CAPITALISM: What it is and how to fight it

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Introduction

In 2020 the media rediscovered *capitalism*. And in 2020 it's a year when many protestors declared themselves *anti-capitalist*. Why not? We're seeing such an economic crisis in our lives—job loss, mass hunger, pandemic, looming evictions, mass incarceration, and more.

So, is capitalism itself in crisis? And so what if it is? This pamphlet aims to define some terms and answer those questions. Because the movement for justice that flowered after the police killing of George Floyd needs more unity and an ever-stronger *power base*. Anti-capitalism suggests a way forward, but to where?

Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were each anti-capitalist. King wrote to his wife Coretta:

> I imagine you already know that I am much more socialistic in my economic theory than capitalistic… [Capitalism] started out with a noble and high motive… but like most human systems it fell victim to the very thing it was revolting against. So today capitalism has out-lived its usefulness. (1952)

Malcolm X said, "Show me a capitalist and I'll show you a bloodsucker," and:

> I believe that there will ultimately be a clash between the oppressed and those that do the oppressing. I believe that there will be a clash between those who want freedom, justice, and equality for everyone and those who want to continue the systems of exploitation… It is incorrect to classify the revolt of the Negro as simply a racial conflict of black against white, or as a purely American problem. Rather, we are today seeing a global rebellion of the oppressed against the oppressor, the exploited against the exploiter. (1965)

We are well beyond the most influential cases of 20th century anti-capitalism, or *socialism*: the Soviet Union, China,

Vietnam, and Cuba. Without such forceful examples, any anti-capitalist movement has to think for itself. This is a challenge. It is also an opportunity. So this pamphlet invites everyone into a new period of study and struggle.

This pamphlet is composed of 26 topics. Each has one page of text and a boxed quote. Important vocabulary is in italics: concepts to make use of. Look them up in a dictionary or search online. They are building blocks for clear thinking, in other words, your theoretical development. The quotes are from important theoreticians we can learn from. They go deep on one or more concepts.

Theory is a nothing but a combination of abstract concepts and summations of history. It is useful when applied in your specific context. It's a guide to action.

This pamphlet explains capitalism more deeply by also looking at women, sexual minorities, racism and Black people, and imperialism. (Additional analysis is needed of Native Americans … Latinos … Asians ... other immigrants.) Then it considers and compares two approaches to social change: reform and revolution.

This pamphlet aims at three audiences:

First, *working class people* whose jobs and communities are imploding. Read this to figure out why. Use what you can.

Second, *activists* in any kind of movement for justice. Read this to inform your leadership. You all are representing the struggle, giving it voice, teaching it—carrying out a *battle of ideas* against the representatives of capital. Fold the ideas here in with what you already know.

Finally, *cadre,* those who link reform to revolution, who will sustain a movement through its wins and losses and keep a strategic vision. Add this pamphlet to your library. Group study and reflection on it will see you through the long haul.

1 How did we get to capitalism? The US story

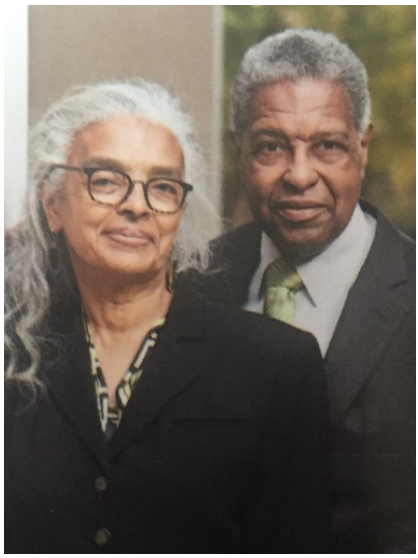
Capitalism is a historical system that must be understood in many different ways. It is an economic system. It is a historical experience that has a beginning and has in some cases been replaced by a post capitalist order. It creates a society dominated by a *market paradigm* of buying and selling everything. In fact, it creates a civilizational model of class rule that dominates cultures and world views.

We begin by conceptualizing society in terms of an economic *base* and a social *superstructure* that is supported by, even determined by, the economic base. This is best demonstrated in the history of the US by the slavery system. *Slavery* was an economic base for the founding of this country. On the economic side it dominated production and commerce in general. Slaves produced the key commodities of the 18th and 19th centuries: sugar, cotton, tobacco, and rice.

Slavery dominated the political founders and their constitution. 41 out of 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence owned slaves. 25 out of 55 delegates to the US constitutional convention owned slaves. 12 US presidents owned saves. And more. Slavery dominated social life and cultural norms. Slave owners invented "race" as a structure that dominated all of society.

The myth of Western Civilization was based on silencing the fact that its foundation is on the anti-democratic slavery system, from Greece and Rome down to the US. Ever since the end of legal slavery in the US, the tension in the economic organization is between driving the working class back in the direction of slavery, versus the forces driving movements to end the capitalist system once and for all.

Who reaped the fruits of slavery?



Lehman Brothers, widely viewed as one of the nation's most powerful investment banks, filed for bankruptcy in 2008. It collapsed under the stress of the mortgage lending crises, but Lehman began in 1850 as a cotton brokerage in Montgomery, Alabama. It served as the state of Alabama's fiscal agent at one point and was designated to "service the state's debts, interest payments, and other obligations."

The company's founder, Henry Lehman, immigrated from Rimpar, Bavaria (now Germany), to Montgomery in 1844 and set up a modest shop selling groceries, dry goods, and utensils to area cotton farmers. Buoyed by strong sales, he was joined by his brothers, Emanuel and Mayer, in 1850, and together, they went not the commodities brokerage nosiness, constructed a cotton storage warehouse, and became he area's largest buyers and sellers of cotton. Thy hen phased out their general merchandising enterprises.

Like all southern financial institutions, Lehman Brothers struggled during the Civil War, and as Reconstruction unfolded, family members focused on relocating their operations to New York City. However, cotton continued to trump all domestic trades, and in 1870 the Lehman brothers spearheaded the formation of the New York Cotton Exchange, the first commodities futures trading venture.—**William Darrity and Kirsten Mullen, 2020**

2 How does capitalism work?

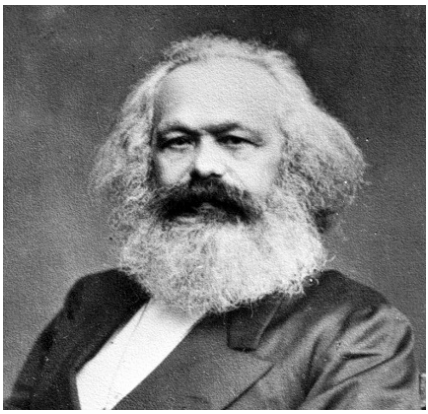
The key feature of capitalism that distinguishes it from previous systems is how the labor process is transformed into a *commodity*. In a slave system, the laborer is a commodity. In a landed feudal system, labor is organized as a serf-based system of legal tribute required from agricultural production by peasants to be given to land owners. This was often a lifelong form of bondage and debt. But under capitalism, *labor power* is transformed into a commodity.

The capitalist system exists when a worker sells his capacity to work on an hourly basis (or some time frame) for a wage. A slave barely gets enough to live to work another day in terms of food, clothing, and shelter. A worker gets that amount and whatever he can fight for from his bosses (management) and the owners.

Management and the corporate bosses are capitalists motivated to make *profit*, so we have to ask where does that profit come from? Workers, using tools and raw materials, produce goods and services. These all cost money that the capitalist has to invest. The goods and services that workers produce can be sold at *prices* that exceed this investment. *Capitalist investment* is made to get a greater return. There are *fixed costs*—tools and raw materials—and *variable costs* in *wages*. How many workers are employed and how much they are paid can vary over time. The capitalist is motivated to have as few workers as possible and pay them as little as possible.

The difference between the investment (in wages, tools, and raw materials, and a few other things) and the *realization of value* in the market sale of these goods and services is realized as profit. In technical terms this profit is based on *surplus value*. Deduct the investment from the market realization from sale and you get the surplus value that can be extracted as profit.

Wage labor and capital



Labor-power was not always a commodity (merchandise). Labor was not always wage-labor, i.e., free labor. The slave did not sell his labor-power to the slave-owner, any more than the ox sells his labor to the farmer. The slave, together with his labor-power, was sold to his owner once for all. He is a commodity that can pass from the hand of one owner to that of another. He himself is a commodity, but his labor-power is not his commodity. The serf sells only a portion of his labor-power. It is not he who receives wages from the owner of the land; it is rather the owner of the land who receives a tribute from him. The serf belongs to the soil, and to the lord of the soil he brings its fruit. The free laborer, on the other hand, sells his very self, and that by fractions. He auctions off eight, 10, 12, 15 hours of his life, one day like the next, to the highest bidder, to the owner of raw materials, tools, and the means of life—i.e., to the capitalist. The laborer belongs neither to an owner nor to the soil, but eight, 10, 12, 15 hours of his daily life belong to whomsoever buys them. The worker leaves the capitalist, to whom he has sold himself, as often as he chooses, and the capitalist discharges him as often as he sees fit, as soon as he no longer gets any use, or not the required use, out of him. But the worker, whose only source of income is the sale of his labor-power, cannot leave the whole class of buyers, i.e., the capitalist class, unless he gives up his own existence. He does not belong to this or that capitalist, but to the capitalist class; and it is for him to find his man – i.e., to find a buyer in this capitalist class.—**Karl Marx, 1847**

3 How US capitalism developed

There are three main origin stories of US capitalism. One is trade (exports being more than imports) based on the economies of European colonizing countries, called *mercantilism*. Another is slave *agriculture*, especially sugar, tobacco, rice and cotton. The third is *industrial production*, especially cloth made from slave-produced cotton.

