

The Civil Rights-Black Power Era, Direct Action, and Defensive Violence: Lessons for the Working-Class Today

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The Civil Rights Movement (CRM) is re-examined to provide lessons for a renewed labor movement in this age of globalization and the accompanying obliteration of both labor and basic human rights. It is argued that the CRM was successful not because of non-violent civil disobedience. Instead, radical counter-ideology, violent self-defense, societal education, independent movement media, and even rebellion supplemented and made possible all other protests. In fact, it was through direct action that rights were finally wrestled from government. Therefore, it is proposed a new social movement be formed to promote both labor and human rights in the United States based on the tactics of the CRM which have been historically proven to be effective. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2010 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]*

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INTRODUCTION

The working class has been defeated on a global scale while the remnants of the Western European welfare State wither away as labor and conservative governments (Democrats and Republicans in the U.S.) take turns governing their de facto corporate states. Now, declining unionization rates and increasing globalization are accelerating the concentration of wealth by the hyper-rich. Consumer debt, foreclosures and contingent work are at all-time-highs surpassed perhaps by peoples' disillusionment with the 'American nightmare'. Welcome to the McDonaldised world where you can super-size anything but your Wal-Mart wage.

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So, what is labor to do? Support Barack Obama who wines and dines with the rest of the Washington vassals of corporate power and is the 'property' of Wall Street? Vote for a European Socialist party such as the one in Greece which, as the government, is bailing-out capital at the expense of labor? One answer is to learn from the U.S. Civil Rights-Black Power Movement (CRBPM). The CRBPM was successful because it challenged existing dominant ideology with its own radical counter-ideology; created mass support by promoting societal education (including through arts) along Gramscian principles; ran and operated its own independent media; and engaged in direct action at the grassroots level with civil disobedience, defensive violence and revolts. For the working-class as a whole this translates into the need to continue the CRBPM with a new citizen rights movement based on a strategy of *direct economic civil disobedience* and the determination to violently resist reactionary state violence. Key elements of this new movement would include promoting and legitimizing a counter-ideology, societal education, independent media, and violent self-defense.

The concept of economic civil disobedience originates from Anarcho-Syndicalist ideology which historically advocated the use of militant direct action defined as the use of strikes, sabotage, workplace occupations, boycotts, etc. Voltairine (1912) made one of the first links between direct action and civil rights. Also, contrary to popular belief, there was nothing *civil* about the civil rights movement. Violent direct action was practiced or threatened by civil rights militants and the Black Power wing of the movement openly, even included in mission statements. Specifically, nonviolent forms of disobedience were often supplemented by militant direct action and ideology from various groups. In addition to earlier classics such as Piven and Cloward's (1971), currently there is slowly developing evidence that direct action with the use of violence for self-defense does have an impact on power holders (Asimakopoulos, 2007; Fording, 1997). Furthermore, recent works, some of which are covered here, on the CRBPM also confirm the effectiveness of militant direct action contrary to popular belief that is shaped by the corporate media. Such works include Tyson (1999), Umoja (2002), Hill (2004), and Strain (2005). After all, if violence does not work why does the state readily employ it internationally and against its own citizens?

To understand the importance of direct action and violence in obtaining working class goals the CRBPM is reviewed with broad strokes. It will be shown that positive changes did not occur politically, peacefully, or voluntarily. Instead, the *use* or *threat* of violent resistance and revolt by the movement had preceded or forced major concessions. People died,

businesses were set ablaze, looting took place, revolts would break out, and even civil war was threatened.

TIMING OF THE PERIOD AND INTELLECTUAL UNITY

There is a debate emerging amongst civil rights and Black Power scholars regarding when these periods began and ended. Traditionally, the *heroic* civil rights era is dated from 1954 to 1965 and is considered distinct from Black Power which is seen as emerging later, in conflict with the former, and having negative consequences because of its advocacy of defensive violence. For this work, the two eras are considered to be synonymous dating from the 1950s to the 1970s, despite some clear distinctions.

Arguing that the “origins” of Black Power rhetoric, ideology, and militancy are to be found by taking a fresh look at ... events during the *heroic period* of the civil rights era, “Black Power studies” transforms civil rights scholarship by placing militant organizers side-by-side with nonviolent moderates. ... Indeed, emerging scholarship suggests that black organizing, protests, conferences, and activism at the local, national and international level *increased* during the first half of the 1970s, a phenomenon that refutes the standard chronology of Black Power, New Left, and other radical social and political movements associated with the 1960s-era political activism. (Peniel, 2006:8)

The groups comprising the CRBPM did not share a singular theoretical ideology. Many were Marxists, Leninists, Maoists, Anarchists, Trotskyites, nationalists, and Pan-Africanists just to name a few. In fact, many of these leaders and groups were practicing their own brands or versions of left ideology as they understood them. However the unifying theme was a militant (often) leftist and radical ideology. “Black Radicalism contoured these activities, [of the CRBPM] providing key intellectual, political, and cultural institutions that nurtured both self-described civil rights and Black Power activists” (Peniel, 2006:22). What is of importance is that all these schools of thought and the groups behind them ultimately represent the same fundamental ideology, namely that the existing structure of society, reflected in the legal code, was underlying many if not all problems including racism.

