Communism in America

A HISTORY

IN DOCUMENTS

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This proof does not come from the enemies of the white supremacists but from their own mouths, their own writings, their political resolutions, their racist laws, and from photographs of their handiwork. Neither Hitler nor Goebbels wrote obscurantist racial incitements more voluminously or viciously than do their American counterparts, nor did such incitements circulate in Nazi mails any more freely than they do in the mails of the United States.

There was a time when racist violence had its center in the South. But as the Negro people spread to the north, east and west seeking to escape the southern hell, the violence, impelled in the first instance by economic motives, followed them, its cause also economic. Once most of the violence against Negroes occurred in the countryside, but that was before the Negro emigrations of the twenties and thirties. Now there is not a great American city from New York to Cleveland or Detroit, from Washington, the nation’s capital, to Chicago, from Memphis to Atlanta or Birmingham, from New Orleans to Los Angeles, that is not disgraced by the wanton killing of innocent Negroes. It is no longer a sectional phenomenon.

Once the classic method of lynching was the rope. Now it is the policeman’s bullet. To many an American the police are the government, certainly its most visible representative. We submit that the evidence suggests that the killing of Negroes has become police policy in the United States and that police policy is the most practical expression of government policy.

Our evidence is admittedly incomplete. It is our hope that the United Nations will complete it. Much of the evidence, particularly of violence, was gained from the files of Negro newspapers, from the labor press, from the annual reports of Negro societies and established Negro year books.

But by far the majority of Negro murders are never recorded, never known except to the perpetrators and the bereaved survivors of the victim. Negro men and women leave their homes and are never seen alive again. Sometimes weeks later their bodies, or bodies thought to be theirs and often horribly mutilated, are found in the woods or washed up on the shore of a river or lake. This is a well-known pattern of American culture. In many sections of the country police do not even bother to record the murder of Negroes. Most white newspapers have a policy of not publishing anything concerning murders of Negroes or assaults upon them. These unrecorded deaths are the rule rather than the exception—thus our evidence, though voluminous, is scanty when compared to the actuality…

We plead as patriotic Americans, knowing that any act that can aid in removing the incubus of United States oppression of the American Negro people from our country is the highest patriotism. The American Dream was for justice, justice for all men, regardless of race, creed, or color. He who betrays it, betrays our country, betrays the world itself since the United States is a power in it for good or for evil.

We speak, too, as world citizens, certain that if the forces of predatory reaction are allowed to continue their present policies, are allowed to continue a profitable genocide against Americans, the time will not be long removed, the world being what it is, that the same forces will practice genocide on a wider scale against the nationals of other nations. So we plead not for ourselves alone but for all mankind. We plead not only for an end of the crime of genocide against the Negro people of the United States but we plead, too, for peace.

If the General Assembly acts as the conscience of mankind and therefore acts favorably on our petition, it will have served the cause of peace, the protection of which is the fundamental reason for its being. We recall the words of Mr. Justice Jackson at the Nuremberg trial of the Nazi war criminals when he declared that silence in the face of such crimes would make us a partner of them. We cannot believe that the General Assembly will not condemn the crimes complained of in this petition.

We ask that the General Assembly of the United Nations find and declare by resolution that the Government of the United States is guilty of the crime of Genocide against the Negro people of the United States and that it further demand that the government of the United States stop and prevent the crime of genocide.

We further ask that the General Assembly by resolution condemn the Government of the United States for failing to implement and observe its solemn international obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and the Genocide Convention and that the General Assembly also demand that the United States immediately take effective steps to carry out and fulfill its international obligations under the Charter and the Genocide Convention…

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REQUEST TO JOIN THE PARTY
W. E. B. DuBois

DuBois, the great social scientist, author of such classics as Souls of Black Folk and Black Reconstruction, who had helped found the NAACP, tells in this letter why at the age of ninety he wished to become a card-carrying Communist. Shortly after, he left for Ghana, the first of the African colonies to be free, where he settled and died two years later.

To Gus Hall,

Communist Party of the USA
New York, New York

On this first day of October 1961, I am applying for admission to membership in the Communist Party of the United States. I have been long and slow in coming to this conclusion, but at last my mind is settled.
In college I heard the name of Karl Marx, but read none of his works, nor heard them explained. At the University of Berlin, I heard much of those thinkers who had definitely answered the theories of Marx, but again we did not study what Marx himself had said. Nevertheless, I attended meetings of the Socialist Party and considered myself a Socialist.

