From Pan-Africanism to Black Internationalism

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Introduction

In recent years, scholars have raised doubts about the usage and utility of the term “Black Internationalism.” In Pan-Africanism: A History, for example, Hakim Adi contends that while the Martinican Negritudist Jane Nardal coined the term “internationalisme noir” to describe the relationship between “Negroes” of diverse origins and nationalities, neither writers nor activists of African descent have historically described themselves as such. Thus, contrary to scholarly trends in the United States academy, distinctions made between Pan-Africanism and Black Internationalism are essentially ahistorical and arbitrary. Likewise, Margaret Stevens questions whether Black Internationalism has the ability to name and describe the struggle for a race-based worker’s revolution enunciated in newspapers like Challenger as early as 1919.

While the usage of Black Internationalism may be absent in the archives, it nonetheless has merit as a conceptual framework that specifies a form of Pan-African activism, organizing, strategy, and scholarship inscribed in, engaged with, or adjacent to international Marxist-Leninist formations. In other words, Black Internationalism in the work of scholars including Robin D.G. Kelley, Sundiata Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, Roderick Bush, Minkah Makalani, Cheryl Higa-Shida, and Keisha Blain elucidates the particular ways that Black anti-capitalists and “fellow-travelers” mobilized Pan-Africanism to radical ends.

This chapter examines key thinkers, organizations, events, and movements to trace the intellectual and political ascent of Black Internationalism as the Pan-African enunciation of broader trans-territorial leftwing insurgencies. While Black Internationalism was nascent in the interwar period, we contend, it matured after World War II as Pan-Africanism expanded into an intercontinental project in concert with the rise of international radical movements aimed at forging an alternative to Euro-American hegemony and domination. Part I defines Black Internationalism as a conceptual framework and explicates it as an ethical practice, an alternative epistemology, and a radical politics. Each section of Part II corresponds to one of the six constitutive elements of Black Internationalism: anti-white supremacy/continental unity, anti-colonialism/self-determination, anti-imperialism/revolutionary transformation, anti-capitalism/socialism, anti-sexism/radical Black humanism, and anti-war/durable peace. As both a critical and constructive radical politics, Black Internationalism aims not only to dismantle the extant system, and also to create the world anew.
Part I: Defining Black Internationalism

As a conceptual framework, Black Internationalism is temporally, ideologically, and geopolitically distinct from Pan-Africanism. The latter describes the ideas, modes of organizing, and movements preeminently concerned with the commonality of purpose among, and the social, political, and economic emancipation of, African peoples on the Continent and in the Diaspora since at least the late eighteenth century. By contrast, the seeds of Black Internationalism were planted in the interwar period when events including the Russian Revolution and the New Negro Movement born out of World War I set to work a form of coordinated Black radicalism, enunciated by the likes of Hubert Harrison and Grace Campbell, that traversed colonial and imperial borders. The 1945 Pan-African Congress, with its emphasis on Black proletarian agency, workers’ struggles, labor militancy, and immediate independence, represented the flowering of African descendants’ trans-territorial leftwing activism into Black Internationalism that, by the Bandung Conference of 1955, was bearing fruit.

Relatedly, while Pan-Africanism spans the ideological spectrum to include thinkers as diverse as Marcus Garvey and Shirley Graham Du Bois, Black Internationalism is best understood as its left-wing subset. Such conceptual precision challenges the anti-Marxism and/or epistemological McCarthyism that erases, obsures, distorts, or sanitizes the contributions of Black communists, socialists, and anti-capitalists to broad-based movements like Pan-Africanism.

With respect to geopolitics, Black Internationalism is ensconced in broader regional, intercontinental, and inter-ethnic offensives that span the Americas, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. In this way, it is the Pan-African enunciation of Afro-Asian solidarity, Third Worldism, and Tricontinentalism emanating from the global left.

Black Internationalism is thus a conceptual framework that illuminates ecumenical anti-capitalist modes of analysis, struggles for liberation, and efforts at worldmaking emerging from the local, national, and global conditions of African people. It centers critical political economy analysis; theorizes the international character of Blackness as a special condition of surplus value extraction; interrogates intra-racial class conflict and antagonism; insists upon the importance of culture in the history, progress, and self-emancipation of African descendants; and strives for the eradication of white supremacist capitalist imperialism.

Informed by and engaged with real-world struggles, Black Internationalism simultaneously envisions and endeavors to build institutions, communities, and societies that affirm the humanity and prioritize the political, economic, social, and cultural well-being of the superexploited. It therefore encompasses African descendants’ multivalent and persistent anti-systemic and counterhegemonic challenges to political economies and legitimating discourses that sustain racialized and gendered exploitation, oppression, dispossession, and class-based domination.

As Black Internationalism reached its zenith in the context of post-World War II capitalist restructuring, the Cold War, and the international insurgency of “les damnés de la terre” against coloniality, the United States became the focus of unrelenting criticism given its position at the nexus of global capitalist hegemony, neocolonialism, imperialism, militarism, and anti-African violence and repression. Likewise, Black Internationalists in the United States became understood as constituents of the Third World waging struggle in the heart of empire.

