

Author's Introduction

There are times in history—slavery, mass lynchings, the Black-led urban rebellions throughout the United States during the 1960s, the Black-led urban rebellion in Los Angeles in 1992, and Hurricane Katrina in August/September 2005—when manifestations of the crisis of Black people in the U.S. require national and worldwide attention and aid. *Katrina's Legacy* is a tactic to challenge the ideology of white supremacy that shapes national policy. It is an effort, in that ideas are a material force, to provide political and ideological support to the struggle for democratic rights and self-determination of Black people in New Orleans, the Gulf Coast, the Black Belt South, and throughout the U.S.

I first became involved in the Civil Rights Movement in 1964, when students from North Carolina A&T State University (an historically Black college) who had risked their lives to simply sit in at a lunch counter asked students at Cornell University to join the “civil rights revolution.” Shortly thereafter, I went to work with the Congress of

Racial Equality (CORE) in Harlem and the Northeast, and I have been “a soldier in the army” ever since.

At the height of the “two decades of the sixties,”¹ the Black Liberation Movement at home and the growing independence movements for self-determination in Asia, Africa, and Latin America shaped my antiracist, anti-imperialist perspective. My view, then and now, is that *it will take a worldwide, anti-imperialist united front to isolate and weaken the U.S. government to win self-determination, ecological sanity, and an end to poverty, racism, and war in the world.*

Inside the United States, the key to that strategy is a multi-class Black United Front. In turn, that Black United Front is key to the strategic alliance inside the United States between the multiracial, multinational U.S. working class, led by the oppressed nationality working class, and the oppressed nationality Black, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Indigenous peoples. In turn, this strategic alliance inside the U.S. is part of a worldwide united front against imperialism as a system led by the oppressed nations and peoples of the Third World.

At this moment in history, the nascent forces of resistance must meet the challenges created by the New Orleans catastrophe and the crimes and punishments of the Bush Administration, the Democratic Party and the capitalist system as a whole—often reflected in the persistent and seemingly never-ending hatred toward Black people in this country by the majority of the white population. And yet, there stands before us a great historical opportunity to help jump-start a renewed Black Reconstruction in the U.S., as

part of the project to rebuild the U.S. Left and to reconstruct an international antiracist, anti-imperialist united front to confront the U.S. empire.

The present painful historical period offers an opportunity and an obligation to resist. The Bush Administration is on the defensive and facing greater isolation in the world. The forces of Black resistance have been weakened by decades of repression, division, and disorientation—conditions experienced by all sectors of the U.S. Left. But Black people in New Orleans and the South are fighting to come up with new programmatic initiatives, demands, and forms of organization out of the struggle for survival of an entire people and, from there, to reach out to form a multiracial alliance. *Katrina's Legacy: White Racism and Black Reconstruction in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast* is an effort to contribute to the debate about the central question facing all of us in the movement: Where do we go from here?

Katrina's Legacy began as an internal paper to the leaders of the Labor/Community Strategy Center and Bus Riders Union in Los Angeles. Now, with the encouragement of comrades in the Gulf Coast, it has become a public discussion paper to generate constructive and engaged debates about movement strategy and tactics.

Right now, the People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition and a broad coalition of grassroots groups are generating tactical plans and demands for federal reconstruction under community control. Saladin Muhammad of Black Workers for Justice has also written an important strategic paper, "Hurricane Katrina: The

Black Nation's 9/11!"² Their ideas are presented in the pages that follow.

Many of the ideas presented here are rooted in the scholarship and polemics of W.E.B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, Randall Robinson, Amiri Baraka, and other Black strategists whose work is referenced throughout this discussion. They are also based on lessons from the theory and practice of my own organizational affiliations and alliances that I have participated in from 1964 to the present—Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Newark Community Union Project (NCUP), Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Black Panther Party, Attica Prisoners Support, August Twenty-Ninth Movement (ATM), League of Revolutionary Struggle (LRS), United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 645, the Bus Riders Union, and the Labor/Community Strategy Center.

The central objective of Katrina's Legacy is to reinforce the historical perspective, rooted in centuries of struggle by the Black Liberation Movement, of four interrelated strategic demands—land, Reparations, full democratic rights, and the right of self-determination, up to and including the right of secession from the United States. This conditional relationship of Black people and a Black Nation is in sharp disagreement with the point of view that tries to liquidate the struggle for Black self-determination, and which tries to explain and restrain the events in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast as “attacks on the poor” or “the working class,” and which aggressively denies the existence of a Black Nation in the Black Belt South and throughout the U.S. Although of course a focus on class is essential, in the actual history

of the United States, as an oppressor nation that oppresses whole nations and peoples inside and outside its borders, *the central "class" question is the national question*, that is, the fight for full democratic rights, for self-determination, and for independence of those nations and peoples oppressed by the United States. Inside the United States, we can only understand class consciousness and class unity by how much workers and peoples of different nationalities work together for the liberation of the oppressed nationalities, and how much the white sectors of the working class work to fight white supremacy and free the colonies, and in this case, fight for Black liberation.

The system's structural, ideological, cultural, economic, and governmental racism has inflicted its attacks on all classes inside the Black community, and thus has created the material basis for a multi-class Black United Front. It is the historically determined Black/white contradiction particular to the U.S. that sets the context and shapes the paths of resistance of all oppressed nationality movements and all strategic thinking upon which to rebuild a U.S. Left.

The present period, shaped by the ongoing disintegration of urban centers, as reflected in government attacks on the Black community in New Orleans, intensifies the challenges to build an explicitly pro-Black, pro-people of color, pro-Third World ideology and movement that combats the white supremacy and "great nation" chauvinism of this country (too often reflected in the U.S. Left), and challenges the system itself.

Katrina's Legacy supports a movement for a Black Reconstruction, a Third Reconstruction in U.S. history, based

on the belief that Black people in the U.S. have the right to self-determination, including an independent land base in the Black Belt South, new forms of state unity to consolidate Black voting blocs in the South and urban centers throughout the U.S., political independence from the repressive laws and institutions of the U.S., and international rights as an internally oppressed people—up to and including the right of secession.

Katrina's Legacy: White Racism and Black Reconstruction in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast is offered as a weapon, a tactic in the ideological battle with right-wing think tanks, right-wing organizers, and right-wing cadre who are leading the counterrevolution. These tightly organized and highly motivated forces of reaction can only be challenged by the most thoughtful, strategic, revolutionary war of position from the Left, to shift the terms of the debate, and to create a framework for a new popular resistance to challenge the Right, to challenge the U.S. empire.

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