After the war to free itself from British colonization, called the American Revolution, the economic development was free to be based on the national market. *Competitive capitalism* drove the urban development and expanded the frontier until the consolidation of the continent from coast to coast, "from sea to shining sea." But economic motion was always headed toward *monopoly capitalism* as each firm tried to dominate its market by destroying or absorbing its competition.

Monopoly control enabled the capitalist to control hiring, set wages, and extract more and more profits from its control over the surplus value. This exhausted its profitability in the national market and forced it into a mode of global expansion called imperialism.

Imperialism involved the marriage of industrial and bank capital making it easier for *capital* to be mobile and move all over the world. This leads to the current state of extreme *financialization*, the wild markets of stocks and other kinds of paper representations of value (capital). So today so much of capital is abstract, when before most capital involved the production of actual goods and services.

Financialization turns into *speculation*, a form of gambling on rise and fall of paper representations of value. The 2008 financial crisis was based on speculative increases in the value of real estate. This was based on granting more and more *credit* to people buying or renting based on fictional increases in the value of that real estate. But *debt* at some point must be paid off. When income does not cover that, the system can crash down.

Monopoly by the numbers

The US capitalist system is now in perpetual debt crisis based on speculative financialization.

Consider retail; today, a single corporation, Walmart, controls 72 percent of warehouse clubs and super centers in the entire United States. In close to 40 metropolitan areas across America, Walmart sells more than half of all groceries. Amazon, meanwhile, dominates e-commerce in general, and many specific lines of business. The corporation, for instance, sells 74 percent of all e-books and 64 percent of all print books sold online. The story's often the same for more specialized retail. In eyeglasses, one company, Luxxotica, dominates the manufacture and retail of glasses. In mattresses, two companies control 60 percent of the entire U.S. market.

Much the same is true in food and farming. … Today, the businesses of beef, pork, and poultry slaughter are all dominated by four giants at the national level. But that greatly understates the problem, as in many regions, a single corporation holds a complete monopoly. Two firms, Dean Foods and the Dairy Farmers of America as much as 80-90 percent of the milk supply chain in some states and wield substantial influence across the entire industry. …

In the average hospital market, the top three hospitals and systems account for 77 percent of all hospital admissions. … Hospital ownership of physician practices more than doubled between 2004 and 2011, from 24 to 49 percent. In drug stores, meanwhile, the pending takeover of Rite Aid by Walgreen's would reduce the market to two giants, along with CVS.—**Open Market Institute, 2020**

4 Technical division of labor

For a deeper understanding we can break this down even further. The base of the society, its *political economy*, is based on natural resources and technology. Labor is organized around these two things. The natural resources are *objects of labor*, the ingredients for everything that gets made. The tools are what we use on these objects, they are the *instruments of labor*. How people are organized around the tools and natural resources is called the *technical division of labor*.

People use tools to produce value and to provide services as a collective process. This is true for steel workers as well as bus drivers, postal workers, or in hospitals. They work with technology utilizing the skills required for each occupation. People acquire *occupational skills* through educational and training programs, in specialized institutions or on the job.

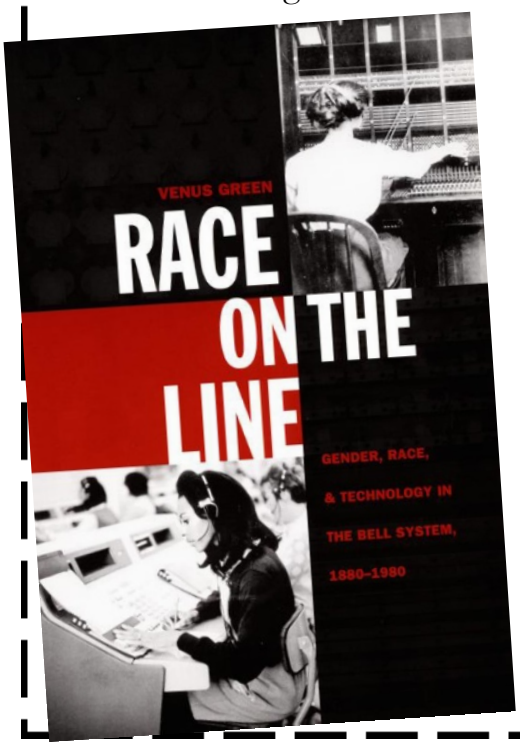
One good example is in agriculture. Slave labor worked in the fields picking cotton by hand. The *cotton gin* invented in 1793 was a tool that could process as much as all the slave plantations could feed it. After the Civil War, freed slaves continued picking cotton by hand until the *mechanical cotton picker* replaced them in the 1940s. The modern tractor replaced labor as well.

As indicated earlier a similar change is taking place in auto production. The assembly line *increased the demand for labor*, and then the computer and robots began *reducing the demand for labor*. Again, a change in technology transforms the technical division of labor.

This is a 21st century revolutionary transformation of *digital technology and robotics*. Every workplace, every job, is either being redefined or eliminated. Thus the systemic qualitative difference between the job skills of grandparents and their grandchildren.

Technology, jobs, and Black women

Periodized before World War II, models based on male craft culture, union membership/militance, and large male-dominated industries have simply pointed to African American women workers' prewar concentration in agricultural and domestic work to fulfill any obligation for a more thorough investigation. Women's labor historians, anxious to construct models that include gender, often fail to acknowledge differences among women or they study occupations and issues that marginalize the experiences of African American women workers. Scholars of black labor have also shown that race alone as a category is inadequate for the study of African American women workers. And, finally, historians who examine issues related to technology and work rarely consider the question of race, even when they include an analysis based on gender. Black and white workers of both genders are affected differently by managerial decisions to introduce new workplace technologies.' For this reason, the impact of technology on African American women's work experience demands specific attention within the analytic frameworks of the skill/deskilling, worker control, work segmentation/ segregation, and union/management.—**Venus Green, 1995**



5 Social division of labor

There is another way in which people are organized called the social division of labor. This is the distinction between those who owns the objects and instruments of labor, the companies that represent private ownership, and those who work and use these tools and natural resources, labor.

The social division of labor is about power, control, and profit. Capitalism is based on private ownership of the *means of production and distribution*. What is more, today the world lives with *monopoly capitalism*: Just a few, or even one, company dominates the market. In the competitive market these big *capitalists* use the advantage of size and power to eliminate everyone else. Think about Amazon or Walmart running smaller stores out of business. Or more than half the world's cell phones being Samsung and Apple. Everyday talk calls the monopoly capitalists the *one percent* or the *billionaires*.

Then there are the financial capitalists and small business, otherwise known as *Wall Street* and *Main Street*. Wall Street includes the banks who lend money and the investors who make bets on companies, industries and even countries. Main Street is sometimes code for *small business*. But watch out! Here is how the federal Small Business Administration defines a small business:

> Depending on your industry, a small business could be defined as a maximum of 250 employees or a maximum of 1,500 employees—which might not seem like such a "small" business, at least to a solopreneur. Or they could be defined by a maximum of $750,000 to $38.5 million in average annual receipts.

Workers are the people employed by the capitalists. The pandemic gave us the term *essential workers*. In fact all workers are essential. As the source of profit, they keep the whole system going. Capitalists pay workers just so much. They then sell the goods produced or the services provided for more than they paid the workers. This is the *labor theory of value*.

> Michael Zweig, a leading scholar in working-class studies, defines the working class as "people who, when they go to

work or when they act as citizens, have comparatively little power or authority. They are the people who do their jobs under more or less close supervision, who have little control over the pace or the content of their work, who aren't the boss of anyone."

Aside from capitalists and workers are the *middle class*: self-employed or professionals who have some freedom about their work and don't exploit others. They are a lot fewer than you think.

So a capitalist economy has two basic *social classes:* capitalists and workers. There is diversity in each class and even conflict. But the overriding conflict is between the two polar opposite classes. These classes determine much of social life: how people think, how they organize themselves, and how they practice culture. The capitalists use their ownership and control of media and education to produce *false consciousness* among the workers. This means workers not knowing their *class interest* or how the capitalists are exploiting them.

As for the *middle class*, the capitalist argues that a certain income level makes workers middle class. They are really saying that if you have a living wage you are in the middle class. That seemed more true when jobs were secure, but no more. And the capitalists sells good and services at all price points to gobble up nearly everyone's paycheck. So whether its production or consumption, social class is about how you fit into the economy.

The capitalists also promote the illusion of *upward social mobility*, being born poor in the working class but rising to the capitalist class through education and hard work. Some of this happens, but there is also *downward social mobility.* All in all, individuals may change places but the basic *class structure of society* remains the same. The 1960s were a time of upward social mobility. Today is a time of downward social mobility. Young people basically cannot live as well as their parents did.

6 Structure of society

Society is structured by social class. The form of society that sits on top of the economy is called the *superstructure*. This includes social institutions, culture and all forms of consciousness. Each of these things is shaped by the influence of social class.