Moreover, Black Internationalism is an ethical practice, an alternative epistemology, and radical praxis. Ethically, it is the practice of cooperative social activity based on shared values, a common conception of “social good,” and mutual comradeship. Expectations and standards are set and maintained through consistent participation in a variety of interactions, including conversation, debate, organizing, institution building, and political struggle. Ethical practice depends upon justice and honesty, and importantly, demands courage—the
willingness to place one’s self at risk for the betterment of others—to cultivate reciprocal care and concern. Black Internationalism also offers what Philosopher Charles Mills calls an “alternative epistemology” whereby those in subordinated groups who have access to zones beyond the universal offer a critical reinterpretation of the social system. Brought about by both structural oppression and the refusal of pseudo-universal positions that maintain relations of domination, Black Internationalism overcomes the illusory perceptions of hegemonic groups, presents a liberating conceptualization of society, illuminates relations of subjection, and repudiates imposed distortions of reality. Finally, as radical praxis, Black Internationalism is constituted by counter-hegemonic and anti-capitalist activism, organizing, movement building, and institution making in an effort to collectively overthrow structures of domination and collaboratively forge human-centered social relations across borders.

Part II: Elements of Black Internationalism

Anti-imperialism and revolutionary transformation

Black Internationalism conceptualizes imperialism as a constitutive component of all stages of capitalist development. Here, sociologist Oliver Cromwell Cox is instructive. He argued that, from the outset, capitalist foreign trade resulted in imperialist relations not least because rivalries between imperialist countries led to the annexation of foreign territories and/or the imposition of political influence over foreign people for the purpose of land appropriation and the control over labor supplies. The essence of imperialism, then, is exploitation, plunder, domination, deception, and force to the end of expanding and protecting commerce and stabilizing national incomes in stronger nations at the expense of weaker nations. Additionally, Cox maintained, racism is an enduring feature of imperialism because “imperialism invariably carries with it contempt for the exploited group. This social fact constitutes the primary source of modern race prejudice and antagonism.”

Black Communist leader James W. Ford’s 1929 report on the Second World Congress of the League Against Imperialism presents a position on imperialism characteristic of Black Internationalism. He analyzed the extant stage of capitalist development to be constituted by the “imperialist oppression of the Negro peoples of the world.” On the African continent, this oppression included the consolidation of partition and the “complete enslavement of its people,” the arresting of industrialization that hindered the development of the “toiling masses,” and the relegation of the Continent to a source of raw material, a market for European goods, and a dumping ground for accumulated surplus capital. In the United States, internal imperial relations intensified Black exploitation by both “white big business” and the “rising Negro bourgeoisie.” The oppression of the Black working class was exacerbated by rigid racial barriers, disenfranchisement, and lynching, which gave Black exploitation its special character: superexploitation. The West Indies, subjected to U.S. militarism and occupation, Ford explained, was largely transformed into a marketplace for American goods. Throughout Africa, the U.S. South, and the Caribbean, the ruling class subjected Black workers to forced labor, laying railroads, building roads and bridges, and working in mines. They were entrapped on plantations through peonage, subjected to convict leasing, and suffered intolerable working conditions and routinized violence.

Additionally, cultural imperialism manifests in the repression of oppressed countries’ endogenous cultural life. As revolutionary leader, politician, and theorist Amilcar Cabral maintained, foreign political and economic imposition is impossible if the “cultural personality” of a society is maintained; therefore, systems like assimilation and apartheid were used to
directly or indirectly “liquidate” the culture of the dominated and thereby undermine resistance. Cultural imperialism disrupts the relationship between the history and culture of a given society by imposing foreign ethics, values, social relations, and processes of development. As Ford and Cabral revealed, at the conjuncture of imperialism and racism is the totalizing effort of old and new powers to politically, economically, and culturally control African nations and peoples. In other words, imperialism is a local, national, and international phenomenon that negatively impacts states and groups alike and super-exploits those of African descent.

Anti-imperialism thus rejects the violent conscription of the entire world into the project of capitalist accumulation through processes of expropriation, dispossession, and violent obtrusion. It challenges the immiseration of the global laboring classes—and the particularly harsh effect on African descendants—and the diminished ability of individual nations to pursue their own programs of political and economic development. Anti-imperialism demands political economic autonomy to upend characteristic patterns of imperialism, including the transfer of surplus value from dispossessed nations to metropolitan centers, the retardation of productive forces in nations historically subjected to imperial relations, and the transformation of weaker nations into an extension of foreign capitalist imperatives. It also challenges the disruption of endogenous social relations through the creation of “comprador” and petit-bourgeois classes that serve the interests of international capital.

Huey P. Newton’s theory of revolutionary intercommunalism is one example of a Black Internationalist project of revolutionary transformation. The United States, he reasoned, had ceased to be a nation-state and had become an empire by globally expanding its technical, military, economic, political, cultural, and social forms of control. All peoples and nations were conscripted into its dispersed and expansive project of expropriation and labor exploitation. As such, decolonization and revolutionary nationalism in and of themselves were insufficient because it was impossible to return to a state of former existence. Revolutionary intercommunalism emplaced the struggles of African descendants amongst other “unemployables” of the world, including Third World and poor peoples. Together, the historical task of the dispossessed was to seize power, redistribute wealth, socialize labor, and realize communism as the highest stage of development. Likewise, these communities should determine their own destinies and develop cultures that were human-centered as opposed to dehumanizing and destructive. At the same time, Newton recognized that the fight to free territory, as was conveyed in the Cuban and Chinese Revolutions and in the Korean, Vietnamese, Angolan, and Mozambican struggles, was essential to challenging “reactionary intercommunalism,” or the hording of land, labor, resources, and technology by imperial powers.

