the brink of being “drawn and quartered” by all the dissent and the many different kinds of initiative and activity. But, led correctly, this ferment will not only give people a sense that they have “air to breathe”—it would ultimately *strengthen* the revolutionary power—as a *revolutionary* power. This is because only with such vigorous social ferment and dissent can the masses,

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should be defensive about, or people should try to make them feel bad about—and Obama refuses to actively and aggressively take on the reactionary forces who want to outlaw not only abortion but even birth control and force women to have more and more babies as an expression of “god’s will” and the “right” of men to dominate women and treat them as mere breeders of children for men. This is WHY Obama promotes religion—with his hat-in-hand appearance at the right-wing evangelical Saddleback Church, his call to continue Bush’s program of giving government money to the churches, and his refusal to defend evolution, which is not only a scientific fact, but one of the most well-established facts in all of science. To a significant degree, all this gets concentrated in Obama’s tremendous professions of “respect for the service” of his Republican opponent McCain—who is nothing but a war criminal who was part of a murderous campaign of bombing which targeted hospitals, schools, farmlands, dams and other vital civilian structures and which resulted in the deaths of millions of people and the devastation of a good part of the country in Vietnam—and Obama’s refusal to say anything negative about Sarah Palin, a Nazi nut-case who upholds “young earth creationism” in opposition to the scientific fact of evolution and science in general and wants creationism taught in the schools.

Third, in regard to Black people, Obama’s candidacy has already done a lot of damage, and his presidency would be worse. Look at his “Father’s Day” speech this year, rehashing that same poisonous Bill Cosby routine that blames Black people for their oppressed situation. Look at his talk about how *his* daughters won’t need affirmative action. And to those people who say, “yeah, but if this candidacy inspires one Black child to believe that they can do more and strive higher, it will have done good”: that is precisely one of the most killing things about this Obama phenomenon! Given the actual nature and dynamics of this system, and its effects on millions of youth, and others, in the inner cities in particular—this whole Obama thing will end up *demoralizing* Black youth, reinforcing notions that something is wrong with *them*, if *they* cannot “make it” in a system that is *designed* to make them fail. It will contribute to the “blame the youth themselves” tendency among Black people more broadly. And it will give the powers-that-be (as well as backward—and even some “well meaning”—white people) more rationale for saying that if Black youth in the inner cities don’t “make it now,” and instead are still caught up in crime, etc., then not only is it their own fault—but *it is necessary and justified to bring down the hammer of repression even harder on them—and “we don’t want to hear any more excuses.”* Some inspiration!

For all these reasons, this Obama phenomenon is extremely negative—and people who have been drawn into this, and let themselves be carried away by it, even against their better judgment, need to put their energies into something that CAN make a positive difference: resistance and revolution. ≈≈

and their leadership, come to learn all that they will need to know about the underlying forces in society and in nature, and the most correct way to go forward. And only through this process can the revolutionary power itself undergo constant and necessary transformation. Only dissent and diversity of initiatives on this unprecedented scale, given leadership by the vanguard party, could give the necessary “richness” to the process of the masses themselves coming to understand and more and more consciously transform the whole world, in the direction of a whole different level and kind of human freedom.

Let’s imagine what this new power could do about some of the most agonizing problems that can NOT be solved by the present system. Let’s take the glaring contradiction of the inner-city streets where the crying need for decent housing, schools, health care, and cultural and recreation facilities exists side-by-side with young people who haunt those same street corners, and can find no other employment but the drug trade. Under capitalism nothing can be done unless it serves the further accumulation of capital and the political interests of the capitalist ruling class, and this requirement stands as a barrier between the work that society needs and the masses who could do it. So either these neighborhoods are left to rot, or they are transformed by capital into “high-end” housing which is more profitable—and which ends up driving the basic proletarian masses out.

