

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

# The Workers' Advocate Supplement



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## What Path for the Black Liberation Struggle?

Today the black people in this country find themselves at a critical point. The vigorous anti-racist battles of the 1950's and 60's smashed up some of the degradation of Jim Crow segregation. But the heavy weight of racist oppression continues to fall upon the shoulders of the black people in capitalist America.

In fact, the capitalist rulers are out to take back the gains that the black people made during the struggles of the past decades. The Reagan administration is heading up a campaign of renewed segregation and terror. And while the capitalist economic crisis squeezes all the working people, the blacks suffer an extra burden of poverty because of the racist oppression against them.

In the face of the racist offensive, outrage is building up in the black ghettos and among progressive people of all nationalities. Here and there, angry protests burst forth from the smoldering embers of indignation. Sooner or later, this ferment is bound to break out in another powerful upsurge.

But how will this struggle be guided and organized? What is the path forward for the black liberation movement today? This is a vital question facing fighters against racism and class-conscious workers.

The Marxist-Leninist Party, USA has spoken to many of the important theoretical questions facing the black liberation struggle. In this issue of the **Workers Advocate Supplement**, we address yet another of these theoretical issues.

### The Question of the Black Nation

In the communist and revolutionary movement in the U.S., the question has been repeatedly raised whether the black people in this country are not just an oppressed people, an oppressed nationality, but also constitute a nation centered on a territory of their own. And connected to this question, there has been a persistent debate on the applicability of the slogan of the right to self-determination for such a territory. These are the questions that we address in this journal.

The theory of a black nation in the black belt South was developed by the Communist International in 1928 and upheld by the CPUSA, at a time when the CI and the CPUSA were following a revolutionary policy. The CI showed that the vicious oppression of the blacks in the U.S. was national oppression, like that of oppressed nations and national minorities elsewhere. And it showed that there was a black nation based on a definite territory. At that time this theory and the conclusions deriving from it were part of a revolutionary program and practice that resulted in a number of prominent successes in advancing the black people's struggle.

But a lot of water has passed under the bridge since then.

Historical development has taken a course which dispersed the black nation. After World War II, an enormous wave of migration of blacks took place from the black belt. By the 1960's, if not earlier, there no longer existed a black nation in the strict sense.

The CPUSA is no longer revolutionary but is a thoroughly reformist party. As well, it no longer subscribes to the black nation theory.

And in the 1960's a number of circles in the U.S. left, circles which hadn't fundamentally broken with

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the revisionist opportunism that had corroded the CPUSA from within and destroyed its revolutionary character, took up the black nation theory in an attempt to distinguish themselves from the CPUSA and look revolutionary and anti-revisionist. These elements were, generally speaking, part of the neo-revisionist trend in the U.S. Marxist-Leninist movement.

Naturally there are some people, including honest activists fighting for revolution, who still hold to the theory of a nation in the black belt South for any of a number of reasons and who should be approached as comrades-in-arms in the fight against the bourgeoisie. However, the neo-revisionists used the theory of the black nation to turn the Leninist teachings on the national question into their opposite. The revival of this theory fit in with "third worldism" which was used to present the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations everywhere as inherently progressive and revolutionary. Anyone who did not take up this theory was denounced in the vilest of terms as "racist" and "chauvinist."

Today, a number of the remnants of the neo-revisionists, among Maoist, pro-Soviet and other opportunist circles, still cling to this theory in order to promote a liquidationist policy towards the black people's struggle. The theory of the black nation is used to justify their trailing behind the Democratic politician Jesse Jackson and their support for all sorts of sellout bourgeois elements among the black people. Other liquidators managed to achieve the same results without the black nation theory. But this theory has in fact proven to be a

prominent one in the service of present-day liquidationism.

Let it be clear that our opposition to those present-day liquidators who champion this theory is not over whether the black people are an oppressed nationality. Indeed they are, and the black people's struggle against national oppression is a vital front of the revolutionary movement.

Neither are we allergic to the mere use of the term "black nation", as many people in popular discourse use it to simply refer to the black people.

The controversy is whether or not there is a nation based on a definite territory, whose right of self-determination should therefore be defended. And behind this dispute is the contradiction over whether a revolutionary or reformist policy should be followed on the black question.

Let us proceed to examine where the question of the black nation and the right of self-determination comes up in the overall context of the struggle against the oppression of the black people.

### The Marxist-Leninist Party Upholds the Path of Revolutionary Struggle

In the face of the Reaganite offensive, there are two basic roads facing the black people today. There is the road of fighting back, of building up a strong anti-racist movement. And there is the road of forsaking struggle in favor of compromise and capitulation towards the racist drive.

The Marxist-Leninist Party, USA stands for revolutionary struggle against the racist offensive. The road of struggle is the path instinctively taken by all militant fighters. The MLP throws itself wholeheartedly into the anti-racist struggles and it stands shoulder to shoulder with all the fighting

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masses. And as the party of the class-conscious workers, as the party of revolutionary Marxism-Leninism and socialism, the MLP works to provide a revolutionary orientation to the fight against racism.

The orientation of the MLP's work in the anti-racist front is spelled out in numerous political and theoretical articles in our press. In particular, a concise summary of this orientation is given in the Resolution of our Second Congress on "The Struggle Against Racism and National Oppression." (Fall, 1983)

Although the anti-racist movement is yet to break out in force, the current restless mood among the masses creates possibilities for the revolutionary activists, the class-conscious workers and the Marxist-Leninists to work to organize the black liberation struggle.

There is a burning contempt for Reagan and his reactionary policies among the black community. This should be used to encourage and build up mass actions against the racist offensive.

There is also a growing and widespread disenchantment with the Democratic Party among the black masses. This should be used to inculcate the masses with the truth that the Reaganite racist offensive is a bipartisan policy of the entire capitalist class. It should be used to direct the anti-racist opposition squarely against the capitalist ruling class as a whole.

The vast majority of the black people are workers. They have been the backbone of the black liberation movement, and they play an important role in the class struggle of the proletariat as a whole. Special attention must be paid to organizing the black workers, and around them, the other downtrodden black masses, in order to consolidate the struggle against racism and carry it forward in a revolutionary direction.

The entire working class, of all races and nationalities, must be encouraged and brought out into the struggle against racism. The struggle for full equality and the liberation of the black people is an essential task of the whole proletariat. This struggle is called for by the interests of elementary justice. And what is more, it is vital in order to break down the walls of distrust and to unite the ranks of the working class for the revolutionary struggle against capitalism.

The more the anti-racist struggle directs its fire at the capitalist ruling class as a whole, the more the working class, black and white alike, is mobilized into the fight -- the stronger the struggle will be and the more it will help to build up forces for the socialist revolution. And it is only the socialist rule of the working class which will put an end to the brutal oppression of the black people altogether.

### The Black Bourgeoisie Stands For Reformist Compromise

There is however another path being held up in front of the black masses. This is the path of compromise, of reconciliation with the Reaganite offensive. This is the path advocated by the black bourgeois politicians and the leaders of such organizations as the NAACP, Urban League and PUSH. These elements represent the interests of the black bourgeoisie.

A section of the black bourgeoisie has directly gone over to the Republican Party. They can be found among Reagan's endorsers, supporters and his appointees. Others, the largest section, remain in the Democratic Party, but being in this party of the ruling bourgeoisie, they have reconciled with the racist offensive. They have accommodated themselves to Reaganite reaction.

The black bourgeois misleaders have worked to hold back a renewed anti-racist struggle from breaking out. They are constantly sabotaging the mass struggles when the masses do stand up, and they subordinate the concerns of the black working and poor people to the interests of the tiny wealthy stratum. Instead of struggle, they offer the politics of reformism and tokenism.