Revolutionary intercommunalism is quintessentially Black Internationalist because, along with offering a global analysis of imperialism and a supranational program for human flourishing, Newton stressed attention to the specificity of contradictions in different localities. For instance, he maintained that it was the special character and the historical conditions of African-Americans that positioned them as the vanguard of world revolution. Slavery made them the first internationalists by undermining their ability to form attachments to the nation, by allowing them to easily relate to other cultures, and by making them progressive and disposed to equality. Revolutionary intercommunalism, then, held intact the dynamic between the historical and material conditions of African descendants, international cooperation, intercontinental solidarity, and inter-ethnic affinity—a relationship that was key to the revolutionary transformation of humanity.
Anti-(Neo)colonialism and self-determination

Black Internationalism posits the inextricable relationship between imperialism and colonialism. Imperial nations were simultaneously colonial exploiters that, in parasitic fashion, sucked resources and labor from colonized nations and peoples for their own nourishment. This relationship of “colonial enslavement” meant that colonized countries were forced to sacrifice the interests of their populations and their independent development to act as economic appendages of imperial capitalism. Colonialism was thus one aspect of imperialism reflective of broader forces that negatively altered the mode of production, social relations, and historical development in colonized countries. In other words, colonial rule was a political phenomenon fixed in broader relations of exploitation and expropriation.

Neo-colonialism, according to the continental Pan-Africanist and first President of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah, was the last stage of imperialism. It was the condition by which states appeared to possess sovereignty but, in actuality, were subjected to political control from outside forces. Likewise, the commanding heights of the economy continued to be controlled by foreign capital. Because “flag independence” did not completely sever colonial ties, neo-colonial formations invited or compelled local elites to act as agents or servants of exogenous powers. Neo-colonized nations generally suffered from underdevelopment, which positioned them on the periphery of the world-system and subjected them to inequitable and declining terms of trade. Such inequity disempowered newly decolonized countries in international relations. In neocolonial formations, imperial countries use economic sanctions to punish, development aid to intervene in, and military might to overpower weaker nations. This multimodal monopoly on force came with the capacity to destabilize, overthrow, or directly invade—often in the name of freedom and democracy.

Anti-colonialism, then, is the struggle for independence from foreign domination and for freedom from European and white supremacist rule. Anti-neo-colonialism, by contrast, is the struggle against material, social, and cultural degradation that persists after the end of formal colonial administration. The life-chances of the masses and workers did not substantially improve in the postcolonial era because the social and political structures had not radically transformed, but rather had merely transitioned to the control of another ruling class. Pan-Africanist intellectual and Black Power activist Walter Rodney explained the transition from anti-colonialism to anti-neo-colonialism thus:

...When I was in Jamaica in 1960, I would say that already my consciousness of West Indian society was not that we needed to fight the British but that we needed to fight the British, the Americans, and their indigenous lackeys. That I see as an anti-neo-colonial consciousness as distinct from a purely anti-colonial consciousness.12

In other words, anti-neo-colonialism is the struggle against traditional colonial powers, United States hegemony, corporate imperialism, and the perpetuation of such relations by indigenous bourgeois classes who stand to benefit from the further integration of African and Caribbean countries into the global capitalist system.

Self-determination in the context of Black Internationalism was the key to cultivating a world in which African descendants had full control over their political, economic, social, and cultural destinies. The Asian-African Conference (commonly known as the Bandung Conference), held from April 18–22, 1955 represents one of the earliest statements of self-determination as the necessary foundation of a viable future. The conference was
instrumental in connecting struggles for African liberation with insurgencies in newly independent Asian countries to assert the Third World as a force in the international community. The conference was planned by the governments of India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Burma, and Ceylon, and twenty-four nations were invited to participate. The explicit exclusion of the United States, Western Europe, and the Soviet Union was a bold act of self-determination that underscored participants’ support for cooperative nation-building, geopolitical autonomy, and world peace. The Bandung conference sought to cultivate a locus of power and leadership that could result in economic and political autonomy predicated upon the cooperation of Africa and Asia.13

Even though the Bandung Conference was not a wholly leftwing affair given the inclusion of a range of nations that were communist, allied with the United States, friendly with “Western” powers, or neutral, it nonetheless created the conditions for a move toward the more explicit embrace of economic, political, and racial radicalism by inaugurating what would come to be known as Non-Alignment. In doing so, the “Third World” offered a geopolitical counterweight to both capitalist hegemony and communist orthodoxy. As Richard Wright noted, the conference was not an episode in Cold War politics or a so-called communist front; its central aim was to develop a strategy for cooperation, economic development, and most importantly, self-determination.14 In this way, the Bandung Conference is an essential event in the history of Black Internationalism because, in creating intercontinental networks, African descendants expanded their chances of creating a world-system that prioritized their imperatives.

The importance of self-determination is underscored in the Ten Principles of Bandung, which included: respect for fundamental human rights; respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; non-intervention and non-interference in a country’s internal affairs; respect for the right of each nation to defend itself singly or collectively; the avoidance of acts of threat or aggression or the use of force against the independence of a country; the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means; the promotion of mutual interests and cooperation; and respect for justice.15 The Bandung Conference was instrumental to the development of Black Internationalism in the 1950s because, as Black communist and Pan-Africanist Alphaeus Hunton pointed out, the conference expanded the arena for African freedom struggles.16

Anti-white supremacy and continental unity

The critique and rejection of white supremacy—a “racial identity politics” born out of the cross-class alliance among European imperialists and settlers—and concomitant processes of racialization is a critical component of Black Internationalism. White supremacy congealed internationally through “apocalyptic” developments of the seventeenth century, including colonialism, the emergence of global capitalism, the violent expropriation of indigenous land, ever-increasing enslaved African labor, and the looting of all groups “beyond the pale” of whiteness.17 White supremacy also became the glue that bonded otherwise disparate Euro-American nations through discourses of superiority that complimented the confiscation

* The complete list of countries that attended, along with the five invitees, is as follows: Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gold Cast, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Nepal, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, North and South Viet-Nam, and Yemen.
of resources, conscription of labor, and deracination of culture from “inferiors” on the
darker side of the color-line. From the very beginning, white supremacy constituted the
ideas and institutions of the capitalist world-system and was necessary to the functioning of
the economic base.