This is why practically all civil rights groups were racially integrated (demonstrating class consciousness)—including the Black Panther Party,

sensitive to the plight of other nations such as Vietnam. and critiqued racist capitalism. Furthermore, these groups agreed that in order for meaningful change to occur there would have to be a social movement that would wrestle rights from the elite and *their* government. Of course there were also significant differences. For example, some groups believed in integration with broader society while others advocated total secession. Such ideological differences though are in fact a powerful feature of left ideology which is known for its theoretical pluralism. This to some extent is true even of capitalism. Therefore, despite the fact that these groups proclaimed diverse ideological traditions, they were nevertheless what we would commonly refer to as 'Left' or 'progressive'. The emphasis on their differences as fundamentally distinct or at odds with other groups is more of leftover propaganda aimed at deliberately fractioning these groups via covert programs such as the infamous COINTELPRO and the standard corporate media.

As Smethurst suggests, the coming together of seemingly irreconcilable trends was not as unusual as it seemed; in political centers such as New York City, Marxists and black nationalists fraternized (while maintaining sharp political differences and organizations) and produced activism that "had a certain practical synergy even if they were opposed on an ideological level." (Peniel, 2006:12)

THE CIVIL RIGHTS-BLACK POWER MOVEMENT

The peoples owe all the political rights and privileges . . . not to the good will of their governments, but to their own strength. Governments have employed every means that lay in their power to prevent the attainment of these rights or to render them illusory. Great mass movements among the people and whole revolutions have been necessary to wrest these rights from the ruling classes, who would never have consented to them voluntarily. . . . Only after the workers had by direct action confronted parliament with accomplished facts, did the government see itself obliged to take the new situation into account What is important is not that governments have decided to concede certain rights to the people, but the reason why they have had to do this. (Rocker, 1938:112-113)

Looking at the history of civil rights we can see that it was not as non-violent as people think. Rather, there has been a significant sanitization and repackaging of the civil rights movement by the corporate mass me-

dia as collective memories begin to fade fifty years later. Accordingly, activists were docile and their tactics nonviolent. However, many of the nonviolent marches and protests could only take place thanks to the armed protection offered by groups such as the Deacons for Defense and Justice and the Tuscaloosa, Alabama defense organization. Also, many of the civil rights leaders expressed a militant ideology that was far more radical by today's neo-conservative standards. The FBI itself considered many civil rights groups and leaders to be a radical threat targeting them with its covert COINTELPRO program which violated most civil rights protections not unlike the Patriot Act (Churchill and Wall, 2002). The program's goal was to prevent the rise of an organized nationalist movement of Black resistance and to discredit Black leaders including Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael, and Elijah Muhammad.

First, the civil rights case is a good example of the inadequacy of law which has been mostly conceived, written, promoted, and voted in by the social classes in power, namely, capitalist institutions and their representatives. The actions of the civil rights movement, such as refusing to sit in the back of a bus, were illegal and took place in defiance of the law. Reform by political institutions was also ineffective and unresponsive at best with perpetual filibusters against all de-segregationist bills—Democrats included (Klarman, 2004). Malcolm X for example, made the following analogy regarding civil rights and law in America which can be applied to labor currently:

When you go to Washington, D.C., . . . to pass some kind of civil-rights legislation to correct a very criminal situation, what you are doing is encouraging the black man, who is the victim, to take his case into the court that's controlled by the criminal that made him the victim. (1965:53)

Political reform was enacted only after extensive direct violent action threatening to escalate into full-blown revolt. In addition, the government-corporate media propaganda machine labeled revolts as *riots* to hide their true meaning and historical significance (see table 1).

Table 1. Race Revolts 1917-1977.