The new state power would change all that overnight. The new state power would channel resources into these neighborhoods. But this would not be a top-down favor, or political patronage. This would be a process in which the masses themselves had not just the resources but the power to debate and discuss and help determine the kinds of housing and other facilities that were needed and should be built. It would involve proletarians working with architects and builders and people with other skills—even as people from among the masses were also learning these skills. The youth would not only have jobs, but *meaningful* jobs that would make a difference in the lives of the community and the society overall, and that would draw on, and further develop, the ingenuity, daring and leadership that is now either suppressed or channeled into destructiveness of the “thug life.” And it would do all this in alliance with and involving people from other strata of society who also have a desire to do something meaningful and skills to share, in a process full of learning on all sides, as well as comradely struggle.

What difference would state power make? Think back again, to the example of Hurricane Katrina and how this system not only left people to die but then used the army and police to threaten, arrest, shoot and even kill those who risked their lives in toxic floodwaters to get children out of the situation, to help people in dire need, to help others get to safe ground, etc. When natural disasters like Katrina happen *after* the revolution, the new state power would not only immediately marshal the resources of government to deal with such natural disasters, it would call forward, build on, and give leadership to—and learn from—the initiative that ordinary people from all walks of life want to take when such things happen.

Or take another literally killing contradiction of this current system: the sharp conflict between Black and Latino masses. The driving compulsions of capitalist accumulation uprooted

Africans and brought them in chains to America as slaves, and then put them through 350 years of hell. The same relations of capital drove the conquistadors from Europe to Mexico and South America to colonize and subjugate the native inhabitants (the ones that they did not wipe out altogether); and those same compulsions resulted in the later subjugation by the United States of Mexico and other parts of Latin America, the plunder of those countries, and the eventual driving of millions of people from those countries *into* the U.S., desperately seeking any work they could get.

The spontaneous workings of these same capitalist relations, coupled with the *conscious decisions of the capitalists themselves*, have pitted these peoples against each other. Immigrants are put to work in terrible jobs and at the same time subjected to fascist-like repression just for living—and as this is done, they are told that Black people are too lazy to take those jobs and should be scorned, and are further told that if they work hard and keep their heads down and suck up to this country’s rulers, proving that they believe in the “American dream,” they will get ahead. Meanwhile, Black people in many parts of the country are largely thrown to the side by this same capitalist class that pumped out their labor for so many years, generation after generation, and are told that “the Mexicans are taking your jobs,” and that Black people should quit being so defiant and instead stand up for their status as “true Americans.” All the while the education system and media reinforce these divisions—on the one hand, hiding from the different peoples how they have, in many ways, shared a similar fate, brought about by oppression at the hands of a common enemy; and on the other, constantly framing things in such a way so as to aggravate the divisions caused by the capitalist system, and how it sets people against each other, including through competition for jobs and resources. While important strides can and must be made in changing this, in developing unity among exploited and oppressed people of all different nationalities in building the revolutionary movement, these divisions cannot be fully overcome without finally getting rid of capitalism and bringing a radically different world into being.

But let’s imagine a state power in which the economic system provides jobs for *everyone* able to work, enabling them to take part in providing the tremendous needs of society and supporting revolutionary transformation around the world. Let’s imagine a state power which fosters exchanges of experience and ideas among the masses. Let’s imagine a state power which upholds and gives increasingly flowering expression to cultural diversity in the media and arts and educational system, all in an atmosphere that brings out human community and commonality. Let’s imagine a state power that provides forms of self-government and autonomy for the formerly oppressed nationalities, and provides resources that enable those autonomous areas to flourish, with vibrant educational and cultural institutions and real self-government in other spheres...but which does not *require* people of those nationalities to live in such areas, and which promotes integration broadly throughout society. Let’s imagine a state power that gives initiative to and backs up the people *combating* the racist, white supremacist ideas and ways of relating that will have been handed down from the old system, a state power that fosters the breaking down of barriers and exposing the false and hurtful myths that people have been taught about each other, and a state power that—as opposed to today, when racist poison spews out on the airwaves—uses the

media and schools to set a whole different atmosphere.

