

Black History and the Class Struggle No. 4

Black Soldiers in the Jim Crow Military



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Introduction

In July 1906, a battalion of black infantrymen was transferred from Nebraska to Brownsville, Texas, for training with the Texas National Guard. The white racists of Brownsville, where "Jim Crow" segregation laws had been enthusiastically adopted, did not want the black soldiers there and federal officials in Brownsville had sought to have the transfer blocked. The black men of the 1st Battalion, 25th Infantry, found themselves barred from stores and even the city parks and were subjected to degrading racist harassment and violent assaults by racist whites.

Just after midnight on August 14, shots were fired in the area bordering the fort. One white man was killed and two other people wounded. Although witnesses were unable to identify anyone in the darkness and all the soldiers protested their innocence, two hasty investigations by the army decided that the black soldiers were responsible and recommended to President Theodore Roosevelt that every black soldier who might have been involved should be punished. As there was no evidence against anyone, the men were not court-martialed; indeed, they were not given a trial of any kind. Instead, except for a handful of men who had been on leave, every black soldier in the three companies of the 1st Battalion was dishonorably discharged and barred from any future federal military or civilian employment.

The following year, a white Republican rival of Roosevelt's challenged the handling of the Brownsville case, emphasizing the flagrant absence of due process. He also argued that the physical evidence, particularly the peculiar condition of the clips and cartridges found at the scene, strongly suggested a conspiracy by townspeople to frame the soldiers and get rid of the black battalion. But although further War Department hearings were eventually convened, they resulted in the reinstatement of only 14 of the 167 men who had been victimized.

In 1972, almost 70 years after the atrocity, the government grudgingly admitted the injustice. The decision stayed away from the suggestion of

frame-up, focusing narrowly on the absence of precedent for punishment en masse and the likelihood that the case had been prejudged through racial bias. The ex-soldiers were given honorable discharges, but no provision was made for back pay or other compensation. By this time, only one member of the Brownsville garrison was still alive. He was 86 years old and had lived out his life as a porter and bootblack.

* * *

During World War II, in June 1943, members of a black quartermaster battalion at Fort Custer, Michigan, heard about the outbreak of violent racist riots against blacks in Detroit. Four of the black soldiers, two of whom had families in Detroit, tried to secure arms and trucks in order to go to Detroit to defend their people. They were arrested, court-martialed and found guilty of violating four articles of war. The four men were sentenced to a combined total of 68 years at hard labor, later reduced to 26 years.

* * *

These two incidents, drawn from different periods of our history and different parts of the country, illuminate the contradictory position of black men in the racist U.S. Army. Black soldiers fought in the American Revolutionary War and in every war fought by this country since then. But the repeated promises that the blood of these men, spilled fighting for "their" country, would bring gains for black America were betrayed. The American capitalist system, founded upon racism and class injustice, has proven itself unwilling and unable to free black people from institutionalized poverty and brutal racial oppression. The history of its wars is a history of racist injustice, from the mass slaughter of the native Indian population—like Andrew Jackson's smashing of the Cherokees—to locking up U.S. citizens of Japanese extraction in concentration camps during World War II.

Yet the integration of black men

into the armed forces is a potentially powerful base of support for struggles for black emancipation. The U.S. government, in order to carry out its imperialist and racist wars of conquest overseas, needs its black and Hispanic troops, as well as its white working-class soldiers. The savagery of the racist repression displayed at Brownsville and Fort Custer reflects the nervousness of the ruling class and the racist forces about black men with guns. Black veterans have often been in the forefront of the mass struggles for equality and freedom which have emerged in this country from the time of the Civil War to the present day.

* * *

This pamphlet brings together articles from the press of the Spartacist League dealing with the military question and black oppression. The history of black soldiers in the U.S. armed forces since the Civil War is a reflection—intensified under the repressive conditions of military life—of the racism integral to American capitalist society.

The hundreds of thousands of ex-slaves who fought in the American Civil War turned the tide in favor of the Union Army, but the victorious Northern capitalists betrayed the promise of equality. The power of the radical Reconstruction in the South, backed up by the military power of the Union Army, was broken and the freed blacks were politically expropriated and kept segregated and economically on the bottom. The triumph of reaction and the institution of official Jim Crow segregation was ultimately expressed in the segregated U.S. armed forces which fought in World War I. However, the horror at the mass slaughter of the war, in which millions of young working men died because their ruling classes could not agree on the division of the spoils of colonial empire, fueled the growth of the communist working-class and anti-colonial movements worldwide. The 20th century has been described as the epoch of wars and revolutions; World War I and its aftermath illustrated how these events are inextricably linked.

The Second World War, like the First, was fought for a redivision of imperialist spoils. The Allied rulers

care little about the hideous crimes of Hitler's fascist regime in Germany, but took advantage of the mass popular revulsion against Hitler to fuel their war effort. As part of the mobilization for the "war for democracy," blacks and women were of necessity incorporated into wartime industry. The history of black soldiers in the U.S. armed forces up to and during World War II is reviewed in the first article reprinted here, "Black Soldiers in the Jim Crow Military."

The Second World War, like the First, did not make the world "safe for democracy." In fact, its outcome strengthened the power of U.S. imperialism at the expense of Western Europe and Japan. The end of the war ushered in the beginning of the Cold War, the preparation for new wars to "roll back Communism" everywhere on the planet, beginning with Korea.

However, the integration of the armed forces was a tremendous impetus to struggles for black freedom at home. Men who had fought for "their" country were determined not to go back to second-class citizenship. Their indignation was an important component of the mass civil rights agitation that shook the country beginning in the mid-1950s. In North Carolina, for example, Robert F. Williams put his military experience in Korea in the service of the civil rights struggle when he organized armed self-defense of his NAACP chapter against racist terrorists.

"Blacks Hated the Vietnam War" examines the Vietnam conflict which politically polarized the American population in the 1960s and 1970s. In general, the black population, keenly aware of the hypocrisy of the rulers' rhetoric about "fighting for freedom" in Vietnam while black Americans were denied elementary democratic rights at home, was a vanguard of opposition to the war. Eventually most of the white working people also got the message, but it took them rather longer. The heroism of the Vietnamese, who endured more than two million dead but kept on fighting, prevailed over the mighty imperialist colossus.

By the end, the ruling class and their kept capitalist politicians, who would cheerfully have presided over

a successful rape of Vietnam, had joined the "consensus" that the war was "unwinnable." Even the Pentagon had become afraid that the continuation of the war would destroy the U.S. Army as a fighting force. The condition of the American army in Vietnam directly reflected the deepening consciousness throughout the working people, including those in uniform, that they had no interest in the subjugation of the Vietnamese peasants and workers.

The U.S. defeat in Vietnam is still expressed in a continuing "Vietnam syndrome" which impedes the American rulers' moves toward new military adventures. Unwilling to risk reinstating the draft, the government is dependent on volunteers who mainly join up out of sheer desperation. This dependency on largely black soldiers is an Achilles' heel of U.S. imperialism.

Today, the U.S. rulers are seeking to reverse the "Vietnam syndrome." In "U.S.-South Africa: Free World Butchers," originally a speech given at Howard University, a black Spartacist spokesman describes how the drive to militarize America for new wars abroad necessarily means a resurgence of "respectable" racism and murderous Klan-inspired terror at home. Enemies of racial oppression must participate in leading the working class in opposition to the capitalist warmakers, through the fight for a new revolutionary leadership of labor committed to the program of working-class emancipation and black liberation.

* * *

As we were preparing this pamphlet for publication in commemoration of Black History Month, we were confronted by the hideous lynch mob murder of a black man in Howard Beach, Queens. The Spartacist League leaflet calling for action by the integrated labor unions to stop racist attacks was distributed widely in New York and published as a "guest editorial" in the *Black American*, a New York black weekly. We are reprinting this leaflet here in the hope that the unionists, community activists and students we reach through this pamphlet will join with us in fighting for this perspective in their own organizations.

—February 1987

Finish the Civil War!

BLACK SOLDIERS IN THE JIM CROW MILITARY

"They say this is a war
For Freedom Over There.
Say, Mr. FDR
How 'bout some Freedom Here?"
—from "Ballad of Ned Turman"
(1942)

A Soldier's Story is set in the Deep South, at an army camp for black troops in World War II. And the signs of vicious "Jim Crow" racial segregation are everywhere. There's no doubt who the hero of the movie is supposed to be. As soon as handsome Captain Richard Davenport (Howard Rollins), a lawyer out of Howard University, steps off the bus, wearing his snappy army uniform and sunglasses "like MacArthur's," he evokes the polished, ebony middle-class black hero Sidney Poitier used to play, ready to do gentlemanly battle with the evils of racism.

"Haven't you ever seen a colored officer before?" a white drill instructor asks the gaping black GIs as Davenport is driven past. "No sir. Have you, sir?"

they answer in unison. The captain is assigned to an empty barracks since his fellow white officers refuse to be housed with him. Davenport's mission is to investigate the murder of black sergeant Vernon Waters, and of course everyone suspects the local Klan or racist white officers at the base. "They ain't crazy about us tan Yanks in this part of the country," Davenport's driver notes.

But the trail leads instead to a black private, Melvin Peterson. While not political with a capital P, he is cast in this situation as a militant, a man who stands up for black rights. (Denzell Washington, who plays Peterson, was deliberately chosen for his resemblance to Malcolm X.) The murdered Sergeant Waters, a contradictory figure, was consumed by self-hatred born of racist oppression, determined to "improve" his race through his own personal program of "purification" in which he eliminated black soldiers he considered "inferior." "Them Nazis ain't all crazy—

whole lotta people just can't fit into where things are goin'," he says at one point. After the sergeant frames up and jails his latest victim, the popular "C.J." Memphis—driving him to suicide—Peterson kills the sergeant one night to avenge "C.J."

Investigator Davenport finally captures Peterson after a chase and confronts him: "Who gave you the right to judge who is fit to be a Negro and who is not?" Here is one of the central themes of the movie: justice is "working within the system," although the black captain is clearly torn by the situation. The case "solved," Davenport is leaving the base the next day when he is given a ride by one of the less prejudiced white officers. "I guess I'm going to have to get used to Negroes with bars on their shoulders, Captain," says the white officer. Davenport replies, "Oh, you'll get used to it—you can bet your ass on that." And so they ride off supposedly into a new dawn of black



A Soldier's Story: Movie transcends liberal message of Capt. Davenport (left). At right, Sgt. Waters frames up "C.J."



Columbia Pictures Photos



National Archives

Black slave Crispus Attacks was one of the five martyrs of 1770 Boston massacre.

advancement and equality.

Playwright Charles Fuller and director Norman Jewison have produced a powerful film. Its characters (except for Davenport) are not cardboard but full of contradictions. From lynchings to black self-hatred, *A Soldier's Story* plumbs the most excruciating aspects of racial oppression in America. It is also a movie with a message, a clear liberal message which is not tacked on but integral—every scene builds toward the climax. And yet that message falls flat. Blacks in audiences across the country cheer Peterson's actions and find Davenport's moral lecture a letdown. Why? Because they already know the sequel to *A Soldier's Story* in real life, in their lives.

They know it took "freedom rides," mass action, deaths, just to integrate drinking fountains, lunch counters and schools. Even then blacks remained on the bottom of American society, North and South, and today the schools are as segregated as before. Many remember that most of those black troops marching off to war never saw combat, so afraid were their white masters of the explosive combination of "Negroes with guns." (The play, at least, was less starry-eyed, reporting that the entire 221st Chemical Smoke Generating Company was wiped out by the Germans. But Hollywood wants its happy ending.) For Black America, it was Malcolm X, not Martin Luther King,

who told it like it is:

"Prior to 1939, our people were in a very menial position or condition. Most of us were waiters and porters and bell-hops and janitors and waitresses and things of that sort. It was not until war was declared with Germany, and America became involved in a manpower shortage in regards to her factories plus her army, that the black man in this country was permitted to make a few strides forward. It was never out of some kind of moral enlightenment or moral awareness on the part of Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam only let the black man take a step forward when he himself had his back to the wall."

—Malcolm X Speaks (1965)

As Leon Trotsky, founder of the Soviet Red Army and together with Lenin leader of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, wrote: "An army is always a copy of the society it serves—with this difference, that it gives social relations a concentrated character, carrying both their positive and negative features to an extreme" (*The History of the Russian Revolution* [1930]). Certainly the black experience in the U.S. armed forces has been a concentrated expression of the virulent racism of American capitalist society.

Slavocracy vs. the Negro Soldier

From the beginning, the United States has always been a hard, mean, violently racist country, founded on genocide and the slave trade, and a slave economy. And so from colonial times to

the present, the sight of armed blacks in uniform, organized for war, has been perceived as a dangerous threat to the racist status quo, whether it was plantation slavery or modern imperialism. For that reason the induction of blacks into the military was always a desperate last resort for the ruling class, to be undertaken only with the strictest racist precautions. Indeed, from the late 1700s up till the end of World War II—with the exception of the Civil War and its immediate aftermath—race lines actually *hardened* in the military.

From the time of their first arrival in the New World as slaves in 1619, American blacks have been used to fight the white man's wars—in fact, blacks have fought in *every* American war except the 1846 war with Mexico. But the idea of arming and training blacks to fight always sent shivers down the spines of the slaveholders: "There must be great caution used, lest our slaves when armed might become our masters," noted a group of colonial Carolina landowners (see historian Jack D. Foner's well-researched account, *Blacks and the Military in American History* [1974]). Hence the recruitment of blacks into the army was always resisted, and was done only when desperate manpower requirements left no alternative. Thus the shortage of men during the French and Indian wars of the 1750s led many towns to overlook laws excluding blacks

MEN OF COLOR, TO ARMS! NOW OR NEVER!

This is our Golden Moment. The Government of the United States calls for every Able-Bodied Colored Man to enter the Army for the THREE YEARS SERVICE, and join in fighting the Battles of Liberty and the Union. A new era is open to us. For generations we have suffered under the horrors of slavery, outrage and wrong; our manhood has been denied, our citizenship blotted out, our souls seared and lacerated, our spirits bowed and crushed, and the hopes of the future of our race involved in doubt and darkness. But now the whole aspect of our relations to the white race is changed. Now this for our most precious moment. Let us Rush to Arms! Fall Now and Our Race is Doomed on this the soil of our birth. We must now awake, arise, or be forever fallen. If we value Liberty, if we wish to be free in this land, if we love our country, if we love our families, our children, our homes, we must strike NOW while the Country calls: must rise up in the dignity of our manhood, and show by our own right arms that we are worthy to be freedmen. Our enemies have made the country believe that we are craven cowards, without soul, without manhood, without self-respect. Shall we die with this stigma resting on our graves? Shall we leave this inheritance of shame? No! A thousand times No! We WILL Rise! The alternative is upon us: let us rather die free men. What is life without liberty? We say that we have manhood—now is the time to prove it. A man cannot fight in a pitiful, but cannot be respected. If we would be regarded Men, if we would force THE TONGUE OF CALUMNY, of prejudice and hate; let us rise NOW and fly to arms: We Value and Honor our brothers displayed at FORT HUDSON and at MILLIKEN'S BAY are just from the galling, polluting group of slavery; they have startled the world by the most exalted have proved themselves heroes, can not we prove ourselves men? ARE FREEMEN LESS B BRAVES? More than a Million White Men have left Comfortable Homes and joined the Armies of their Country: cannot we, free men, and swell the hosts of the Union, to save our liberties, vindicate and deserve well of our Country?