War and Inter-War Period 1917 – 1945	
1917	East St. Louis, Chicago, Illinois
1917	Chester, Pennsylvania
1917	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
1917	Houston, Texas
Red Summer of 1919	Washington, D.C.
	Chicago, Illinois
	Omaha, Nebraska
	Charleston, South Carolina
	Longview, Texas
	Knoxville, Tennessee
	Elaine, Arkansas
1921	Tulsa, Oklahoma
1923	Rosewood, Florida
1935	Harlem, New York
1943	Detroit, Michigan
1943	Beaumont, Texas
1943	Harlem, New York
1943	Los Angeles, California
Postwar Era 1946 - 1954	
1946	Columbia, Tennessee Riot
Civil Rights and Black Power Movement's Period 1955 - 1977	
1962	Mississippi Riot
1964	Harlem Riot, New York
1964	Philadelphia Race Riot, Pennsylvania
1964	Rochester Race Riot, New York
1965	Watts Riots, Los Angeles, California
1966	Hough Riots, Cleveland, Ohio
1966	Hunter's Point Riot, San Francisco
1966	Chicago Race Riot, Chicago, Illinois
1966	North Omaha, Nebraska
1967	Texas Southern University Riot, Houston
1967	12th Street Riot, Detroit, Michigan
1967	Buffalo Riot, New York
1967	Milwaukee Riot, Wisconsin
1967	Minneapolis North Side Riots, Minnesota
1967	Newark Riots, New Jersey
1967	Plainfield Riots, New Jersey
1968	Orangeburg Massacre, South, Carolina
Nationwide riots in 125 Cities following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.	
1968	Baltimore Riot, Maryland
	West Side Riots, Chicago, Illinois
	Louisville Riots, Kentucky
	Washington, D.C. Riots
	New York City Riots
1969	York, Pennsylvania Race Riots
1970	Jackson State Killings, Mississippi
1971	Camden Riots, New Jersey
1972-1977	Escambia High Riots in Pensacola, Florida

Furthermore, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed on July 2nd after a long history of lynchings, assassinations, protests, economic boycotts, lootings, revolutionary speeches, and revolts (*riots*). Examples include the Red Summer riots, 1919; Harlem riot, 1935; Murder of Emmett Till, 1955; Montgomery bus boycott, 1955; Desegregation at Little Rock, 1957; Sit-in campaign, 1960; Freedom Rides, 1961; Mississippi riot, 1962; Birmingham sit-ins, 1963; March on Washington, 1963; Birmingham church bombing, 1963; April 1964, Malcolm X gives his speeches *The Ballot or the Bullet* and *The Black Revolution*. In response to this continued series of actions and violent resistance, the Social Security Act of 1965 (part of Johnson's War on Poverty) and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (signed on August 6) were passed. However, given that the new laws were practically meaningless in regards to on-the-ground realities, there were yet more protests and deaths: Selma to Montgomery marches/Bloody Sunday 1965 and the riots of Harlem, Brooklyn, and Philadelphia 1964, Watts 1965, Detroit, Newark and Plainfield 1967 (see tables 1 and 2).

Second, the civil rights movement relied heavily on societal learning to get its message to the public and obtain popular support for direct actions. Organizations such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) (Meier and Rudwick, 1975); the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (Stoper, 1989; Zinn, 2002); the United Defense League (UDL) (Morris, 1984); and the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) acted as a source for disseminating information and raising awareness (Garrow, 1989). Most of these groups worked closely with local community organizations, such as churches and offered training and information through mass meetings. This created powerful grass roots movements via societal education. Finally, some of the organizations like CORE used various tactics such as sit-ins, freedom rides, boycotts, etc. which would lead to confrontations and thus generate main stream news coverage (Krajnc, 2000).

These organizations also established over 30 Freedom Schools, local citizenship schools in Mississippi. Volunteers at these schools taught over three thousand students in 1964. The Highlander Folk School, a labor college, was one of the best examples which later became the model for other organizations (Glen, 1996). As far back as 1959 Bernice Robinson, Septima Clarke, and Esau Jenkins had established citizenship schools in South Carolina with the assistance of Highlander. Overall, these schools primarily helped Blacks register to vote but they also served as a source for teaching leadership skills, critical thinking, and Black history. Later the SNCC also organized various voter registration

programs which were educational in their nature offering workshops and political lectures.

Table 2. Key Events of the Civil Rights Movement.