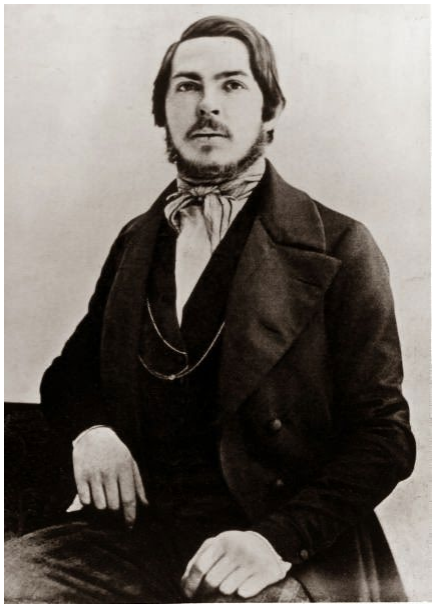
The main institution in every society is the *state*: the government and the military. Those who rule the economy always control the state. Even in a so-called democracy, representing the illusion of rule by the majority, plenty of mechanisms keep the capitalists in power. In the US, capitalists control both political parties, dominate financing political campaigns, control the media to inform the voting public, and recruit candidates. The working class needs a political party that can contest for power.

Every social institution is dominated by the ruling class. This includes religion, education, health, housing, food, transportation, entertainment, sports, art, memory (libraries and museums), social fraternities, and communication. The wealthy was their financial strength to own everything, to create a market so that everything is for sale, and to fight against the workers organizing to build a power base in their own interest.

This ownership also controls *culture* and *consciousness*. The capitalists *manufacture consent* for their system, making it seem logical that the capitalist system is the best system in the world, and must be protected to last forever. The media and educational institutions are based on this mission.

The *class struggle* is performed in every aspect of the society, every aspect of the social superstructure is a *battlefront* in which the working class can fight for power. The ultimate fight is for *state power*.

The state



[T]he state is an organization for the protection of the possessing class against the non-possessing class. ...The highest form of the state, the democratic republic, which in our modern social conditions becomes more and more an unavoidable necessity and is the form of state in which alone the last decisive battle between proletariat and bourgeoisie can be fought out – the democratic republic no longer officially recognizes differences of property. Wealth here employs its power indirectly, but all the more surely. It does this in two ways: by plain corruption of officials, of which America is the classic example, and by an alliance between the government and the stock exchange, which is effected all the more easily the higher the state debt mounts and the more the joint-stock companies concentrate in their hands not only transport but also production itself, and themselves have their own center in the stock exchange. ... As long as the oppressed class – in our case, therefore, the proletariat – is not yet ripe for its self-liberation, so long will it, in its majority, recognize the existing order of society as the only possible one and remain politically the tall of the capitalist class, its extreme left wing. But in the measure in which it matures towards its self-emancipation, in the same measure it constitutes itself as its own party and votes for its own representatives, not those of the capitalists.—**Frederick Engels, 1844**

7 Women

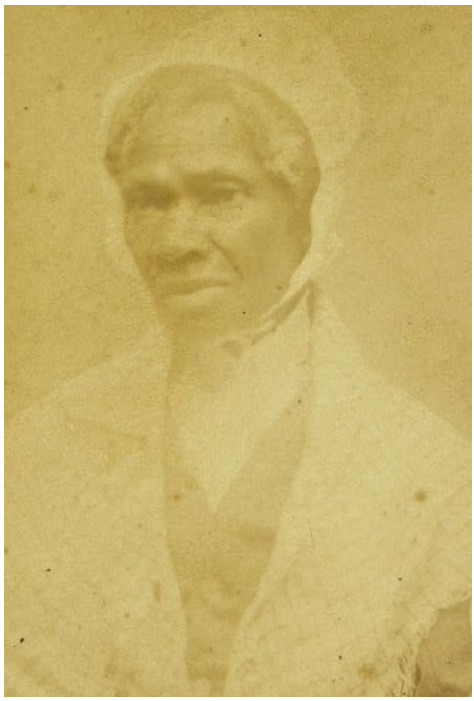
Women have been as central to capitalism as to any society. But most known anti-capitalist movements and leaders have been male. Why is that? The short version of the story is that in many cases women were at home with the children while men were out fighting and leading. And theories of struggle neglected to explain this or do anything about it.

Workers produce the value that gives rise to products and profits. But women reproduce the workers. Women birth, raise, and care for the workers so they can go to work each day. But while *production* has been analyzed and re-analyzed, *reproduction* has gotten less attention. It's less visible, carried out mostly in the home. It's even lower status, commanding no wage. And it's carried out by people—women—who have been subjugated for ages. Perhaps the most widespread and degrading example in US history is the legal right of any slaveowner, and in fact any white man, to rape women who were enslaved, or merely African American. As Selma James put it,

> Even when women do not work outside the home, they are vital producers. The commodity they produce, unlike all commodities, is unique to capitalism: the living human being, the laborer him [or her]self.

Patriarchy is the name for any society where men subjugate women. Capitalism is just one of such societies. Patriarchy gives us a culture of male violence against women and others. This violence generates traumatic injury that keeps many of us off balance and unable to fight back. But we do fight back, as the #MeToo movement shows. Women exposed the sexual predators. Women made clear, "No means no." Women claimed the right to safe/decriminalized sex work. Women maintained pro-choice with regard to reproductive rights. And of course, so many women have led labor struggles and other movements—even if their words, deeds, and names are less well known than the men.

Ain't I a woman?



That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [member of audience whispers, "intellect"] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.—**Sojourner Truth, 1851**

8 Women reproducing labor

Every woman knows the problem of working two shifts. One shift is in a workplace. The other is at home: cooking, cleaning, shopping, caring for children and others. Included in the work at home—and often in the workplace too—is the emotional labor of keeping other people happy. Making love can certainly fall in that category—at which point the freedom and mutual satisfaction of lovemaking can vanish in a flash.

Even when there's no man in the house or partner of any kind, the reproductive work goes on. And no family matriarchy can totally overcome patriarchy in society at large. So: giving birth. Tending the babies. Getting children and sometimes grandchildren into school. Keeping them in school. Fighting with the school as needed. Explaining and modeling what a young person has to do to get a job. Picking them up when they don't. On the other end of life, taking care of parents and anyone who is sick. Fighting through the baffling and unhelpful medical system. Men can do this work, but women have been acculturated into it for centuries. We're pretty good at it.

When production processes moved from the farmhouse to the factory, from the village to the plantation, men were swept away from their home responsibilities. We've been battling to get them back ever since, and sometimes it works. Especially now when men's wages are dropping. But since women's work pays exactly zero, women and the invaluable work we do is taken for granted and our wages in general remain lower.

Wages for housework, welfare rights, family sick leave, parental leave, child care policies and other campaigns and reforms have brought these issues forward. Oxfam put a dollar value on all women's unpaid work worldwide during 2019: $10,900,000,000,000, or close to $11 trillion. So when women step up in the struggle despite all the odds, men have to make a space. "When you strike a woman, you have struck a rock," and change is gonna come.

The woman question

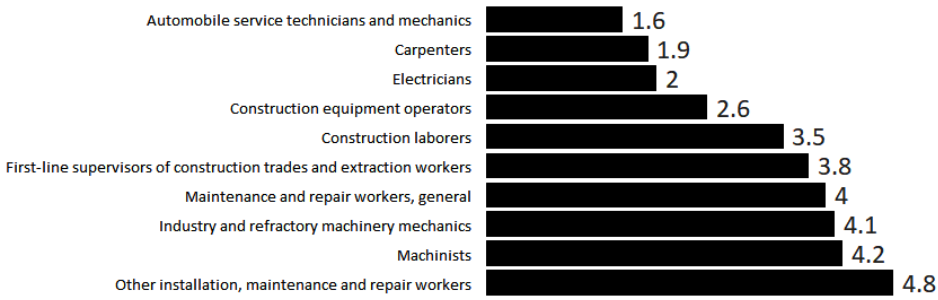
If in certain circumstances the short-term tasks of women of all classes coincide, the final aims of the two camps, which in the long term determine the direction of the movement and the tactics to be used, differ sharply. While for the feminists the achievement of equal rights with men in the framework of the contemporary capitalist world represents a sufficiently concrete end in itself, equal rights at the present time are, for the proletarian women, only a means of advancing the struggle against the economic slavery of the working class. The feminists see men as the main enemy, for men have unjustly seized all rights and privileges for themselves, leaving women only chains and duties. For them a victory is won when a prerogative previously enjoyed exclusively by the male sex is conceded to the "fair sex". Proletarian women have a different attitude. They do not see men as the enemy and the oppressor; on the contrary, they think of men as their comrades, who share with them the drudgery of the daily round and fight with them for a better future. The woman and her male comrade are enslaved by the same social conditions; the same hated chains of capitalism oppress their will and deprive them of the joys and charms of life. It is true that several specific aspects of the contemporary system lie with double weight upon women, as it is also true that the conditions of hired labor sometimes turn working women into competitors and rivals to men. But in these unfavorable situations, the working class knows who is guilty.—**Alexandra Kollontai, 1909.**

9 Women in the economy / in politics

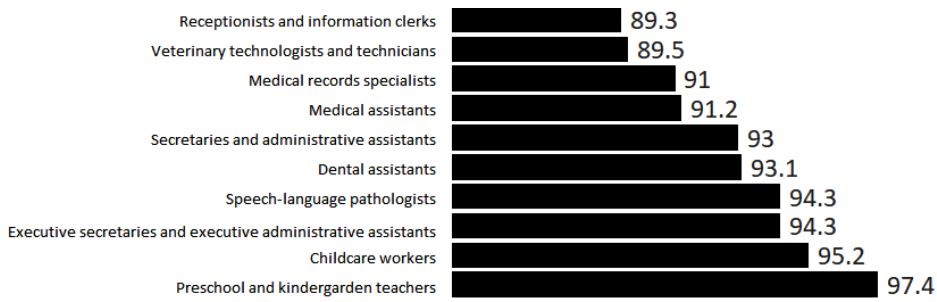
Women hold up half the sky, the Chinese saying goes. But we haven't been able to choose which half. This holds true in our capitalist economy and in capitalist democracy.