On my return to America, I taught and studied for sixteen years. I explored the theory of Socialism and studied the organized social life of American Negroes; but still I neither read nor heard much of Marxism. Then I came to New York as an official of the new NAACP and editor of the Crisis Magazine. The NAACP was capitalist orientated and expected support from rich philanthropists.

But it had a strong Socialist element in its leadership in persons like Mary Ovington, William English Walling and Charles Edward Russell. Following their advice, I joined the Socialist Party in 1911. I knew then nothing of practical Socialist politics and in the campaign of 1912, I found myself unwilling to vote the Socialist ticket, but advised Negroes to vote for Wilson. This was contrary to Socialist Party rules and consequently I resigned from the Socialist Party.

For the next twenty years I tried to develop a political way of life for myself and my people. I attacked the Democrats and Republicans for monopoly and disfranchisement of Negroes; I attacked the Socialists for trying to segregate Southern Negro members; I praised the racial attitudes of the Communists, but opposed their tactics in the case of the Scottsboro boys and their advocacy of a Negro state. At the same time I began to study Karl Marx and the Communists; I read Das Kapital and other Communist literature; I hailed the Russian Revolution of 1917, but was puzzled at the contradictory news from Russia.

Finally in 1926, I began a new effort; I visited Communist lands. I went to the Soviet Union in 1926, 1936, 1949 and 1959; I saw the nation develop. I visited East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland. I spent ten weeks in China, traveling all over the land. Then, this summer, I rested a month in Rumania.

I was early convinced that Socialism was an excellent way of life, but I thought it might be reached by various methods. For Russia I was convinced she had chosen the only way open to her at the time. I saw Scandinavia choosing a different method, half-way between Socialism and Capitalism. In the United States I saw Consumers Cooperation as a path from Capitalism to Socialism, while England, France and Germany developed in the same direction in their own way. After the depression and the Second World War, I was disillusioned. The Progressive movement in the United States failed. The Cold War started. Capitalism called Communism a crime.

Today I have reached a firm conclusion:

Capitalism cannot reform itself, it is doomed to self-destruction. No universal selfishness can bring social good to all.

Communism—the effort to give all men what they need and to ask of each the best they can contribute—is the only way of human life. It is a difficult and hard end to reach—it has and will make mistakes, but today it marches triumphantly on in education and science, in home and food, with increased freedom of thought and deliverance from dogma. In the end Communism will triumph. I want to help to bring that day.

The path of the American Communist Party is clear. It will provide the United States with a real Third Party and thus restore democracy to this land. It will call for:

1. Public ownership of natural resources and of all capital.
2. Public control of transportation and communications.
3. Abolition of poverty and limitation of personal income.
4. No exploitation of labor.
5. Social medicine, with hospitalization and care of the old.
6. Free education for all.
7. Training for jobs and jobs for all.
10. No dogmatic religion.

These aims are not crimes. They are practiced all over the world. No nation can call itself free which does not allow its citizens to work for these ends.

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An Autobiography

Angela Davis

That the Party had not entirely lost its ability to attract talented young radicals is evident from Davis's 1974 Autobiography. She became a Communist (as she describes below) while studying philosophy at the University of California at Los Angeles with Herbert Marcuse, aging days of the New Left; eventually she taught there. A few years later she was indicted for helping a black inmate of Soledad Prison in his attempt to break out, during which he and several others, including a judge, were slain. She had then fled, been captured, tried, and acquitted. It went without saying that she was, and remains, America's most celebrated Communists (this despite the fact that she and the Party's official leadership have fallen out).

I tried to acquire the information I needed in order to decide whether I wanted to become a member of the Communist Party. At this stage in my life and my political evolution—even more than during the San Diego days—I
needed to become a part of a serious revolutionary party. I wanted an anchor, a base, a mooring. I needed comrades with whom I could share a common ideology. I was tired of ephemeral ad-hoc groups that fell apart when faced with the slightest difficulty; tired of men who measured their sexual height by women’s intellectual genealogy. It wasn’t that I was fearless, but I knew that to win, we had to fight and the fight that would win was the one collectively waged by the masses of our people and working people in general. I knew that this fight had to be led by a group, a party with more permanence in its membership and structure and more substance in its ideology. Confrontations were opportunities to be met; problems were entanglements to be sorted out with the right approach, the correct ideas. And I needed to know and respect what I was doing. Until now all our actions seemed to end, finally, in an ellipsis—three dots of irresolution, inconsistency and ineffectiveness.