Let's imagine this—and let's do more than just imagine. Let's *understand* that such things have been done where communist revolutions have taken place and the formerly exploited proletariat has wielded state power, or that we have learned more fully, through that experience, the need and importance of making these kinds of radical changes. And let's begin working to prepare for that revolution, which will finally *take* state power out of the hands of the oppressors, and create a new state power, in the hands of the masses, led by their vanguard party.

In all this, the existence of a revolutionary-communist solid core that comes at everything as “emancipators of humanity” will be crucial. This solid core will need to anchor and guide the whole revolutionary process, firmly drawing the links between every stage of struggle and the goal of all-the-way communist emancipation. Of course, this solid core is not a once-and-for-all, never-changing thing; it would be constantly developing and going through changes at each stage of the revolutionary process. This core must begin to be forged today, through the process of hastening and preparing for a revolutionary situation, and then developed further—in a whole different context—in the situation where millions of people are rising up to seize power, and then further still and in a far greater way in the context of the new revolutionary society, in which it will be a guiding principle, and something actively encouraged, that everyone who yearns for emancipation should take up and concern themselves with the problems of the revolution and the radical transformation of society as a whole. A crucial part of carrying out this transformation is grasping clearly the centrality of abolishing all forms of national oppression as a cornerstone of achieving a communist world; and also crucial in all this is that all those motivated by wanting to see an end, at long last, to the brutal and seemingly unending forms of oppression of Black people and other oppressed peoples, must increasingly grasp how this can only be achieved in the context of emancipating all of humanity and moving human society to a whole new era.

How Could Such a Revolution Develop? What Would It Look Like?

This is a huge question, one demanding a serious and scientific answer. Again, we can only touch on this here and urge people to get into *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*. But we can and will say a few essential things:

A revolution in a country like the U.S. would require a major qualitative change in the nature of the objective situation. Such a revolution could only take place once society as a whole were in the grip of a profound crisis, owing fundamentally to the nature and workings of the system itself. Such a revolution also requires the emergence of a revolutionary people, numbering in the millions and millions and conscious of the need for revolutionary change and determined to fight for it. As an important statement of the RCP has put it: “In this struggle for revolutionary change, the revolutionary people and those who lead them will be confronted by the violent repressive force of the machinery of the state which embodies and enforces the existing system of exploitation and oppression; and in order for the revolutionary struggle to succeed, it will need to meet and defeat that violent repressive force of the old

exploitative, and oppressive order.”³⁴

Trying to jump off a revolution before those conditions exist—trying to initiate, or advocate, isolated acts of violence by individuals or small groups, divorced from the masses of people and attempting to substitute for a revolutionary movement of masses of people—is very wrong and extremely harmful. As the Party also pointed out in the statement just cited, “It will aid the extremely repressive forces of the existing system in their moves to isolate, attack and crush those, both revolutionary forces and broader forces of political opposition, who are working to build mass political resistance and to achieve significant, and even profound, social change through the politically-conscious activity and initiative of the masses of people.”³⁵

But that does NOT mean that the movement should just busy itself in fighting for reforms while it waits for a better situation to develop. This too has proven deadly to the hopes of the people. Instead, the movement must “hasten while awaiting” the development of the opportunity for revolution. This “hastening while awaiting” involves a whole range of activity that raises the ideological and political consciousness of people and builds massive political resistance to the most essential outrages of the system, keeping the people “tense” to seize on any opening; in short, preparing minds and organizing forces for revolution.

In thinking about this big question, it's important to recall the points we made about the '60s. These include:

- the ways in which millions of people, from many different parts of society, were drawn forward to mass militant resistance and to favoring revolution;
- the ways in which that struggle, reacting back and forth with things that were happening internationally, to a significant extent threw open the question of the “legitimacy” of the rulers of this system and put them on the defensive, revealing weaknesses that are not apparent in “normal times”;
- and the fact out of those times a party arose which, with the leadership of its Chairman, Bob Avakian, has gone on to confront the questions that stymied the movement back then and set a basic framework for answering those questions.