Economically, we are in the helping occupations: teaching, nursing, clerical/administrative, cleaning and service. In factories our so-called small nimble fingers are put to light-assembly tasks: garment work, electronics and so on. And the pay is lower than what men earn. When we've fought our way into male jobs, our wages are the closest to men's.

Percent of women in ten most "male" jobs:



Percent of women in the ten most "female" jobs:



In politics, we can all think of our favorite women leaders. But we are only 28% of Congress and 33% of elected officials in the White House, Congress and state legislatures. And in any domain, if you're in the room only as a handmaid, you can't determine what happens there.

Double jeopardy: Black and female

The economic system of capitalism finds it expedient to reduce women to a state of enslavement. They oftentimes serve as a scapegoat for the evils of this system. Much in the same way that the poor white cracker of the South who is equally victimized, looks down upon blacks and contributes to the oppression of blacks. So by giving to men a false feeling of superiority (at least in their own home or in their relationships with women,) the oppression of women acts as an escape valve for capitalism. Men may be cruelly exploited and subjected to all sorts of dehumanizing tactics on the part of the ruling class, but they brave someone who is below them—at least they're not women.

Women also represent a surplus labor supply, the control of which is absolutely necessary to the profitable functioning of capitalism. Women are systematically exploited by the system. They are paid less for the same work that men do and jobs that are specifically relegated to women are low-paying and without the possibility of advancement. […]

This racist, chauvinistic and manipulative use of black workers and women, especially black women, has been a severe cancer on the american labor scene. It therefore becomes essential for those who understand the workings of capitalism and imperialism to realize that the exploitation of black people and women works to everyone's disadvantage and that the liberation of these two groups is a stepping stone to the liberation of all oppressed people in this country and around the world.—**Frances Beal, 1969**

10 Sexual identity

Several decades of growing clarity around women's oppression in capitalism has been paralleled by growing clarity and militancy against the oppression of non-binary or non-heterosexual people—gay, queer, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, intersex and so on. These movements assert a new way to think about humanity—summed up today as adopting the pronoun "they" instead of "he" and "she." The more elite members of these sexual minorities, as they have been called, might make peace with capitalism. But most are working class and subject to double, triple, quadruple oppression based on their class, color, gender and sexuality. Because of course male/female—or male/female/other, as some US jurisdictions allow—is not the same as sexuality with its many possibilities.

So trans people must be protected everywhere, from the armed forces to the prisons. So many rules and norms of our culture need an overhaul guided by respect for all: marriage … public bathrooms … health care are just three examples.

Lesbian + Black + working class

Although we are feminists and Lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism [...] Lesbian separatism because it is not a viable political analysis or strategy for us. It leaves out far too much and far too many people, particularly Black men, women, and children. We have a great deal of criticism and loathing for what men have been socialized to be in this society: what they support, how they act, and how they oppress. But we do not have the misguided notion that it is their maleness, per se—i.e., their biological maleness—that makes them what they are. As Black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic. We must also question whether Lesbian separatism is an adequate and progressive political analysis and strategy, even for those who practice it, since it so completely denies any but the sexual sources of women's oppression, negating the facts of class and race.—**Combahee River Collective, 1977**

11 Racism and Black people

U.S. society is structured by *racism*. Racism promotes the socially constructed lie that there are biological differences that constitute a *hierarchy of human types*, with white people on top and Black people (and all people from the Global South) on the bottom. And racism says that if it's not biology, then Black people are different based on culture or behavior. Even some Black people have been tricked into believing that the differences are greater than the universal reality that all human share.

Ever since slavery became racialized, racism has been the major way that the capitalists have maintained two fundamental processes to build up their capitalist system. They have practiced *superexploitation* against the labor of Black people. They have manufactured racism in the thinking and practice of white workers making them think their main enemy is Black and not capitalist. White workers are rendered weak by false consciousness. Every time one says capitalism one is also saying racism. Racism is a fundamental way that capitalism in all forms is practiced, including its imperialist form.

Racist thinking, consciousness in all forms, produces *prejudice*. Prejudice is a form of pre-judgement, being guilty until proven innocent rather than the other way around. Biological markers and cultural styles trigger prejudicial thinking. For Black people this includes hair, facial characteristics, and extends to wild fantasy about sexual organs, size of brains, and body shapes that are used to rationalize athletic ability instead of talent and skill. This also includes cultural styles, even while Black people are the most dynamic innovators of culture in language, clothing, communication, and music.

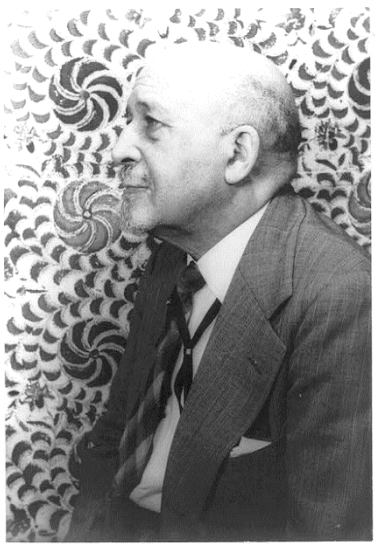
Prejudice leads to racist behavior called *discrimination*. The most systemic and blatant form of discrimination is *segregation*, whether *de jure* (legal) or *de facto* (based on "normal" social practice). In the US when people look around and everybody is

white that is considered normal. It is often unusual to have some Black or global south people show up. When Black people are "integrated" into the ranks of the powerful, capitalists, they are expected to act as people of power, not people representing the masses of Black people who are working people.

Racism is not benign, or without serious consequences because it involves power. Many people suffer from prejudice and discriminatory behavior as individual acts. We all have to learn how to be better people. The main difference is that racism is wielded by powerful people who use it to beat down Black people. Black people suffer shorter lives, less healthy and happy lives because of the power of racism used against them.

We need to understand how racism works as an integral part of the capitalist system. On the level of *perceptual knowledge* white people are the agents who practice racism and therefore act like the enemy of Black people. To the extent that when white workers attack and hurt Black people in that instance they are the enemy. But that is the surface of racism. To defeat racism, we need to have a deeper understanding of how racism operates within the capitalist system. We need *theoretical knowledge.*

W. E. B. DuBois suggests a way forward for us based on his own experience:



> My long-term remedy was Truth: carefully gathered scientific proof that neither color nor race determined the limits of a man's capacity or desert. I was not at the time sufficiently Freudian to understand how little human action is based on reason; nor did I know Karl Marx well enough to appreciate the economic foundations of human history.

12 Racism: The technical division of labor

The technological division of labor is not neutral, it is not free of racism. The US begins to structure its economy by defining the enslaved as instruments of labor, just like a horse or a hammer. There were no rights, and slave owners have the absolute authority to rule over the life and death of the enslaved. Of course, there were many ways in which this system was violated because of the utility of how the enslaved were bearers of occupational skills, as well as human sources for the reproduction of labor. Slaves were considered non-human animals, but also capable of human reproduction. This contradiction between being an instrument of labor and labor itself was a troubling part of the slavery system.

After slavery, racism functioned to control the allocation of Black labor into occupations just like gender. In any given instance there have been Black jobs and white jobs, just like there have been and are male jobs and female jobs. To get a job you have to have the skills required, and you have to be hired. One of the main mechanisms is exclusion, so Black people always have higher unemployment rates.

> Black workers are twice as likely to be unemployed as white workers overall (6.4% vs. 3.1%). Even black workers with a college degree are more likely to be unemployed than similarly educated white workers (3.5% vs. 2.2%). When they are employed, black workers with a college or advanced degree are more likely than their white counterparts to be underemployed when it comes to their skill level—almost 40% are in a job that typically does not require a college degree, compared with 31% of white college grads. This relatively high black unemployment and skills-based underemployment suggests that racial discrimination remains a failure of an otherwise tight labor market.

The Negro in steel

What sort of jobs did Negroes get in the industry? Naturally nothing but the unskilled, the lowest paid, the most unpleasant jobs. Between 1910 and 1930 the Negro made little progress in getting the better kind of job. Take for instance the work in blast furnaces and steel-rolling mills. In 1910 there were between 45 Negroes out of every 1,000 working as laborers in these industries. In 1930 there were 85. Thus the number of Negroes almost doubled. But it was chiefly laborer's jobs that the Negroes got. In 1910 out of every 1,000 laborers, 69 were Negroes. In 1930, there were 165 Negroes out of every 1,000. But whereas in 1910 there were 29 Negroes out of every 1,000 skilled workers, in 1930 there were only 40. Thus 96 more laborers got jobs, proportionally, but only 11 skilled workers. That is a point we have to keep our eye on. As for office jobs there were 3 Negroes out of every 1,000 in 1910, and only one out of every 1,000 in 1930.