Fascism, an especially pernicious form of white supremacy, was a key target of Black
Internationalism. During the interwar period, Black Internationalists including CLR James
and George Padmore linked Fascism not only to white supremacy, but also to colonialism
and imperialism by arguing that as long as Africans continued to be treated as inferior
“others” to be ruled by Europeans, the threat of Fascist tyranny would always be present.18
As well, Black Internationalism linked the Fascist drive to amass territory to racist policies
in the United States that circumscribed the rights and equal treatment of African-
Americans. All of the elements of Fascism—suppression of freedom, appeal to tradition,
rigid legal-economic imposition along racial lines—could already be found in the Jim
Crow south.

Perhaps more than any other event, the invasion of Ethiopia (Abyssinia) in 1935 spotlighted
the parallels between Fascism and U.S. white supremacist terrorism. The failure of the United
States and the League of Nations to defend Ethiopia’s sovereignty, despite the 1928 Kellogg-
Briand Pact, mirrored the government’s unwillingness to protect Black people from domestic
racial terrorism. Likewise, U.S. industrial capitalists like Henry Ford provided aid to Fascist
Italy to dispossess Ethiopia in much the same way that they financed the economic exploit-
ation of Black people throughout the Southern “Black Belt” and in Northern ghettos. Thus,
the superexploitation of African descendants undergirded white supremacist aggression in the
United States and in Ethiopia alike.

The experience of white supremacy in the United States, ranging from individual attacks
by the Ku Klux Klan to the structural injustices of Jim Crow, fomented anti-Fascist senti-
ments and a sense of solidarity with Ethiopians. The nascent Black Internationalist response
to Ethiopia’s invasion was the most important manifestation of anti-Fascism as one aspect of
rejecting white supremacy during the “popular front” era. This preceded by almost a decade
the more well-known, and liberal, “Double V” campaign for victory abroad against Fascism
and victory at home against Jim Crow. Black radicals on both sides of the Atlantic, including
Esther V. Cooper and Amy Ashwood Garvey, agitated against the invasion, and myriad
leftwing organizations from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade to the Pan African Reconstruction
Association were organized in support of the country that symbolized African resistance.
These organizations lobbied not only for the freedom of Ethiopia, but also for antiracist and
anti-imperialist legislation and practices in the United States and throughout the colonized
world. Relatedly, labor strikes broke out across the Caribbean, influenced by protests against
the invasion and the failure of European metropoles to intervene.19

The Black Internationalist resolution to global white supremacy and Fascism was inter-
continental and transcontinental unity. One manifestation of this was the formation of the
Organization of African Unity (OAU) on May 25, 1963 in—not inconsequentially—Addis
Ababa, Ethiopia. This event represents the height of Black Internationalism not least because
its condition of possibility was Ghana’s independence in 1957 under Kwame Nkrumah, who
had a vision of a liberated and united Africa. Nkrumah believed in a non-aligned foreign
policy fundamentally predicated on preserving Ghanaian—and by extension African—inde-
pendence. He also believed that African revolution, which included the liberation of the
masses from international and domestic capitalist exploitation, was a prerequisite to adopting
the best economic path for Ghana: socialism.
Nkrumah thus convened the Conference of Independent African States on April 15, 1958 for the eight independent African nations at the time to develop a coordinated program of trade, mutual cultural and educational cooperation, and support for liberation struggles throughout the continent. The conference also took a firm stance against colonialism, racialism, and imperialism, and eschewed the arbitrary bifurcation of the Continent by the Saharan desert to assert a united African bloc. However, given his belief that the unity of all African people—trade unions, youth organizations, cooperative movements—and not just heads of state was necessary to combat neocolonialism and imperialism, he convened the All African Peoples Conference in December 1958. There, he analyzed the relationship between national liberation, continental unity, and socialist transformation, a cornerstone linkage of Black Internationalism that would be internationalized at the Tricontinental Conference of 1966. The objectives outlined at the Conference would remain key to Black Internationalist struggles in subsequent decades: assault on colonialism and imperialism, the use of both peaceful means and force, coordinated efforts to achieve independence and freedom, rejection of racialism, condemnation of South African apartheid, and concerted efforts toward a union of African States.

While there were many regional bodies that developed based on divergent objectives, ideologies, and strategies as the African continent formally decolonized throughout the 1960s, e.g., the Monrovia and Casablanca blocs, the Pan-African Freedom Movement of East, Central, and Southern Africa, the Union of African States, and the Brazzaville Group, it was Nkrumah’s Black Internationalism, clearly articulated in the 1958 conferences held in Accra, that set the stage for the OAU. The latter provided an official body through which African states could advocate not only for themselves, but also for the Diaspora. The resolution adopted at the first Conference of Independent African Heads of State dealing with apartheid and racial discrimination is a case in point. The resolution condemned racial discrimination in Africa and throughout the world and expressed “the deep concern” shared by African people “by the measures of racial discrimination taken against communities of African origin living outside the continent and particularly in the United States of America.” It further urged the United States to continue efforts to end these “intolerable malpractices which are likely seriously to deteriorate relations between the African peoples and governments on the one hand and the people and Government of the United States of America on the other.”