While the black masses are being devastated by unemployment, the black misleaders do not lift a finger to fight for jobs. Instead they fight for more black franchises and black businesses, claiming that the black businessmen will provide jobs. This is just an echo of the Reaganite "trickle-down" theory. As well, they join with Reagan in lobbying for the sub-minimum wages for teenagers.

While the black communities across the country are being hit by racist police atrocities, the black misleaders do not work to build any resistance. Instead they say the solution is to elect black mayors and appoint black police chiefs, naturally from among the upper strata who pledge loyalty to the capitalist parties and the ruling white bourgeoisie. But all this is done, and police brutality against blacks continues, in Atlanta, in Chicago, in Detroit, in New York, etc.

There are many deceptive and poisonous ideas used by the black bourgeoisie to spread their capitulationist course. One of the key ideological issues involved is the promotion of bourgeois nationalism. This promotes the lie that what's good for the black bourgeoisie is good for the black masses. Bourgeois nationalism tries to appear as if it is connected to a serious struggle against racism, but in fact it weakens and holds back the struggle against the oppression of the black people. This is because it attaches the black workers to the coattails of the black bourgeoisie, and through them, to the interests of the U.S. ruling class and the capitalist system.

### Struggle Against the Reformist Course is An Essential Task

Clearly, breaking out of the stranglehold of the black bourgeoisie is essential for the renewal of the anti-racist struggle. Organizing the movement requires a tenacious struggle against the politics of compromise, reformism and tokenism. This also requires ideological work against bourgeois nationalism.

In our work to advance the black liberation struggle, the Marxist-Leninist Party carries out a clear, thorough, and consistent exposure of the reformist treachery of the black bourgeoisie to the black people's struggle. This is vital for a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist approach to the black liberation movement.

But there are others who call themselves socialists and communists who take a diametrically opposed approach. They jump in line behind the reformist misleaders and help them sabotage the mass ferment and divert the masses into the arms of the Democratic Party. And yet all this is done behind a Marxist cover.

These pro-Soviet, Maoist and other revisionist trends have embraced a policy of liquidationism all down the line. They have abandoned, liquidated, any struggle for the independent class interests of the working class in favor of class collaboration with the capitalist liberals and reformists.

In the black liberation struggle, they have liquidated any semblance of a militant policy for the struggle against racism. They have entered into a compact with the black bourgeois misleaders to keep a lid on the mass struggle. They say the key to progress for the black people today is such things as getting the vote out for the capitalist parties and support for the electing of black Democratic Party politicians.

The bankruptcy of this path is shown every day. Take just one example. Racist police murders have continued without letup in New York City and one scandal after another has emerged as the city authorities have sought to coverup their racist brutality. And in the face of this, what are the black politicians up to? They have refused to lift a finger to organize a mass protest; instead they threw their energy behind impotent electoral campaigns to elect themselves to local offices. And it is this that the liquidators praised to the skies as progress for black people in New York City!

The advance of the black liberation struggle requires not only a struggle against the reformist misleaders but also against the liquidators who paint up the reformists in "Marxist-Leninist" clothing.

### Oppose the Liquidators' Attempts to Distort Revolutionary Theory

In order to prop up the reformists, the liquidators distort and drag into the mud the scientific theory of Marxism-Leninism. In their hands, theory is not a weapon to advance the revolutionary struggle but an instrument to cook up revolutionary-sounding rhetoric for supporting the reformists and liberals.

Indeed, the liquidators are wonder-workers in this arena. They have come up with justifications for every political and ideological banner of the black bourgeoisie: from reformism and nationalism to electoral cretinism and support for the Democratic Party.

As we noted earlier, a section of the liquidators holds fast to the theory of a black nation in the black belt South in order to give a Marxist-Leninist cover to their support for black bourgeois nationalism and reformism. They claim that a black nation still exists today in the black belt and therefore a program of struggle for the right to self-determination of such a nation must be advanced. Indeed, they say that this is the central component for a revolutionary strategy for the black liberation struggle.

In the name of upholding the right of self-determination, these liquidators downplay the actual struggle of the black masses against segregation, discrimination, terror, and exploitation. These struggles are condemned as allegedly being lowly and reformist while only "the right of self-determination" is exalted as revolutionary. But what they mean by "self-determination" turns out to be thoroughly corrupt reformism. It is the electoral campaigns of the black Democrats that are being painted up in such high-sounding slogans as "black empowerment" and so on.

Besides using their theorizing for cozying up to the black bourgeoisie, the liquidators also use it to directly laud bourgeois nationalism. And they use it to negate the socialist revolution as the only real path for the emancipation of the black people.

In their attempt to make this a revolutionary-sounding idea, these liquidators try to invoke the prestige of the revolutionary traditions of the Communist International and the once-revolutionary CPUSA. But this is a travesty.

### The Contents of This Journal

The Marxist-Leninist Party has over the years paid a great deal of attention to clarifying many important theoretical questions on the revolutionary orientation for the black people's struggle. For many years, we have also wanted to clear up the confusion on the black nation question. But, because of the press of other theoretical work we

weren't able to get to it.

Over the last couple of years since the Second Congress, our Party has advanced its theoretical work on the subject. Initial findings were presented to the Second National Conference in the Fall of 1984 and a party-wide discussion launched. This inner-party discussion concluded with the adoption of a resolution on the black nation question.

This issue of the **Workers' Advocate Supplement** carries a series of articles and documents on the MLP's views on the black nation question.

\*\*There is an additional introductory article which elaborates further on how the liquidators use the black nation theory to promote subservience to reformism and bourgeois nationalism.

\*\*We reprint an extract taken from the resolution from the 2nd Congress of the MLP on "The Struggle Against Racism and National Oppression," which provides a general view of our Party's work on the anti-racist front.

\*\*We reprint the resolution passed by the MLP on

the black nation question in Spring 1985 at the conclusion of the party-wide discussion on the subject.

\*\*The stand of the resolution is further explained in another article based on a speech given at the 2nd National Conference which gives an analysis of the history of the black people in the south with respect to the question of the black nation.

In the next issue of the **Workers' Advocate Supplement**, we will carry another article based on a speech from the 2nd National Conference which discusses the history of the work of the CPUSA and Comintern in the black people's movement, with special attention to the CI resolutions of 1928 and 1930 and the role played by the analysis of the black nation in the South. It also discusses how distortion of the principle of the right to self-determination into national fetishism played a harmful role in the communist movement, particularly after World War II and in the 1960's and 1970's. <-

### ON THE HISTORY OF THE CPUSA AND THE COMINTERN ON THE BLACK NATIONAL QUESTION IN THE U.S.

The next issue of the Supplement will carry an article based on the speech at the Second National Conference that traced the stand of the CPUSA and the CI on the black national question. It has been revised and supplemented in line with further research and inner-party discussion since the Conference. It is particularly useful in understanding the 1928 and 1930 resolutions of the Executive Committee of the CI, their valuable role in pushing forward the work of the CPUSA, and also certain weaknesses that appear in the 1930 resolution.

Contents include:

The Emergence of the CPUSA  
The Trade Union Educational League  
The African Blood Brotherhood  
Overcoming Social-Democratic Carry-overs  
The CP, However, Didn't Yet Grasp the Revolutionary Role of the Black People's Movement

The 6th Congress of the Communist International on the Black National Question  
The 1928 Resolution of the Political Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the CI (ECCI) on the Negro Question in the U.S.  
The Work of the CPUSA Moves Forward  
The 1928 Resolution Found Fertile Ground in the CPUSA  
Resistance to the CI's Analysis of the Black National Question  
The Debate Leading to the 1930 CI Resolution  
The 1930 Resolution of the ECCI  
Apparently a Scheme for Secessionist Revolt  
Rapid Growth of the CP's Influence Among the Masses  
Liquidationism and the Black National Question  
National Fetishism Helps Sidetrack the Repudiation of Browderism  
The Neo-revisionists Champion National Fetishism  
Oppose National Fetishism While Carrying Forward the Struggle Against Racism and National Oppression

## Why the liquidationists champion the black nation theory In service of reformism and nationalism

Today the various opportunist trends in the U.S. left, whether pro-Soviet revisionist, Maoist or Trotskyite, have joined together in a common policy of liquidationism. They have no loyalty to the independent interests of the workers and oppressed masses and instead favor class collaboration with the capitalist liberals. In the struggle of the black people against racism and national oppression, the liquidators all adapt themselves to reformism and bourgeois nationalism. They have turned themselves into cheering squads for the black bourgeois misleaders tied to the Democratic Party.