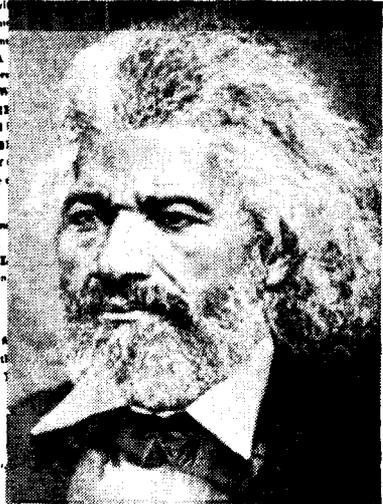
MEN OF COLOR: All Races of Men—the Englishman, the Irishman, the Frenchman, the German have been called to assert their claim to freedom and a manly character, by an appeal to the sword, seen an enslaved race in arms, has, in all history, seen their last trial. We say, now see that OUR LIBERTY HAS COME! If we are not lower in the scale of humanity than Englishmen, Irishmen and other races, we can show it now.

MEN OF COLOR! BROTHERS and FATHERS: WE APPEAL TO YOU! even for yourselves and your liberties, by all your regard for God and Humanity, by all your desire for Equality before the law, by all your love for the Country, to stop at no sacrifice, listen to nothing but your rallying for the Army. Come forward, and at once Enroll your Names for the Three YEARS SERVICE NOW, and you are henceforth and forever FREEMEN!

- K. D. Roberts, Wm. D. Foster, Frederick Douglass, Wm. Whipper, D. D. Turner, Jas. McCune, A. S. Conroy, A. M. Green, J. W. Page, L. R. Seymour, Rev. J. Underhill, John W. Price, Augustus Thayer, Rev. Stephen Smith, S. W. Dwyer, Dr. J. H. Wilson, J. W. Conroy, P. J. Armstrong, J. W. Simpson, Rev. J. B. Travis, S. Morgan Smith, Wm. E. Gibson, Rev. J. Buckles, Rev. J. A. Lee, Rev. J. C. Gibb, Daniel George, Robert M. Adg, Henry M. Gray, Rev. J. B. Ross, Rev. J. A. Wall, Rev. A. L. Swan, Thomas J. Ben, Elijah J. Davis

Union Army black recruitment poster signed by Frederick Douglass.

Historical Pictures Service





Women and Revolution

Statue of white abolitionist Col. Robert Shaw, commander of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment of black freedmen.

in order to fulfill their quotas, and black slaves were promised freedom if they served. Blacks served in unsegregated units in this period and were paid the same wages as whites, although slaves had to surrender at least part of their wages to their masters, and typically the blacks would be assigned non-combat roles such as laborer, scout and servant.

In the American War of Independence, the Founding Fathers tried to avoid inducting blacks, although black soldiers had fought in such early battles as Lexington and Concord in 1775, and the famous black slave Crispus Attucks was one of the five martyrs of the 1770 Boston massacre. Foner reports that on 9 July 1775 commander in chief George Washington's headquarters issued orders to his officers not to recruit "any stroller, Negro, or vagabond." Washington was himself a major slaveholder and thought blacks would make inferior soldiers, but events forced a reversal of policy. Ironically it was the cynically opportunist *British monarchy* which first instituted the policy of offering freedom to black slaves who served on their side. As many slaves started deserting their masters for the British army, and as manpower shortages grew in the Continental Army, the Americans were soon forced to enlist free blacks, and then even slaves. Thus in this war for the birth of American bourgeois "democracy," the emerging American ruling class had to be compelled literally at the point of British guns to offer a few blacks their freedom in exchange for military service. Through the whole war, about 5,000 blacks served in the Continental Army of 300,000.

After the War of Independence, the conditions of blacks declined as they were no longer needed for the army. The slaveholders' fear of armed blacks was

heightened by the greatest slave rebellion in modern times, Toussaint L'Ouverture's triumphant victory against Napoleon's army in Haiti in 1802. "The existence of a negro people in arms," wrote Napoleon's foreign minister Talleyrand to a general in Washington, "is a horrible spectacle for all white nations" (quoted in David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti* [1979]). Certainly it was a horror to the white slaveholders of the U.S.—not until 1862, in the middle of the Civil War, did Washington recognize the black republic in the Caribbean. Meanwhile the exclusion of blacks from the military tightened, except in the navy, where difficulties in recruiting sufficient numbers of white sailors forced the recruitment of blacks and strict segregation was difficult to enforce.

In the War of 1812, the Americans were again forced to follow the British example of offering slaves freedom in exchange for military service, and 600 black troops fought for Andrew Jackson at the famous Battle of New Orleans. After the war, slaves seeking freedom took refuge among the motley Seminole Indians in Florida. But in 1830 President Andrew Jackson—a Southern cracker ahead of his racist time—ordered their removal. In the Second Seminole War (1835-42) Jackson managed to recapture a number of blacks for slavery, but the U.S. never managed to impose a victory treaty on the Seminoles.

Civil War: The Second American Revolution

The Civil War (1861-65) was the first and only American war in which blacks clearly had a stake. While Lincoln considered it to be a war to preserve the

Union, the "irrepressible conflict" between Northern capitalism and Southern slavocracy quickly became apparent. As Karl Marx and Frederick Engels wrote at the very beginning of the war:

"The present struggle between the South and North is...nothing but a struggle between two social systems, between the system of slavery and the system of free labor. The struggle has broken out because the two systems can no longer live peacefully side by side on the North American continent. It can only be ended by the victory of one system or the other."

—"The Civil War in the United States," 7 November 1861

Many Union commanders pressed for the arming and training of blacks, from professional soldiers like John C. Fremont to the abolitionists like Thomas Wentworth Higginson (a friend of John Brown) to the German American Marxists like Joseph Wedemeyer. Lincoln and the War Department tried to resist the recruitment of blacks, and as Foner notes, "blacks themselves initiated much of the action that culminated in abolition and their admission into the armed forces. Thousands of fugitive slaves flooded the Union lines wherever federal forces penetrated new areas of the South." Union commanders had to decide on the spot what to do with the flood of sympathetic black fugitives, and many Union officers, starting with General Benjamin Butler in 1861, put the blacks to work constructing Union

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**Port Hudson,
Louisiana,
27 May 1863:
the first major
Civil War battle
in which
black troops
took part.**



fortifications and performing other services. Finally in August 1862 Secretary of War Stanton relented by officially sanctioning the recruitment of blacks.

Lincoln, recognizing the reality of the situation, issued the Emancipation Proclamation on 1 January 1863, and after that black recruitment began in earnest. Ex-slave and black revolutionary Frederick Douglass issued a historic appeal in March 1863, "Men of Color, To Arms!", arguing that "liberty won by white men would lose half its luster." In a famous speech, Douglass argued for black enlistment not only because the logic of the war must lead to the abolition of slavery, but also because blacks fighting for their own freedom would transform the black soul itself:

"Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters U.S.; let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder, and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on the earth or under the earth which can deny that he has earned the right of citizenship in the United States."

—"Address for the Promotion of Colored Enlistments," 6 July 1863 (*The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, Vol. 3 [1952])

The close to 200,000 black troops who served in the Union Army (about 10 percent of the Union Army was black in 1865) and 30,000 in the navy (one-quarter of the total navy enlistments) provided the critical fighting spirit to bring Union victory. For instance, the famous 54th Massachusetts Regiment of black freedmen led by the white

abolitionist, Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, fought valiantly in the attack on the Confederate stronghold of Fort Wagner, South Carolina, where 247 men of the 54th died, including Colonel Shaw (see *Young Spartacus* No. 90, April 1981). The racists' fear of armed blacks drove the Confederacy to take extra brutal measures against the black Union troops—exemplified by the infamous massacre of over a hundred captured black troops at Fort Pillow in 1864 by Confederate butcher Nathan Bedford Forrest, who later founded the Ku Klux Klan.

The Civil War was a revolutionary war of liberation. In Dixie mythology, pictured in *Gone With the Wind*, Union General Sherman's "march to the sea" leaves nothing but flames of destruction and weeping belles behind. But for the freed slaves the Union banner was the sign of liberation:

"Meridian [Mississippi] was thoroughly sacked.... Black smoke lay on the land as the troops marched away...and as the column swung back toward home territory it was followed, as Sherman recalled, by 'about ten miles of Negroes'."

—Bruce Catton, *This Hallowed Ground* (1955)

But blacks also had to fight for equality inside the Union Army: the entire 54th Massachusetts Regiment and other black units refused to accept their pay because it was several dollars less than white soldiers' pay, until Congress rectified the situation in 1865. Summarizing his experience in the war, white abolitionist Colonel Thomas Went-

worth Higginson, who commanded the pioneer regiment of ex-slaves, the First South Carolina Volunteers, described how the arming of blacks transformed racial perceptions:

"We who served with the black troops have this peculiar satisfaction, that, whatever dignity or sacredness the memories of the war may have to others, they have more to us...the peculiar privilege of associating with an outcast race, of training it to defend its rights and to perform its duties, this was our especial meed. The vacillating policy of the Government sometimes filled other officers with doubt and shame; until the negro had justice, they were but defending liberty with one hand and crushing it with the other. From this inconsistency we were free. Whatever the Government did, we at least were working in the right direction. If this was not recognized on our side of the lines, we knew that it was admitted on the other. Fighting with ropes round our necks, denied the ordinary courtesies of war till we ourselves compelled their concession, we could at least turn this outlawry into a compliment. We had touched the pivot of the war. Whether this vast and dusky mass should prove the weakness of the nation or its strength, must depend in great measure, we knew, upon our efforts. Till the blacks were armed, there was no guaranty of their freedom. It was their demeanor under arms that shamed the nation into recognizing them as men."

—Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (1869)

From Radical Reconstruction to Imperialist War

All in all, there were 16 all-black regiments in the Union Army, and in

recognition of the black contribution, after the war Congress created four special permanent "colored" regiments of the army: the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry. In the postwar Reconstruction period, when the South was occupied by the Union Army and for a few years blacks were enfranchised, the Reconstruction state governments recruited former black soldiers into federal militias, which were sometimes used to put down Klan violence (such as in Arkansas). But too often the Reconstruction governors hesitated to mobilize armed blacks, because "it was the silent verdict of all America that Negroes must not be allowed to fight for themselves" (W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* [1935]). The Compromise of 1877, which involved the withdrawal of Union troops from the South, definitively put an end to the Reconstruction attempts at "equality" for blacks and ushered in a period of thoroughgoing racist reaction and Klan terror. From then till now, for Southern whites the image of armed blacks in uniform instantly evokes memories of the Civil War and black liberation, and so it is no coincidence that many blacks have been lynched in their army uniforms.

Ironically, the four regular black regiments were used after the Civil War to crush the other colored peoples of even lower social status than the blacks—the Indians. The black "Buffalo Soldiers" won many medals in the Indian Wars of 1869-1890, and were



Library of Congress

In Spanish-American War of 1898, black soldiers were used to seize Cuba.

again used in the Spanish-American War of 1898, in the fight to seize Cuba for the U.S. ruling class. After a campaign around the slogan "No officers, no fight" resulted in the recruitment of 100 black officers, blacks joined in the creation of volunteer outfits in addition to the four regular black regiments. But as the U.S. turned to crushing an anti-imperialist guerrilla movement in the Philippines, a split developed in the black community as many felt sympathy for "another people of color." Many black soldiers actually

deserted in the Philippines—the most famous was David Fagan of the 24th Infantry, who accepted a commission in the Philippines guerrilla forces of Emilio Aguinaldo.

The rise of American imperialism abroad in the Spanish-American War was of course directly linked to the triumph of racist reaction at home. The racist tide was reflected in a monumental racist frame-up of black soldiers of the 25th Infantry stationed at Fort Brown, Texas. The men had suffered the typical racial abuse by the white citizens of nearby Brownsville, and when a shooting occurred in the town in August 1906 in which one white man was killed and a cop injured, 170 black soldiers were immediately charged with murder even though their white officers proved the men had been asleep in their quarters at the time of the shooting. The War Department immediately sided with the townspeople, and without a trial, President Theodore Roosevelt signed an executive order drumming all 170 men out of the army with dishonorable discharges.

World War I: The Main Enemy Was At Home

The entry of the U.S. into World War I in 1917, allegedly to "make the world safe for democracy," at first raised false hopes among the black community that by fighting in that war perhaps a little "democracy" might be granted to blacks at home. Despite some opposition from black leaders like A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen,

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the predominant black view as expressed by W.E.B. Du Bois was that an Allied victory would bring the Negro "the right to vote and the right to work and the right to live without insult." Du Bois urged blacks to "close ranks" behind the war effort and defer all "special grievances" until the war was over. It was a betrayal—for the entry of American imperialism into the world battle for booty only led to an intensification of racial and class oppression at home. Under President Wilson segregation became government policy, especially in Washington, D.C., where "colored" restrooms were established in government office buildings and blacks were systematically removed from federal employment.

As usual, the government was reluctant to use blacks in any combat role—the four experienced, regular all-black army regiments were never allowed to do any fighting throughout the war. But once again the need for manpower forced a reversal of policy, and blacks were inducted into new units to do some fighting. Eventually the rate of black draftees accepted was higher than the white acceptance rate, as whites found more ways to get deferments from the all-white draft boards. But of the 380,000 blacks drafted, only 42,000 were given a combat role, in the all-black 92nd and 93rd Divisions in France. Over one-third of American forces in Europe were black, but they were concentrated disproportionately in non-combat menial assignments.

Needless to say, there were very few black officers, and the (frequently Southern) white officers assigned to black units often treated their ranks with racist contempt. Even in France, where there was no native policy of segregation and black soldiers were more readily accepted as equals by the French soldiers, the U.S. Army tried to export Jim Crow to make it clear that blacks must know "their place" after the war. A secret order from General Pershing's headquarters to the French military liaison on 7 August 1918 made this clear:

"We must prevent the rise of any pronounced degree of intimacy between French officers and black officers. We may be courteous and amiable with the last but we cannot deal with them on the same plane as white American officers without deeply wounding the latter. We must not eat with them, must not shake hands with them, seek to talk to them or to meet with them outside the requirements of military service. We must not commend too highly these troops particularly in front of white Americans. Make a point of keeping the native

cantonment from spoiling the Negro. White Americans become very incensed at any particular expression of intimacy between white women and black men." —quoted in Mary Penick Motley, ed., *The Invisible Soldier* (1975)

Nevertheless, of the four all-black regiments attached to the French army (the 369th, 370th, 371st and 372nd), three received the *Croix de Guerre* medal from France. In contrast, the U.S. Army's fear of black leadership was highlighted in May 1917 when the army forced Colonel Charles Young, the only black West Point graduate on active duty, to retire for "medical reasons." Young would have been in line to become a general and hence possibly command white troops; he protested by riding on horseback from his home in Ohio to Washington, D.C. to prove his

had been appointed to try the case! Thirteen soldiers were hanged and a large number [42] were sent to prison for life."

—Motley, *The Invisible Soldier*

This was the largest murder trial in U.S. history, and the *one-day* proceedings by an all-white military tribunal can only be called a legal lynching. It was a signal of what was in store for blacks in American "democracy" after the war. Indeed, hundreds were lynched during and after the war, many of them still wearing their army uniforms. The defeat of the postwar strike wave of 1919-20 encouraged the growth of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, and the dream of "freedom" for blacks quickly turned into a nightmare of race-terror.

If black soldiers returned from World War I to the lynch mobs, race riots and

**February
1919:
Returning
soldiers of the
black 369th
Infantry
Regiment
wearing the
Croix de
Guerre.**



fitness, but it was no use. Young did manage to establish a training school for black officers at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, and one of the first black officers to graduate from that school, Colonel Howard Donovan Queen, years later described the most infamous racist incident of the war:

"In August 1917, a race riot between the white citizens of Houston, Texas, and the 24th Infantry Regiment, a Regular Army regiment, occurred. It was the result of insults and abuse heaped upon the members of the 24th by the white citizenry. Two Negroes and seventeen whites were killed in the ensuing battle....