The social make-up today poses many different challenges than it did in the '60s. Let's take one big difference—the far greater predominance of the illegal economy in the inner cities today, and the corresponding dominance of the “code of the streets” and the “gangsta” thing. The kinds of hopes of the movement that inspired people in the 1960s seem distant to many of the youth of today—again, both because hopes for revolution and a radically different and better world were temporarily dashed *and* because even those hopes that were realized (the removal of some legal barriers, etc.) proved unable to deal with the larger problems caused by the system.

On one level, that makes it harder to mobilize many youth today in struggle against the system. But this also points to the need to go much deeper than any struggles of the past, no matter how inspiring, and to go far beyond their horizons and demands. As shown earlier in regard to Katrina and the contradictions between African-Americans and Latinos, the proletarian revolution and the revolutionary state power this will bring into being can deal with

these problems, relatively quickly; the reality of this fact has to be brought out for masses of people in powerful and vivid ways, repeatedly, boldly and from many different angles—with examples that point to the killing contradictions that people face every day and that show, in a living way, how these contradictions can and will be dealt with in a radically different way, in accordance with the common interests of the masses of people, once the revolution has established a new state power that embodies and furthers those interests.

On another level, this makes it all the more important to struggle sharply with youth, and others, to get into the revolution and draw out the aspirations for freedom which exist, but have been stomped on and nearly buried by this system. The challenge has to be made: get out of trying to make it in “the game” which the system has given you to play and in which you’ll never be more than a pawn, used against the very people you come from; get into something that can finally bring an end to the long dark night brought down on people by that system. Rupture with the kill or be killed mentality and the mind-set that comes with “the game”—and unleash what “the game” has suppressed: the aspirations for freedom and emancipation for *all* people that have been buried but not killed...and the deep desire to turn your anger and daring where, and against whom, it should and must be turned to realize *those* aspirations. Get out of seeking to get over on and even killing people just like you—and get into fighting the power today, as part of getting ready for this revolution, and as part of transforming the people to make that revolution.

There were glimpses of this potential in Hurricane Katrina, when people in “the life” sometimes risked all to save someone from a different “set,” and in some of what happened in the 1992 L.A. Rebellion, when gang antagonisms were temporarily put to the side. There was more than a glimpse in the ’60s, when people like George Jackson broke out of the criminal life and into the revolutionary movement. And there must be much more of that in the revolutionary movement today—brought forward by the vanguard party of revolution, the Revolutionary Communist Party, and all who come to deeply understand that a radically different future is possible, with this becoming in turn a tremendous force of inspiration for millions more...*not* in some scheme to “stop the violence” that cannot work in this system, and *not* in a gang truce that can never be more than a truce...but in a revolutionary movement aiming to change everything.

Yes, there are difficult challenges in building a revolutionary movement today. But to think that one can emancipate humanity without confronting challenges this tough and far tougher is to turn away from reality. And that we cannot do, and do not need to do. We have the tools to scientifically understand the world and society, to figure out why things happen and how to change them, and to bring out of that a new world; we have to join together and use them.

To be very clear: none of this will come easy. It will entail tremendous struggle and sacrifice, and it will only come about amidst great upheaval and even destruction—brought about largely by the forces seeking to keep in effect the old order of oppression and exploitation—which will of necessity be part of finally overthrowing and doing away with this system. But this struggle and sacri-

fice can, at long last, serve to completely sweep away the chains of oppression that have bound so many for so long, and bring about a true emancipation. Such a revolution would be greeted with joy in every corner of the world and inspire hundreds of millions, throughout the globe, to take up this cause.

IV. The Challenge We Must Meet

Summing up:

1) The USA arose on the foundation of the genocidal theft of Native American (Indian) lands, and the enslavement of African people. Since that time, the oppression of Black people has been essential to the functioning of this system, changing as that system has changed, but always deeply woven into the very fabric of society. White supremacy and capitalism have proven to be so closely intertwined that, even when millions have risen up, time and again, to fight the oppression of African-American people, the system has in the end responded by re-entrenching and reinforcing, even if modifying the forms of, that oppression. Today’s situation is extreme and dire; and any solution that leaves capitalism intact is no solution at all and, indeed, a damaging dead end.