The liquidators flagrantly distort the Marxist-Leninist principles to cover for their opportunism. Among them, they find a variety of ways to justify their support for reformism and nationalism. A small section of the liquidators, such as the Maoist League of Revolutionary Struggle (LRS) and the pro-Soviet Communist Labor Party (CLP), use the theory of the black nation in the South to bolster their treacherous policies in the black liberation movement.

Those liquidators who champion the black nation theory insist that the struggle for the right to self-determination of the black nation must be at the heart of a revolutionary program for the black people in the U.S. In this article, we take a brief look at how this view flouts the real world and we show how the advocates of this view put it forward in order to oppose a revolutionary orientation on the black question. Here we again stress that we are referring to the main theoreticians of this theory, the liquidators, and not to various activists who may be under the influence of this theory while sincerely striving for revolution or pushing forward the mass struggle.

### Flying in the Face of Reality

As we describe in the other articles in this journal, a black nation did at one time come into being in the black belt South. This nation was formed in the decades following the Civil War and lasted for a period. But following World War II, a series of major economic and social changes swept the black belt. A new wave of migration bigger than any heretofore dispersed large numbers of the black people to urban centers across the U.S.

The liquidators who continue to hold fast to the black nation theory today simply shut their eyes to the changes that have taken place as a result of this dispersal. None so blind as they who refuse to see the facts before their eyes.

The emigration of blacks from the black belt has meant the dispersal of the black nation. Today, the

black belt no longer has a majority black population. There is no longer a sizeable continuous territory with a black majority. In fact, there are roughly five separate clumps of areas with a majority black population. All together, there are just over a million black people in these areas, where they constitute a bare majority (51.1%). The blacks who live here only make up about 4.1% of the total black population in the U.S., fewer than the number of black people in either New York City or Chicago. The vast majority of the 27 million blacks live in urban areas across the U.S.

This stands in contrast to the situation when there was in fact a black nation in the black belt. In 1880 for example, there were nearly 3.5 million black people in the black belt, where they constituted a 60.3% majority. And this black population made up just over half the total number of black people in the U.S. Even as recent as 1930, there were 4.8 million blacks in the black belt where they formed a 50.3% majority. This comprised about 40% of the total black population in the country, a large section though no longer a majority. Still even then a majority of the black people continued to live in the South as a whole.

The dispersal of the black nation does not mean that the national oppression of the black people in the U.S. has been resolved. Far from it. The black people retain many of the features of an oppressed nation, but today they form an oppressed national minority concentrated in urban centers spread across the country. Everywhere the black people face a common struggle against segregation, discrimination, and racist terror, and they join with with the rest of the working people in the struggle against capitalist exploitation.

This dispersal has put an end to any real material and economic basis for an independent country. There is no longer a nation, no longer a historical territory with a black majority, that could provide the basis for such a country. The dispersal of the black nation has rendered meaningless the question of the right of such a nation to self-determination or secession.

With their stubborn adherence to the black nation theory, the champions of this theory not only disregard reality, but as well, by raising the slogan for the right to self-determination for a non-existent black nation, these liquidators have made a complete hodge-podge of the principles of Marxism-Leninism on the national question.

With the black nation theory the liquidators try to sound oh-so revolutionary and militant. They pretend as if their stand holds dear the highest interests of the black people. But this is sheer

demagogy. In fact, it is all just a cover for their craven support for reformism and bourgeois nationalism.

### A Cover For Promoting Reformism

The champions of the black nation theory claim that recognition of a nation means a fight for self-determination which is revolutionary, while denial of a nation means a "mere" fight for "equality" which they say is non-revolutionary and reformist. Many times this is accompanied by pointing the finger at reformists and liberals who promote a reformist and pacifist approach in the name of fighting for equality.

The liquidators are talking nonsense. There can be a reformist approach both in the name of fighting for equality as well as in the name of upholding self-determination. The real issue is what the actual conditions call for, and the content of one's approach.

It is indeed true that there are liberals and reformists who speak of equality for the black people. But the problem with liberalism is not that it speaks in the name of equality, it is that liberalism is entirely hypocritical. Liberal talk of equality is merely lip service. And what is more, in recent years a whole section of liberals have directly joined the Reaganite racist campaigns around so-called "reverse discrimination" and "anti-crime" hysteria.

As to "equality", when revolutionary Marxist-Leninists speak of a fight for equality, or against racist terror, or on any democratic question, we do not mean simply verbal declarations and hand-wringing, like the liberal bourgeois friends of the liquidators do. And we do not promote any illusions that progress will come through the good graces of the capitalists. No, we mean mobilizing the masses for real struggle. And we link the struggle for equality with the struggle against the merciless capitalist exploitation of the masses. When the masses rise in struggle, they rise against the miserable conditions they face and do not stop at the boundary between democratic issues and the fight against exploitation of all kinds.

By denigrating any struggle that fails to raise the banner of the right to self-determination as "reformist," the liquidators are sneering at the struggles the black people are engaged in on a daily basis. They are turning the theory of the right to self-determination -- which in Lenin's hands was part of a powerful struggle against all forms of national oppression -- into a wet blanket to put out the flames of the ongoing struggles against oppression, to oppose anything that goes beyond the bounds that their liberal bourgeois friends will allow.

No, the liquidators will never get away with their mock cries about the horrible "reformism" of the struggle for "equality". Indeed, when one

examines what the liquidators are actually advocating in the name of "the right to self-determination," one finds that it is not some revolutionary policy but the crassest reformism. Today in the name of championing "self-determination," the liquidators are supporting the efforts of the black bourgeois politicians to get elected to office as candidates of the Democratic Party.

This politics is being promoted as a substitute for the actual struggle against racism and it is aimed at keeping the black masses hitched to the coattails of the Democratic Party of monopoly capital, precisely at a time when the disenchantment of the black people with the Democrats is growing. But to the lying liquidators, this becomes "black empowerment," "black political power", "black self-determination," etc. Everything from the election of black Democrats to local offices in the South to the election of Harold Washington in Chicago -- which of course is quite far removed from the black belt, to the electoral campaign of Jesse Jackson has been justified in the name of "self-determination."

### Collaboration With the Black Bourgeoisie

The class content of the program advocated by the champions of the black nation theory is collaboration with the black bourgeoisie. These liquidators use the black nation theory to play down the class differentiation within the black people and to claim that there is a unity of interests between the black upper crust and the black working people.

**This flows from the strange theory of these liquidators that if there is an oppressed nation, then the bourgeoisie of that nation is automatically a progressive force, an ally of the toiling masses.** This is not true in general, and it is ridiculous with respect to the black bourgeoisie.

Marxism-Leninism holds that there may be instances where on a temporary basis the national bourgeoisie -- or, more likely, sections of it -- may take a national-revolutionary stand in the struggle against national oppression. This is particularly so where the class antagonisms within the nation are not much developed. More often, however, the national bourgeoisie takes at best a national-reformist stand or tends to fall into outright collaboration with the oppressors of the nation. Indeed, the more aroused the masses of toilers are or the more acute the class contradictions are within the oppressed nation, the more likely is the national bourgeoisie to embrace a compact with the oppressor bourgeoisie against the toilers of all nationalities.