All the nasty jobs are for the Negroes. But here again we must have some historical perspective. All the white groups, American born and foreign born, discriminate against the Negroes. But the American-born whites discriminate against the foreign-born whites. The American born usually take all the best jobs for themselves and the bosses encourage them. (For the boss loves, how he loves to see the workers divided.)—**C. L. R. James, 1939**

13 Racism: The social division of labor

Racism is a key feature of who gets to work, where, and how much power they can have in relation to their fellow workers. Black people are much more likely to supervise other Black people than workers in general. This is true for other Black and Brown people as well as women. Racism is always an attempt to keep power in the hands of white men.

However, there are Black people who have been coopted into the ranks of capital. There are only 5 Black CEOs over Fortune 500 companies as of 2020:

> That means that black CEOs make up a tiny fraction—just 1%—of the *Fortune* 500 despite African-Americans representing 13.4% of the U.S. population, according to the most recent government estimates. In all there have only been 18 black CEOs on the *Fortune* 500 lists since 1999. The peak was six in 2012.

Racism has prevented Black family wealth and defined access to power:

> A close examination of wealth in the U.S. finds evidence of staggering racial disparities. At $171,000, the net worth of a typical white family is nearly ten times greater than that of a Black family ($17,150) in 2016. Gaps in wealth between Black and white households reveal the effects of accumulated inequality and discrimination, as well as differences in power and opportunity that can be traced back to this nation's inception. The Black-white wealth gap reflects a society that has not and does not afford equality of opportunity to all its citizens…during the most recent economic downturn, median net worth declined by more for Black families (44.3 percent decline from 2007 to 2013) than for white families (26.1 percent decline). In fact, the ratio of white family wealth to Black family wealth is higher today than at the start of the century.

On Race & Racism

The groupings of people that exist in our species are socially-defined, dynamic, and continually evolving — amalgamations of socially- and biologically-interacting individuals with constantly-shifting boundaries, reflecting the myriad ways that individuals, families, and other clusters of people create ties, move, trade, mate, reproduce, and shift their social identities and affiliations through time. Race does not capture these histories or the patterns of human biological variation that have emerged as a result. Nor does it provide a clear picture of genetic ancestry. It does, however, reflect the legacy of racist ideologies, as well as the sociopolitical considerations, cultural identities, and social experiences prevalent in the eras during and since the start of European settler colonialism. […]

While "race" is not biology, racism does affect our biology, especially our health and well-being. Racism is prejudice against someone because of their race in the context of a belief in the inherent superiority and inferiority of different racial groups, which is reinforced by institutional and historical structures. Interpersonal experiences of racism and structural racism include, but are not limited to, overt oppression, physical subjugation, dispossession or displacement, decreased access to health care, economic and educational discrimination, histories of segregation, and material deprivation. A substantial body of research demonstrates the many ways that racism can affect how our bodies, immune systems, and even our cognitive processes react and develop. This means that "race," while not a scientifically accurate biological concept, can have important biological consequences because of the effects of racism. The belief in "races" as natural aspects of human biology, and the structures of inequality (racism) that emerge from such beliefs, are among the most damaging elements in the human experience both today and in the past.**—American Association of Physical Anthropologists, 2019**

14 Racism: Ideology

Racism is an ideological force that controls the mindset of *popular discourse*. We have to be clear on the meaning of ideology as a key form of consciousness. *Ideology* is a set of beliefs about the present and the past, and on that basis beliefs about the way things ought to be. There is a fundamental difference between an ideology that regards the past as good and the present as bad, hence one ought to return to the past, versus holding the present as better than the past but needing an even better future. The first is *reactionary* and the second is *progressive*.

A racist ideology longs for the good old days, wanting to "make America great again" like in the days of slavery or segregation. A progressive ideological orientation is more like what Langston Hughes said: "Let America be America again, the last it never has been yet, and yet must be, the land where everyone is free!"

There are three main aspects of racism as an ideology: *deficit*, *difference*, and *dependence*. A racist believes that white people are superior to Black people because of biological traits that whites have and Black people lack. Black culture is believed to hold people back, use emotion more than reason, and incline people to violence and sexual deviations. Finally, racism holds that for Black people to survive they must rely on the goodwill of white people. On this basis a racist ideology believes that police and prisons are necessary to control Black people.

Racism as ideology must be confronted by an *ideology of Black liberation*. In the long run, ideological racism can only be defeated by a fighting working class movement that ends capitalism, and that builds a culture of social justice and equality.

On views of race and inequality, Blacks and whites are worlds apart

[This survey focusses on the gap] between blacks and whites and on the treatment of black people in the U.S. today. In recent years, this centuries-old divide has garnered renewed attention following the deaths of unarmed black Americans during encounters with the police, as well as a racially motivated shooting that killed nine black parishioners at a church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015.

The survey finds that black and white adults have widely different perceptions about what life is like for blacks in the U.S. For example, by large margins, blacks are more likely than whites to say black people are treated less fairly in the workplace (a difference of 42 percentage points), when applying for a loan or mortgage (41 points), in dealing with the police (34 points), in the courts (32 points), in stores or restaurants (28 points), and when voting in elections (23 points). By a margin of at least 20 percentage points, blacks are also more likely than whites to say racial discrimination (70% vs. 36%), lower quality schools (75% vs. 53%) and lack of jobs (66% vs. 45%) are major reasons that blacks may have a harder time getting ahead than whites.

More broadly, blacks and whites offer different perspectives of the current state of race relations in the U.S. White Americans are evenly divided, with 46% saying race relations are generally good and 45% saying they are generally bad. In contrast, by a nearly two-to-one margin, blacks are more likely to say race relations are bad (61%) rather than good (34%). Blacks are also about twice as likely as whites to say too little attention is paid to race and racial issues in the U.S. these days (58% vs. 27%). About four-in-ten whites (41%)—compared with 22% of blacks—say there is too much focus on race and racial issues.

Blacks and whites also differ in their opinions about the best approach for improving race relations: Among whites, more than twice as many say that in order to improve race relations, it's more important to focus on what different racial and ethnic groups have in common (57%) as say the focus should be on what makes each group unique (26%). Among blacks, similar shares say the focus should be on commonalities (45%) as say it should be on differences (44%).—**Pew Research Center, 2016**

15 Racism: Cultural values

In alignment with racism in ideology are cultural values that embody racism. This is the fundamental contradiction in the US, where a founding cultural value was equality while Black people were enslaved. US cultural values accept the hypocrisy that Black and white are not equal. When Black people suffer there is no moral outrage. When Black people are denied recognition for high cultural attainment, aesthetics that reach universal standards, that's OK. In other words, US culture is *Eurocentric* and adamant that assimilation is the necessary future and not multi-culturalism.

The norms of everyday life are a negation of Black cultural lifestyles. Even as Black culture is adored and emulated by more and more white youth, it is often reduced to exotic entertainment. Culture is appropriated but power is not shared.

More often than not Black cultural performers are allowed in the mainstream to present comfortable stereotypes of the happy darkie, the simpleminded fool, or the uneducated self-indulgent ghetto criminal. There is also the ghetto fabulous entertainment and sports figures who perform extreme consumption to amuse the market, usually disposing of income for consumption and not to gain power.

Mainstream US culture is many areas is actually dominated by Black cultural innovations. This includes language, music, food, clothing and more. In cultural terms the US is more Black than people are prepared to admit.

Massive cultural movements have challenged this Eurocentrism including the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s. Today there is an emerging cultural agency against racism as Black youth perform the politics of revolt in cultural terms. This involves hair styles, music, language innovation, and general aesthetic values.

Racism and culture

The racist in a culture with racism is therefore normal. He has achieved a perfect harmony of economic relations and ideology. The idea that one forms of man, to be sure, is never totally dependent on economic relations, in other words--and this must not be forgotten--on relations existing historically and geographically among men and groups. An ever greater number of members belonging to racist societies are taking a position. They are dedicating themselves to a world in which racism would be impossible. But everyone is not up to this kind of objectivity, this abstraction, this solemn commitment. One cannot with impunity require of a man that he be against "the prejudices of his group."

And, we repeat, every colonialist group is racist.

"Acculturized" and deculturized at one and the same time, the oppressed continues to come up against racism. He finds this sequel illogical, what he has left behind him inexplicable, without motive, incorrect. His knowledge, the appropriation of precise and complicated techniques, sometimes his intellectual superiority as compared to a great number of racists, lead him to qualify the racist world as passion-charged. He perceives that the racist atmosphere impregnates all the elements of the social life. The sense of an overwhelming injustice is correspondingly very strong. Forgetting racism as a consequence, one concentrates on racism as cause. Campaigns of deintoxication are launched. Appeal is made to the sense of humanity, to love, to respect for the supreme values.—**Frantz Fanon, 1956**

16 Racism as social institutions

Racism is practiced on a daily basis as part of everyday life in this country. It has become normal because it is part of how social institutions have been developed. White people think things are normal when the look around and they only see white people. In many instances this is true for Black people as well. There is only one issue of importance – how did it get this way? Clearly racism created this pattern in the form of institutional *segregation* (exclusion) and *discrimination* (bad treatment).