The OAU also expressed a commitment to support African freedom struggles; as Haile Selassie I put it, “Our liberty is meaningless unless all Africans are free. Our brothers in the Rhodesias, in Mozambique, in Angola, in South Africa, cry out in anguish for our support and assistance… We must align and identify ourselves with all aspects of their struggle. It would be betrayal were we to pay only lip service to cause of their liberation and fail to back our words with action.”

Selassie’s words have particular symbolic importance because, much like Africans throughout the world had mobilized against the Fascist invasion of Ethiopia three decades earlier, so too were Black Internationalists organizing against Portuguese Fascist colonialism in southern Africa. The Third International Congress of Africanists, for example, issued a resolution that “unreservedly” condemned Portuguese colonial aggression in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau as well as external agencies—namely the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—that were arming, financing, and maintaining imperialism, colonialism, and apartheid in southern Africa. The organization applauded material and moral support from governments inside and outside Africa, particularly the socialist countries, and welcomed the increasing assistance from African Liberation Support Committees and other...
international organizations. Moreover, the resolution affirmed the necessity for Africanists, scholars, and colleges and universities to further the cause of African liberation.\textsuperscript{24}

The collapse of Portugal’s Fascist regime in 1974—a direct result of anticolonial struggles in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, and Cape Verde—and the defeat of Portugal in Angola and Mozambique in 1975, was a triumph of Black Internationalism not least because, given the instrumental role of Cuba in the victory, it represented the expansion of continental unity into intercontinental solidarity. In other words, the defeat of Fascist Portugal brought into fruition the Marxist-Leninist, tricontinental, inter-ethnic vision that had been cultivated at the Tricontinental Conference held in Havana in 1966. More than five-hundred representatives from national liberation movements, guerrilla organizations, and independent governments of some eighty-two countries gathered to forge a radical internationalist challenge to United States and North Atlantic hegemony. There, Amilcar Cabral presented an analysis of the goals and foundations of African liberation movements and emphasized that the armed struggle in Guinea-Bissau, alongside anti-imperial struggles like those in Vietnam and Palestine, were central to world revolution. Out of this conference came the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and more importantly, international support for the liberation of southern Africa.

This mode of Black Internationalism also extended to the United States. In 1972, African Liberation Day (ALD) activism led to the development of the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC) in 1973. The committee represented mass-based popular support for anti-imperialism, anti-Fascism, anti-racism, and the liberation of the Portuguese colonies and white settler colonies (e.g., Rhodesia, South West Africa, and South Africa).\textsuperscript{25} It is important to note that such support for these struggles was not without its tension and contradictions. One faction of Black Internationalists tended to support the six liberation movements that, in 1969, had been approved by the World Peace Council and the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization as the representative organizations of national liberation in southern Africa: the African National Congress (South Africa), the SouthWest Africa Peoples Organization (Namibia), the Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, and the Zimbabwe African People’s Union. Many U.S. Black Nationalists and those who subscribed to Maoism, on the other hand, tended to support the Pan-Africanist Congress (South Africa), the Union for the Total Independence of Angola, and the Zimbabwe African National Union.\textsuperscript{26} Despite these real differences that ultimately led to the decline of the ALSC by 1975, the ALD/ALSC insurgency as a whole nonetheless epitomizes Black Internationalism given its radicalism, mass base, anti-imperialism, and support for anti-Fascist guerilla struggles in Africa.\textsuperscript{27}

\textit{Anti-capitalism and socialism}

Black Internationalism posits that the expansion of the capitalist world-economy, constituted by surplus value extraction, labor exploitation, land and resource expropriation, and the perpetual accumulation of profit, has relied upon the superexploitation of nations and peoples subjected to imperialism, colonialism, and antiblack racism. As the “father of Harlem radicalism” Hubert Harrison explained, Black workers in the United States “form a group that is more essentially proletarian than any other American group” because enslaved Africans were brought to the “new world” to be ruthlessly exploited. This reality fixed their social status as the most despised group, which in turn intensified their subjection.\textsuperscript{28} Likewise, organizations like the American Negro Labor Congress and the Anti-Imperialist League analyzed that the
imperial superexploitation of Black nations like Haiti in the first quarter of the twentieth century for the purposes of consolidating “Wall Street” control over land, commercial relations, and production was accompanied by the brutalization of Black labor, the export of Jim Crow practices, military occupation, and political repression. Mobilization against superexploitation is thus central to Black Internationalism not least because it highlights how white supremacy, racialization, and the “badge of slavery” exacerbate the conditions of exploitation to which the general working classes are subjected. As the transgenerational Black Marxist Harry Haywood argued in 1948, “[T]he stifling effects of the race factor are most strikingly illustrated by the drastic differences in the economic and cultural status of Negroes and whites… Beyond all doubt, the oppression of the Negro, which is the basis of the degradation of the ‘poor whites,’ is of separate character demanding a special approach.”

A seminal Black Internationalist enunciation of anti-capitalism is *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government Against the Negro People*, edited by the Black Communist William Patterson (with significant help from his wife and comrade Louise Thompson Patterson) and submitted to the United Nations by the Civil Rights Congress in 1951. The petition meticulously documented the past and present subjection of Black people in the United States to institutionalized oppression through consistent and persistent discrimination in employment, unfair wages, forced ghettoization, inequitable and inferior accommodation and services, and the denial of justice in the courts. It further argued that this superexploitation was sustained by “genocidal terror,” white supremacist law, and the drive of monopoly capitalists for super-profits. Importantly, *We Charge Genocide* noted that, for primarily economic reasons, the historical and geographical locus of antiblack genocide was the “Black Belt” of the southern United States. This was due in large part to plantation systems of sharecropping and peonage—legacies of slavery—in which Black political and economic rights were virtually non-existent, Black laborers were inexorably tied to the land through debt, and the threat of violence and death precluded demands for justice. This superexploitation was the basis of “racist contamination that has spread throughout the United States.”