Among the black bourgeoisie today in the U.S., one finds both reform spouters as well as outright collaborators like Reagan's lackey Clarence Pendleton. But even the reformists are conciliating with the Reaganite racist offensive and participating in the capitalist drive against the black working

masses. This does not need great insight to see. It is sufficient to take just a glance at what is taking place with the black masses in the big cities which are today governed by black reformist and liberal mayors, like Coleman Young's Detroit, Wilson Goode's Philadelphia, or Andrew Young's Atlanta.

**Denying the Postive Impact  
of the Dispersal of the Black Nation  
for the Black Liberation Struggle**

**The champions of the black nation theory promote the view that an oppressed people can fight against their oppression only if they are forged into a nation.**

This too is untrue. Just take a look at the history of the black people over recent decades. Contrary to the prejudices of the champions of the black nation theory, the dispersal of the black nation, despite the pain and suffering that it entailed, has helped to facilitate, not hinder the struggle of the black people against racism and national oppression.

The biggest upsurge of the black people in this century took place not when there was a black nation, but coinciding with its dispersal -- in the 1950's and 60's. The upsurge of the black liberation movement during this period was facilitated by the results of the dispersal of the black nation.

The dispersal of the black nation led to the widespread proletarianization of the black people. Today the majority of the black people are urban workers. The dispersal of the black nation has also meant that the large numbers of black people are not scattered in the rural countryside but concentrated in large urban communities. This proletarianization and concentration are favorable for the development of struggle and organization against the oppression of the black people. The black people's will to rise up and break down the barriers that stood in their way has only been stiffened.

The dispersal of the black people to urban centers throughout the country has also helped to bring the black workers in closer contact with the workers of other nationalities. This has helped to cut down national barriers within the ranks of the working class and promote class unity and struggle. The black workers have played a militant role in the

proletarian movement.

The conditions created by the dispersal of the black nation have not only been favorable for the growth of the black people's struggle but they have also been favorable for the eventual merger of the anti-racist movement with the other currents of the mass movement into a single torrent of the socialist revolution.

**Negating the Socialist Revolution**

The champions of the black nation theory will occasionally talk about socialism. But in their hands, socialism becomes a totally lifeless phrase. The result of their distortion of the right of self-determination is to oppose using the black liberation struggle as a lever for the socialist revolution.

These liquidators not only use the question of "self-determination" to downplay the day-to-day struggles of the black masses but they also counterpose it to the socialist revolution. They present the question of "self-determination" as the highest goal of the black people. Despite the verbal declarations about the socialism -- in some distant future -- this amounts to putting forward a nationalist program for the black people; not one that organizes towards the socialist revolution.

What is more, the practical activity of these liquidators goes directly against using the energy of the anti-racist struggle for the socialist revolution. One cannot promote alliance with the black bourgeoisie, thorough lackeys of capitalism that they are, and still claim to stand for socialism. One cannot promote hitching the masses to the black bourgeois politicians and the Democratic Party of monopoly capital, and still pretend to stand for socialist revolution. One cannot promote narrow bourgeois nationalist prejudices among the black working masses, undermine class unity, and still pretend to stand for proletarian revolution.

No, the champions of the black nation theory both betray the democratic struggle of the black people against national oppression and their struggle against capitalist exploitation. They denigrate not just democratic goals such as that of equality, but also the class struggle and the socialist revolution.

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# Resolution on the black national question

## -Spring, 1985-

The following resolution was adopted by the MLP, USA in Spring, 1985 after a period of thorough inner-party discussion.

In the revolutionary movement the question has been repeatedly raised of whether the black people in the U.S. constitute not only an oppressed nationality but also a nation based in a definite territory where they form the majority of the population. Connected to this question, there has been a persistent debate on the applicability of the slogan of the right of self-determination for the black people. After thoroughly studying the facts, and by applying the theoretical principles of Marxism-Leninism, the Marxist-Leninist Party has come to the conclusions expressed below. This assessment, besides answering the above questions, also confirms the correctness of the orientations for the black people's movement which were set out in the resolution from the 2nd Congress of the MLP entitled **The Struggle Against Racism and National Oppression.**

1. The liberation movement of the black people in the U.S. is an essential front of the struggle against capitalist reaction and is an important lever of the proletarian revolution.

2. The nearly 30 million black people in the U.S. are an oppressed nationality. Racism against the black people has long been one of the foundations of capitalist rule in the U.S. and a bulwark of all political reaction. The exploitation of cheap black labor is a source of great profits for the rich. As well, the capitalists' promotion of the poison of racism is a major instrument of their divide-and-rule tactics against the entire working class.

Today, the oppression of the black people is growing. The capitalist class has unleashed against the black people a major racist offensive, headed up by the Reagan government and supported by the Democratic Party. The vast majority of the black people are industrial workers, service workers, and other sections of the working people. They are concentrated in the major urban centers throughout the country where they are frequently forced into segregated neighborhoods and decaying ghettos. They are suffering from especially high levels of unemployment, impoverishment, and other burdens of the capitalist economic crisis. At the same time the capitalist government is on a segregationist drive, stepping up discrimination in housing, jobs, and education while racist terror by the police and government sponsored gangs is increasing against the black people.

3. The deep South continues to be a bastion of racist oppression. The dominance of the most overtly racist politicians combined with KKK terror, lynchings, and other of the most ugly forms of racism have endured to confront the black masses with daily degradation and terror.

4. Historically the deep South was the center of the inhuman system of chattel slavery which had been revived by the American exploiters and used to enslave black people from Africa. The black people never accepted this bestial system. Major slave revolts broke out in the 1600's and 1700's and reached a peak in the decade of the 1850's. Finally, the Civil War, in which the black masses played a major role, broke the back of the slaveocracy and abolished chattel slavery. But the northern capitalists soon compromised with the former slaver owners, and formal slavery was replaced with a ruthless semi-feudal system of Jim Crow segregation and Klan terror.

The majority of the black people were concentrated in the deep South. And in the zone commonly known as the "black belt," where the plantation system was concentrated, the black people formed a large majority of the population.

After the Civil War, for some time the black people in this zone went through a process of developing into a nation. This refers to a nation in the strict sense, that is, a nation based on a definite territory, with a certain economic development and class differentiation, where the black people comprised the majority of the population and which is "a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture." (**Marxism and the National Question**, Section I "The Nation," J.V. Stalin, 1913) These basic features existed during this period, and all together meant that a nation (in the strict sense) of the black people came into being for a time in the area known as the "black belt." But due to various factors, such as the emigration of black people out of this area, certain features defining the black people as a nation were not stable and they were not as accentuated as with most nations. Thus there was definite potential for the nation to become dispersed.

Throughout the period of the existence of this nation the possibility existed for the emergence of a black secessionist movement based on this national territory. However, for a number of reasons, such a movement did not come into being. The black masses showed disinterest in or, at times, even hostility to the idea of forming a separate black country in

the South. The mass struggle of the black people developed mainly as a battle for the abolition of Jim Crow segregationism, for the elimination of the semi-feudal oppression suffered at the hands of the plantation lords, and for full equality.

In the late 1920's and 1930's the CPUSA upheld the black people's right to self-determination, that is, the right of the population in the territory of the black nation to themselves democratically decide whether or not to secede from the U.S. and form a separate government, and this was correct. At the same time, the interests of the liberation of the black people and of the socialist revolution of the working class demanded that the communists should not orient the movement to take up the goal of secession. Rather, the communists, in their practical work, were right to center their efforts on developing mass revolutionary struggles against discrimination in the work places and exclusion from the unions and for organizing together the workers of all nationalities; against Jim Crow segregation, lynching, and all forms of national oppression; against landlordism and the plantation system and to organize the tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and agricultural laborers. And they worked to merge these streams of struggle with the proletarian movement for socialism.