"Major General Chamberlain, Inspector General, United States Army, came to Fort Des Moines and in the presence of the 1,200 men announced, 'If you know anything about the matter you'd better start talking now because there is going to be a big hanging'; this before the General Court-martial members

mass unemployment, this was due in no small part to the political immaturity of the American working class and the domination of the reactionary Jim Crow AFL in the organized labor movement (except for the heroic IWW). But in Russia, where the workers had a revolutionary leadership, a Bolshevik party that could link their aspirations to the emancipation of the colored peoples and oppressed nations of the tsarist empire, out of the blood and destruction of World War I there emerged the first victorious proletarian revolution. V.I. Lenin sought through the Communist International (Comintern) to impart to the young Communist parties that emerged in solidarity with the October Revolution the indispensable lessons of that revolution, especially the need to rally the specially oppressed to the banner of the proletariat. It was



Steinheimer/Life

93rd Infantry, on parade at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, summer of 1943—America's first all-black combat division, formed during World War I.

in government-financed training programs set up to overcome the shortage of skilled workers. But in the armed forces as well as in industry blacks were systematically excluded, or assigned to menial roles and rigidly segregated. In the Navy, blacks could enlist only in the all-black messmen's branch. The Marines and Air Corps excluded blacks entirely. In the Army blacks were only allowed to fill the few vacancies in the four regular all-black regiments which had been created after the Civil War. In the fall of 1940, President Roosevelt explicitly defended Jim Crow in the military:

"The policy of the War Department is not to intermingle colored and white enlisted personnel in the same regimental organizations. This policy has proven satisfactory over a long period of years, and to make changes would produce situations destructive to the morale and detrimental to the preparation for national defense."

Added to the fact that Jim Crow was now the official policy of the federal government were countless other insults. Thus because of pressure from the Army and Navy, blacks couldn't contribute blood to the Red Cross program because it was not considered the same as "white" blood. This was doubly insulting because the pioneer researcher in blood preservation was

Dr. Charles R. Drew, a black, who was also medical director of the Red Cross program. Drew resigned from the Red Cross over its refusal to accept blood from black people.

Moderate black leaders had trouble selling this imperialist war to American blacks, and could only do so by promising some benefits *now*. Thus arose the "Double V Campaign" ("victory for democracy abroad and at home"), organized by Rooseveltian trade unionist A. Philip Randolph, who on New Year's Day 1941 proposed an "anti-Jim Crow, pro-jobs" march on Washington that July. Randolph soon capitulated to White House pressure, canceling the march in exchange for FDR's sop, a Fair Employment Practices Committee, which did not mention the armed forces, merely promised to end discrimination in industry and had no teeth for enforcement (see "The March on Washington That Wasn't," *WV* No. 336, 12 August 1983).

The successful CIO organizing strikes of the late '30s coupled with the virtual full employment brought on by the war created the basis for a broad radicalization of labor and blacks. This was reflected in the growth of both the Communist Party (CP) and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). But between the Stalinist CP and the Trotskyist SWP

there was the dividing line between reform and revolution, which came sharply to the fore over their attitudes toward the March on Washington Movement (MOWM). Prior to Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union on 21 June 1941, the CP denounced the MOWM as a social-patriotic maneuver to build black support for imperialist war. After June 21, the Stalinists flipfopped, becoming rabid social-patriots and denouncing the MOWM for sabotaging the "war effort." Randolph and his supporters were now said to be "aiding the Axis camp" by creating "confusion and dangerous moods in the rank and file of the Negro people" (article by black CP leader James Ford in the July 1943 *Communist*, cited in Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party* [1957]).

In contrast, the SWP, whose leaders were jailed under FDR for their courageous opposition to the imperialist war, supported the March on Washington while disagreeing with Randolph's pro-war stance: "essentially it is an *action* against the system of Jim Crowism that segregates and discriminates against Negroes wherever they go" (*Militant*, 21 June 1941, reproduced in *Fighting Racism in World War II* [1980], a collection of articles from the SWP press documenting the Trotskyists' consistent support for black struggle during 1939-45). Thus the SWP backed the numerous blacks who refused the draft in World War II. The most famous case was that of Winfred Lynn, brother of noted civil rights lawyer Conrad Lynn, who refused to report for induction in 1942 on the grounds that a 1940 draft law forbade racial discrimination.

Soldiers, Seamen Defy Racism

Throughout the war, black soldiers repeatedly clashed with Jim Crow in the military. Even before the U.S. entered the hostilities, black anger burst to the surface when 15 black sailors aboard the cruiser USS *Philadelphia* stationed at Long Beach, California took the risky step of writing a protest letter to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a leading black newspaper. The letter documented the racism of the Navy brass: black sailors were restricted to duty as mess attendants, were given lower pay than whites and denied promotion, and if they talked back they were thrown in the brig on bread and water. The 15 sailors ended their letter with a bitter warning which must have made the Navy Department shudder:

"We, the mess attendants of the *Philadelphia*, are not merely stating these

facts because of our own plight. In doing so, we sincerely hope to discourage any other colored boys from joining the Navy and make the same mistake we did.

"All they would become is sea-going bell hops, chambermaids and dishwashers.

"We take it upon ourselves to write this letter, regardless of any action the Naval authorities may take or whatever the consequences may be.

"We only know that it could not possibly surpass the mental cruelty inflicted upon us on this ship."

The Navy immediately arrested all the signers and threw two of them, Shannon Goodwin and Byron Johnson, into prison for a court-martial. Meanwhile a defense movement sprang up, supported by the NAACP, the SWP-supported Workers Relief & WPA Union, and predominantly black labor organizations such as the Building Service Employees. Significantly, solidarity letters from several other ships were sent to FDR and the Secretary of the Navy, corroborating charges of discrimination. But the government stood by its racist policy. And black protest against Jim Crow in the armed forces steadily mounted:

• In August 1941, black draftee Ned

Turman witnessed white military police severely beat another black soldier on a bus returning to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. When Turman demanded medical attention for the victim, an MP sergeant coldly refused. The enraged private pulled out a revolver, vowing to "break up you MPs beating us colored soldiers!" When his gun was empty, Turman was shot dead. There followed a night of terror as all 5,000 blacks at Fort Bragg were rounded up and driven out of the camp by MPs armed with sawed-off shotguns. The SWP honored Turman's courageous act of anti-racist defiance:

"He did not have a hero's burial, but he joined the long list of fighters for Negro freedom and equality who were not afraid to risk everything, even their lives, in the struggle against oppression."

—*Militant*, 23 August 1941, reprinted in *Fighting Racism in World War II*

Can anyone imagine today's "peaceful, legal" ultrareformist SWP hailing this courageous act?

• That same month, the all-black 94th Battalion, assigned for maneuvers to Camp Robinson in Arkansas (not far from where *A Soldier's Story* was

filmed), was marching along the highway when several carloads of white state troopers pulled up and ordered the "niggers" off the road. The troopers shoved the black soldiers into a water-filled ditch; when two white lieutenants protested, they too were roughed up. Some of the black soldiers returned to base and requested ammunition for their guns for protection. Fearing for their lives, 60 black soldiers went AWOL; most eventually turned up at their home base of Fort Custer, Michigan.

• In July 1944, a huge explosion at the Port Chicago ammunition depot in California killed 327 men, mostly black seamen, and wounded hundreds more. The remaining black sailors naturally were reluctant to continue loading ammo without adequate safety measures. The Navy responded by convicting 50 for "mutiny" after a kangaroo court "trial" with only 45 minutes deliberation. The "mutineers" got long prison terms and dishonorable discharges.

• In March 1945, 101 officers of the 477th Bomber Group at Freeman Field, Indiana refused to sign a statement agreeing to be segregated from their own officers club, which many had previously defiantly entered to challenge segregationist policies. They were arrested, but protests forced a dismissal of the charges.

Also in March 1945, a hundred or so black Women's Army Corps (WAC) members staged a sit-down strike at a hospital at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, complaining that they were restricted to kitchen chores while only white WACs were assigned technical duties. All but four were pressured into returning to work, and the four were court-martialed, sentenced to one year hard labor and drummed out of the army with dishonorable discharges. At this point the Communist Party, whose *Daily Worker* would soon be hailing the atom-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, declared (via black CP leader Benjamin Davis, Jr.):

"The U.S. general staff has on many occasions... proved that they deserve the full confidence of the Negro people.... We cannot temporarily stop the war until all questions of discrimination are ironed out."

—quoted in Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party*

Black Soldiers and the Civil Rights Movement

As in previous wars, the American ruling class was at first reluctant to use black soldiers in combat. The bourgeois

THE MILITANT

PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKING PEOPLE

Lynn Case First Legal Test Of Army Jim Crow

On Dec. 8, the United States Circuit Court of Appeals sitting in New York City, will hear the Winfred Lynn case. Arthur Garfield Hays, attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union, will argue the case and if necessary will carry it to the U. S. Supreme Court.

The Lynn case originated in June 1942 when Winfred Lynn, Negro worker of Jamaica, L. I., notified his draft board "that I am ready to serve in any unit of the armed forces of my country which is not segregated by race. Unless I am assured that I can serve in a mixed regiment and that I will not be compelled to serve in a unit undemocratically selected as a Negro group, I will refuse to report for induction."

The Lynn case is thus a part of the struggle of the Negro people against the whole Jim Crow



Winfred Lynn

accepted make the the army ed to retu grounds methods the Draft The N the Ad People hi Jim Crow

Negro Soldiers Killed In Jersey, Arkansas, Texas

Army Jim Crow Responsible for New Wave Of Violence That Takes Lives of 4 Negroes

By ALBERT PARKER A new wave of violence has broken out against Negro sol-

diers a Negro who was ordered of firing to get to the press to face his trial. Some of the best newspapers reported it, but an eye-witness in the building told a "MILITANT" correspondent that the U. S. military authorities had "other" who the received the report. The Negro who had been arrested in the U. S. Army was found dead. The press all reported of these cases.

Unions Must Come To Defense Of Negro People

An Editorial

The tragic clashes in Detroit threaten not only the lives and welfare of the Negro people but also the interests of the labor movement.

The CIO unions from the very first have preached and practiced the fraternal solidarity of all workers, regardless of color, race, sex,

The Ku Klux Klan and similar groups use League labor or read the Citizens United Lynn 25th Str to public por and

WELCOME HOME BOYS FREEPORT, N.Y. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Lynch Law In Freeport



DEFEND The NEGRO SAILORS U.S.S. PHILADELPHIA



1948: Black vets return to fight the war at home: "Fox-Hole to Slum... We Want Apartments."

sie's fears were obvious: as an SWP resolution stated, "no Negro trained to handle a gun would peacefully go back to the old life of discrimination, segregation, disfranchisement and insult, after training in an army where he was treated as an equal with white soldiers" (*Fourth International*, June 1943). But the pressure of manpower requirements, together with protests from black organizations, eventually forced a reversal of policy. In 1942 the Army Air Corps, Marines, Navy and Coast Guard opened their ranks to blacks, and in late 1944 black units began to get combat assignments, notably the 92nd Infantry Division in Italy and the 93rd Division in the Pacific.

All-black flying units were also formed, notably the 99th Pursuit Squadron and the 332nd Fighter Group which participated in campaigns in Italy, France, Germany and the Balkans, earning the Distinguished Unit Citation (Alan M. Osur, *Blacks in the Army Air Forces During World War II* [1977]). The desperate Battle of the Bulge in the winter of 1944-45 caused a severe shortage of infantry replacements and a breakdown of strict segregation, as General Eisenhower reluctantly accepted black volunteers to replace losses in white companies. By August 1945 over one million blacks had served in the armed forces, representing 9 percent of all draftees.

The experience of World War II opened the floodgates of black demands for equality, first of all in the military. President Truman finally issued the order for desegregation of the armed forces in 1948, but the process was not completed until 1954. When Texas

Senator and future U.S. president Lyndon Johnson questioned the desegregation move in 1949, Truman's secretary of defense replied that "the practice of segregation is damaging to our country's reputation," and "its practice reduces the efficiency of our military strength." This view was reinforced by an incident during the Korean War, in July 1950, when the all-black 24th Infantry Regiment fled in the face of attack. According to Joseph Goulden's *Korea—The Untold Story of the War* (1982), the prevalent view in the unit was: "Why should we get our asses shot off fighting for a bunch of people who don't give a damn about us as human beings?" Goulden concludes that the experience "pointed up the absurdity of a segregated army and hastened the integration of black troops into units where they were treated the same as other soldiers."

The hundreds of thousands of black soldiers who went through World War II and the Korean War left the service determined to break down Jim Crow barriers. Many who later played a prominent role in the civil rights movement were also inspired by the independence struggles in black Africa. A striking example was Robert F. Williams, who left the newly integrated Marine Corps in 1955. "When I got out of the Marine Corps, I knew I wanted to go home and join the NAACP. In the Marines I had got a taste of discrimination and had some run-ins that got me into the guardhouse," Williams later wrote in his book *Negroes with Guns* (1962). Leading the local NAACP in Monroe, North Carolina during the integration struggles of the late '50s,

Williams played a key role by championing black armed self-defense against Klan and police terror.

A liberating social revolution next door in Cuba also had a great effect on black struggle in the U.S. (Williams took refuge in Havana in 1961 in the face of a massive police manhunt), as did the determined fight of the Vietnamese against American imperialism. Muhammad Ali struck a popular chord when he remarked, "No Viet Cong ever called me nigger." And many returning black Viet vets, like Geronimo Pratt, were attracted to the Black Panther Party in the hopes of achieving black liberation through revolutionary struggle at home. But the Panthers were caught in the nationalist trap, with nothing to offer but heroic gestures and breakfast programs while the cops and feds imprisoned and murdered any Panther leader they couldn't buy off.

The Vietnamese Revolution dealt a historic defeat to U.S. imperialism, consummated by the fall (liberation) of Saigon in 1975. But it was the 1968 Tet Offensive that broke the morale of the American army, at the same time that Northern ghettos were burning over cop terror. In response to the assassination of Martin Luther King, there were numerous black protests in the U.S. armed forces. And a couple of months later, 150 black GIs at Fort Hood, Texas refused to leave base for "riot control" duty against antiwar protesters at the Democratic Party convention in Chicago. Pretty soon black soldiers from Germany to Vietnam were giving the "black power" salute.

Perhaps the most spectacular black



Militant Robert F. Williams organized black self-defense against KKK.

protests in the armed forces during the Vietnam War came in October-November 1972. Pent-up frustration over racist attacks exploded aboard the aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk* as it headed for North Vietnam from the Philippines: 21 black sailors charged with "rioting" were flown to the brig at San Diego. And a few days later over 300 sailors, mostly blacks, staged a sit-down on the USS *Constellation* while on a training exercise off the coast of

on wage slavery to produce their profits. Yet by the 1960s, black soldiers—who suffered a disproportionate number of casualties in Vietnam—had become the Pentagon's front-line cannon fodder (see "Blacks Hated the Vietnam War," *WV* No. 372, 8 February). This was hardly a deliberate choice by the U.S. imperialists, who know well that a heavily minority army cannot be relied upon for their Third World adventures. Even the 1983 Grenada invasion, which

from state repression, the SL opposed the petty-bourgeois "draft resistance strategy" and counterposed the program of revolutionary antiwar and socialist education in the armed forces. And as the reformists followed the liberals in the call to "bring our boys home," the SL forthrightly proclaimed: Victory to the Vietnamese Revolution!