1958	Brown v. Board of Education
1955	Murder of Emmett Till
1955-1956	Montgomery Bus Boycott
1957	Desegregating Little Rock
1960	Sit-in Campaign
1961	Freedom Rides
1961-1963	Voter Registration Organizing
1956-1965	Integration of Mississippi Universities
1961-1962	Albany Movement
1963-1964	Birmingham Sit-in Campaign
1963	Birmingham Church Bombing
1963	March on Washington
1964	Mississippi Freedom Summer
1964	Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
April 1964	Malcolm X Speeches <i>The Ballot or the Bullet</i> and <i>The Black Revolution</i>
July 2 nd 1964	Civil Rights Act of 1964 was Signed
1964	Dr. King Awarded Nobel Peace Prize
1965	Boycott of New Orleans by American Football League players
1965	Selma to Montgomery Marches/Bloody Sunday
August 6 th 1965	Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed
1965	The Social Security Act of 1965 was signed
1968	Memphis- assassination of MLK and the Poor People's March

Art through song, theatre, and film was also used as a means of societal learning. Plays such as *The First Militant Preacher* by Ben Caldwell and Amiri Baraka's award-winning *Dutchman* proliferated. The plays were performed by Black theatre groups like Baraka's Spirit House Movers and Players who sang songs like *Who will Survive America?* More so, the civil rights movement was very active in producing songs to raise awareness such as *We Shall Overcome*, *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around*, *Keep Your Eyes on the Prize*, and *Oh Freedom*. The participatory nature of the songs promoted solidarity, class-consciousness, and offered positive and empowered Black images. More

importantly, these songs taught people that change was possible (Krajnc, 2000). As Smethurst (2005) shows, one key figure amongst many in the civil rights-Black Power artistic movement was Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones). Baraka combined art with politics and Black identity. In 1965 he founded the short lived yet influential Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School in Harlem creating the foundation of what became known as the Black Arts Movement (BAM)—the cultural/artistic counterpart of the socioeconomic Black Power Movement. BAM included notable literary figures like Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, Maya Angelou, and Rosa Grey. In addition, Baraka formed in Newark, a hotbed of activists, the Spirit House Movers and Players, the United Brothers, and the Committee for a Unified Newark (CFUN). More importantly, Baraka and Sanchez helped establish the first Black studies program at San Francisco State University. The importance of the program was that it finally acknowledged within legitimating institutions a counter-perspective thus lending *it* legitimacy as well. In addition, Baraka became pivotal in the promotion of Black studies arguing for an international Black identity separated from what he referred to as the murderous U.S. identity.

Overall, as Smethurst (2005) argues, many of the artists and performers in BAM were taught and influenced by radical leaders from the civil rights and union movements most of whom were left ideologists. This education included left-wing history, theory, politics, and organizations. Thus, militant ideology and art grew side-by-side to form a formidable social movement challenging the existing social structure economically, politically and culturally.

In addition, the civil rights, Black Power and Black Arts movements were very active in promoting Black media such as journals, magazines, and even publishing houses in addition to theatre groups, poetry, music and dance. Through poetry the movement engaged in education. By owning and operating its own media, the movement was able to further engage in societal education and an overall dissemination of its message. This would prove to be extremely important given the deliberate propaganda against them by corporate mainstream media and government. This in fact was also the case with the pre-1950s labor movement which owned and operated its own media to counter-balance mainstream media-government anti-labor propaganda. Publications included *Freedomways*, *Liberator*, Rob Williams' newsletter *Crusader*, Paul Robeson's newspaper *Freedom*, *Muhammad Speaks*, *Soulbook*, *The Baltimore African-American*, and Jihad the publishing house of the Congress of African People to mention just a few.

Third, many civil rights leaders rejected nonviolence favoring radical direct action and ideology. Then there was the Black Power Movement itself exemplified by Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, the SNCC (Ogbar, 2004) and the Black Panthers Party to name a few. In addition, there were the militant factions of the civil rights movement that rejected nonviolence in favor of defensive violence such as the Deacons for Defense and Justice (Hill, 2004), Rob Williams (Tyson, 1999) and the CORE. Malcolm X however was clearly one of the most influential figures of the Black power movement. There is a rich literature on Malcolm X indicating his radical thought which evolved over time. Despite his controversial and evolving positions there was a basic theme to his message. He clearly identified capitalism and existing (White) power holders as the source of Black repression. He did not believe the solution to be coalescing into capitalism (as the Nation of Islam through *Black Capitalism*) but to radically rearrange power relations by challenging structural inequality through any means, including violent direct action.

He also did not believe that nonviolence was sufficient nor did he have faith in political institutions (Klarman, 2004). In response to the filibustering of civil-rights legislation he said: "I'm ... one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy", a sentiment shared by many to this day (Malcolm X, 1965:26). Instead, he clearly stated that if persuasion through the threat of violence did not work then actual violence would have to be used against injustice. In fact, he encouraged armed revolt and retaliation to killings of Blacks as a means of self-defense:

There's new strategy coming in. It'll be Molotov cocktails this month, hand grenades next month, and something else next month. It'll be ballots, or it'll be bullets. It'll be liberty, or it will be death. The only difference about this kind of death—it'll be reciprocal. I find you can get a whole lot of small people and whip hell out of a whole lot of big people. They haven't got anything to lose, and they've got everything to gain. And they'll let you know in a minute: 'It takes two to tango; when I go, you go.' (Malcolm X, 1965:32)

Interestingly, this passage echoes the Communist Manifesto's famous declaration "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workingmen of all countries, unite!" (Marx and Engels, 1973:44).