5. During the period that lasted into the 1940's there were significant waves of migration of black people out of the rural areas of the deep South and to the big cities. But at the end of World War II a new wave of migration began which was bigger than any in the past. The black people were forced off the land in the rural South and were driven into ghettos in the major urban centers throughout the country. Pushed off the plantations and farms the black people increasingly became workers.

The process of dispersing the black nation was in full swing by the late 1940's, even then putting in doubt the existence of the nation in the strict sense, and by the 1960's one can certainly no longer speak of a black nation in the deep South. This process has dispersed the black people to such an extent that there is no longer a significant area of black majority in the former territory of the black nation. The small areas in this territory where there continues to be a black majority have only an insignificant population. Many black people live in the South, but most have migrated out of the former territory of the black nation to the big cities. And immigration patterns in recent years, which have seen many black people leaving the North and returning to the South, have not reversed this trend but have continued the process of concentrating those black people who live in the South into the big Southern cities.

Although some exceptional circumstances in the future, generally involving catastrophes for the black people, could conceivably reconcentrate black

people in the "black belt", or some other region, at present one cannot speak of a black nation, in the scientific sense of the term. The historic trend, which has been developing for many decades, is presently against the crystallization of a black nation.

In this situation, there is no longer a basis for raising the slogan of the black people's right of self-determination, that is, the right of the people in a definite territory to secede. At the same time, the black people remain an oppressed nationality; they retain many of the features of a nation and the savage yoke they bear is similar in character to that borne by other brutally oppressed national minorities.

6. These conclusions do not mean that the Party should denounce every use of the term "black nation." Frequently in popular language the term "nation" is not used in the scientific sense, but as simply another word for a people. In some situations, to make a point of denying the existence of a black nation would mean to those hearing it that the existence of the black people, or the black people's movement, is being denounced; and this is true even among people who would regard it as absurd to regard the black people as a nation in the strict sense. The distinction between a nation and a nationality is generally slurred over in popular language. And these differences between the strict, scientific use of terms and the widespread, popular understanding of these terms must be taken into full account in our work against the oppression of the black people.

To a certain extent, the same considerations apply to the term "right to self-determination." It is often used in a figurative or imprecise way or to express that someone wants to fight on some democratic issue. The imprecise use of this term can give rise to serious problems, and does so much more frequently than the popular use of the term "black nation." Nevertheless, there are other cases where it would be pedantic to get upset over the imprecise use of the term "right to self-determination."

In its own agitation, the Party must generally strive to use these terms scientifically. But it is important to grasp that the Party's aim is not to create a fight over terms, but to provide the movement with a correct analysis and orient it in a revolutionary direction. There must be sensitivity to what various people and forces are saying and not just a mechanical reaction to their use of different terms.

7. The dispersal of the black people out of the rural areas into the major cities and their proletarianization has been a very painful process. Nevertheless, this dispersal and proletarianization has been favorable to the development of the black liberation struggle. The great power demonstrated in the movement that swept across the country in the late 1950's and the 60's shows the enormous revolu-

tionary potential of the black people's movement today.

The driving of black people off of the plantations and farms led to the vast majority becoming workers. In the black liberation movement, it is the workers who are the most consistent and resolute fighters against racism, the backbone of the anti-racist movement, around whom the other sections of the black people must be rallied. Meanwhile the black bourgeoisie sells out the mass struggle in order to reach accommodation with the monopoly capitalist ruling class.

At the same time, the concentration of black workers in factories and work places, where they work and struggle side by side with workers from other nationalities, has further created conditions for the breaking down of racism and national dis-

trust among the workers. It is the working class of all nationalities, united in struggle against the exploiters and oppressors, which forms the powerful force that can smash national oppression and the entire capitalist system. The Marxist-Leninist Party works with all of its might to bring out the entire working class in struggle against racism and national oppression.

The struggle for full equality and liberation of the black people is not only demanded by elementary justice, but is also essential to break down the strongholds of reaction, to widen the field of the class struggle and to unite the working class for the socialist revolution. The battle of the working class against racism and national oppression is one of the important fronts that altogether form the revolutionary class struggle of the working class.<>

## From the resolutions of the Second Congress of the MLP, USA -Fall, 1984-

### THE STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM AND NATIONAL OPPRESSION (Excerpt)

The mass movements against racism and national oppression are one of the important fronts of the mass struggles in the U.S. From the slave revolts and the Native people's resistance wars in earlier centuries to the demonstrations and mass rebellions of the 1960's, the oppressed nationalities have repeatedly risen up in heroic battles against the racist exploiters and their state machine.

The history of capitalist rule in this country is a history of the most savage racial and national oppression. It is a history which includes such infamy as the genocidal wars against the Native population and the inhuman enslavement of blacks. Racism has been institutionalized by the capitalist class and its state. Today tens of millions of people suffer under the terrible yoke of national oppression. The black people, the Mexican nationality people, Puerto Ricans, Native people, Asian-Americans and other nationalities are subject to barbaric discrimination, racist brutality and the worst conditions of life and work.

Racism has long been a bulwark of all political reaction in the U.S. It is a weapon systematically used by the capitalists to try to divide the workers of different races and nationalities and thereby to weaken the workers' movement and keep down the entire working class. As well, racism is the source of enormous profits for the capitalists as they super-exploit the workers of the oppressed nationalities.

Any improvements in the conditions of the oppressed nationalities have come about only through the most bitter mass struggle. But capitalism is unable to provide full equality for the black people and other nationalities. Brutal racism and national oppression are the way of life in capitalist America. The capitalist rulers and their state are racist to the core. Their much-vaunted 'freedom' and 'democracy' stand exposed as nothing more than hollow and hypocritical lies.

The oppressed people have never taken their subjugation lying down. U.S. history is filled with examples of the valiant struggles of the long-suffering masses. The mighty upsurge of the black people, which began in the 1950's and grew to powerful rebellions in city after city in the late 1960's, is of particular importance. This movement shook capitalist America to its foundations. The powerful struggle of the black people, along with

major battles waged by other nationalities, struck down some of the worst features of Jim Crow segregation. They greatly inspired the workers, youth, and women of every nationality and played an important role in the development of the revolutionary movement of the 1960's.

Today the capitalists are seeking revenge against the black people and other oppressed nationalities. A renewed racist offensive is underway to take back every past gain that the masses had achieved through struggle. The Reagan administration is heading up a drive to further segregate the schools. Under the banner of opposing so-called 'reverse discrimination,' capitalist reaction is working to intensify discrimination in jobs and other fields of life. Brutal racist attacks and murders continue from the police and racist gangs. As well, the oppressed nationalities are forced to bear the heaviest load of the measures of the rich to shift the burden of the economic crisis onto the shoulders of the workers and poor.

The racist offensive of the bourgeoisie has given rise to widespread angry dissatisfaction among the oppressed nationalities. Here and there a number of fierce battles have already broken out. Throughout the country the oppressed peoples are girding themselves for the fight. A new upsurge of struggle against racism and national oppression is inevitable.

The Marxist-Leninist Party takes its stand shoulder to shoulder with the masses of the oppressed nationalities, and it fights with all its might against racism and all forms of national oppression. The Party is irreconcilably hostile to discrimination, segregation and racist terror. It opposes all prejudice and bigotry. The Party encourages active resistance to racist attacks and works to build up the mass actions of the people into a powerful anti-racist movement.

In this work, the Party pays attention to bringing out the class source of racism and national oppression. The MLP exposes the bourgeois lies, such as the idea that racism is inherent in human nature; it emphasizes that the fountainhead of racist and national oppression is the capitalist class and its state. The MLP works to direct the anti-racist struggle squarely against the capitalist rulers.