Like the Scottsboro case, the Rosa Lee Ingram case, W.E.B. Du Bois’s *An Appeal to the World*, and the subsequent Free Angela Davis Campaign, *We Charge Genocide* is a particularly important form of Black Internationalism because, in taking the plight of African-Americans to the United Nations, it conveyed that the conjuncture of racism, capitalism, and militarism was a world problem that required an international response. In other words, superexploitation in the United States was more than a domestic concern because “discriminatory policy at home must inevitably create racist commodities for export abroad—must inevitably tend toward war.”

Black Internationalism endorses socialism to upend capitalist superexploitation and the root causes of human exploitation: imperialism and perpetual war. As Black educator and “professional revolutionary” Doxey Wilkerson averred,

*The peoples of the world are moving. Their immediate struggles are for decent standards of living, for civil liberties, for national liberation and independence, for peace… Their best teacher is that increasing exploitation which inheres in the capitalist-imperialist-war system itself… As capitalism continues to decay with internal crises… as the peoples of the world achieve greater clarity as the real cause of their discomfiture, there may be expected to develop a might world movement against the whole rotten system of oppression and war.*

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In a socialist system, production is planned and carried out for use because, rather than profit, the end of this economic system is to assure the well-being of the populous. The tenets of socialism promote common ownership of the means of production to prioritize the economic and cultural level of the masses; the liberation of oppressed people through the eradication of the small parasitic class of owners who are dependent on the perpetuation of colonialism; sustainable internal expansion that does not require imperialist conquest of foreign markets; and a concomitant foreign policy directed at world peace. In short, Black Internationalism advocates socialism to resolve the internal contradictions of the capitalist economy that compel reactionary social policy domestically, aggression internationally, periodic depression, mass unemployment, and entrenched poverty—malformations exacerbated by antiblack racism.

Anti-sexism and radical Black humanism

Black Internationalism also includes the analysis of “triple oppression,” or the special and multimodal character of Black women’s exploitation at the intersection of racial capitalism, imperialism, and male chauvinism. In 1936, for example, the lifelong Black radical Louise Thompson explained that Black women’s superexploitation in the capitalist mode of production was based on their race, sex, and subordination in the labor market. That same year, Black militants Marvel Cooke and Ella Baker published an article titled “The Bronx Slave Market” in which they studied triple oppression as it related to Black domestic workers. Cooke and Baker explained that the entanglements of racism, sex-based labor subordination, and structural poverty were deeply intensified by the Great Depression and forced Black domestic workers to pauperize their labor for the abysmal wage of less than thirty cents an hour. This form of labor exploitation was unique to the female sex because domestic work was conventional “women’s work,” and it was racialized insofar as the denigration of Black people fitted this group of women for low-wage, unprotected, contingent labor.

In 1940, the Black communist activist-intellectual Esther V. Cooper took a different approach to analyzing triple oppression, arguing in her master’s thesis, “The Negro Woman Domestic Worker,” that the exclusion of Black women from trade unions and the organized labor movement reified their superexploitation by excluding them from labor protections afforded to other classes of workers. Likewise, the argument that Black domestics were “unorganizable,” Cooper claimed, was based on racist and sexist assumptions that continued the social stigma and vulnerability of this class of workers. Moreover, as Cooper underscored, the organization, unionization, and protection of Black women is essential to the eradication of capitalist exploitation. In other words, the continued marginalization of Black women workers severely hampers the international proletarian struggle. Following this line of argumentation, Claudia Jones concluded in the 1949 article, “An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!” that Black women’s special form of subjection made them the most militant and therefore the most essential to socialist revolution. She forcibly argued that Black women’s responsibility as partial or sole breadwinner, treatment in the labor market, and active participation in the social, political, and economic life of the Black community rendered them “the real active forces—the organizers and the workers.” As such, their empowerment is instrumental to liberation. Given the sexual character of racial capitalist exploitation, anti-sexism is a central component of Black Internationalism. This entails the dismantling of patriarchy and the abandonment of male chauvinism, misogyny, and the subordination of women to secondary roles in organizations.
and movements. Likewise, the “special demands” of women, from ownership over their bodies to maternity leave to birth control, must cease to be auxiliary and become part of the objective demands for social transformation. In other words, anti-sexism requires specific attention to the ways that differently gendered and sexed bodies are subjected to exploitation, oppression, and discrimination in the family, the home, the workplace, the labor market, and in relationship to the capitalist mode of production; the organization and leadership of all people irrespective of sex or gender; the eradication of roles in all areas of society that subordinate women and reduce them to a servile class; the socialization of productive and reproductive roles; and the creation of social and material conditions in which all African descendants can flourish in the public and private sphere.