Stokely Carmichael headed the SNCC in 1966. He was known as one of the more articulate proponents of Black Power with a speech by the

same title given at Berkeley University in 1966. He and the SNCC had been early practitioners of nonviolent civil disobedience and part of the civil rights movement. By 1965, though, they were disenchanted with Dr. King's nonviolent civil disobedience and adopted the policy of armed self-defense. Eventually, the organization advocated revolution against the institutional power structure. The following excerpts from Carmichael's Black Power speech at Berkeley exemplify his Marxist revolutionary ideology:

This country is a nation of thieves. It stole everything it has, beginning with black people. The U.S. cannot justify its existence as the policeman of the world any longer. . . . I do not want to be a part of the American pie. The American pie means raping South Africa, beating Vietnam, beating South America, raping the Philippines, raping every country you've been in. I don't want any of your blood money. I don't want to be part of that system. . . . We must question whether or not we want this country to continue being the wealthiest country in the world at the price of raping everybody else. . . . *Isn't it hypocritical for Lyndon to talk about how you can't accomplish anything by looting and you must accomplish it by the legal ways? What does he know about legality? . . . 'Move on over, or we're going to move over you. [italics added]*' (Carmichael, 1965:54-60).

The Deacons for Defense and Justice were formed in Jonesboro Louisiana, 1964 by for all accounts ordinary people. The organization did not align with ideological factions. Although they were not part of the Black Power Movement they were willing to take arms in active self-defense. The members consisted of Black veterans from WWII and Korea. They used their military training to protect civil rights workers from assassinations. In fact, many of the nonviolent marches and protests of the NAACP and CORE were made possible *because* of the armed security provided by the Deacons. Eventually, the FBI investigated and infiltrated the organization because of its willingness to engage in armed self-defense (Hill, 2004).

In fact, I argue the use and advocacy of violent resistance by the Deacons, Malcolm X, Black Panther Party, Stokely Carmichael-SNCC, and others created a more serious threat to the power structure in that it forced facts on the public agenda and corporate media that contradicted the legitimizing narrative of the power holders. And, if the race narrative was shown to be a myth then it logically follows that capitalism itself upon which racism was grafted was probably a myth as well. A point

commonly raised by many groups of the CRBPM. As Chomsky, Max Weber and others would say, illegitimate authority cannot tolerate any challenge to its legitimizing ideology. As such, the very act of revisiting this history is a continued act of direct challenge to the same authority and its now neo-legitimizing myths of a nonviolent civil rights movement.

“The experience of the Deacons,” writes Hill, “lays bare the myth of nonviolence, testifying to the crucial role of defensive violence in securing the law of the land.” What Hill provocatively characterizes as the “myth of nonviolence” dovetails into a larger reconsideration of longstanding civil rights tropes that depict a world filled with polarities between pacifism and violence, nationalism and integration, and personified by divergent historical conceptions of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. (Peniel, 2006:14)

In other words, militant direct action and defensive violence were not separate from the CRBPM. To the contrary, it was interwoven between nonviolence practitioners, political reformers, and ultimately even social revolutionaries.

Little is mentioned today about Robert F. Williams (Tyson, 1999) or the Black Panthers Party during MLK celebrations, given the sanitization of the movement by the corporate media. Rob Williams exemplifies how a number of civil rights militants expressed an overlapping ideology with the Black power movement as it relates to violence and armed resistance. Early on, Williams saw violent self-defense as a compliment to the non-violent tactics of the civil rights movement in the South. However, he eventually rejected nonviolence altogether as ineffectual focusing instead on resistance and an increasingly revolutionary internationalist ideology. Interestingly, although he advocated Black separatism he connected U.S. racism to the government and capitalism itself exemplifying his overall class consciousness:

In Havana and Beijing, he devised plans for an apocalyptic struggle with the white oppressor. In interviews with his first biographer Robert Carl Cohen in 1968, Williams insisted that the black revolutionary juggernaut would obliterate America. Black guerrillas would strike at the heart of the capitalist system, such as oil fields and pipelines. Using arson and sabotage, the black underground army would then destroy the nation’s cities, and, eventually, the United States itself. (Wendt, 2006:163-64)