The MLP also rejects the opportunist concept that class analysis is not relevant to the mass movements of the oppressed nationalities. The class issues within the oppressed nationalities manifest themselves in various ways.

First, the vast majority of the oppressed nationality masses are workers. They are the most consistent and resolute fighters against national oppression, they form the backbone of the anti-racist movement, and they play an important role in the class struggle of the proletariat as a whole.

As well, there is an ever-deepening polarization between the oppressed nationality workers and the bourgeoisified upper strata of the oppressed nationalities. The upper strata within the oppressed nationalities sell out the mass struggle against racism in order to reach cozy accommodations with the ruling class at the expense of the workers of their own oppressed nationality. In the final analysis, it is impossible to develop the struggle against the racism of the ruling class without also opposing the treachery of the bourgeois of the oppressed nationalities.

Thus the recognition of the class divisions within the oppressed nationalities does not weaken, but strengthens, the overall struggle against national oppression. The Marxist-Leninist Party, as the party of the class conscious vanguard of the workers of all nationalities, holds that the class differentiation and class struggle within the oppressed nationalities should not be covered over but encouraged.

Thus, in building up the movement against racism, the MLP pays special attention to organizing the workers of the oppressed nationalities. It is by organizing the workers, and around them the other sections of the masses of the oppressed nationalities, that a firm struggle against racism can be consolidated and that the movement can be carried forward in a revolutionary direction.

At the same time, the MLP encourages the struggle against the sellout bourgeois elements within the oppressed nationalities. In this regard, it is important to fight narrow, bourgeois nationalism. Bourgeois nationalism is promoted by the bourgeois elements of the oppressed nationalities. It tries to claim that the oppressed nationality workers have common interests with the bourgeois of their nationality rather than with the rest of the workers. Thus bourgeois nationalism seeks to bind the oppressed nationality workers to the interests of the bourgeois of their own nationality and, through them, to the ruling class as a whole. It is a roadblock to the struggle against racism and national oppression.

The Marxist-Leninist Party also works steadfastly to organize the workers of every nationality into the fight against racism and national oppression. The Party counterposes proletarian internationalism to the racism of the bourgeoisie. The fight for the full equality and the liberation of the oppressed nationalities is an essential task of the entire working class. The workers support all democratic struggles of the oppressed in the interest of elementary justice. What is more, every real step

forward in the anti-racist struggle weakens the strongholds of reaction, strengthens the hands of all the exploited and oppressed, and widens the field of the class struggle. The fight against national oppression is essential to break down the barriers of distrust and to unite the ranks of the working class for the revolutionary struggle against capitalism. What Karl Marx said of the United States in the last century still rings true today: **"Labor in the white skin cannot emancipate itself as long as labor in the dark skin is branded."**

The Marxist-Leninist Party stands for the development of the unity of the workers of all nationalities in a single front against exploitation, racism and all forms of oppression. The MLP stands for a single party for the entire working class of the U.S., a party that organizes the advanced workers of all nationalities. The working class must ensure that the class organizations embrace the workers of all nationalities.

Life has amply demonstrated the capitalism cannot bring emancipation for the oppressed nationalities. Only the overthrow of the racist capitalist rulers can usher in freedom for all the oppressed nationalities. The struggles against racism and national oppression are very important streams preparing the way for the proletarian socialist revolution.

#### **The Fight Against the Oppression of the Black People**

Today there are almost 30 million blacks in the U.S. The oppression of this people has been one of the basic foundations of capitalist rule in the U.S. Racism against the blacks is an entrenched feature of every variety of political reaction. The exploitation of cheap black labor is a source of great profits for the rich. As well, the promotion by the capitalists of the poison of racism against the blacks is a major instrument of the divide-and-rule tactics of the rich against the whole working class.

Every step forward for the black people has taken tremendous struggle. The abolition of slavery was accomplished only through the Civil War. But formal slavery was soon replaced with the ruthless system of Jim Crow segregation and Klan terror. The worst features of the Jim Crow system were removed only after decades of hard struggle, especially the upsurge of the black people during the 50's and 60's. To gain even the smallest rights the black people had to face rabid terror and shed their blood. These struggles of the black people had a great liberating significance. They taught the masses confidence in the power of mass struggle. They allowed the black people to lift their heads up high.

However, the black people continue to face great oppression. Desperately poor in ordinary times anyway, today the black masses are being devastated by the economic crisis. They are suffering twice

the national rate of unemployment, while joblessness among the black youth is over 50%. With a poverty rate at more than double that of the population as a whole, over 35% of all black families struggle to survive below the government's official poverty level.

Besides ever-deeper impoverishment, the black people also face the government's segregation drive and racist terror campaigns. Blacks continue to be shot at, lynched and beaten by policemen and racist gangs such as the KKK. The bourgeois courts allow the racist murderers to go scot-free or at the most give them light taps on the wrist.

There is a great anger building up among the black masses. This discontent can be seen in the rebellions in Miami of recent years, in fights against the Klan, in demonstrations against police murders, in the widespread hatred against Reagan, etc. However the struggle has yet to break out in force as happened in the 50's and 60's.

The ability of the black people to resist the racist offensive has been undermined by the treacherous role of the official leaders of the black community. These leaders include the black bourgeois politicians and the leaderships of such organizations as the NAACP, the Urban League, PUSH, etc. They are in reality misleaders of the black people, and they represent the interests of black bourgeois and those sections of the black petty-bourgeoisie which identify with the ambitions of the black bourgeoisie.

The black misleaders worked to sabotage the black people's struggles of the 1960's. Instead of supporting active resistance, they promoted passive methods of struggle. Instead of using the energy of the rebellions to organize the masses and to develop a more systematic and conscious struggle against racism, they denounced the militant rebellions of the masses. Instead of building the struggle relying on the strength of the masses, they worked to tie the masses to the Democratic Party of the racist ruling class.

Today the misleaders of the black people are wallowing in abject treachery against the black masses. They do not stand for fighting back against the racist offensive. When the black masses rebel, they come in as 'riot stoppers.' Instead of struggle, they work for cozy accommodations with the ruling class. They are working harder than ever to keep the black masses tied to the Democratic Party. Indeed their support for this party is one of the main factors allowing the Democrats to posture as

the champion of the minorities.

In particular, the black misleaders seek to use the anger of the black masses as a springboard for the ambitions of the black bourgeoisie and those sections of the petty-bourgeoisie with the same aspirations. Under the slogan of working to increase the 'clout' of the black people, the black bourgeoisie seeks to use the black people's struggle to pressure for more token positions within the ruling class, such as in the higher levels of the government, in the capitalist parties, in the corporate boards, etc. They do not fight for the interests of the black working masses. Instead they echo the Reaganite 'trickle-down' ideologues by claiming that improving the positions of bourgeois blacks will ultimately translate into gains for all the black people.

The reformist policy of tokenism for a small handful of blacks has long been encouraged by the capitalist rulers of the U.S. In the 1960's, they stepped up this policy on realizing that the former bribed strata was too narrow and had too little influence on the masses. This was a bipartisan policy of the bourgeoisie. It was promoted through a variety of programs, such as the promotion of 'black capitalism' by the Nixon administration. But while the black bourgeoisie is relatively well-off in comparison with the black workers, it is not as rich as the monopolists and it forms a very small section of the American bourgeoisie as a whole. At most, the black bourgeois are millionaires, while the white bourgeois include billionaires. As well, there is a much smaller proportion of the bourgeois among the black people than among the white population of the country. In brief, the black bourgeoisie has been given some crumbs and it has sold out but it has been kept out of the ruling, monopolist section of the U.S. capitalist class.