Today, as the warmongers in the White House and Pentagon move toward new imperialist adventures in Central America and ultimately toward world war against the Soviet Union, the American ruling class is still haunted by the "Vietnam syndrome"—the result of the heroic victory of the Vietnamese social revolution over the mightiest and most savage imperial power in history. As Reagan salutes Nazi SS graves in Bitburg and they firebomb a working-class black neighborhood in Philadelphia, they are mobilizing ideologically against the struggles of the oppressed abroad and at home. And the state of the U.S. army, comprised disproportionately of discontented blacks seeking to escape unemployment, has become a concern of the first order for the bosses.

The autobiographical novel *Black Boy* by Richard Wright was such a scathing indictment of racist America that it was banned from military bases during World War II. In his book, Wright describes how his aging grandfather "sat his days out in his room where his Civil War rifle stood loaded in a corner, where his blue uniform of the Union Army lay neatly folded." Wright continues:

"It was from Granny's conversations, year after year, that the meager details of Grandpa's life came to me. When the Civil War broke out, he ran off from his master and groped his way through the Confederate lines to the North. He darkly boasted of having killed "mo'n mah fair share of them damn rebels" while enroute to enlist in the Union Army. Militantly resentful of slavery, he joined the Union Army to kill southern whites; he waded in icy streams; slept in mud; suffered, fought ... Mustered out, he returned to the South and, during elections, guarded ballot boxes with his army rifle so that Negroes could vote. But when the Negro had been driven from political power, his spirit had been crushed. He was convinced that the war had not really ended, that it would start again."

In the Civil War, black people in arms broke the chains of chattel slavery. But the promise of social equality remains unfulfilled. Richard Wright's grandfather was right: it's time to finish the Civil War, to complete it with proletarian revolution, led by a multiracial vanguard, that goes all the way. ■



Guardian



Sailors from USS *Constellation* protest Navy racism during Vietnam War (above). GIs commemorate Martin Luther King's birthday in Long Binh, Vietnam, 1971 (left).

California, protesting racist treatment and defending six black sailors who had been singled out for discriminatory discharge. When the carrier arrived in port, 122 black sailors and eight white seamen staged a sitdown on the docks, raising clenched fists and refusing to reboard ship.

From colonial times up through the end of formal Jim Crow segregation, the capitalist rulers of America had recourse to black troops only in case of dire necessity. The spectre of "Negroes with guns" stalked not only antebellum slaveholders, but also those who relied

was supposed to be a "walkover," led Marine Corps corporal Alfred Griffin to courageously refuse to fight against his black brothers.

The Spartacist League seeks to build a multiracial revolutionary workers party to fuse opposition to imperialist war and to racial oppression in the army with the proletarian class struggle. Counterposed to the "peace" crawls dominated by pro-Democratic Party social-patriotism and petty-bourgeois pacifism, the SL fought for labor political strikes against the Vietnam War. While defending draft resisters

Black Soldiers in WWII: U.S. Army's Racism in the Pacific

22 June 1985

Dear Editor,

Workers Vanguard's two-part series, "Black Soldiers in the Jim Crow Military" (*WV* No. 378, 3 May 1985 and *WV* No. 380, 31 May 1985) concentrated on the "war at home," the impact of blacks in uniform on racist American society. But reference should also be made to the black GIs' experience of racism and resistance in the Pacific theater during World War II, which foreshadowed the experience of black troops during the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

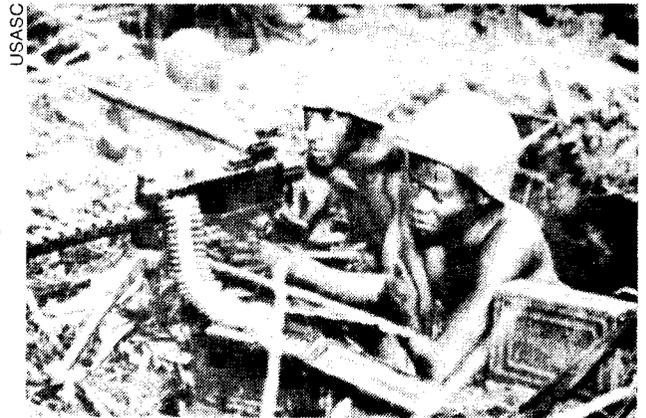
World War II was no war for "democracy" and in the Far East U.S. imperialism openly fought to turn the Pacific into an American lake and its islands into U.S. colonies. The colonial as well as imperialist nature of the war there exacerbated the racism endemic to America's Jim Crow military. From the white racist bastion of Australia to the brutalized Pacific island colonies, black GIs encountered fear, resentment and violent hatred from the region's old colonial masters and privileged whites and, most intensely, from their own white "comrades-in-arms."

British officials were particularly worried about the impact black troops—comparatively well-fed, well-paid and well-educated—would have on

their colonial "subjects." When the War Department proposed sending a black cavalry regiment to New Caledonia where combat troops were urgently needed, army commanders protested: "French control of local natives was delicate enough not to aggravate it further by the presence of additional

from white American soldiers. The most explosive issue was black socializing with Australian women, which was violently resented even more by white soldiers from the "good ole US of A" than white chauvinist Aussies. In Sydney most popular dance and music halls were declared off limits to black

Black soldiers in the Jim Crow U.S. Army, Solomon Islands.



Negro troops" (quoted in Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against The Sun—The American War With Japan* [1985]).

With its official "white Australia" laws and immigration policies, this former convicts' colony at first protested receiving black American troops. Given the manpower requirements of imperialist war, the Australian government begrudgingly acquiesced to the presence of black GIs. The then-Trotskyist U.S. Socialist Workers Party called attention to a cartoon which "cleverly summed up the situation":

"...showing a Negro soldier being greeted by an Australian official standing in front of a sign which reads, 'Colored persons not allowed in Australia.' The official is saying to the Negro soldier: 'Jolly glad to see you, old boy. Just ignore these bloody signs around here—for the duration.' The final payoff is that the Negro troops are not to be used for combat but only as work gangs to do the dirty work."

—*Militant*, 11 April 1942,
quoted in *Fighting Racism
in World War II* (1980)

In a society saturated with racism and bigotry, black troops stationed in Australia were subjected to constant harassment and violence, especially

GIs. Women who dared to attend black social functions were beaten up as they departed. In New South Wales, newly arrived American white troops attacked an army truck full of black GIs, forcing the blacks to dismount and provoking a race riot.

On Guam, repeated racial attacks by white Marines on black sailors from the local naval depot over socializing with native women in the town of Agana compelled the blacks to acquire arms like rifles and knives illegally. The Marines, of course, had access to weapons. On Christmas Eve, 1942, a white sailor shot a black sailor in Agana. The black sailors armed themselves, commandeered trucks and attempted to drive to Agana. They were stopped by military police, provoking a full-scale riot and shootout. Most of the blacks involved refused to testify before an all-white Navy Court of Inquiry and even a visit by NAACP executive secretary Walter White to solicit cooperation did not shake this black solidarity.

Comradely,
Deborah Maguire and
Reuben Samuels

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Struggle Against Imperialism

Blacks Hated the Vietnam War

On Veteran's Day last November, amid all the hoopla about the "new patriotism," another Vietnam veterans memorial statue was dedicated. (The first was dug into a depression, resembling a trench—appropriately for a war the American bourgeoisie wishes would disappear.) The new statue was designed to evoke images of the Iwo Jima memorial across the river by the Pentagon. And sure enough, it attracted hordes of warmongers like flies to shit. In front of cheering vets, imperialist chief Ronald Reagan asserted that there has been a "rethinking" on the war. Notorious liar "General Wastemoreland" told the men they "did the job," trying to forget that the U.S. *lost the war*. But as the *Washington Post* (18 November 1984) noted, "Amid an abundance of green fatigues and red, white and blue sentiments, there was hardly a black veteran's face to be seen." Blacks didn't come to wallow in the glorification of imperialist slaughter, because better than anyone besides the Vietnamese, they knew what that dirty war was all about. And when they came back, they were hit with the worst this country has to offer, from depression-level unemployment to cop/Klan race-terror.

From Vietnam in the '60s to Central America today, the imperialist planners have worried whether a heavily black army will fight and die for the cause of greater corporate profit margins and U.S. world hegemony. In the early years of the Vietnam War, blacks comprised 31 percent of the combat troops and 23 percent of the fatalities (compared to 11 percent of the U.S. population as a whole). The proportion of blacks in the army is virtually the same today. A 1982 Brookings Institution study delicately raised the question that many black youth and their parents ask themselves:

"Does the fact that blacks will probably die in grossly disproportionate numbers, at least initially, in defense of



Black GI in jungles of Vietnam. Sign reads, "U.S. Negro Armymen! You are committing the same ignominious crimes in South Vietnam that the KKK clique is perpetrating against your family at home."

national interests outweigh the fact that the armed forces provide many blacks with their own bridge from the 'permanent underclass' to a better life?"

—*Washington Post*,
12 December 1984

Judging by the Vietnam experience, the bosses have good reason to worry.

A whole wave of "coming home" books and movies have come out in recent years in an attempt to give the Vietnam vets a pat on the back as part of the Reaganite effort to erase the "Vietnam syndrome" and prepare for the next imperialist adventure. One book, *Bloods* (New York: Random House, 1984), by Wallace Terry, a black journalist who was *Time* magazine's deputy bureau chief in Saigon in 1967-69, claims to pay a "special debt" to the blacks who fought in Vietnam by retelling the oral accounts of 20 black vets. Outrageously, Terry tries to duck the issue of the war, even noting that in

1967 he wrote in *Time* that "most black soldiers in Vietnam supported the war effort." He was rewarded for that cynical propaganda by a personal meeting with LBJ at the White House. Nevertheless, the feelings of many black soldiers come through in the accounts in *Bloods*. Specialist 4 Charles Strong recounts:

"I made a promise in 'Nam that I would never risk my life or limb to protect anybody else's property. I will protect my own. So this country is not going to tell me to go out again to stop the spread of communism.... I don't walk around blind anymore. If another war breaks out and they want me to go, I'd rather die. I'll fight anyone here in America. But if they come and get me to send to some other country, I'm going to have my gun ready for them."

Vietnam was America's dirtiest colonial war. U.S. forces and their Vietnamese puppets killed, maimed and tortured millions of Indochinese men, women and children before they were

driven out in bloody and ignominious defeat in 1975. The vets' stories are brutal, and almost to a man—even the officers—they reflect on the fact that blacks were used and abused in the military, and got second-rate treatment as vets. The black soldier in Vietnam got shafted. He got the dirtiest front line jobs while cushy positions in the rear were generally reserved for whites. Especially in the early years of the war, before the draft brought more whites into combat, blacks suffered a disproportionate number of casualties and deaths.

Racism and prejudice ran rampant, particularly in the rear areas. Confederate flags were everywhere and there were even cross-burnings. On occasion, as Staff Sergeant Don Browne noted, black soldiers would fight back:

"A few days after the assassination [of Martin Luther King], some of the white guys got a little sick and tired of seeing Dr. King's picture on the TV screen. Like a memorial. It really got to one guy. He said, 'I wish they'd take that nigger's picture off.' He was a fool to begin with, because there were three black guys sitting in the living room when he said it. And we commenced to give him a lesson in when to use that word and when you should not use that word. A physical lesson."

In another incident, Specialist 4 Richard Ford reported that when some black troops came out of the field and saw a Confederate flag flying over the MP barracks in Nha Trang they announced, "Y'all the real enemy. We stayin' here," and ripped the place apart, overturning bunks, trashing stereos. But it was risky to stand up for your dignity; blacks who got "uppity" in base camp would often get sent back into the field.

A big reason that the U.S. Army lost on the battlefields of Vietnam was that the troops saw *no reason* to fight and die, and that was doubly true for the black soldier. One black vet, First Lieutenant Archie "Joe" Biggers, contrasted his own position with that of the "enemy":

"The enemy would do anything to win. You had to respect that. They believed in a cause. They had the support of the people. That's the key that we Americans don't understand yet."

The turning point came with the 1968 Tet offensive, when the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese launched a full-scale offensive all across the south. It suddenly became clear to the American bourgeoisie that there was no "light at the end of the tunnel." Short of nuking the whole country—prevented by fear of what the Soviet Union's reaction would be—the glory boys of the imperialist war machine had no choice but to

negotiate the terms of withdrawal. Draftees and enlisted men may have gone to 'Nam naive and willing to fight, but they generally came out disillusioned, opposed to the war, burned, and often destroyed as human beings. Toward the end there was not just indiscipline but outright mutiny in the army:

"According to Congressional data, US army convictions for 'mutiny and other acts involving wilful refusal' in Vietnam rose from 82 in 1968 to 117 in 1969 and 131 in 1970....

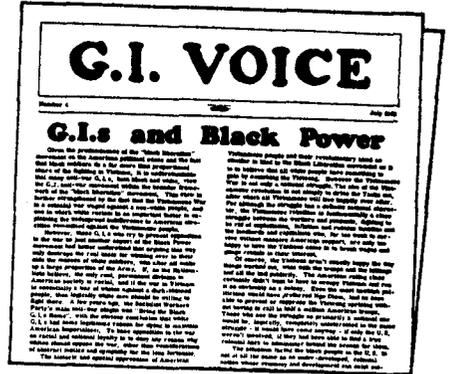
"From 1969 Vietnam brought a grim new word in the military lexicon—'fragging': in plain English, murder. The term fragging derived from the use of a fragmentation weapon, usually a hand-grenade, as the surest way of dispatching an unpopular officer. Between 1969 and 1971, according to Congressional data, the total number of 'fragging incidents'—including actual attempts at murder and intimidation—was 730, and eighty-three officers were killed this way. But these figures do not include assaults on officers with other weapons—rifles or knives—and by one official estimate there was sufficient evidence in only ten percent of suspected 'fraggings' to warrant investigation. The ratio of violence against officers in Vietnam was believed to be almost fifteen times as great as the grim trench-warfare of World War I."

—Michael Maclear, *The Ten Thousand Day War* (1981)

"Fragging" was not a political protest, though the large number of incidents certainly shows vast demoralization of the troops and hatred for the war. The problem was the absence of revolutionary political organization inside the army. With its line of moral protest draft resistance ("we won't go"), the petty-bourgeois antiwar movement voluntarily isolated itself from potentially the most explosive antiwar "con-



Black antiwar protesters at 1967 march in New York.



July 1969 issue of antiwar GI paper initiated by Spartacist supporters in the army.

stituency": working-class, and particularly black, soldiers. In a leaflet mass-distributed at a 1967 antiwar march, the Spartacist League wrote:

"You WILL Go"

"Far from resisting the war, the voluntary purging of radicals from the army strengthens the ideological purity and political reliability of the army.... The Americans who suffer most from the war are the soldiers in Vietnam, and as the war grows longer and bloodier, discontent among G.I.s and its effect on prosecuting the war could be very great indeed."

—"From Protest to Power"
(21 October 1967)

While "peaceniks" holed up in the communes and campuses, preaching holier-than-thou moralism and pandering to spoiled college kids eager to preserve their class privileged 2-S deferments and avoid the harshness of army life, Marxists sought to bring about class polarization in the army, setting the proletarian ranks (and even sympathetic officers) against the top brass and their political bosses—the ultimate war criminals. As the Russian revolutionary and founder of the Soviet Red Army, Leon Trotsky, wrote, "an insurrection is, in essence, not so much a struggle against the army as a struggle for the army" (Trotsky, 1905).