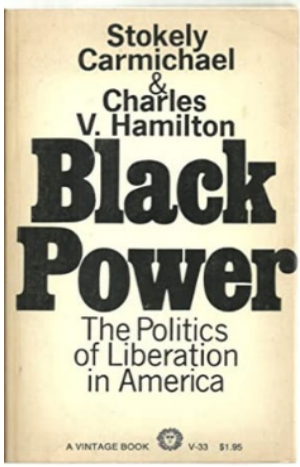
Institutional racism exists in education, in schools. 70% of Black students attend majority Black K-12 schools, while only 13% of whites attend these schools. From 1988 to 2016 Black enrollment in schools with less than 10% white students increased from 5.7% of all Black students to 18.6%. Segregated schools are increasing.

Institutional racism dominates in workplaces. White people are 81% of the workforce but get preferential treatment to the extent that at least 33 occupations that are over 90% white. Affirmative action used to be applied when there were no Blacks on the job, but now you have to prove this was intentional. Otherwise, no Blacks is considered normal.

Institutional racism exists in health care. Black and white get different treatment in hospitals and by doctors and nurses. The difference in health care is demonstrated by counties where more than 86% of residents are Black experienced up to 10 times the death rates than whites from COVID-19. Black patients are given less time by doctors and nurses, offered less medication, and are covered less by insurance.

Institutional racism dominates how government is organized. Black political representation is restricted by gerrymandering, the drawing of political districts by republican dominated state legislature that implement racist redistricting. Black political office holders have increased but have not yet reached proportionate representation.

Black power



Racism is both overt and covert. It takes two, closely related forms: individual whites acting against individual blacks, and acts by the total white community against the black community. We call these individual racism and institutional racism. The first consists of overt acts by individuals, which cause death, injury or the violent destruction of property. This type can be recorded by television cameras; it can frequently be observed in the process of commission. The second type is less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts. But it is no less destructive of human life. The second type originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society, and thus receives far less public condemnation than the first type. When white terrorists bomb a black church and kill five black children, that is an act of individual racism, widely deplored by most segments of the society. But when in that same city - Birmingham, Alabama - five hundred black babies die each year because of the lack of proper food, shelter and medical facilities, and thousands more are destroyed and maimed physically, emotionally and intellectually because of conditions of poverty and discrimination in the black community, that is a function of institutional racism. When a black family moves into a home in a white neighborhood and is stoned, burned or routed out, they are victims of an overt act of individual racism which many people will condemn - at least in words. But it is institutional racism that keeps black people locked in dilapidated slum tenements, subject to the daily prey of exploitative slumlords, merchants, loan sharks and discriminatory real estate agents. The society either pretends it does not know of this latter situation, or is in fact incapable of doing anything meaningful about it."—**Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, 1967**

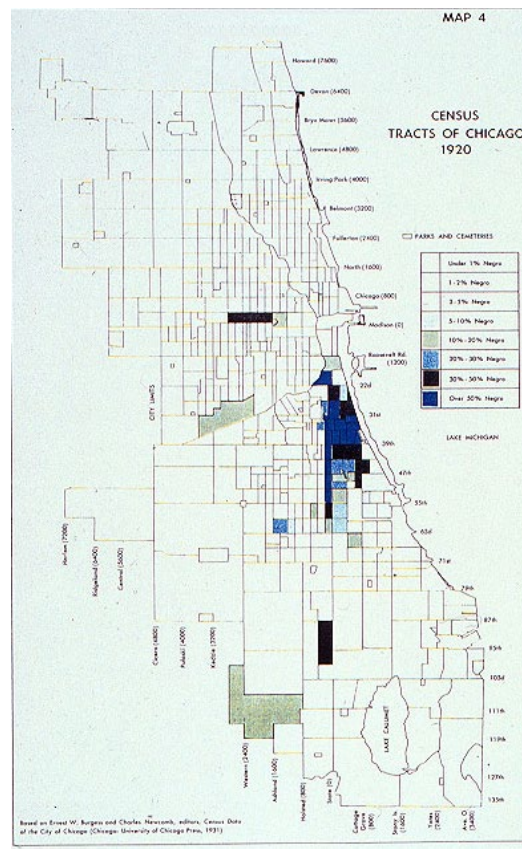
17 African American national question

There is a spatial aspect to racism that has developed historically because of the apartheid rules of keeping Black people separate. This is called the *national question* and applies to what is called the Black Belt South and the Black ghettoes of mainly northern cities.

The *Black Belt South* is generally regarded as about 200 counties with large Black populations. This is the area of the most intense form of US fascist rule of lynching. It is also the place for the most fundamental development of the forms of Black culture that have enabled Black people to survive the American holocaust, in food, religion and music. This geographical isolation and system of total oppression brought forward *Black nationalism* as the ideology of *linked fate*.

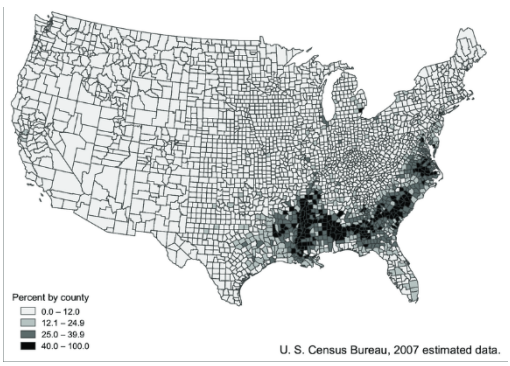
Racist rules were embedded in real estate laws and contracts, so when Black people moved into cities they were herded into *racially segregated ghettoes*. Much like the Black Belt South, Black urban ghettoes were sites of police state repression as well as autonomous institutional and cultural development. The worst of times and the best of times, all in contention.

The Black ghetto of Chicago, shown as the dark areas in the 1920 map here, is an example.



Negro liberation

Everywhere in the world, a study of the national question reveals the use of these differences by the ruling bourgeoisie as the foundation for its strategy of "divide and rule," of fomenting strife and friction between the toilers of various nationalities. In Hitler's Germany with its slogan of "one race, one culture, one nation," racism reached a high peak making the cult of race the cornerstone of state and world policy. Bloody pogroms, artificially created almost overnight against Jews, became the openly declared official program of Nazi rule.



In America, the roots of racism are deeper, sunk as they are in the unsolved land question of the Black Belt. [Shown in the map here as highest Black population counties in 2007.] The current upswing of racism in the United States is utilized by monopoly capital in the drive toward fascism a nd its by-product, war. In the United States, perhaps more than anywhere else in the world, a far-flung system of racial persecution, springing from the mire of chattel slaverywith strong survivals up to the present dayprovides an even more fertile soil than Hitler had.

Racism, always the game of a reactionary governing class, is being played for much higher stakes today.—**Harry Harwood, 1948**

18 Imperialism

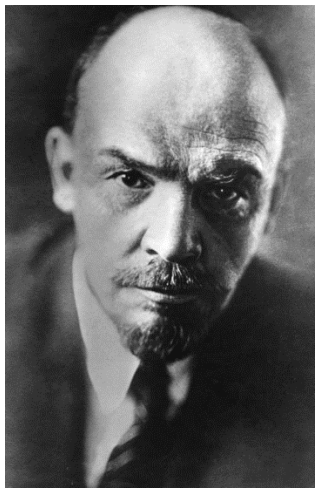
Capitalism develops in each country around its national market, binding together capitalists and workers in their contradictory unity, each needing the other but forever in a class struggle, sometimes hot and sometimes simmering. But that is never enough. Capitalist aspire to control their own country, and then to go on attempting to control the world. Capitalism is transformed into a global imperialist system.

The dialectical opposite are forces united in the historical motion of *proletarian internationalism*. In other words: "Workers of the World, Unite!"

On a global scale capitalism takes the form of *imperialism*. Imperialism is the global form of capitalism. Capitalists, mainly located in Europe and the US, run three attacks on the people in the *Global South*. The first is to exploit their labor to the extreme, approaching slavery as close as the global capitalists can get. The second is to seize their raw materials for little or no cost. Sometimes they coopt locals into the capitalist system (*comprador capitalists*) and sometimes they work with or are opposed by independent *national capitalists* of the local country. The third way is the dumping of goods into the market in the Global South, liquidating local businesses and avoiding regulations that protect health. The general history of this domination is called *colonialism*, and after these countries of the global south get political independence imperialism is called *neocolonialism*.

Capitalism is always a system in *crisis*. The capitalists try to produce as much as possible, but that creates a glut in the market and the economy slows down as prices decline. This is the *crisis of overproduction*. Capitalists try and use new tools (advances in technology) but their profit can only come from exploiting human labor so to reduce the quantity of labor creates a crisis. More and more the capitalist starts gambling by inflating the value of resources for sale based on increasing debt, but at some point debts must be paid, hence another crisis.

Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism



Imperialism emerged as the development and direct continuation of the fundamental characteristics of capitalism in general. But capitalism only became capitalist imperialism at a definite and very high stage of its development, when certain of its fundamental characteristics began to change into their opposites, when the features of the epoch of transition from capitalism to a higher social and economic system had taken shape and revealed themselves in all spheres. Economically, the main thing in this process is the displacement of capitalist free competition by capitalist monopoly. Free competition is the basic feature of capitalism, and of commodity production generally; monopoly is the exact opposite of free competition, but we have seen the latter being transformed into monopoly before our eyes, creating large-scale industry and forcing out small industry, replacing large-scale by still larger-scale industry, and carrying concentration of production and capital to the point where out of it has grown and is growing monopoly: cartels, syndicates and trusts, and merging with them, the capital of a dozen or so banks, which manipulate thousands of millions. At the same time the monopolies, which have grown out of free competition, do not eliminate the latter, but exist above it and alongside it, and thereby give rise to a number of very acute, intense antagonisms, frictions and conflicts. … [I]mperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism.—**Vladimir Lenin, 1916**

19 Two approaches to anti-capitalism

In all anti-capitalist motion, we need to make a distinction between reform and revolution. Reform is on the surface, a response to the everyday attacks and suffering that we endure living in capitalist societies. Reforms can make life a litter better. Reforms respond to symptoms of capitalist oppression and exploitation. They are always necessary.

Spontaneous movements are almost always reform movements. People rise up spontaneously against police violence and demonstrate for accountability, transparency and most of all justice. The same is true in fighting for changes in political policy, for new legislation, for correcting any particular grievance. Reforms aim to make the system work better, to improve things.

Reforms are *quantitative changes* in the system. Revolution is a *qualitative change* from one system to a new one. A frequent example here is water. If you heat or cool water it will still be water, just hotter or cooler. But at certain points the quality of water changes. It can boil and turn into steam. It can freeze into ice. Then it's quite a different thing. A sustained struggle with a vision of transformation can get a society into a different state. Let's just be sure we all aren't frozen out in the process.

Revolutionary change in the 20th century created a number of socialist countries. Capitalism was replaced by a state-run system guided by the interest of the workers and peasants. This was a new process of industrialization during which the surplus value was used for the public good and not the private interests of capitalists.

So, it is important to have a clear understanding of reform struggles and revolutionary struggles. It's time to fight to change the system in every way we can.

Ella Baker on struggle

Remember, we are not fighting for the freedom of the Negro alone, but for the freedom of the human spirit, a larger freedom that encompasses all of mankind

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Oppressed people, whatever their level of formal education, have the ability to understand and interpret the world around them, to see the world for what it is, and move to transform it.

In order for us as poor and oppressed people to become part of a society that is meaningful, the system under which we now exist has to be radically changed… It means facing a system that does not lend itself to your needs and devising means by which you change that system

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I began to feel that my greatest sense of success would raise the level of masses of people, rather than the individual being accepted by the Establishment. So, this kind of personal thinking, combined with, say, even the little bit more radical thinking – because at one time the pacifist movement was a very radical concept.

20 Reform

Malcolm X was clear about the reform struggle: "I don't believe in fighting today on any one front, but on all fronts." So the reform imperative is that you fight where you are, you fight back when and where you can.

The most general reform struggles focus on changing government: changing the laws or those who make and enforce them. The electoral arena is set up by the capitalist class as a game that is fixed for them to always win. However, it is possible to make some reforms in terms of who gets elected and what laws are passed. These are always limited, because the elected government is always held in check by the permanent government bureaucracy, and ultimately the Supreme Court. Laws can be passed but they have to be interpreted and implemented. The main process is how many people are active and overtime are people being education about the real workings of the system and are working class organizations becoming more powerful.

There are four main social forces for the overall reform struggle, while of course needing all sectors of society to become active. The keys social forces are *workers*, *women*, *oppressed nationalities*, and *youth*. There is a need for these four forces to have organizations for the protracted struggle of uniting and educating their mass bases. For the workers movement this means trade unions. A good example of militant trade union reform has been recently advanced by UE in their *Them and US Unionism* pamphlet.

Reform battles heat up when in each of the four cases activists unite into an active *social movement*. Sometimes in a reform struggle unity is a necessary tactic to achieve specific goals. But as the saying goes forces for change have temporary alliances, and permanent interests.

The general strike

[T]he working class, on the other hand, has always been taught to take care of the capitalist's interest in the property. You don't look after your own interest, your labor power, realizing that without a certain amount of provision you can't reproduce it. You are always looking after the interest of the capitalist, while a general strike would displace his interest and would put you in possession of it. That is what I want to urge upon the working class; to become so organized on the economic field that they can take and hold the industries in which they are employed. Can you conceive of such a thing? Is it possible? What are the forces that prevent you from doing so? You have all the industries in your own hands at the present time. There is this justification for political action, and that is, to control the forces of the capitalists that they use against us; to be in a position to control the power of government so as to make the work of the army ineffective, so as to abolish totally the secret service and the force of detectives. That is the reason that you want the power of government. That is the reason that you should fully understand the power of the ballot.—**Big Bill Haywood, 1911**

21 Trade unions

In order to reform capitalism the main force for change has to be the very workers that the capitalist system is based on. Many social forces are activated in the struggle against the negative aspects of how capitalism works, and all of this is necessary. The decisive battles take place when the working class gets organized and becomes the main power base for the anti-capitalist struggle. We know this because we know how capitalism works.

The most important organization of workers for reform is the trade union. In 1935 Congress passed the *Wagner Act* that established the *National Labor Relations Board*, to advocate for the workers. However, by 1947 they passed the *Taft-Hartley Act* that was designed to hold the workers movement in check. They were particularly against political general strikes, and Taft-Hartley enabled states to ban trade unions. Today 27 states have so-called *right-to-work laws* that ban unions.

The capitalist bosses fight against all trade unions. In 2019 they have beat down trade union membership to 6.2% of private sector workers and 33.6% of public sector workers. Black workers are more unionized than white workers, 12.5% compared to 10.4%. Non-union workers make only 81% of what income trade union members make.

The key is rank and file organizing to reach out to all the workers. *Solidarity* of the working class is the main goal—*an injury to one is an injury to all!* With every action taken by the workers it is important to educate everyone on the nature of the system and how the fight is to reform it. The workers learn about the system when they fight it, and even if they win a battle they must be educated about how that one win simply fits into the bigger question of the class war.

Them and Us unionism

UE was founded by workers who understood how the economic system we work under—capitalism—actually works, how it functions to allow bosses (them) to make money off of workers (us), and how bosses maintain their power by trying to divide workers. Profits come from the products and services that we produce with our labor. The less employers pay us, or the faster they make us work, the more profits they make. That understanding is why UE has been able to win gains for our members, resist employer attacks, and play a leading role in the broader labor movement. It is why working people need unions like UE now more than ever.

This understanding of the economic system has allowed UE to develop the key organizational approaches needed to take on the bosses and win real gains for workers. The preamble to the UE constitution contains the core UE principles of aggressive struggle, rank and file control, and uniting all workers. Over decades of experience taking on some of the most powerful corporations in the world, UE members have also learned the crucial importance of political independence and international solidarity. It is these five core principles that make UE so effective and consistent at leading struggles for justice for working people both in the workplace and in society more broadly.—**UE Union, 2020**

The MEMBERS RUN This UNION

UNITED ELECTRICAL, RADIO AND MACHINE WORKERS OF AMERICA · UE

22 A workers program

Most people in this country are in the working class. However, the politics of this country are not controlled by nor intended to serve the working class. The capitalist minority are in control and they disguise their interests by arguing that they serve "the American people." We need to break that abstract concept of the people in this country and state clearly, they are mainly working-class people. They have class interests.

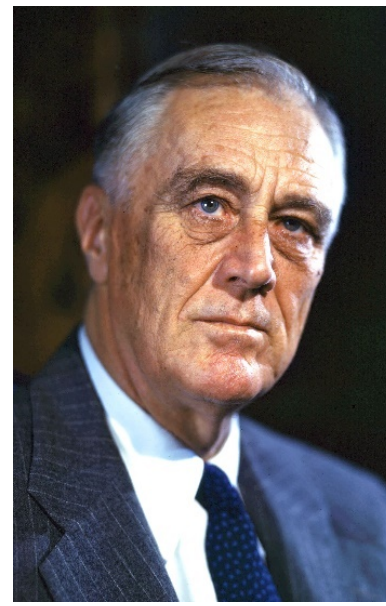
Over 40 million workers live below the *official poverty line*, which is $26,200 a year for a family of four in 2020. Too many people in this capitalist country don't have a *livable wage*. The *national minimum wage* is $7.50 an hour. If we raise this to $15 per hour it would impact these 40 million workers.

But wages should be understood in the context of the *cost of living*. A decent living for workers and their families includes food, housing, health care, and all aspects of care for self and family. It includes education. It includes a safe and sustainable planet.

The workers programs need to become a general orientation for workers, a consensus of their public opinion. Workers need to embrace the program as their own, something they can all talk about in their own words, something that can be related to where they work and live. Some form of the workers program needs to be adopted by all kinds of organizations, not only trade unions, but political parties, social organizations, churches, youth groups, and social justice movements.

The workers program is what workers need to submit to all candidates for office. All electoral political action should be guided by a workers program. After the organized working class made its demands clear, President Roosevelt put forward the Economic Bill of Rights, on the opposite page.

Economic bill of rights



We have come to a clear realization of the fact that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. "Necessitous men are not free men." People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made.