The advance of the struggle against the oppression of the black people requires a stern struggle against the misleaders who represent the interests of the black bourgeoisie. The black liberation struggle cannot have tokenism as its aim; instead it must seek to meet the interests of the vast numbers of working and poor blacks. This calls for struggle against the racist oppressors, not compromise with them. It calls for breaking with the path of reliance on the Democratic Party.

(From the collection of the bulk of the resolutions of the Second Congress in the January 1, 1984 issue of *The Workers' Advocate*.) <>



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# On the black national question and the right of self-determination

The following article is based on a speech at the Second National Conference of our Party. It has been revised for publication and additional material has been added.

The black liberation movement, from its roots in the heroic resistance against slavery to its dynamic battles that rocked the big cities all across the country in the 1960's, is one of the essential fronts of mass struggle in U.S. It is not only a necessary movement for the black people to free themselves from the outrages of racial discrimination and segregation, but it is also an essential struggle for the unity of the working class and an important lever of the socialist revolution.

In this article we will deal with one question that has come up repeatedly on the orientation for the black peoples movement, that of the theory of the existence of a black nation in the black belt region of the South and of the need to fight for the right to self-determination of that nation. To deal with this question we will examine the history of the black people's movement, especially in its relation to the question of the black nation in the South, and some of the important principles of Marxism-Leninism on the national question.

Put in brief terms, this examination will show the following:

After slavery was abolished through the Civil War, in which the black people played such an important role, the black people's movement took the course of mass struggle against Jim Crow segregation and for agrarian reform, equal rights, and complete emancipation.

In the decades following the Civil War a black nation did come into existence in the black belt region of the deep South. However, no mass national independence movement to form a separate black country in the black belt ever emerged among the black people.

In the situation facing the communists in the 1920's and 30's, it was essential for them to uphold the right of the black nation to secede and form its own state, that is, the right to self-determination. But the task of the communists was not to advocate secession. Rather the need was to put all of their energy into the ongoing struggle of the black people for full equality, for agrarian reform, and against capitalist exploitation. It was essential for the communists to organize this struggle in a revolutionary way, and for them to work to link up the black people's movement with the revolutionary socialist movement of the working class.

Eventually, after World War II, the black people

who had been concentrated in the black belt were forced off the land and dispersed throughout major cities all over the U.S. This dispersal has developed to such a degree that one can no longer speak of a black nation in the black belt South and there is no longer a material basis to form an independent black country or for raising the slogan of the right to self-determination.

Today the issue in fighting against the oppression of the black people is to organize a revolutionary struggle against capitalist exploitation, against all forms of national oppression, for equality, and for complete liberation. This struggle is part of and a necessary preparation for the socialist revolution. Only socialism can completely liberate the black people.

Let us now proceed to the examination of the history of the black people's movement and the history of the black nation in the South.

## The Black People Fought Heroic Battles Against Slavery

Although chattel slavery was a inhuman system that had long been in its grave in most of the world, the American exploiters revived it and built it up on a grand scale throughout the plantation system of the South. For the sake of the rich capitalist cotton trade and the mint-julep luxury of a handful of Southern plantation aristocrats, slavery flourished for a time. Black people out of many African tribes were stolen from their native land and put through the deadly ocean passage only to face the humiliation of the auction block, the lash of the slavelord's whip, and a life cut far short from the overwork and mistreatment in the cotton fields.

Black people never accepted this bestial system and repeatedly rose up against it. Freed slaves joined the abolition movement and a number became foremost abolitionists leaders. Meanwhile in the South the black slaves waged many forms of struggle, from torturous escapes from slavery and small scale resistance to major slave revolts. There are at least 250 cases of known slave conspiracies and insurrections. Major slave revolts broke out as early as the 1600's and 1700's. The first half of the 1800's saw the now famous events of the plot of Gabriel in 1800, of Vesey in 1822, of Nat Turner in 1831, and of the crews of the Amistad and Creole in 1839 and 1841. In the 1850's, the decade leading up to the Civil War, this struggle reached a high point with important slave movements in Louisiana, Florida, Arkansas, Georgia, South Carolina, Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. One planned revolt

in 1853 is reported to have involved 2500 slaves in the New Orleans area.

Although the black people were unable to overcome the many obstacles to organizing a generalized slave revolt, and their rebellions were mainly isolated to individual plantations and crushed, their heroic struggles exposed the bestial system of slavery, lifted the hope of freedom in the masses, and established the fighting traditions of the black people's movement in the United States.

### **The Beginnings of a Black Nation During the Period of Slavery**

It was in the crucible of brutal slavery that black people from diverse African tribes began to be forged into a distinct oppressed people in the U.S. And, it was in this period, that black slaves in the lowland plantation area of the South started to develop certain of the features of a nation.

Here we are speaking of a "nation" in the strict sense, as distinct from the meaning of an "oppressed people"; that is, a nation based on a definite territory where black people comprise the majority of the population and where there is a certain economic development and class differentiation. Joseph Stalin, whose definition is as comprehensive as any short one can be, described the characteristics of a nation as "a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture." (Marxism and the National Question, Section I "The Nation") Let us look at some of these characteristics with respect to the black people during the period of slavery.

First, they developed as a people in a common territory. The slave system was not uniformly distributed throughout the South but, instead, it was chiefly found in the deep South, an area which runs from eastern Virginia and eastern North Carolina through most of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, Southern Arkansas and on into east Texas. Slavery was concentrated in the core of this region where the large-scale plantations were located, an area known as the "black belt" for its rich soil. In 1860 black people counted for 56% of the population of the black belt. About 55% of all the black people in the U.S. lived in the black belt, and over 70% lived in the deep South as a whole.

Secondly, they developed a common language. The slave masters feared that slave conspiracies would be hatched under their noses if the slaves were allowed to speak their native languages. So the different African languages spoken by the slaves were suppressed and English, the slavemasters language, was thrust upon them. Over time English became the common language spoken by all of the black slave masses.

As well, due to the fact that the slaves were of African origin and to the fact that they were kept separate from the white masses, the black people developed a sense of being a separate people from the whites. Forced together under the lash of slavery various African tribal distinctions were eliminated and the black masses developed certain common cultural characteristics based on the mixture of the African cultures with the dominant English or white American culture of the slavemasters and the local white population.

Thus during the period of slavery black people became the majority of the population in a definite territory of the South, they developed a common language, and they began to evolve a common culture and psychology as a people.

However, due to their status as slaves, it was very difficult for the black people in the black belt South to actually crystallize as a nation. The slave system confined the black people to a very closed, narrow existence on individual plantations. They were barred from travel except in a few, highly controlled situations. Any regional or South-wide organization, even of the most innocent variety, was strictly forbidden. And even minimal communication and interaction between slaves of different plantations was nearly impossible.

Thus, the slave system acted in two ways. It threw together people from different African tribes and regions and began to forge them into a distinct oppressed people. But, at the same time, the slave system kept them isolated on separate plantations, with no common economic life drawing them into mutual interaction, and thus barred the door to their development into a nation.

It would take the abolition of slavery through the Civil War and the development of capitalist economic relations in the deep South to mold the black people into a nation.

### **The Civil War Breaks the Back of Slavery**

The offensive of the slave masters to extend the area of slavery and to dominate the whole country led to the outbreak of the Civil War. The Northern industrial capitalists, in order to defend themselves and to open up the Southern market for their exploitation, were eventually forced into war by the secession of the Confederate slave states. Despite the initial resistance of Abraham Lincoln, the Northern capitalists' president, to abolishing slavery and to enlisting the assistance of the black people in the war effort, the threat of losing the war eventually forced him into action. Black freedmen and escaping slaves enlisted in the Union army in droves. Slaves acted as spies and saboteurs behind the Confederate lines. They commandeered Confederate ships, supplied the Union army with food and other provisions stolen from the slave masters, and rose en masse as the Union army approached their

plantations. The abolition of slavery also won the support of the British working class and blocked the British capitalists from coming to the aid of the Confederacy. Thus the balance of the war was tipped to the Union side and the Confederacy went down to defeat.