Bringing the War Home

From the beginning, black America was overwhelmingly against the racist war which took their sons and brothers off to die in the jungles of Indochina. Wallace Terry to the contrary, black soldiers knew that this wasn't the black man's war. When world heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali refused the draft in 1966, blacks throughout the country hailed his statement that "No Viet Cong ever called me nigger." And the racist Georgia state legislature refused to seat civil rights leader Julian Bond, a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC),

citing SNCC's opposition to the Vietnam War. Even relative moderates like Martin Luther King were forced to speak out against the war in order to maintain credibility among the black masses. Vietnam played a major role in radicalizing young black militants. At the same time that SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael was calling for "black power" in 1966, he denounced the "illegal and immoral war." And when King, the NAACP's Roy Wilkins and the Urban League's Whitney Young pleaded with SNCC to call off an antiwar protest outside the wedding of LBJ's daughter, SNCC denounced the establishment black leaders as messengers for the White House.

Black veterans returning from Vietnam were particularly drawn to the Black Panther Party, which campaigned for black self-defense against racist victimization and cop terror. Private First Class Reginald "Malik" Edwards explained:

"I had left one war and came back and got into another one. Most of the Panthers then were veterans.... We had already fought for the white man in Vietnam. It was clearly his war....

"So I went to the Panther office in D.C. and joined. I felt the party was the only organization that was fighting the system.

"I liked their independence. The fact that they had no fear of the police. Talking about self-determination. Trying to make Malcolm's message reality. This was the first time black people had stood up to the state since Nat Turner. I mean armed. It was obvious they wasn't gonna give us anything unless we stood up and were willing to die. They obviously didn't care anything about us, 'cause they had killed King."

The Panthers became the vanguard of

Malcolm X: Vietnam and the War At Home

Malcolm X struck a chord throughout black America when he told civil rights workers from Mississippi visiting Harlem in 1964:

"Imagine that—a country that's supposed to be a democracy, supposed to be for freedom and all that kind of stuff, when they want to draft you and put you in the army and send you to Saigon to fight for them—and then you've got to turn around and all night long discuss how you're going to just get a right to register and vote without being murdered. Why, that's the most hypocritical government since the world began!"

—*Malcolm X Speaks*, edited by George Breitman



Foreign Languages Press

Vietnamese working masses' heroic struggle against U.S. imperialism was inspiration to black struggle at home.

black liberation in this period because they broke from the liberal preachers' dependence on the Democratic Party and organized militant black action. Geronimo Pratt was one of those vets who joined the Black Panthers. In Vietnam Pratt was wounded three times, received two purple hearts, two bronze stars for valor, one silver star, a soldier's medal, an army commendation medal, three combat infantry badges and master paratrooper's wings. And today he is fighting for his freedom after 14 years in jail on a frame-up murder charge growing out of the FBI's COINTELPRO campaign to disrupt the Panthers and all radical black organizations.

Black America hated the Vietnam War. The war radicalized ghetto youth. Returning black veterans joined the most revolutionary-sounding black organization they could find. And the Northern ghettos were burning down as the black masses responded to cop terror, poverty and the murder of their leaders (King, Malcolm, prominent Panthers). Meanwhile hundreds of thousands of students were marching against the war, driving army recruiters off campus, even being shot down by the National Guard at Kent State. And yet the "antiwar movement" and the "black movement" remained separate. The antiwar movement never mobilized the masses of blacks against the racist imperialist war. The separate protests died out rather than flowing together in a revolutionary conflagration. Why?

It was the crisis of revolutionary leadership in the flesh. The New Left and reformist fakers glorified separate sectoralist struggles—students, blacks, women, workers. The "official" antiwar

movement locked up in the popular-front coalition led by the reformist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) made it a virtue to refuse to address black oppression, stressing the need for a "single-issue" focus on the war! (The SWP's "contribution" to black liberation was the call to "bring our boys [the imperialist army] home and send them to Mississippi.") The more experienced pop-fronters of the Communist Party (CP) called for a "multi-issue" approach in order to attract different "constituencies." But their message to black people, after calling on them to vote Democratic for Lyndon Johnson against the "new fascist threat" represented by Goldwater, was to pressure LBJ to turn the "Great Society" hoax into reality! None of this had any appeal to ghetto blacks, who were fighting to *survive* in the face of war, poverty and repression.

The endless "peace" crawls were nothing more than a giant postcard to your Congressman, a walking ad in the *New York Times*, a pressure tactic aimed at shifting administration policy. But the impoverished black masses would never be attracted by such reformist tactics. *To mobilize the ghetto requires a struggle for power*, a fight against black oppression and class exploitation at home as well as imperialist war abroad. The Black Panthers, meanwhile, were caught in the nationalist trap, with nothing to offer but heroic gestures as the cops and feds murdered some of their leaders (and bought off the rest). The Spartacist League called for labor strikes against the war, for an "antiwar Friday," to mobilize the working class in *action*, just as we have fought for the unions to defend busing and for labor/black action to stop racist

Klan terror. In contrast to the social-patriots of the SWP and CP, we raised slogans of revolutionary proletarian internationalism: Turn the guns the other way! Victory to the Vietnamese Revolution! All Indochina must go Communist!

As the Vietnam War drew to an end, the prospects of working-class action were not far off. The same National Guard units which murdered students at Kent State were used to put down a Teamsters strike in Ohio in 1970. But to lead the struggles of the oppressed required a vanguard party of the proletariat. As we said in our leaflet, "From Protest to Power": "With the widespread discontent over the war, the rising militancy and restiveness in the labor movement, and the explosiveness of the black ghettos, the prospect for initiating such a party is better now than at any time in the last twenty years." The antiwar movement could stop the warmongers, we said, only if the White House was more afraid of it than of the victory of the Vietnamese Revolution.

At the height of the antiwar movement, a famous joke depicted Pat Nixon looking out the White House windows and watching an antiwar demonstration drawing near. "Call out the 82nd Airborne," says President Nixon. "But dear," replies his wife, "it is the 82nd Airborne." Open defiance was breaking out inside the army—at Fort Hood, for instance, 43 black soldiers refused to go to Chicago for the August 1968 Democratic convention to be used against the antiwar demonstrators outside the convention. *Bloods* recounts the story of another black soldier at Fort Carson who also refused to go to Chicago: "I told them I'm not going there holding no weapon in front of my brothers and sisters," said Specialist 4 Hayward Kirkland.

At Fort Sam Houston (Texas) black GIs put out a pamphlet containing statements and a poem supporting "Black Power" and opposing the Vietnam War. At Camp Pendleton (California) black Marines organized a group based on the Black Panthers' Ten Point Program. Throughout all branches of the service, black soldiers inspired by the civil rights movement and the Panthers organized "Black Power" groups and militant protests against racist discrimination. Often overlapping with this Black Power movement in the armed forces were integrated groups of GIs which published antiwar newsletters. Even in Vietnam, black GIs staged antiwar protests, like the reported demonstration at the U.S. base at Qui

letter reprinted from *Workers Vanguard* No. 376, 5 April 1985

Remember Jackson State

Atlanta, GA
16 February

Editor, *Workers Vanguard*:

Unfortunately, in the article "Blacks Hated the Vietnam War," *Workers Vanguard* left out some of the atrocities committed against black people during the late '60s and early '70s (which were fairly thoroughly covered up by the media): "...hundreds of thousands of students were marching against the war, driving army recruiters off campus, even being shot down by the National Guard at Kent State." While the murders at Kent State are appropriately mentioned, we should remember that murders and attempted murders of blacks on black campuses were all too common. At Texas Southern University, May 16, 1967, police fired several thousand rounds into the dorms; at South Carolina State College in Orangeburg, February 7, 1968, 33 students were shot with three dead at the hands of state troopers backed by the National Guard. In this regard, within ten days of the Kent State murders, there was a similar event at Jackson State College in Mississippi. Kirkpatrick Sale in the book *SDS* says the following: "On May 14, white police and state patrolmen in the city of Jackson, Mississippi opened fire on an unarmed and unsuspecting crowd of black students at Jackson State College, killing two and injuring twelve. Another wanton murder by officials of the state, but this time, no



LNS
1970: Dorm at Jackson State riddled by cop bullets.

doubt because the students were black, the country was more subdued in its reaction: *The New York Times*, which had given a four-column headline and fifty-one inches of copy to the Kent State killings, gave this story a one-column headline and six inches; the students, who had been outraged at Kent State, mounted protests this time at only some fifty-three campuses, most of them black" (p. 638).

Comradely,
Joe Vetter

P.S. To my knowledge, the only GI ever successfully court-martialed for a fragging was black and then he had to be brought to California for trial.

Nhon on 30 July 1969 by over a hundred black soldiers who battled police and marched on the local airport demanding an end to U.S. aggression in Vietnam.

Today as the U.S. imperialists plan their new adventures in Central America and elsewhere, they are haunted by the "Vietnam syndrome." Even the Grenada walkover brought forth a heroic refusal to fight from inside the Marine Corps, from black corporal Alfred Griffin. What will be the result of a bloody intervention in Nicaragua, worried Pentagon planners ask. Basing himself on the experience of the 1905 Russian Revolution, Trotsky wrote:

"Only when the soldiers become convinced that the people have come out into the streets for a life-and-death struggle—not to demonstrate against the government but to overthrow it—does it become psychologically possible for them to 'cross over to the side of the people'."

—Trotsky, 1905

For the working class, *Vietnam was a victory!* Forward to proletarian revolution! What's needed is a fight not to change the "priorities" of U.S. imperialism, but to overthrow the murderous capitalist system which has brought death and destruction to the masses from Hanoi to Watts. ■

War Drive Means Racist Terror at Home



UPI



Magubane/Gamma-Liaison

Workers revolution will avenge proletarian martyrs! Racist bombing of Philly MOVE (left), signature of Reagan years. South African militants at funeral procession (right) in defiance of Botha regime, August 1985.

U.S./South Africa:

“Free World” Butchers

On September 23, the Spartacist League held a forum at Howard University in Washington, D.C. The speaker was SL Central Committee member Ed Kartsen, who was the party's candidate for Manhattan borough president last year. The forum was a significant political event at Howard, attracting students from a broad political spectrum.

Addressing the relationship between South African apartheid and U.S. imperialism, comrade Kartsen exposed the Democratic Party's role in the division of labor with Reagan in blocking militant class and social struggles. Kartsen explained that the Democrats share Reagan's program on all essentials of anti-Communist warmongering abroad and repression at home. The capitalist rulers require the services of Democratic front men, like the black mayors of most of America's major cities, to carry out the program of the more openly racist and labor-hating Reaganites. To keep the angry inner-city masses in line and to wrest from all the working people the sacrifices neces-

Howard University Forum

sary for new wars of imperialist aggression, the rulers need some “black elected officials” and have uses even for some who posture as more “independent” from the racist system, like black demagogue Louis Farrakhan.

It was this insistence which caused sparks to fly at the Howard forum. When comrade Kartsen exposed Farrakhan's “self-reliance” schemes as cynical and reactionary, one Farrakhan supporter stormed out of the room saying, “You can't say that about the brother!” Another drifted out after him.

A lively discussion period followed the presentation, exploring the need for a revolutionary party to lead the struggles of South Africa's oppressed masses against racist capitalism and for working-class power. Equally, the discussion concerned the Spartacist League's strategy of revolutionary in-

tegrationism as the key to an effective fight against racist terror and for socialist revolution in the U.S.

Young Spartacus is pleased to publish here comrade Kartsen's presentation along with some of his remarks from the discussion period and summary. All of this material has been edited and condensed for publication.

Ed Kartsen: I'm going to start off with a basic premise. There's something called U.S. imperialism, which right now is an organized effort on the part of the Reagan administration to terrorize the world. And U.S. imperialist terror internationally is accompanied by anti-communist, racist terror domestically. Reagan is in the business of rolling back every gain that's been won through social struggle in this country. That is, every gain won by the workers movement in the '30s and after that, every gain won through the civil rights movement, even the Civil War and the American Revolution.

This is a broad statement, strongly supported by political events in this

country during the last few years. For example, the massacre of MOVE in Philadelphia—eleven people were burned to death, including five small children. The MOVE massacre is reminiscent of the massacres going on in South Africa. Hundreds of blacks are being gunned down in the streets of Soweto, while here in Washington Caribbean students are being attacked like they're in Soweto.

From Libya to Nicaragua, from the Gulf of Sidra right off the coast of Libya to the Sea of Okhotsk in the Soviet Union, Reagan has planned *strikes of terror* which are pushing this world closer to the brink of World War III. The Republicans and Democrats are basically united in a domestic crackdown on the Bill of Rights to facilitate this war effort. And here I'm talking specifically about the drug crackdown. The black Democrats—like Wilson Goode, Philadelphia's Mayor of Murder—are pushing Reagan's program in the anti-drugs campaign. Internationally, anti-drug hysteria has been used as a cover for American forces to intervene in Bolivia, for U.S. police intervention in Mexico.

The Ku Klux Klan and Nazis are seeking to come together to exploit the political environment of Reaganism in this country. The KKK now gets away with prime-time cross-burnings on TV. The flag of the defeated Confederacy—the *flag of slavery*—is getting more and more public display; it appears in Army-Navy stores in the major cities, at public events. It flew at the 350th anniversary of Harvard University. Racist provocations are staged from Chicago this summer to the Mexican border, where hooded commandos round up immigrants at gunpoint. In Norfolk, Congress and the courts are rolling back busing for racial integration in the schools. The Klan simultaneously has



Workers Vanguard

Washington, D.C., 27 November 1982: We stopped the Klan! 5,000 join Spartacist-initiated Labor/Black Mobilization to stop terrorist KKK.

been staging cross-burnings in the Tidewater area.

The racist murders committed by South Africa's apartheid government are backed by Reagan's policy of "constructive engagement." South Africa, after all, is part of the "free world." It is a junior partner in racist terror and anti-communism. Reagan only complains when South Africa pulls the same war provocations against the so-called "front line countries" as the U.S. pulled against the North African country of Libya.

The primary target of U.S. imperialism is the rollback of the Russian Revolution. The Democrats are at one with the Republicans in this aim. In southern Africa, the policy of containing Russia means giving military support to Jonas Savimbi of UNITA against the Cuban- and Russian-supported government of Angola. Savimbi wants to turn all of southern Africa into a massive bantustan to enslave more of the continent to

apartheid exploitation. Angola would have lost its independence at the moment it defeated the colonialists if the USSR, Cuba and East Germany had not intervened with technical and military support to crush the South African invasion of Angola backed up by the bandit Jonas Savimbi.

South Africa's population is defiant, the country is in a prerevolutionary situation—it could easily explode in revolution—but a *revolutionary party* is lacking. The masses have been heroic, ready to put their lives on the line—that's been clear in every newspaper story. Their political leadership, however, is nationalist, not communist. The movement does not have at its head a communist *vanguard party*, capable of leading the working class to smash apartheid. South African unions have the power to deny the South African capitalists their superprofits. They can hit them at the most strategic and critical point. But the leadership subordinates the working-class movement to nationalism and divestment schemes. And divestment is a strategy that only weakens the potential power of the working class.

In South Africa, democratic freedoms can only be won and defended by the working class under revolutionary leadership. A strike campaign directed immediately at the abolition of the state of emergency would bring massive social force to bear. But the nationalists are politically *opposed* to working-class power. They want to get rid of the white capitalists, but their program is for a black capitalist system. We are for a black-centered workers government to transform society. Working-class leadership must unite all the oppressed ethnic groups in South Africa and all



Workers Vanguard

NYC, August 1985: Ed Kartsen (right) at labor anti-apartheid march. SL stands for international labor action against apartheid butchers, not pro-imperialist divestment schemes.

elements opposed to apartheid in an anti-capitalist struggle.