The Black Panther Party, which was heavily influenced by Rob Williams, was an interesting organization in that it openly advocated and practiced armed resistance for self-defense and even revolution (Abu-Jamal, 2004). In California, members with legally registered guns and a copy of the Penal Code would shadow police patrols to ensure citizen rights were not violated (Wendt, 2006). Contrary to popular perception, the organization included and worked with White activists, also indicating a high level of class-consciousness. “The BPP’s ultimate goal was to lead an interracial coalition of revolutionaries in an anticapitalist and anti-imperialist struggle against common enemies” (Wendt, 2006:160). The Black Panthers presented a direct and concrete threat to the institutional power structure because they did not simply dish out rhetoric. They were active in societal education offering free classes on economics and politics; ran one of the most successful testing programs for sickle-cell anemia; became well known for their Free Breakfast for Children Program; and engaged in a host of other community based activities. They eventually came to be seen as a serious threat by the power holders. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover himself declared the group was a major Marxist threat to internal security.

Eventually, their popularity, radical left ideology, and willingness to engage in armed resistance made them an investigation target by the FBI. The FBI through its COINTELPRO program engaged in infiltration, propaganda, surveillance, prosecutions, and a host of other illegal tactics. It even engaged in assassinations of party members the most famous being that of Fred Hampton, an effective organizer, during an FBI raid of the Black Panthers’ headquarters on December 4th, 1969 (Abu-Jamal, 2004).

Dr. Martin Luther King is also presented in a non-threatening light these days, his radical arguments being sanitized. Although an ardent proponent of nonviolent civil disobedience, he was not as docile as the general public may think today. Instead, it was his class-conscious ideology rather than his actions which exhibited a well articulated radicalism with strong anti-capitalist positions as indicated by many of his speeches:

Negroes in the United States read the history of labor and find it mirrors their own experience. We are confronted by powerful forces telling us to rely on the good will and understanding of those who profit by exploiting us. They are shocked that action organizations, sit-ins, civil disobedience and protests are becoming our everyday tools, just as strikes, demonstrations and union organization became

yours to insure that bargaining power genuinely existed on both sides of the table. . . . That is why the labor-hater and labor-baiter is virtually always a twin-headed creature spewing anti-Negro epithets from one mouth and anti-labor propaganda from the other mouth. (King, 1991:202-03)

Other examples of his radical ideology can be found in his speeches in which he would state ‘Black is beautiful’, called for Black political power in major U.S. cities, condemned the Vietnam War calling for global racial and class unity, referred to the U.S. racist social structure as internal colonialism and toward the end of his life echoed the rhetoric of Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party. Thus, he too was considered an ideological militant by the FBI making him a major target of the COINTELPRO program.

As for peaceful marches and protests, those were not as devoid of violence as currently presented by the corporate media either. There were many peaceful marches, but in almost all cases the marchers were heckled, abused, beaten, and even attacked and killed by police and White mobs alike. Thus, there was a high level of violence by the power holders in response to nonviolent civil disobedience. But the protesters themselves would often also respond with defensive violence when attacked. Such protests would turn into full-blown revolts (*riots* in the corporate media) with casualties and attacks on private productive property of the perceived power holders via mass lootings. Examples of violent direct actions include the 26 *Red Summer* race riots of 1919 (Tuttle, 1996); Tulsa, OK, 1921 (Madigan, 2001); Philadelphia, PA, 1964; Watts, CA, 1965 (Boesel and Rossi, 1971; Rossi, 1973); Detroit, MI, 1967 (Boesel and Rossi, 1971); Newark, NJ, 1967 (Boesel and Rossi, 1971; Rossi, 1973); and Plainfield, NJ, 1967 (Boesel and Rossi, 1971); for a comprehensive list see table 1.

Many of these revolts/riots were sparked by some nominal (although significant) event such as the killing of Dr. King or the lynching of 14 year old Emmett Till for flirting with a White woman. Their underlying cause though has always been a deep dissatisfaction, disenchantment, and overall alienation with capitalist racist society. Thus riots have been a direct reaction to racist capitalist oppression. Furthermore, riots would lead in virtually all cases to mass lootings and destruction of private business property but not residences (Rossi, 1973). Therefore, this challenges the notion that these were indiscriminant riots. For example, Philadelphia, Watts, Detroit, Newark, and Plainfield were all characterized

by wide spread looting and thousands of burned stores (Boesel and Rossi, 1971; Rossi, 1973).

The Watts rebellion, in which tens of thousands participated, including 14, 000 national guardsmen, provides a good example of how revolts were more targeted than believed. The overall property damage was estimated at \$45 million which in today's dollars is over \$296 million (author's calculations, <http://www.measuringworth.com/index.html>).