During that depressing time, I reread Lenin’s What Is To Be Done, and it helped me to clarify my own predicament. I read DuBois again, particularly his statements around the time he decided to join the Communist Party.

Since Frankfurt, since London, since San Diego, I had been wanting to join a revolutionary party. Of all the parties that called themselves revolutionary or Marxist-Leninist, the Communist Party, in my opinion, alone did not overstate itself. Despite my criticisms of some aspects of the Party’s policies, I had already reached the conclusion that it would be the Communist Party or, for the time being, nothing at all.

But before I could make my decision I had to examine it, study it. The Che-Lumumba Club, the Black cell of the Party in Los Angeles, was the section of the Party which interested me. I wanted to know what its role and responsibilities were within the Party and how it maintained its identity and consistency as its cadres involved themselves in the Black Liberation Movement. As with all the other Communist parties, the basic unit of the CPUSA was and remains the “club” (or cell, as it is called in other countries). In general, the club is composed of from five to twenty members. There are sections, districts, states, regions, and finally the national leadership, which carries out policy which is made by periodic national conventions. Insofar as the democratic centralist structure of the Party was concerned, the Che-Lumumba Club was just like any other club. Yet it did have a special role, originating from the fact that Black Communists in Los Angeles had fought within the Party for a club that would be all Black and whose primary responsibility would be to carry Marxist-Leninist ideas to the Black Liberation struggle in L.A. and to provide leadership for the larger Party as far as the Black movement was concerned.

The club had been established in 1967—at a time when the Black movement was approaching its zenith. The Communist Party was bound to be affected by the stirrings in the ghettos from Harlem to Watts. Because L.A. was the scene of one of the first recent, full-scale Black uprisings, it seemed inevitable that the Che-Lumumba Club would come into existence in that city.

The knowledge I gained about the Che-Lumumba Club did not satisfy me completely, because I had little firsthand knowledge of the larger Party. Kendra and Franklin, therefore, introduced me to some of the white comrades. I began to pay visits to Dorothy Healey, who was then the District Organizer of Southern California. We had long, involved discussions—sometimes arguments—about the Party, its role within the movement, its potential as the vanguard party of the working class; its potential as the party that would lead the United States from its present, backward, historically exploitative stage to a new epoch of socialism. I immensely enjoyed these discussions with Dorothy and felt that I was learning a great deal from them, regardless of whether I ultimately decided to become a Communist myself.

In July 1968, I turned over my fifty cents—the initial membership dues—to the chairman of the Che-Lumumba Club, and became a full-fledged member of the Communist Party, USA...

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Radical Perspectives on Empowerment for Afro-American Women

Angela Davis

Davis wrote this piece for the August 1988 issue of the Harvard Educational Review.

During this decade we have witnessed an exciting resurgence of the women’s movement. If the first wave of the women’s movement began in the 1840s, and the second wave in the 1960s, then we are approaching the crest of a third wave in the final days of the 1980s. When the feminist historians of the twenty-first century attempt to recapitulate the third wave, will they ignore the momentous contributions of Afro-American women, who have been leaders and activists in movements often confined to women of color, but whose accomplishments have invariably advanced the cause of white women as well? Will the exclusionary policies of the mainstream women’s movement—from its inception to the present—which have often compelled Afro-American women to conduct their struggle for equality outside the ranks of that movement, continue to result in the systematic omission of our names from the roster of prominent leaders and activists of the women’s movement? Will there continue to be two distinct continuums of the women’s movement, one visible and another invisible, one publicly acknowledged and another ignored except by the conscious progeny of the working-class women—Black, Latina, Native American, Asian, and white—who forged that hidden continuum? If this question is answered in the affirmative, it will
mean that women's quest for equality will continue to be gravely deficient. The revolutionary potential of the women's movement still will not have been realized. The racist-inspired flaws of the first and second waves of the women's movement will have become the inherited flaws of the third wave.