Anti-Communism Walks with Racist Terror

Here at home, black Democrats, along with white Democrats, sound more and more like Reagan. Anti-communism walks hand in hand with racist terror. Between Feinstein on the West Coast, the SF mayor who loves the Confederate flag, and Metzger, former "grand dragon" of the Klan, and Wilson Goode, the black mayor who burned eleven black people to death, the Democratic Party is trying to keep in step with Reaganism. They



William Campbell

Apartheid terrorists at Angolan border (left). Spartacists protest Angolan contra Jonas Savimbi, denounce U.S.-South Africa racist axis, New York, February 1986 (right).

push racist terror and anti-Soviet war provocations.

The MOVE massacre is a signature of the Reagan years. The KKK and Nazis are seeking to exploit the reactionary climate created by the anti-Soviet war drive. The fascist filth have to be stopped and they have to be stopped effectively. Where the Ku Klux Klan and Nazis are overbold in driving to exploit the Reagan years, they have to be confronted and *defeated*. The Confederate flag is a spearhead. Its existence is a racist provocation. It is a calling card of the Ku Klux Klan. Wherever the Dixie flag is displayed, Klansmen feel comfortable in escalating into open racist terror. *It's a flag that's a prelude to lynching.*

The black Democrats as represented by Jesse Jackson in particular are keeping up with the main line of the Democratic Party, which is: out-Reagan Reagan, out-right the right. And the drug witchhunt was designed specifically to be used as a popular

campaign amongst black people particularly, as a means for the Democrats to get on the bandwagon and out-Reagan Reagan. So every community group this summer, every Democratic Party-dominated community organization, had massive street rallies against crack, and Jesse Jackson came out with his bootlicking statement that drugs are worse than the Klan.

What the anti-drug witchhunt really is all about is it's Reagan's attack on the Bill of Rights. Reagan and the Democrats are getting ready for a Vietnam-style war in Central America. And as black people are gunned down by racist cops and lynched by fascist terrorists,



Workers Vanguard

Jesse Jackson is talking like Reagan in blackface. Reagan and his Democratic Party allies want to start a Vietnam War in southern Africa too. They want to support the bandit Savimbi and the South African regime against the independent government of a former Portuguese colony in Angola.

The contras of the world have to be defeated—the Angolan contra Savimbi, the Nicaraguan contras, U.S. contras like the KKK and Nazis. This country needs an authentic *workers party*: a party that will lead the American working class in mobilizing against these contras, a party that will lead the American working class in stopping fascist terror. This country needs a party whose platform is to finish the Civil War and establish a workers government. A government that will put workers in control of the means of production, that will end imperialist war provocations and imperialist war. A government that will organize the economy on the basis of a plan democratically decided by the

workers, instead of an economy driven by profit based on exploitation.

U.S. Liberals Capitulate to Domestic Apartheid

The liberals who want "divestment" refuse to recognize racism in this country, basically. The liberal left only pays attention to appealing to some nonexistent moral supremacy this country is supposed to have, through the strategy of the divestment movement. This strategy, simply stated, is the idea that American moral standards are superior to the moral standards of South Africa. They turn a blind eye to racist terror in this country, perpetrated by the people whom they are pressuring to set a moral standard for the rest of the world. So we have racist cop terror, mob terror, scab violence, Klansmen, Nazis—all running amok, directed and protected by the American capitalist class. Remember Greensboro, where federal agents and cops helped the Klan and Nazis, so they could kill leftist demonstrators.

The Reaganite rulers want to honor the Confederacy. They want to praise and honor reactionary butchers, like Jeane Kirkpatrick at Columbia University. They want to corrupt science and culture with "creationism"—that's supposed to be a moral standard superior to South Africa? Not for anybody with brains—but brainlessness is also part of Reagan's program. They want to enforce the teaching of creationism; they want the people of this country to become fanatical American mullahs who will "kill a commie for Christ." There's no superior moral authority held by the United States, which is the only country ever to use the atomic bomb, and against civilian populations—the ultimate war crime.

The liberal left refuses to see that *the main enemy is at home*; they capitulate to the imperialist war drive. Their refusal to fight against racist terror in this country is a capitulation to domestic apartheid. This country went through a bloody *Civil War* to destroy the slave system. Black and white soldiers fought hard to defeat the Confederates. Based on the anti-scientific doctrine of racial inferiority and on the notion of one day becoming slaveholders themselves, the Confederate soldiers fought very hard for slavery. Their legacy remains; the drum roll of the right-wing movement of today can be traced to the drum roll that led the Confederate armies, and today again it is associated with the Confederate flag.

A movement to roll back the right

is urgent, and it must be coupled with a campaign to reverse the capitalist takebacks. American workers have to come to understand the critical link between the war drive internationally and the capitalist attacks on the unions.

Farrakhan Allies with White Racists

Farrakhan's influence has represented a serious obstacle to combatting this rightward mobilization. It has to be remembered that *Farrakhan wanted Malcolm X dead*. Farrakhan's anti-Semitic tirades have won the praise of Klan Democrat Tom Metzger.

The most powerful black revolutionary force in America's history was armed black soldiers who fought heroically in the overthrow and military defeat of the slave system. Today, that revolutionary tradition must be carried on *in opposition* to Farrakhan's reactionary and utopian strategy of "black capitalism." The followers of Farrakhan are infected by the Reagan years, in fact they have been encouraged by the Reagan years. They hope the racist terror of the Klan and Nazis will drive black people into an American bantustan system which will make them susceptible to exploitation by black capitalists instead of white. By allying with the white racist terrorists, Farrakhan hopes to *deepen* racist divisions in this country. Farrakhan, like Savimbi in Africa, has allied himself with the forces of anti-communism and racism.

The Ku Klux Klan and Nazis must be *stopped*, not ignored. The mobilizing of the labor movement and the integrated neighborhoods can spike the KKK provocations. In Atlanta this summer an integrated community stopped the Klan from rallying in a section of Atlanta. Revolutionary leaders must fight to complete the Civil War by organizing actions that will stop the KKK and Nazi threat.

Anti-Drug Crusade: Regimenting the Workers

The current bipartisan anti-drug witchhunt attempts to place the blame for the disintegration of capitalism on the working class. The danger to workers from industrial chemicals is completely ignored by the anti-drug crusaders. In South Africa 177 miners died because toxic and explosive gases were released in the mine. It is the ruthless exploitation of the workers in the attempt to squeeze out further profits that is the cause of the major increase of industrial accidents and the general increase in the danger of

industrial work. The government is trying to place the blame for a rotting capitalist system on the working class. Workers are forced to undergo drug tests if they dare to raise a grievance against unsafe job conditions. Mass victimization of workers who show the least resistance to intensifying management pressure is becoming commonplace.

That's what the capitalist class wants to institute throughout this country. They want every worker to be terrorized into total submission to the war drive, to passively accept increasingly brutal exploitation. Both the Democrats and Republicans know they can't successfully conduct any war—against Nicaragua, Libya, Angola, Cuba and ultimately the Soviet Union—without the subjugation of the working class. Strike actions would detract from the imperialist war effort.

Racism, nationalism and anti-communism are the political weapons the labor traitors use in the workers' organizations to keep in step with the Reaganite political climate and the capitalist takebacks. But black and white workers united in concrete class-struggle actions against the legacy of slavery in this country would spike the capitalists' right-wing campaign.

Workers Revolution Must Disarm the World's Contras

I suspect that some of the people who walked out disagree with what I have to say. It would have been preferable if they had stayed and discussed the questions. There is a need for political dialogue, particularly against the illusions propagated by nationalism and also by the liberal left. *The American left is keeping up with the anti-Soviet war drive*. That's very important. This is why there are sharp disagreements

between us and people who follow Farrakhan or the divestment movement. They're trying to keep up with mainstream American politics. But mainstream American politics is following Reagan, so what they have to do is keep up with rapid rightward movement.

Internationally, the fight against racist capitalist repression is linked to the defense of the Soviet Union, the defense of the gains of the 1917 Russian Revolution. You can't fight for new social gains unless you are capable of defending gains that have already been won. The capitalist system is attempting to pump life into a dying system by imperialist war. It wants to enforce class peace at home, through anti-drug witchhunting, through union-busting and racist terror, while the rulers seek to provoke worldwide reactionary movement. And South Africa is part of that. South Africa is an important regional component of the world anti-communist drive.

Pacifism won't stop the war drive. Internationally the contras of the world must be disarmed by the armed working class. That's the only road that exists to peace. The policy of "peaceful coexistence" advocated by the Russian Stalinists propagates a dangerous illusion that some understanding between the Americans and Soviets can achieve peace and eliminate imperialist threats. But the U.S. is an imperialist country in decline, and in decline it becomes increasingly dangerous and violent rather than less. The Reaganites and the Democrats are determined to solve the problems of capitalism by exploiting more and more of the earth. But there's a problem with that. They have to run directly up against the Soviet state that stands in the way.

The architects of nuclear apocalypse



Workers Vanguard

Spartacists join united-front protest in D.C. over racist terror against South African black toilers.

are the main danger in this country. They have to be stopped by the social power of the working class fighting to finish the Civil War, fighting for international solidarity with workers of other countries against imperialism, to defend the gains of the Russian Revolution. Fighting to establish the international organization of the economy on the basis of human needs, socialized planning as opposed to profit. That's what we are struggling for.

Discussion: Black Nationalism Opposes Struggle

Jesse Jackson has had an effect in disorienting black people and inhibiting



Young Spartacus

Spartacist supporters join Howard student protest against racist DJ, "the Greaseman," February 1986.

them from finding a revolutionary road. Farrakhan talks a lot more militant and therefore has greater influence. But at the base of his ideology is channeling the black movement into a utopian and reactionary scheme. "Black capitalism" is not only reactionary but it's utopian because the racist rulers of this country will not allow black capitalism to develop in any way, shape or form.

Farrakhan thinks we should have no argument with the people who run the bantustans in South Africa. These people are basically just lackeys for the South African regime, but they exploit black people. They are nationalists who live comfortably off selling black labor to the racist apartheid regime. Farrakhan supports segregation in the U.S. where the politics of segregation is associated with everything reactionary. By pushing "black capitalism" and separatism, by his anti-Semitism and racist formulations, he allies himself with people like the Ku Klux Klan.

Look what Farrakhan himself said—he said that Hitler was a great leader. Farrakhan's influence is rather a depressing aspect of the black political

movement to this point: it indicates the backwardness that exists. It's also very pervasive and must be dealt with seriously. Even the claim that Hitler was a great man has to be dealt with seriously for black people. *Hitler was not a great man.* Even for the nationalist aspirations of the German people—the Third Reich was supposed to expand the national boundaries of Deutschland to all the world? That was driven back; Germany is now cut into pieces.

Farrakhan identifies with the reactionary nationalism of Hitler. Hitler was a reactionary; Hitlerism must be opposed. That means there must be mobilizations of the working class and black people to confront and destroy the KKK and Nazis. *That's not Farrakhan's program.* He is not for mobilizing the masses of black people to stop cross-burnings and the Klan! He feels that segregation is a good thing. That is why I mention his name, and why his is a dangerous ideology. Because it represents an *obstacle* to the effort to finish the Civil War and to fight those people who want to reinstitute slavery. Not slavery only of black people, but black people as the first scapegoats, because racism is the basis on which this country is built. The reactionaries want to reinstitute slave-labor conditions for the working class—black, white, people from Latin America, all races.

Mobilizing to stop the Klan and Nazis, who are anti-Semitic and racist killers, is key to revolutionary mobilization in this country. Whether someone is for or against that determines where they stand politically. The Spartacist League and unions from the Washington/Tidewater area and black residents mobilized to stop the Ku Klux Klan on November 27, 1982. Farrakhan was not in the vanguard of that movement; he was in the rearguard.

Summary: Farrakhanism vs. Communism

It's clear that the debate tonight has been between Farrakhanism and communism. Jesse Jackson is put forward as

a respectable black Democratic Party politician. But he's not really taken that seriously. Farrakhan is the glue that binds black students at this campus to Reagan's administration, to its major positions. This country is moving sharply to the right; Reaganism was in this room tonight, in the form of this debate on Farrakhan. What you saw here was a debate which most clearly characterizes the political spectrum that exists with regard to the black movement.

We want to lead the black and white workers in a movement that will finish the Civil War and establish a workers government here and internationally; Farrakhan supports the right-wing movement to divide black and white, suppress the workers movement and facilitate Reagan reaction, which means attacking democratic rights and laying the basis for this country to go to war. The Farrakhanites cannot stand to be exposed as lining up with the legacy of the Confederacy. But that is what they believe in. Black nationalism is associated with the spearhead of racism and segregation in this country.

I want to end by making a pitch for socialism. Exploitation of labor is what capitalism runs on. It's the gasoline that makes that engine run. The "magic of the marketplace"—that's what the Reaganites are pushing. And that's what Farrakhan is also pushing. He gets up at conferences and says, "Hey, buy black shampoo, check out the black-produced product we have here, you-all consumers can dig it." What is he doing? He's exploiting black labor. Who produced those goods—black labor. He wants to get in on the action: hey, the white man can exploit the hell out of the world and maybe blow it up, well how about the black man?

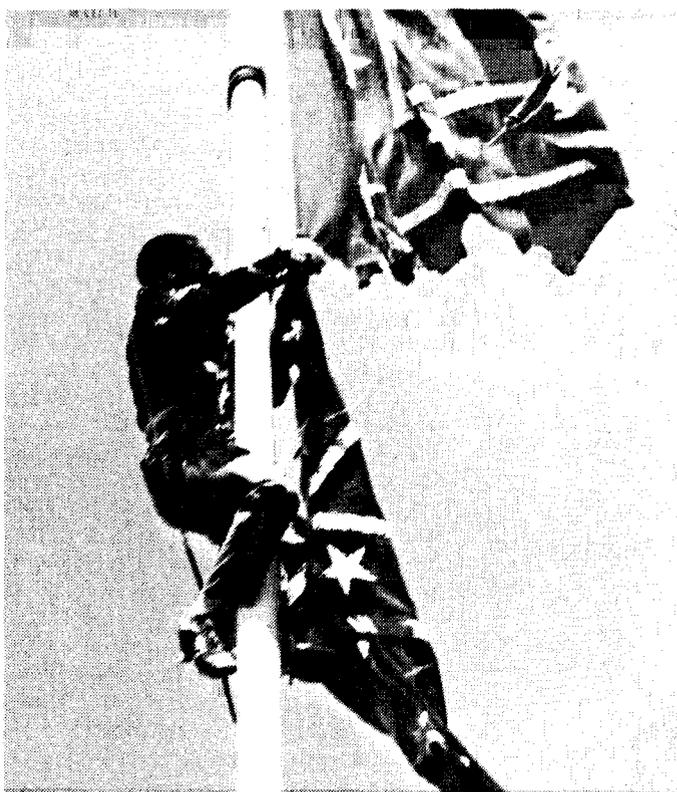
The magic of the marketplace? The United States is becoming more and more *de-industrialized*. It is degenerating, decaying. The future of this country is bleak because of the "magic of the marketplace"! The cause of this decline has to be laid clearly at the door of the

Fortune

Chenet/Newsweek



Farrakhan, the man who wanted Malcolm X dead, pushes segregation and capitalism. The bow tie isn't the only thing he shares with Reagan.



Workers Vanguard

Spartacist supporter in Union Army uniform rips down Confederate flag from SF Civic Center, April 1984.

“great capitalist architects,” the “super-industrialists” that Farrakhan wants to follow. Capitalism has run the industry of this country and other countries into the ground.