The riot was more targeted than public officials suggested. ... the Urban League's Watts project was unscathed, the only building not burned on the block. Some—but not all—white businesses in South L.A. were burned (such as the 4300 block of Central Avenue that restricted African Americans from renting business fronts and 37 of 40 savings and loans associations that charged higher interest rates in South L.A.); some—but not all—black establishments were spared. Aimed largely at commercial interests, most housing was untouched. Stan Myles, a black student at Cal-State Long Beach, explained that people were “not lawless”; community members volunteered to man street corners where traffic lights had gone out and drivers followed their lead. But it became easier to describe rioters as indiscriminate and criminal (although most arrested had no previous record) [many even had full-time jobs] than to grapple with the substance of the uprising. Chief Parker, for instance likened rioting blacks to “monkeys in a zoo.” (Theoharis, 2006:50)

Interestingly, even art such as the 104 foot Watts Tower, a mosaic by Sabatino Rodia, was left unharmed.

On the surface one would say this is an example of poor people engaging in opportunistic stealing, an image promoted in the media coverage of the time. This is probably true to an extent, but what underlies this action is the feeling of being disrespected, exploited, and impoverished. Ironically, this was the conclusion reached by the Kerner Commission (1968) set up by Lyndon Johnson to examine the *riots* after Dr. King's assassination. Of course the commission did not explicitly blame racist capitalism as this would have been unacceptable to the power structure, opting instead to focus on racism and ... inequality. Looting was thus an instinctual working-class/racial response to institutional exploitation and injustice. It is above all a direct attack on private business property and thus revolutionary in its nature. The typical government response has been deployment of tens of thousands of police, national guards, federal troops, and mobs to restore government control with machine guns and

heavy artillery (Brecher, 1997). Ironically, the state too would violate laws in its efforts to regain control.

Furthermore, many of these revolts were not ephemeral riots by youngsters detached from long histories of organized activism as the Watts case demonstrates. According to Theoharis “The notion that activism pre-Watts was strictly older generation and conciliatory is a troubling act of historical amnesia” (2006:45). She goes on to demonstrate that there was a long history of activism in Los Angeles prior to the revolt centering on school desegregation. And it was the passage of Proposition 14 which effectively re-permitted housing discrimination in California that sparked the revolt rather than the police beating of Marquette Fry and his mother which was the ‘match’ but not the cause.

Finally, there was also an economic aspect in the civil rights movement which supplemented the spontaneous revolts and lootings. Protestors engaged in economic boycotts of businesses and local governments. This was an effort to exact an economic toll on the power holders in order to extract concessions. Usually such efforts had been proven to be ineffective in-of-themselves. One of the first efforts to boycott segregationist bus companies was in 1953 by the UDL established in Baton Rouge Louisiana. Later, the UDL became the model for the MIA which organized the more successful boycott of the Montgomery bus company (Garrow, 1989; Morris, 1984). The boycott led to a 65% drop in revenues for the Montgomery bus company (Krajnc, 2000).

The most important lesson from the civil rights movement is that there was nothing handed voluntarily out of good will to Blacks. They did not further their rights by ‘asking’ power holders through nonviolence. Instead, Blacks had to riot and engage in armed resistance finally threatening revolution. Nonviolence was only one strategy which itself was often backed by arms, violence/self-defense and radical ideology. Black people obtained their rights through violent revolutionary direct action taking them back from the very institutions that had usurped them (Fording, 1997). But this message is deliberately ignored by the corporate mass media. Specifically, the media are owned by and represent the interests of major corporations and the elite (Chomsky, 1994). As such, they do not inform the public as to the effectiveness of violent direct resistance should it be adopted by other movements to further promote citizen sovereignty.

CONCLUSION

History shows us that the labor and civil rights movements attempted to achieve the same basic goal of liberty from alienating and enslaving

capitalism. This is also demonstrated by the common tactics used by these movements and the identical responses offered by the power elite. For one, those in power make the laws which criminalize any challenge to the structures underpinning the authority of the socioeconomic system. Consequently, both labor and the CRM had to operate in defiance, and often outside of, existing legal parameters. Law did not provide rights. Rather, it acknowledged realities on the ground after they have been established as articulated by Rocker (1938). Today this means that the working class has a right, if not obligation, to operate in defiance of anti-working class legislation. Examples would include the right to engage in secondary strikes also known as *sympathy-strikes* in support of workers in other establishments and industries—a right available to European workers and most others around the world; Resisting the permanent replacement of strikers which is not allowed in European and other nations; Closing down Guantanamo Bay and abolishing any *Patriot Style* attacks on civil liberties; Forming labor unions spontaneously irrespective of the prohibitive laws governing union formation and representation as is done in other industrial nations; Actively resisting any arrests of strikers including government employees stemming from the anti-rights Taylor Laws; And simply refusing to comply with any and all anti-working class laws.