How can we guarantee that this historical pattern is broken? As advocates and activists of women's rights in our time, we must begin to merge that double legacy in order to create a single continuum, one that solidly represents the aspirations of all women in our society. We must begin to create a revolutionary, multiracial women's movement that seriously addresses the main issues affecting poor and working-class women. In order to tap the potential for such a movement, we must further develop those sectors of the movement that are addressing seriously issues affecting poor and working-class women, such as jobs, pay equity, paid maternity leave, federally subsidized child care, protection from sterilization abuse, and subsidized abortions. Women of all racial and class backgrounds will greatly benefit from such an approach.

For decades, white women activists have repeated the complaint that women of color frequently fail to respond to their appeals. "We invited them to our meetings, but they didn't come." "We asked them to participate in our demonstration, but they didn't show."

"They just don't seem to be interested in women's studies."

This process cannot be initiated merely by intensified efforts to attract Latina women or Afro-American women or Asian or Native American women into the existing organizational forms dominated by white women of the more privileged economic strata. The particular concerns of women of color must be included in the agenda.

Black women scholars and professionals cannot afford to ignore the straits of our sisters who are acquainted with the immediacy of oppression in a way many of us are not. The process of empowerment cannot be simplistically defined in accordance with our own particular class interests. We must learn to lift as we climb.

If we are to elevate the status of our entire community as we scale the heights of empowerment, we must be willing to offer organized resistance to the proliferating manifestations of racist violence across the country.

Black women have organized before to oppose racist violence. In the nineteenth century the Black Women's Club Movement was born largely in response to the epidemic of lynching during that era. Leaders like Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell recognized that Black women could not move toward empowerment if they did not radically challenge the reign of lynch law in the land. Today, Afro-American women must actively take the lead in the movement against racist violence, as did our sister-ancestors almost a century ago. We must lift as we climb. As our ancestors organized for the passage of a federal antilynch law—and indeed involved themselves in the woman suffrage movement for the purpose of securing that legisla-

— we must today become activists in the effort to secure legislation declaring racism and anti-Semitism as crimes. Extensively as some instances of racist violence may be publicized at this time, many more racist-inspired crimes go unnoticed as a consequence of the failure of law enforcement to specifically classify them as such. A person scrawling swastikas or "KKK" on an apartment building may simply be charged—if criminal charges are brought at all—with defacing property or malicious mischief. Recently, a Ku Klux Klanner who burned a cross in front of a Black family's home was charged with "burning without a permit." We need federal and local laws against acts of racist and anti-Semitic violence. We must organize, lobby, march, and demonstrate in order to guarantee their passage.

As we organize, lobby, march, and demonstrate against racist violence, we who are women of color must be willing to appeal for multiracial unity in the spirit of our sister-ancestors. Like them, we must proclaim: We do not draw the color line. The only line we draw is one based on our political principles. We know that empowerment for the masses of women in our country will never be achieved as long as we do not succeed in pushing back the tide of racism. It is not a coincidence that sexist-inspired violence—in particular, terrorist attacks on abortion clinics—has reached a peak during the same period in which racist violence has proliferated dramatically. Violent attacks on women's reproductive rights are nourished by these explosions of racism.

The vicious antiblack and antigay attacks are a part of the same menacing process. The roots of sexism and homophobia are found in the same economic and political institutions that serve as the foundation of racism in this country and, more often than not, the same extremist circles that inflict violence on people of color are responsible for the eruptions of violence inspired by sexist and homophobic biases. Our political activism must clearly manifest our understanding of these connections. . . .

I want to suggest, as I conclude, that we link our grassroots organizing, our essential involvement in electoral politics, and our involvement as activists in mass struggles to the long-range goal of fundamentally transforming the socioeconomic conditions that generate and persistently nourish the various forms of oppression we suffer. Let us learn from the strategies of our sisters in South Africa and Nicaragua. As Afro-American women, as women of color in general, as progressive women of all racial backgrounds, let us join our sisters—and brothers—across the globe who are attempting to forge a new socialist order—an order which will reestablish socioeconomic priorities so that the quest for monetary profit will never be permitted to take precedence over the real interests of human beings. This is not to say that our problems will magically dissipate with the advent of socialism. Rather, such a social order should provide us with the real opportunity to further extend our struggles, with the assurance that one day we will be able to redefine the basic elements of our oppression as useless refuse of the past.