Black Internationalism thus entails what we name “Radical Black Humanism,” a form of Black anti-sexist mobilization and analysis inscribed in broader anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist praxis. Here, the work of the Sojourners for Truth and Justice (STJ) is exemplary. Founded in September 1951 by a cadre of radical women in the United States,** STJ sought to harness the power of Black women to reveal and combat the forms of oppression that differentially impacted women and men. For example, the group sustained the fierce international battle for the freedom of Rosa Lee Ingram, a Black sharecropper and widowed mother of twelve who had been convicted in 1948 (along with two of her sons) of killing a white man who attempted to assault her.40 They noted that as a poor Black mother, Ingram was vulnerable to not only capitalist exploitation but also sexual assault. The group’s internationalist efforts included submitting a petition, written by W.E.B. Du Bois, to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights demanding that the General Assembly take up the Ingram case. STJ also protested the Korean War because of its specific impact on Black men. Indeed, the organization was formed in part to “rally Black women to defend their men” and to organize wives and mothers “of the legally lynched … of those imprisoned and threatened with prison … widowed by police brutality … [and] who mourn [their] sons dead in foreign wars” against the insults, humiliations, indignities, and repression of the U.S. government.41

To protest the oppression and repression of Black women and men, STJ organized a sojourn to Washington D.C. from September 29-October 1, 1951 and worked closely with a number of leftist entities including the Civil Rights Congress, the National Negro Labor Council, and the Progressive Party (for which STJ co-founder Charlotta Bass was the 1952 Vice-Presidential candidate). The organization inveighed against white supremacist terrorism, conveyed in the murder by bombing of NAACP activist Harry T. Moore and his wife Harriet in Mims, Florida; warmongering and aggression against other nations, manifested in the Korean War (and the conscription of their sons into it); and McCarthyism and McCarranism, demonstrated in the indictment of W.E.B. Du Bois in 1951 and the revocation of Paul Robeson’s passport that same year. In short, STJ attended to the specific ways that racist capitalist imperialism affected women and men in order to protest the overall dehumanization of oppressed people generally, and African descendants particularly.

** The STJ initiating committee was comprised of Charlotta Bass (California), Alice Childress (New York), Shirley Graham (New York), Josephine Grayson (Virginia), Dorothy Hunton (New York), Sonora B. Lawson (New York), Amy Mallard (Georgia), Rosalie McGee (Mississippi), Bessie Mitchell (New Jersey), Louise Thompson Patterson (New York), Beulah Richardson (Mississippi), Eslanda Robeson (Connecticut), Pauline Taylor (Ohio), and France Williams (California). Other notable members and affiliates included Lorraine Hansberry, Claudia Jones, Audley Moore, and Angie Dickerson.
Another example of radical Black humanism is the Combahee River Collective’s (CRC) demand for the recognition of Black women as “human, levelly human.” In highlighting the cultural, experiential, and class-specific nature of Black women’s oppression, the CRC called for a deep analysis of how race and sex shape relationships to the mode of production and concomitant social relations. Such careful attention was part of the broader struggle for a socialist society in which Black women, men, and children could progress together. Likewise, in their rejection of “lesbian separatism,” the CRC guarded against the reactionary turn to biological determinism as the basis of oppression, underscoring that dehumanization derives from capitalist social structures out of which racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class “privilege” are born.

For the CRC, Black feminism was a necessary hermeneutic to raise the political consciousness of, and do political work among, Black women in the service of upsetting the economic and sexual relations that constrict all human life. In other words, Black feminism was one enunciation of radical Black humanism that shed light on “black women’s extremely negative relationship to the American political system (a system of white male rule)” and Black women’s “need as human persons for autonomy.” Like STJ, the CRC strove for solidarity with progressive Black men, activism around the fact of racist exploitation, and the liberation of all oppressed people from capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy.

Anti-war and durable peace

Finally, Black internationalism contends that war and militarism are technologies of imperialism, (neo)colonialism, white supremacy, capitalist expansion, and sexist exploitation. Insofar as the prosperity and privilege of imperial countries requires cheap labor from and expropriation of materials produced in poor countries, militarism legitimates the contravention of sovereignty and the mobilization of extraordinary violence in the service of dispossession. The ruling elite and “labor aristocracy” in imperialist countries—especially the United States—support perpetual war to defend their “way of life” and standard of living against racialized populations and those who advocate the socialist transformation alike.

Warmongering facilitates the drive for endless profit through the continual construction of enemies and threats that ostensibly menace democracy, prosperity, freedom, and security. Often, these enemies are populations of color; for example, it is no coincidence that the Cold War got “hot” in countries where “non-white” populations resided, including in Korea, Vietnam, Angola, and Palestine.

Anti-war activism thus demands an end to war as a method of hording wealth, establishing monopolies, pauperizing labor, and resigning racialized populations to disease, destitution, and destruction. As well, insurgency against imperialist warfare entails the elimination of foreign military bases; the end of military pacts like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization, and the Warsaw Pact; the prohibition of the use, production, testing, and storage of nuclear weapons; and the dismantling of existing nukes. It is important to note that, while Black Internationalism rejects war, it recognizes armed struggle in the service of liberation as essential to bringing about a permanent end to international conflict.

Black Internationalism advocates durable peace as the anecdote to war. W.E.B. Du Bois was a tireless activist for world peace—efforts for which he was awarded two international peace prizes. In a 1953 television appearance with leftist lawyer and Congressman Vito Marcantonio, Du Bois summed up his belief in peace thus: “Cease fire now. Bring back our troops... dismantle our costly forts that encircle the world. Stop our aid to empires trying to
conquer colonial peoples struggling desperately to be free... Cut our impossible tax burden, house our people, educate our children and declare a world policy of peace on earth, goodwill toward men.”
For Du Bois, peace was the only way to ensure decent and humane material and social conditions for all.