Interestingly, as both movements have shown, when sufficiently threatened, capitalists and government violated existing laws and violently suppressed mass protests. Troops and paramilitary groups were often given shoot-to-kill orders to protect business property resulting in civilian casualties (Brecher, 1997). People were arrested and their homes were searched without warrants to the dismay of local officials. The government and capitalists engaged in kangaroo-court prosecutions and executions as with Joe Hill (who proclaimed at his execution *Don't mourn for me. Organize!*). Other leaders, like Fred Hampton, were assassinated by official government agencies or capitalists.

Societal education through independent media, schools, and art had been important to both movements in terms of obtaining popular support, mobilizing people, and developing class-consciousness beyond race or industry. Without it, developing class-consciousness would be difficult. Without class-consciousness there is no solidarity and without solidarity movements fail. It was through this solidarity that workers of the old labor movement would engage in *sympathy-strikes* and get the support of entire communities behind them. Consequently, societal education for both the labor and civil rights movements, challenged capitalist ideology making education another form of revolutionary action. To this end, it is

imperative to form our own Labor Universities as was done in the past (Altenbaugh, 1990; Teitelbaum, 1993). These would be centers of counter-ideology that would educate the children of the masses not in corporate skills but the plain old truth which is synonymous with knowledge. Those progressive faculty expelled from the corporate university would be welcomed as educators. Their students would be instructed on an apprenticeship model centered on the concept of activist-scholarship to promote social justice thus ending the myth of academic value neutrality which de facto supports the status quo of inequality. More importantly, these true educational institutions would provide working models of a new future egalitarian socioeconomic form of organization based not on oppression, coercion and alienation but self-management, self-direction and creativity. This would then be disseminated to broader society through working class owned and operated means of mass communication. An example of such educational efforts is provided by the Transformative Studies Institute of NJ (www.transformativestudies.org) which is in the process of establishing an independent accredited graduate school to form the basis of a new social justice movement.

Societal education, in turn, depended heavily on an independent media, often run, managed, and owned by the movements themselves. Currently, media concentration and pro-capitalist bias has become a well documented obstruction to democracy and objective information (Chomsky, 1994; Greenwald, 2004). This is why it will be crucial for the new movement to develop an independent mass media so as to get its message out and raise support for radical direct action. There should be working class television stations, news papers, radio stations, internet media, and arts centers. As long as capitalist interests control the mass media their own interests will never be truly questioned let alone meaningfully challenged. Robert Murdoch will not allow any counter-ideology threatening his to air.

Furthermore, in order for people to support radical action progressives need to demonstrate a feasible working alternative to existing structures. This is another valuable function to be performed by Labor Universities. People will not act without knowing where this would lead them. Such actions often wind up being little more than short-lived historical occurrences such as riots. This was why Gramsci (1971) advocated developing an *ethical state* and a *disinterested culture*. For this to happen, though, there must be not only a free state but also a free media to provide objective information which would be the basis of truly educating the people. It is through education that people need to learn of a viable *counter-hegemony* to that of existing socioeconomic and political relations. To

complicate matters further, all this would have to be done ultimately at the global level given that we now have a global capitalist state.

Ideology matters. This is closely related to societal education. Educators, labor leaders, and organizers have played an invaluable role in both movements. It is through the courage of ordinary people that devote their energy and lives to the cause that change is possible. The importance of these leaders is also demonstrated by the reaction of the power holders either through hired thugs or the state. Radical labor and civil rights leaders, organizers, Anarcho-Syndicalists, and Communists have been imprisoned, exiled, beaten, and killed by the power holders when they challenged the legitimacy of Capitalism.

Furthermore, both movements had economic direct action as one of their core strategies. It was through inflicting financial losses upon the power holders through mass strikes, sit-ins, and boycotts that forced concessions. Often this included the destruction of private corporate property and the real threat of revolution. Violent economic direct action was revolutionary in that it complimented challenging the power holders' political authority with challenges to their economic base as well.

Finally, labor and civil rights have never been handed peacefully (Asimakopoulos, 2007; Rocker, 1938). Instead, the standard response by the state and capitalists has been an indiscriminant use of lethal force against the people (Brecher, 1997). Private guards, police, national guards, and federal troops have all been used, including heavy artillery and machinegun units, regularly resulting in many deaths. This was a standard response any time the power holders felt their institutional grasp loosening by mass movements. However, when the people engaged in armed resistance in defense of themselves they were successful in the long run in obtaining their goals. Perhaps today is the time for all working class people to realize this and engage in a new movement to liberate themselves from the yoke of capitalist boom-bust-bailout for the rich.

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