2) There *can* be a revolution in this country and this revolution *can* finally uproot and put an end to the long nightmare of oppression and degradation that has been the lot of Black people in particular, along with many, many others, in this country, throughout its history. During the 1960s, a movement that arose from the struggle of African-American people for freedom ended up spreading throughout society and bringing every pillar of this oppressive capitalist-imperialist system into question and under fire; it seriously shook the foundations of imperialist rule. That it did not go far enough must not obscure what it DID accomplish and powerfully demonstrate; and today a party and a leader which locates its roots in that era but which has developed the theory to meet the challenges of this time not only exists, but is actively working to bring forward a new revolutionary movement.

3) This Party has a deep understanding of what kind of revolution must be made, of how the new state power can back up the masses in transforming every sphere of society and in finally overcoming the wounds and scars of capitalism and all forms of enslavement and degradation—including the oppression of Black people—and how all that can and must be linked to the largest goal of all: the emancipation of all humanity from the chains of class society and all the oppressive divisions, all the institutions and ways of thinking that are bound up with and reinforce those chains.

We are determined to do everything we can to hasten the day when such a revolution can finally be made, and fundamental change can begin for real. The challenge now is posed to you who read this.

Having taken this journey so far, will you now shut your eyes and turn away?

Or will you join with us in deeply grappling with how to bring this about, taking up with us the urgent questions of closing the gap between what could, and must, be brought into being and the obstacles we face today, and uniting in common struggle to overturn this monstrosity and take a giant leap for humanity's emancipation? ~~~

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31. It is difficult to find a unified estimate of how many people these "reforms" forced into the workforce. The website *Almanac of Policy Issues* says that in 1994 5 million families were on welfare and after the new welfare law passed the number dropped to 2.6 million families—this was taken from a website called *Almanac of Policy Issues*. [www.policyalmanac.org/social_welfare/welfare.shtml] The right-wing Manhattan Institute wrote: "The decline in welfare dependency since then has exceeded even the most optimistic forecasts. Between August 1996 and December 2001, caseloads plummeted. The number of families on welfare declined by 52%. Among families headed by a single mother—the predominant category of recipients—the change was truly extraordinary. Between 1988 and 1993, the welfare participation rate of this group ranged between 30 and 35%. By 2000, it had fallen to 13%; and in 2001, despite the weakened economy, it declined to 10%." "Gaining Ground, Moving Up: the Change in the Economic Status of Single Mothers under Welfare Reform," June O'Neill and M. Anne Hill, Center for Civic Innovation, Manhattan Institute, March 2003. By any estimation, this was a massive social change—one which has been extremely under-reported and under-appreciated. [back]
32. Bob Avakian, *From Ike to Mao and Beyond: My Journey from Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist*, Insight Press, Chicago, 2005. For more writings and downloadable talks by Bob Avakian, go to bobavakian.net. [http://bobavakian.net/]. See also "The Crossroads We Face, The Leadership We Need" in *Revolution*, #84, April 8, 2007. [http://revcom.us/avakian/crossroads] [back]
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34. "Some Crucial Points of Revolutionary Orientation – in Opposition to Infantile Posturing and Distortions of Revolution," in *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation And Strategic Orientation*, a Revolution pamphlet, May 1, 2008, p. 91. [http://revcom.us/a/102/crucial-points-en.html] [back]
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There will never be a revolutionary movement in this country that doesn't fully unleash and give expression to the sometimes openly expressed, sometimes expressed in partial ways, sometimes expressed in wrong ways, but deeply, deeply felt desire to be rid of these long centuries of oppression [of Black people]. There's never gonna be a revolution in this country, and there never should be, that doesn't make that one key foundation of what it's all about.

**Bob Avakian, Chairman of the
Revolutionary Communist Party, USA,
from Question and Answer
Session following the 7 Talks**

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