In 1950, he ran for the New York seat of the United States Senate with the motto “peace and civil rights” for the American Labor Party. He chose this party because they were “the only recognized political party in New York that stood unequivocally for Peace and world conference to end war...”
During his rigorous speaking tour, he argued that capitalist exploitation, the negation of civil rights, imperialism, colonialism, and the repression of radicals were antithetical to a durable peace.
Along with running for the Senate, Du Bois co-founded the Peace Information Center (PIC) with a cadre of progressives on April 3, 1950 to spread knowledge about the peace movement that was burgeoning across the world and to promote friendship and cooperation between nations. Importantly, the PIC helped to circulate the Stockholm Peace Appeal, also known as the “ban the bomb petition.” The document emerged in March 1950 out of a worldwide insurgency that called for the outlawing of atomic weapons, international controls to enforce the measures, and the treatment of any country that used atomic bombs as war criminals that had committed crimes against humanity.

Relatedly, the decades-long struggle for the end of apartheid in South Africa was inextricably linked to the drive for peace. The Council on African Affairs (CAA), an organization committed to Black Internationalism under the leadership of Alpheus Hunton, Paul and Elsa Robeson, and W.E.B. Du Bois, drew upon its close relationship with the African National Congress (ANC) to expose and condemn apartheid as it became intensified in 1948 by the National Party’s Daniel François Malan. The ANC painstakingly outlined the terrorism and indignity to which the non-white majority was subjected by the European minority, including taxation without representation, the complete denial of political power, land dispossession, the virtual enslavement of workers, denial of labor rights like unionization and striking, police brutality, and the circumscription of movement. The ANC conveyed that the Malan government’s Hitler-like doctrines not only defied the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, but also endangered international relations, stability, and security, thereby sowing the seeds of World War III.

Alongside the ANC, the CAA warned that the apartheid regime threatened international peace and harmony by intensifying racial struggle throughout Africa and fomenting the resentment of racialized people throughout the world, from Indians to African Americans. The failure of the United Nations to bring world pressure on South Africa, one CAA memorandum quoted, would force the “Negro race to rely on themselves and make ready for the liquidation of 2,000,000 South African Europeans in the life and death struggle that is to come...” Further, if Africans did not have freedom and equality, “all the races should march to mass destruction.” The CAA released memoranda, pamphlets, and several issues of its newspaper, New Africa, to bring attention to the atrocities of apartheid; to encourage the international community to cut off business and trade relations with South Africa; and to pressure the United Nations to implement measures to end the odious system. Apartheid and world peace, the ANC and CAA intimated, were fundamentally incompatible.

The pioneering efforts of the CAA were escalated in subsequent decades, as leaders from Albert Luthuli to Julius Nyerere called for a boycott of South Africa in the 1950s; the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960 incited the formation of numerous organizations, protests, rallies, and demonstrations throughout the African Diaspora; and the Black Consciousness Movement took off in the 1970s under the leadership of “Bantu” Steve Biko
and the South African Students’ Organization. In the United States, a “group of Black activists whose focus is foreign policy” led daily protests at the South African embassy in Washington D.C., which inspired the formation of the Free South Africa Movement in 1984 and ultimately led Ronald Regan to impose limited economic sanctions on South Africa the next year. Insofar as apartheid encouraged anticommunism and nuclear proliferation, worked to preserve colonialism in southern Africa, and was the closest ally on the African continent of U.S. imperialism, it represented a tremendous barrier to global peace and prosperity.

Conclusion

Black Internationalism is a conceptual framework that illuminates anti-capitalist enunciations of Pan-Africanism as one facet of a broader insurgency against Euro-American domination. While its origins can be found in the interwar period, Black Internationalism reached full maturity in the context of decolonization; the Cold War; the entrenchment of United States imperialism; struggles against apartheid, and Afro-Asian, Third World, and Tricontinental attempts to forge an alternative political, economic, social, and cultural future.

As an ethical practice, an alternative epistemology, and radical praxis, Black Internationalism constitutes the rejection of white supremacy, anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, anti-sexism, and anti-war activism. It offers a program of African flourishing based on continental unity, self-determination, revolutionary transformation, socialism, radical Black humanism, and durable peace. Activist-intellectuals such as George Padmore, Claudia Jones, W.E.B. Du Bois, Kwame Nkrumah, and Louise Thompson Patterson; organizations including the African National Congress, the Council on African Affairs, and the Sojourners for Truth and Justice; and international movements against, inter alia, U.S. white supremacist imperialism, the invasion of Ethiopia, and apartheid demonstrated that the liberation of African descendants was instrumental to the creation of a world in which anti-black racism, superexploitation, and militarism were obsolete. Hence, Black Internationalism encapsulates past, present, and future efforts to radically envision and manifest local, national, and global conditions of African betterment.

Notes

32 Patterson, *We Charge Genocide*, 22.
33 Patterson, *We Charge Genocide*, xii.
34 Doxey A. Wilkerson, “Russia’s Proposed New World Order of Socialism,” The Journal of Negro Education 10, no. 3 (July 1941): 419.
38 Erik McDuffie, “Esther V. Cooper’s ‘The Negro Woman Domestic Worker in Relation to Trade Unionism’: Black Left Feminism and the Popular Front,” Communist History 7, No. 2 (2008): 205.
41 Sojourners for Truth and Justice, “A Call to Negro Women.”
42 Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds, All the Women are White, All the Black are Men, But Some of Us are Brave: Black Women’s Studies (Old Westbury: The Feminist Press, 1982), 13–22.
43 Hull et. al, Some of Us are Brave, 14–16.
44 “(The Marcantonio-Du Bois television program,” April 3, 1953, (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries (Du Bois papers hereafter).
47 Horne, Black and Red, 126.
48 (Council on African Affairs, “Memorandum on government policy and practices of racial discrimination and oppression in the Union of South Africa,” July 23, 1953, Du Bois Papers.)

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