In our day these economic truths have become accepted as self-evident. We have accepted, so to speak, a second Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all—regardless of station, race, or creed. Among these are:

The right to a useful and remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms or mines of the nation;

The right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation;

The right of every farmer to raise and sell his products at a return which will give him and his family a decent living;

The right of every businessman, large and small, to trade in an atmosphere of freedom from unfair competition and domination by monopolies at home or abroad;

The right of every family to a decent home;

The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health;

The right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment;

The right to a good education.—**President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1944**

23 Spontaneous movement: strengths

Often in response to attacks, spontaneous social justice movements wake up the country to the possibility of change. They bring optimism in many ways. How?

They demonstrate that it is possible to counter attack against injustice, and by so doing open up and raise the heat on a battle front. Sometimes the *battlefront* has been known and sometimes not very much, but when a movement breaks out and people being to demonstrate and *speak truth to power* the battlefront gets defined and resistance can spread from location to location.

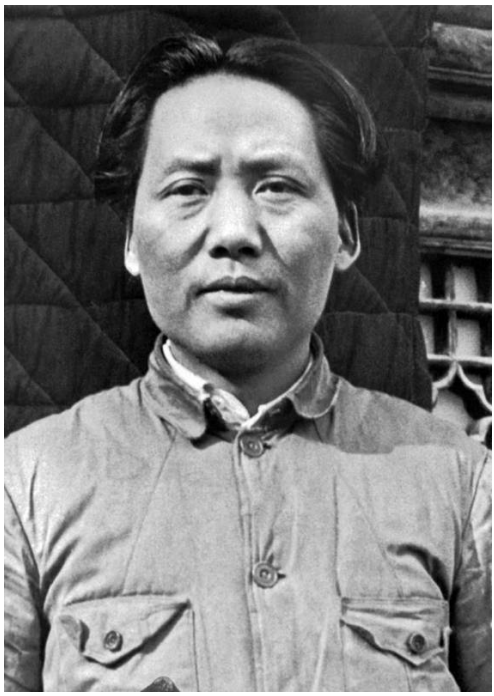
Spontaneous movements are catalysts for uniting activists across generations. The *older activists* can sum up and share the experience of past battles on each battle front if they are legitimating themselves by being engaged in the current battles. The *younger activists* can sum up their current experience and anchor themselves in history linking the past with the future. Memory for the current generation is like ammunition, necessary but you have to know how to shoot, where to shoot, and when to shoot. Of course, this is not your grandmother's movement, but without knowledge of her movement the chances of being successful are way weaker than they need to be.

Leadership from pre-existing movements and organized forces bring the perspective of a developed program to facilitate unity of thought and action in a spontaneous movement. Movements unite by having a common language connected to a timetable for goals and objectives.

Spontaneous movements force a *national dialogue*, impact the media, and raise new questions about what constitutes public opinion, who belies what about the issues being raised by the movement.

These are some strengths of the spontaneous movement.

On workers



What then is the main force? The workers and peasants. Our young intellectuals and students must go among the workers and peasants, who make up 90 per cent of the population, and mobilize and organize them. Without this main force of workers and peasants, we cannot win the fight against imperialism and feudalism, we cannot win it by relying only on the contingent of young intellectuals and students. Therefore, the young intellectuals and students throughout the country must unite with the broad masses of workers and peasants and become one with them, and only then can a mighty force be created....How should we judge whether a youth is a revolutionary? How can we tell? There can only be one criterion, namely, whether or not he is willing to integrate himself with the broad masses of workers and peasants and does so in practice. If he is willing to do so and actually does so, he is a revolutionary; otherwise he is a non-revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary. If today he integrates himself with the masses of workers and peasants, then today he is a revolutionary; if tomorrow he ceases to do so or turns round to oppress the common people, then he becomes a non-revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary.—**Mao Tse Tung, 1939**

24 Spontaneous movement: drawbacks

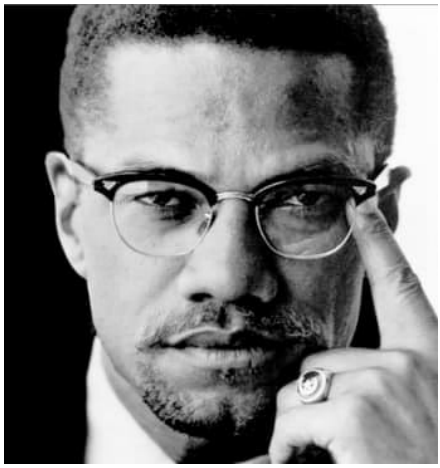
There are also drawbacks to a spontaneous movement.

First is that a spontaneous movement is relatively unorganized, *without clear leadership* and direction. *Mass actions* become ritualized and repeated without a plan. This leaves the movement vulnerable to three main dangers: *agent provocateurs*, *ultraleft adventurism*, and *opportunism*. Right-wing activists can pose as members of the movement and get people to violate the law activating police repression. Ultraleft activists can try to force more change than is possible, often acting like agent provocateurs. This also brings police repression and the loss of general popular support for the movement.

Opportunism is always present. It is the tendency of people to use a movement to advance their personal life. Today the non-profit or nongovernmental organizations that fund movements are the financial basis for opportunism, turning movement leadership into something for sale to the highest bidder.

In the end all spontaneous movements have a life and then they end. Our concern is that they create movement resources that can be sustained and activated for the next campaign. If not, each time a social movement ignites requires new people to start from scratch. Moreover, it is necessary to connect all movements for reform to the possibility of revolution, ending capitalism once and for all time.

On the 1963 March on Washington



Kennedy said, "Look, you all letting this thing go too far." And Old Tom said, "Boss, I can't stop it, because I didn't start it." I'm telling you what they said. They said, "I'm not even in it, much less at the head of it." They said, "These Negroes are doing things on their own. They're running ahead of us." And that old shrewd fox, he said, "Well If you all aren't in it, I'll put you in it. I'll put you at the head of it. I'll endorse it. I'll welcome it. I'll help it. I'll join it."

A matter of hours went by. They had a meeting at the Carlyle Hotel in New York City. The Carlyle Hotel is owned by the Kennedy family; that's the hotel Kennedy spent the night at, two nights ago; belongs to his family. [JFK actually owned an apartment in the hotel.] A philanthropic society headed by a white man named Stephen Currier called all the top civil-rights leaders together at the Carlyle Hotel. ... Let me show you how tricky the white man is. And as soon as they got it formed, they elected Whitney Young as the chairman, and who [do] you think became the co-chairman? Stephen Currier, the white man, a millionaire. Powell was talking about it down at the Cobo [Hall] today. This is what he was talking about. Powell knows it happened. Randolph knows it happened. Wilkins knows it happened. King knows it happened. Everyone of that so-called Big Six—they know what happened.—**Malcolm X, 1963**

25 Revolution

Revolutionary practice requires a revolutionary theory, having a strategic goal and a method to negotiate a way through the twists and turns of the transformative historical process.

20th century revolutionary struggle (Russia, China, etc.) took place in countries that had not yet been industrialized. Revolutionary movements took state power in order to industrialize their societies under the leadership of a working class party. Politics led before the transformation of the productive forces, especially the technology of the instruments of labor. Today the opposite is true. We now have the qualitative transformation of the instruments of labor because of computers and robots, and new revolutionary politics are called forth to reorganize society based on these new conditions that are disrupting everything.

We need a theoretical definition of a post capitalist future based on the science of political economy.

1. Our focus should be to change the use of surplus value by private ownership as profit to public (government) and collective forms of ownership used for the public good. This enables us to have health care for all, free education, and a decent life guaranteed for all.

2. The focus on distribution of goods and services should be on the use value (what people need) and not the exchange value (what people can pay for).

3. In general we need a cultural transformation that replaces competition with cooperation as the main process of social life.

We begin this march into the future with renewed commitment to raise our level of study and struggle.

The city is the Black man's land

A revolution involves the conquest of state power by oppressed strata of the population. It begins to loom upon the horizon when the oppressed-viewing the authority of those in power as alien, arbitrary, and/or exclusive-begin to challenge this authority. But these challenges may result only in social reform and not in the conquest of power unless there is a fundamental problem involved which can be solved only by the political power of the oppressed.

It is because labor is becoming more and more socially un-necessary in the United States and another form of socially necessary activity must be put in its place that a revolution is the only solution. And it is because Afro-Americans are the ones who have been made most expendable by the technological revolution that the revolution must be a black revolution.—**Grace and James Boggs, 1966**

26 What is to be done?

This discussion has to end with next steps, how to implement the process being argued here, both reform and revolution. The process begins by activists transforming themselves into revolutionaries. This involves study.

We begin our study by recognizing that we have a history of building revolutionary organization. Our last high point was in the 1960s. We first have to study some of these organizations to get a historical background for what we have to do. Some include the following:

1. League of Revolutionary Black Workers
2. Black Panther Party
3. Labor Party

The study of organizations such as these help us to think about the two organizational tasks for building the anti-capitalist process: a united front and vanguard organization. The key to this is cadre development.

Cadre are individuals who study and immerse themselves in the mass movements. They bring strategic understanding to the reform struggles, educating and mobilizing. Cadre turn every defeat into victory by summing up lessons for the battles to come. The slogan must be "fight, fail; fight again, fail again; fight on to victory!" Cadre train and promote new leadership that emerge from the spontaneous movement and inspire them remain active.

A united front is when diverse forces act in unison, unity of action is the key. The four main social forces for reform must be transformed into the main forces for revolution. This must include tens of thousands of activists transformed into leaders.

Vanguard organizations are networks of cadre who sum up movement experience and coordinate programs of action.

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