This country used to be the master of the world capitalist system, as Britain was before that. Japan with its more modern industry now dominates sections of the world market that the U.S. used to dominate. The capitalists want to blame the workers for America's industrial decline. And they want to take it out of the workers' hides. They attack the unions; they destroyed the air controllers union as a prerequisite for attacking all organizations of labor.

The imperialist war provocations are attempts by the capitalist class to export the domestic economic crisis to other countries. So government terror rules in Latin America, Africa, Asia; the U.S. supports governments like South Africa and Chile in order to extract from their workers increased profits to ensure that the American banks get their interest payments. Apartheid terror is used to maintain the system of exploitation. U.S. imperialism backs the South African regime as an ally to intensify the exploitation of the working people of southern Africa. To separate apartheid terror from the system of capitalist exploitation is like trying to separate H₂O from water. To separate the struggle to smash apartheid from the need to put the working class in power is like

trying to separate the ocean from the waves.

Build a Revolutionary Workers Party!

The crisis of human civilization must be resolved. The capitalists who run the world—except for those sections of the world which have been ripped out of its money-grabbing hands—are driving this planet toward destruction. *A leadership must be forged that will put the working class in power.* Only the working class in power can institute a rational, socialist plan for society that can rebuild this country and this planet on a new foundation. Socialist property and peace instead of imperialist war.

Science and culture will begin an explosive advance reminiscent of the Renaissance. Instead of racism and creationism, new generations will study evolution and cosmology. Instead of “Star Wars” and anti-homosexual bigotry—the peaceful exploration of space and a cure for AIDS. Instead of anti-drug hysteria, enforced with government repression—real job programs, full employment, free higher education. Instead of anti-abortion and anti-sex crusades—comprehensive sex education, 24-hour day care.

In order to spike racist reaction from South Africa to the U.S., a party must be built, committed to the revolutionary transformation of society. *Workers Vanguard* readers' circles can be a springboard for a political fight to roll back the right, reverse the capitalist takebacks and conduct effective confrontation to defeat Klan and Nazi terror. The American left is looking to pressure the labor misleadership instead of fighting to replace it. They ignore the KKK and Nazis or rely on the government to ban them, instead of mobilizing to stop them as the Spartacist League has.

While the “free world” butchers push closer to the brink of world war, fascist terror intensifies. The danger from the right can't be fought so long as pacifism and nationalism dominate the working class. Political education and political combat constitute the foundation on which a workers party can be built in this country. A party to combat the ideology of Farrakhan, to expose illusions that “peaceful coexistence” will result in a better world. To smash the fascists, who are the vanguard of the drive to reinstitute slavery and slave-labor conditions in this country. I would like you to think seriously about becoming politically active in this struggle. ■

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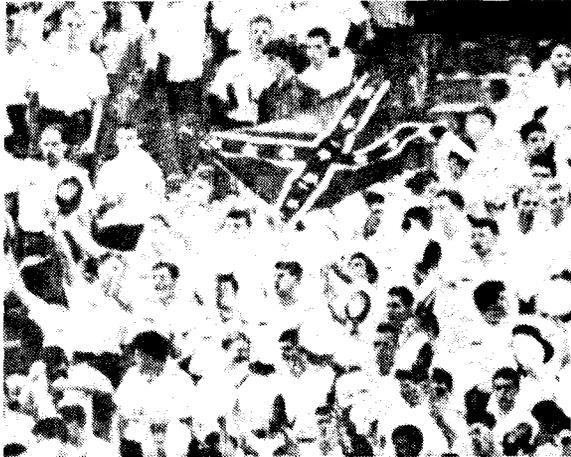
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KKK Terror at The Citadel



Spees/NY Times



UPI

Citadel students wave racist Confederate flag of slavery at football game. Kevin Nesmith (right), target of Klan-inspired terror.

Dressed in KKK-style white hoods and sheets, five white cadets burst into the room of a first-year black cadet, Kevin Nesmith, after midnight on October 23. Acting fully in the Confederate tradition of The Citadel, located in Charleston, South Carolina, one of two remaining state-supported antebellum military institutes in the South, the nightriders awakened the terrified black cadet by shouting racist obscenities and burning a paper cross. After a scuffle with Nesmith's roommate, who is a Filipino American, the five racist scum escaped into the darkness, leaving the hated symbol of KKK terror behind.

The Citadel's Dixie-loving brass and cadets initially tried to excuse this racist attack as nothing more than "hazing" (the brutal "initiation" rights imposed on first-year cadets) gone awry. But black Charleston took to the streets in anger to protest this act of Klan-inspired terror. Black community leaders together with Nesmith's mother Amelia and brother Larry led a march of some 500 to the gates of this fortress which revels in the racist heritage of the Confederacy. The marchers were demanding the immediate expulsion of Nesmith's assailants and the resignation of Citadel

president, Major General Grimsley. Although The Citadel's own rule book prescribes expulsion for this kind of conduct, Grimsley literally let the racists walk—"punishing" them with 195 hikes around the school's courtyard! When black members of the school band objected to playing "Dixie" (the vile Confederate anthem which is the school's fight song), and other black cadets planned a symbolic protest against the attack on Kevin Nesmith, they were threatened with discipline by the school administration.

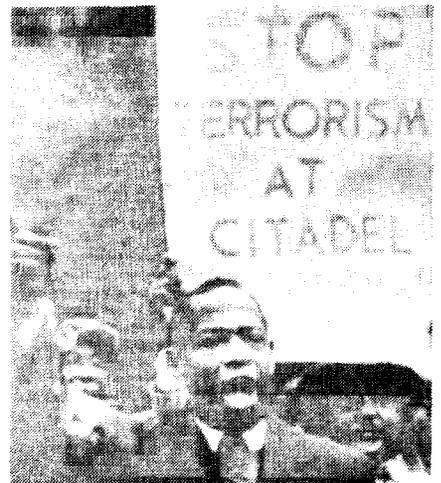
Kevin Nesmith resigned in disgust, saying "I feel that I have been made the victim while the villains remain." His older brother, one of the first black graduates of The Citadel, described the incident as "an act of terrorism" and resigned from the school's governing board. Kevin Nesmith now plans to file a civil rights lawsuit against this racist snakepit. As the executive director of the South Carolina NAACP noted, "If a group of five black students, wearing the berets of the Black Panthers and shouting 'honky' and 'cracker' had invaded the room of a white student, they would be doing the I-26 shuffle the next day, heading home" (*San Francis-*

co Chronicle, 28 November).

The Citadel is not just any military academy—its purpose is to train an elite cadre of officers to fight for the kind of society we'd have if the South had won the Civil War. Here the Confederate flag of chattel slavery is prominently flown and cadets wear the same Confederate gray uniforms worn by their predecessors. In 1861, as Citadel bigots brag to this day, cadets from the college fired the first "hostile shots" of the Civil War, aiming at a Navy vessel sent to reinforce the Northern troops at Fort Sumter. Some 200 Citadel alumni became ranking officers in the slaveholders' Confederate army. But in 1865, those "Dixie"-whistling racists were sent packing when Union troops headed by the 54th Massachusetts Colored Regiment entered Charleston singing "John Brown's Body" and shut down The Citadel! Its very existence today, reopened in 1883 following the defeat of Radical Reconstruction, is testimony to the urgent need to *finish the Civil War*.

The post-Reconstruction Citadel was exclusively for the training of white cadets in the racist traditions of the slavocracy. By the turn of the century, this legacy melded with the need to train officers for the Jim Crow forces of American imperialism. As General Grimsley put it, The Citadel gives a cadet the "inner strength to go out and take charge of his little piece of turf, wherever it is in the world" (*Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 3 November 1985). Once the training ground of slaveholders' sons, The Citadel today gears up its cadets to be bloodthirsty defenders of capitalist slavery.

The stench of the slave masters' legacy



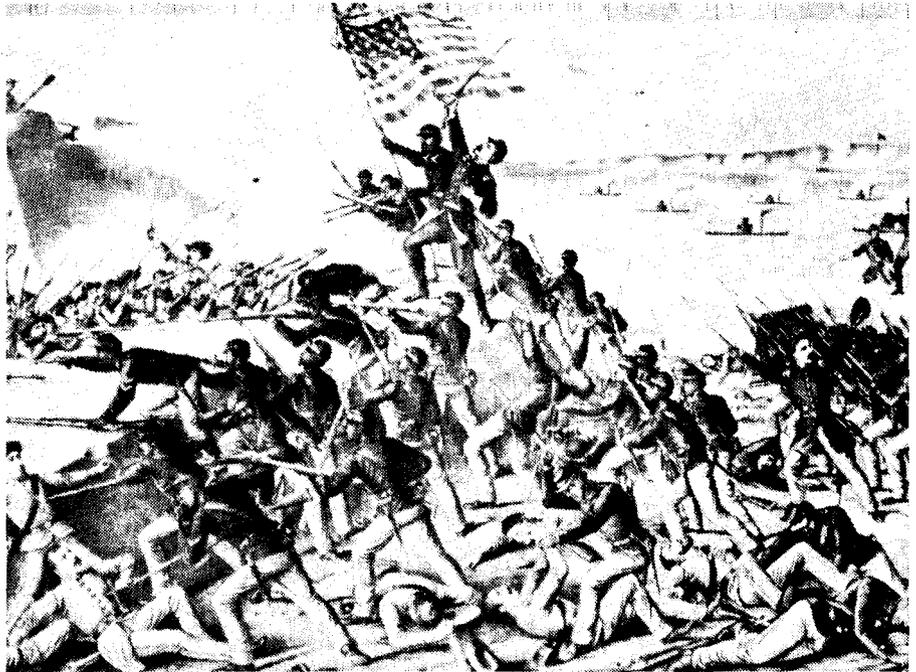
UPI

Charleston demonstration against racist attacks on black cadets.

imbues The Citadel's history—from Tullifinny Creek in 1864 to Grenada in 1983, and these contemporary "sons of the Confederacy" are proud of it. Every Friday afternoon, the American flag is lowered on the parade ground and both black and white cadets are forced to march to "Dixie." Referring to this disgusting racist pageant and the omnipresent Confederate flags, one black cadet remarked, "God, I hate them both. Hate. Despise. Loathe." (*New York Times*, 23 November).

The Citadel's method of training the future Lt. Calleys whose racist bloodlust targets blacks and all of the oppressed was captured in the movie and book, *Lords of Discipline*, by Citadel graduate Pat Conroy. Conroy describes a white fraternity at his alma mater which, like a Klan klavern, brutally tortures the first black cadet to enter the academy. Kevin Nesmith is the real life victim of The Citadel's racist terror—the likes of which has become increasingly frequent in this country, North as well as South.

At a recent school game, numerous Citadel alumni and cadets brandished brand new Confederate flags while blacks countered by raising a large American flag (*People* magazine, 15 December). However, the present-day "stars and stripes" is not the flag of a liberating Union army, but of bloody racist imperialism. It will take the red flag of proletarian revolution to smash the legacy of slavery and Klan terror which is perpetuated at The Citadel. Honor the glorious Massachusetts 54th! Shut down The Citadel for good! Finish the Civil War! ■



Library of Congress

**Finish the Civil War!
The 54th
Massachusetts
Colored
Regiment
(above).
Labor/Black
Mobilization
stopped the
Ku Klux Klan in
Washington, D.C.,
27 November
1982 (right).**



Washington Post

**In the Revolutionary Vanguard
of the Civil War**



**Harriet Tubman:
Fighter for Black Freedom**

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

"She looked musingly toward a nearby orchard, and she asked suddenly, 'Do you like apples?' On being assured that I did, she said, 'Did you ever plant any

19th century, her life directly reflects the issues of the time.

Although the hope for a complete liberation of black people was later defeated in the cowardly betrayal of Reconstruction, Tubman's "apple orchard"—freedom for the slave—was a tremendous historical advance. The abolition of slavery and the fight for full citizenship

**Women and
Revolution**



As a conductor on the Underground Railroad and a military strategist and spy during the Civil War, Harriet Tubman stood in the revolutionary insurrectionist wing of the abolitionist movement in the struggle against the Southern slavocracy. Like John Brown and Frederick Douglass, Tubman knew freedom for the slave would come only through blood and iron. Her life and work directly reflect the great issues of the time, as detailed in *Women and Revolution* No. 32, Winter 1986-87.

To order your copy (50¢) and to subscribe to *W&R* (four issues for \$2) write to: Spartacist Publishing Co., Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116.

Gun Control Kills Blacks!

Mobilize Labor and Minorities to Stop Racist Attacks!

Spartacist League Statement

DECEMBER 26—Last weekend the racist punks that roam the Howard Beach section of Queens went on a bloody rampage. A gang of a dozen punks, screaming racist epithets and wielding baseball bats and sticks, savagely beat three black men, killing 23-year-old construction worker Michael Griffith, driving him into the path of an oncoming car. Three hours earlier in neighboring Ozone Park another racist gang attacked two Hispanic youths. And only a half-hour after and one block away from the earlier assault in Howard Beach, two carloads of bat-wielding thugs beat up a white fireman after trying to run him over. Assaulted along with Michael Griffith was his stepfather and coworker Cedric Sandiford, who told *Newsday* (22 December): "It was like a lynch mob. Like something that would happen in the



Workers Vanguard Photos

Left: Spartacist League and New York Labor Black League protest Koch's racist killer cops. Above: SL demonstration against apartheid regime's execution of ANC militant Benjamin Moloise.

days of slavery."

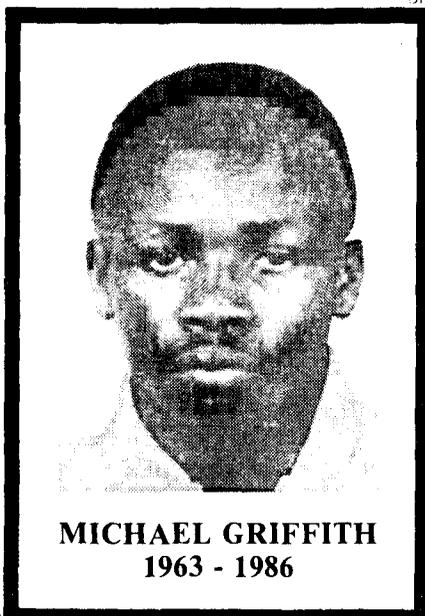
In Reagan's America and Koch's New York lynch-mob terror is on the rise, as even the *New York Times* was compelled to editorialize. The *Times* praised Koch's "rightful anger" and the "appropriate urgency" of his racists in blue after the racist terror in Howard Beach. But it is racist pig Koch who inflames the white, ethnic middle-class backlash. As his egomaniacal biography brags, "hizzoner" really gets off on closing down West Harlem's only hospital, Sydenham, and trying to break the 1980 transit strike. It was Koch's SWAT team cop Stephen Sullivan who blew away black grandmother Eleanor Bumpurs with two shotgun blasts in her Bronx apartment because she was two months behind in her rent, while his Uncle Tom police commissioner Ward exonerated Sullivan's brutal murder as "within departmental guidelines."

Koch and his ghoulish coroner Dr. Gross covered up the racist murder of black artist and son of a retired transit worker Michael Stewart at the hands of the transit cops in Union Square. From the cop murder of 81-year-old Dennis

Groce in the vestibule of his own apartment building, to the systematic stun-gun torture of black youth in the 106th Precinct, Koch's racist killers in blue have been given license to kill.

Blacks and other minorities, all decent people in this city, share the deep grief and bitterness of the Griffith family over the brutal racist murder of Michael Griffith. We are fed up with racist terror, in and out of uniform. Koch is Reagan reaction in New York City, and he has driven this city to the brink of race war. From Trump Tower to Wall Street, the swindlers who rule NYC are afraid the lynch-mob murder of Michael Griffith might push it over the edge. So they got the big-mouth bigot of Gracie Mansion to denounce the "racial lynching" in Howard Beach. That's about as sincere as Reagan denouncing the diversion of Iran arms money to the contras. Queens D.A. Santucci dredged up three likely suspects from the sewers of south Queens and slapped them with second-degree murder charges.

But working people in New York remember the similar lynch-mob murder of Willie Turks and the beating of



MICHAEL GRIFFITH
1963 - 1986

two fellow workers in 1982, only blocks from their Coney Island shop in the Gravesend section of Brooklyn. The most any of the killers of Brother Turks got was a slap on the wrist from Brooklyn D.A. Liz Holtzman. And every single one of those racist thugs are back on the street, free to kill again. Yet liberal Democrat Holtzman subjected black token-booth clerk James Grimes to a four-month "legal" lynching for defending his life (and transit funds) from armed muggers. Gun control is killing black people in this city, ensuring that the racist thugs and the killers in blue are armed to the teeth while decent working people remain defenseless. If Willie Turks and Michael Griffith had been armed, they would be alive today. No reliance on Koch's "injustice" system, which turns loose the racist killers of Willie Turks, and tries to jail a courageous black worker like James Grimes!

Across the country large cities are run by Democrats, frequently black, who are front men for Reagan reaction. In NYC the black Democratic Party politicians and preachers have rushed in to contain the flood of anger over Michael Griffith's murder. Led by Rev. Al Sharpton, they held a December 22 "eat-in" at the pizzeria in Howard Beach where the lynch-mob assault began. Relying on the "protection" of stun-gun cops from the 106th Precinct and the sinister Guardian Angels, the black ministers and a handful of supporters at the pizzeria were subjected to threats and humiliating taunts. Such dangerous stunts, preaching reliance on Koch's racist cops, will only embolden the racist scum and leave blacks defenseless from racist and fascist terror. Similarly, the liberal left's call for the hoax of a "democratic civilian review board" to



Workers Vanguard

Brooklyn Supreme Court, 20 July 1983—Transit militants demand action to defend blacks, following lynch mob murder of Willie Turks. If unions had acted then, Michael Griffith might still be alive.

"control" the racists in blue is a *diversion* meant to channel the outrage over Michael Griffith's murder into empty schemes to "reform" Koch's cossacks. It will mean *more* black victims on the streets of New York. The lawyer for the Griffith family has already charged the Queens D.A. and the 106th Precinct with a cover-up of the full extent of the racist crime while the press has put the surviving victims on trial.

What is needed *now* is a powerful mobilization of labor and minorities on the streets of Howard Beach. Let those racist scum try and take on thousands of integrated transit workers, hospital workers and city workers patrolling Cross Bay Boulevard on flatbed trucks. Then the racist punks with their Mussolini T-shirts will get a taste of what their hero got. In 1982, following the murder of Willie Turks, the Spartacist League

supported the call of militants in the TWU to provide such a defense against racist terror in the streets of Gravesend. But it was sabotaged by the TWU tops, who seek to keep the integrated power of the labor movement in the chains of their masters in the racist, strikebreaking Democratic Party. The absence of that labor power to smash racist terror leaves blacks and other minorities defenseless, and prey to the deadly schemes of nationalist and anti-Semitic demagogues like Farrakhan and Herbert Daughtry. *For integrated armed workers defense guards, drawn from responsible union men and women!*

In 1985 at a forum in solidarity with the victims of the hideous racist massacre in Philadelphia of the MOVE organization, Ed Kartsen, SL candidate for Manhattan Borough President, called for the kind of integrated labor power that must be mobilized against the racist terror in Howard Beach: "We stand ready at all times to mobilize our strength in united actions against racist terror. The mass power of organized labor, black militants, once broken from the Democratic Party in mass actions, will constitute the kind of invincible force that will avenge the Philly bombing. Legal lynchings must be met with revolutionary class justice.... United actions mobilizing the power of organized labor and minority organizations must be brought to bear to smash racist terrorism.... We have to move forward to a mass labor/minority party that can lead the working class to seize power in order to end racist terrorism once and for all."

—NY Spartacist League

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Defend Corporal Griffin! Black Marine: I Won't Go!

Refused to Go to Lebanon, Grenada

On May 15, a military judge at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina threw the book at U.S. Marine corporal Alfred Griffin. This black Marine was sentenced to four months at hard labor, reduction in rank to private, forfeiture of \$395 monthly pay for six months and a bad-conduct discharge. His "crime" in the eyes of the Marine Corps? Griffin, a black Muslim, refused to go to Lebanon and Grenada to kill fellow Muslims and blacks. *This soldier has stood up to the Marine Corps.* The draconian sentence is an attempt to intimidate all soldiers, particularly blacks, in the imperialist U.S. military. The Spartacist League demands: "Drop the charges! Freedom for Corporal Griffin—Restore his rights!"

A machine-gun team leader and two-year member of the Presidential Honor Guard, Griffin was depicted as a model black Marine on the cover of the *Marine Corps Gazette*. He had a flawless record until he refused to join his unit when it left for Beirut on 18 October 1983. "If I had gone to Lebanon," he said later on the stand, "I would have been put in a

situation in which I would have had to take arms against other Muslims." The Marine brass had a politically explosive situation on their hands, complicated by the fact that only a few days after Griffin returned to Camp Lejeune on October 19, more than 240 Marines were blown up in their barracks in Beirut. So they offered Griffin an "all is forgiven" deal to rejoin his unit in Beirut. Griffin refused. When the unit was diverted for the assault on Grenada, the Marines tried to send him there. But citing religious and moral grounds, Griffin again said "No" to all "offers" to kill Muslims and blacks. Therefore, on November 29, special court-martial proceedings were begun, the prosecution seeking their heaviest penalty.

Reagan and the racists gloried in the sight of white Marines ravaging a black and largely defenseless Grenada. But a military machine based heavily on black enlisted men poses serious problems for U.S. imperialism. Racist Marine Corps "justice" was demonstrated in the case of the Camp Pendleton 14 in 1976. A group of black Marines defended themselves against repeated terror raids by Ku Klux Klan Marines and the military threw the blacks into the stockade. For the U.S. military with its endless history of war crimes, from atom-bombing Nagasaki to mining Nicaraguan harbors, the "crime" is to refuse to carry out murderous orders. American military and civilian "justice" means that Lieutenant Calley, the butcher of My Lai in Vietnam, is driving around today in a Mercedes in Columbus, Georgia thanks to a pardon from Jimmy Carter, while Corporal Griffin, who refused to commit such atrocities, gets imprisonment at hard labor.

The case of Corporal Griffin reveals the Achilles' heel of American imperialist militarism. The rotting U.S. economy has driven tens of thousands of desperate black and Hispanic youth into



ABC-TV

the recruiting stations as a last-ditch means to escape starvation. Griffin himself told reporters that he signed up at 19 because he couldn't find work and wanted job training. But under fire, many GIs, especially minorities, realize that they don't want to be cannon fodder for their oppressors. Some, like Corporal Griffin, object for religious reasons. No doubt many recall Muhammad Ali saying "No Viet Cong ever called me nigger." At the time of the Beirut bombing, we noted that the widespread American outrage was mainly directed at the imperialist commander in chief. We seek to channel this outrage against the entire imperialist war effort. And as for vicarious bloodthirsty "leftists" who say of the Marines in Beirut, killed in a senseless imperialist adventure, "live like pigs, die like pigs," we wrote: "We can only despise those who call for the death of American soldiers for the crimes of their rulers" ("Marxism and Bloodthirstiness," *WV* No. 345, 6 January).

It took courage for Corporal Griffin to stand up to the USMC. But more than an individual's moral stance is required to fight racist U.S. imperialism. As a crucial part of the struggle to achieve a socialist society we need to burst asunder the U.S. armed forces from within, mobilizing the ranks against the brass who are prepared to slaughter millions in the Cold War crusade against Communism. Proclaiming solidarity with their "foreign" class brothers against the bosses' wars, revolutionary soldiers and sailors will inscribe on their banners: "The Main Enemy Is At Home!" ■



Sherbell/Picture Group

Yankee Marines rape black Grenada. U.S. get your bloody hands off the world!

Support the Partisan Defense Committee

We want to introduce our readers to the Partisan Defense Committee, the non-sectarian class-struggle legal defense organization in accordance with the political views of the Spartacist League. The PDC's heritage is the defense policies of the International Labor Defense (ILD) of the early Communist movement, before the Communist Party's Stalinist degeneration into reformist betrayal and stupid sectarian manipulation sullied the tradition that "an injury to one is an injury to all." The PDC was initiated by the Spartacist League in 1974, and stands on the record of principled defense work conducted by the SL.

The PDC is partisan, standing unconditionally on the side of working people and their allies in struggle against their exploiters and oppressors. "We place all our faith in the power of the masses and no faith whatever in the 'justice' of the courts." The PDC defends, in the words of ILD founder James P. Cannon, "any member of the workers movement, regardless of his views, who suffered persecution by the capitalist courts because of his activities or his opinions."

The PDC has raised funds for the legal defense of American strikers, black activists, student protesters. It has championed the cause of Caribbean oil workers and women textile workers in Asia. It has defended the democratic rights of left-wing activists from dozens of different political organizations. Alongside the Spartacist League, the PDC has demonstrated against arrests of picket-line militants, against executions of ANC militants by the South African apartheid regime, against racist cop brutality and murder, against deportations of immigrant workers and political "undesirables." During the bitter 1984-85 strike of British miners, the PDC initiated a labor-centered campaign which raised over \$20,000 for the striking miners and their families. The PDC's books are open to inspection by any bona fide workers organization.

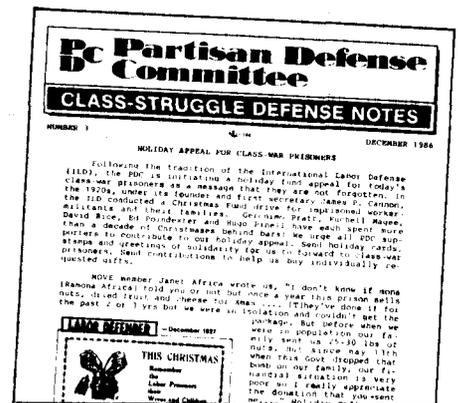
Last year, the PDC joined the SL in filing a "friend of the court" brief with the U.S. Supreme Court in opposition to the teaching of so-called "creationism" in the public schools. The brief defends the constitutional principle of separation of church and state and the right of students not to be subjected to outright racist and anti-science bigotry in the guise of "education." Among other important legal efforts, the PDC supported the Spartacist League suit

against the FBI in 1983-84, challenging the government's dangerous equation that Marxist political advocacy constitutes "terrorism." The PDC supported the SL's libel lawsuit which forced the right-wing *Washington Times* to retract deadly slanders against the militant union-backed demonstration which stopped the KKK from marching in Washington, D.C. in November 1982.

The PDC has received a warm response to its efforts to make sure that labor and black militants behind bars are not forgotten by those "outside." In the tradition of the early ILD, modest monthly stipends are sent to class-war prisoners so that they can obtain books, food, cigarettes, stamps, and so forth to ease the privations and isolation of jail. Among those receiving stipends so far are British miners still jailed by the vindictive Thatcher regime, former Black Panther leader Geronimo Pratt, and Ramona Africa, survivor of the state's murderous aerial bombardment of the black MOVE commune in Philadelphia. This program has nothing in common with the demeaning spirit of "charity," but is based on class solidarity—the elementary duty of all who would fight for democratic rights and social freedoms to remember those who have been victimized for their struggles on our behalf. Every issue of the PDC's newsletter, *Class-Struggle Defense Notes*, features reports on and letters from these courageous men and women.

Right now the PDC is organizing a demonstration in Oakland, California demanding freedom for Geronimo Pratt. Brother Pratt is a former leader of the Black Panther Party who has been behind bars for 16 years, including eight years in solitary. He is a victim of the FBI "COINTELPRO" vendetta that physically exterminated much of the Panther leadership. After a massive cop siege of the L.A. Panther headquarters failed to kill Pratt in 1969, the state framed him for a murder he did not commit and could not have committed. He is still fighting for a new trial, although the frame-up was totally exposed by the revelation that the FBI had destroyed surveillance records on Pratt which proved him to have been hundreds of miles away from the crime.

Readers interested in "Black Soldiers in the Jim Crow Military" will find Brother Pratt's history very relevant. In a 1985 interview ("Geronimo Pratt



PDC's newsletter features letters from class-war prisoners. Send 75 cents to receive the latest issue.

Speaks from San Quentin." *WV* No. 382, 28 June 1985). Pratt spoke of how, as a U.S. paratrooper in Vietnam, his experiences in the military and with the people of Vietnam had "enlightened" him about the nature of the war and the nature of the U.S. government back home. He described how he and a friend were standing on a bunker overlooking a bombed-out cathedral near Hue when they got the news of the racist murder of Martin Luther King. And he described how, between tours of duty in Vietnam, his unit was mobilized to repress the Detroit ghetto explosion in 1967:

"I was a sergeant and I had done the year over there [Vietnam] that was required. And they sent us back, but before we were sent back they had the situation in Detroit. And they called the National Guard couldn't do it. It just so happened that the paratrooper unit they sent out, our unit, were something like 60-70 percent black and quite—immediately they pulled us out of there....

"See, you have to understand we were nothing but street people, country people in uniform.... Shortly thereafter we were sent against our will back to Vietnam during the height of the Tet Offensive...."

Geronimo Pratt is both a symbol of the millions who participated in the civil rights and antiwar activism of the 1960s and 1970s, and an unusual individual who, through the long years of incarceration, remains unbroken and deeply committed to the cause of the oppressed. We urge all our readers to support him in his fight to win his freedom, and to support the work of the PDC in whatever ways you can.

To support the PDC, or to receive more information, please write to: Partisan Defense Committee, P.O. Box 99, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013. ■

Black History and the Class Struggle

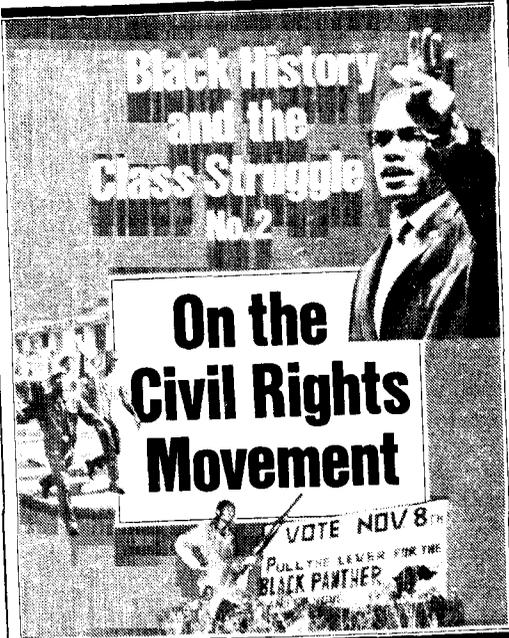


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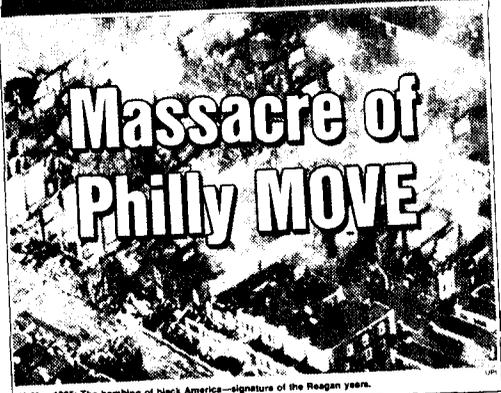
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