The Civil War broke the back of slavery, the South was opened up for capitalist development, and the previous isolation and narrow borders of slave life began to be broken down as communication and organization among the black people spread through the South.

But while the Civil War abolished slavery it by no means completely freed the black people. After a few years of Reconstruction the Northern capitalists reached an accommodation with the Southern planters, withdrew the federal troops, and turned the South back over to the former slave masters.

This accommodation with the Southern planters signified that the former slave owners were being integrated into the capitalist bourgeoisie that had won the Civil War and was now the undivided ruler of the country; the former slaveholders, however, remained a backward, especially reactionary section of the ruling bourgeoisie. The Southern market was now opened to the Northern capitalists and they could now join hands with the former slaverholders to strengthen reaction against the laboring classes.

The South was drawn into the sphere of widening capitalist relations. But capitalist development was retarded and distorted as the former slave owners fought to retain various semi-feudal and semi-slave features in the deep South. With the defeat of Reconstruction the drive intensified to force the freed slaves into the position of semi-slavery as sharecroppers and peons in bondage to the large plantation owners. These semi-feudal and semi-slave economic relations were enforced by a reign of Klan terror and a whole system of Jim Crow degradation including the elimination of blacks' right to vote and a series of agricultural laws which firmly bound the sharecropper and tenant farmer to the plantation.

It was in this situation -- where, on the one hand, various of the restrictions of slavery were broken down and capitalism began to develop and, on the other hand, the black masses had to wage decades of struggle against semi-feudal enslavement and Jim Crow segregation and terror -- that a black nation in the black belt South developed.

#### **A Process of National Formation in the Decades After the Civil War**

We earlier noted that the isolated slave life was an important obstacle to the black people emerging as a nation in the black belt. But with the victorious Civil War that isolation began to be broken down and organization spread widely among the black people.

In the first months after the war and through the Reconstruction period black people formed local "union clubs" which affiliated to the Republican Party, organized militias to defend themselves from racist night riders, held state-wide political conventions, and built other political, educational and religious organizations.

The plantation lords immediately attempted to smash this organization and to drive blacks back into isolated plantation life. By 1877 Reconstruction was defeated and the period began in which the racist night riders were given free reign to throttle the black masses and the Jim Crow laws were, step-by-step, put into place. Despite the reign of terror and the backward features of economic life, organization continued to develop among the black people. Black workers joined trade unions and, where they were excluded from common unions with the white workers (which was almost everywhere in the deep South except New Orleans), they established their own. Organizations of black sharecroppers and tenant farmers also developed. And by the turn of the century the black bourgeoisie, headed by Booker T. Washington, was building up trade and business organizations. A measure of black development can be seen in the fact that by 1914 there were over 250 black local newspapers in the South.

This spread of organization found its economic basis in the development of capitalism for which the victorious Civil War had opened the way. Although the development of capitalism was retarded by the former slave masters' establishment of semi-feudal and semi-slave structures, still the former slaves began to be absorbed within the sphere of capitalist relations and class differentiation developed among the black people.

A large part of the freed slaves were forced into becoming sharecroppers and tenant farmers on the plantations. Despite the semi-slave features of their oppression, these blacks were somewhat brought into the sphere of capitalist relations through engaging in a certain amount of trade.

As well, even in the largest plantation regions, 10-20% of the black peasants were able to buy land and become independent farmers, although very poverty-stricken ones.

A proletarian section of blacks also developed. Many former slaves became agricultural laborers. As well a small black industrial proletariat grew, especially in the saw mills and lumber industry, in transportation, on the docks on the coast, and also in the building trades in some small towns. Although there were many attempts to exclude them, blacks eventually became workers in the textile mills, the tobacco processing plants, and other industries.

A small class of black bourgeois, based on exploiting the newly found market among the black people, also emerged in the cities and towns. As the economy developed, a small number of bigger black businessmen arose. But the upper strata among the

black people was mainly made up of petty bourgeois professionals (such as teachers and doctors) and small businessmen. Blacks established funeral parlors, small enterprises to manufacture personal products, insurance companies, real estate firms in the cities, and even a small number of banks. By 1914 there were 40,000 black businesses and 51 black banks in the U.S., mostly in the deep South.

This drawing of blacks into capitalist relations, the class differentiation among them, and the emergence of South-wide organization were important factors in the emergence of a black nation.

Along with these factors it should also be mentioned that blacks continued to be concentrated in a definite territory, the black belt, and they further developed socially and culturally as a distinct people. In fact, the concentration of the black population in the black belt region of the deep South actually increased between 1860 and 1880 and remained almost unchanged until World War I. Blacks were prevented from spreading into other regions of the country by the whole system of debt and legal restrictions which bound them to sharecropping and tenant farming on the black belt plantations. The Jim Crow system was established to enforce this semi-slavery. But it also forced on the black masses a separate social and cultural development from the whites.

From all of the above angles, it can be seen that in the period following the Civil War the black people developed all of the characteristics of an oppressed nation in the black belt.

#### **Factors That Worked Against the Black People's Movement Taking the Form of a Struggle for an Independent Country**

Although a black nation came into existence, a mass movement never emerged among the black masses for national independence, for the formation of a separate black country in the black belt region of the South. There are a number of historical and economic factors for this.

For one thing it must be recognized that for various reasons certain features defining the black people as a nation were not stable and were not as accentuated as with most nations.

The fact that the black belt was an economically undeveloped region probably operated in this direction. While there was a degree of capitalist development among the blacks in the black belt, the black belt was a distinct economic region of the country which was kept industrially backward to facilitate the super-exploitation of the blacks on the plantations. For example, when the textile industry moved South in the 1880's and 1890's, it did not build its plants in the black belt region which was the center of the "cotton belt." Rather the textile industry was built in the remote majority-white regions of the Piedmont plateau of Tennessee, North Carolina,

and western South Carolina. This was done to avoid attracting blacks away from the plantations which might have undermined the source of cheap cotton. For the same reason laws were actually passed prohibiting blacks from operating textile machinery. This kept the black belt distinct, but also retarded the capitalist development of the region and may have operated as another factor retarding the development of a black nation in the black belt.

The underdeveloped conditions also propelled the black people to leave the South, whenever they could, in search of a better life. Although the black population in the black belt was stable through the turn of the century, mass migrations eventually began. The expansion of industry with World War I provided an opportunity for blacks to escape the plantations and then and later the mass migrations threatened to disperse the black people away from the black belt.

It should also be noted that nowhere in the black belt was the population homogeneous. Everywhere there was a large white minority which included not only exploiters and their agents but also white toilers -- workers, tenant farmers and sharecroppers. Even on the large plantations, and this was where the concentration of blacks was highest, on the average 17% of the sharecroppers were white. Off the plantations the white proportion of the population was larger. If we take the entire region of the deep South through which the plantation system extended to varying degrees and which was closely linked with the black belt economically, blacks formed either a slight majority or a slight minority depending on the decade. These facts, which were quite clear to the masses, contributed to the lack of enthusiasm among the black people to fight to break off into a separate black country.

Another historical factor discouraging a separatist movement was that the history of Reconstruction and of the Populist movement -- which will be gone into below -- had shown the black masses that to further their struggle they needed the support, or at least the benevolent neutrality, of the poor whites.

There were also other factors that worked against the emergence of a movement for national independence.

One of the biggest was that slavery had been overthrown by the Civil War against the Confederate secessionists and that the highest degree of freedom that blacks had experienced had been during Reconstruction when the South had been occupied by federal troops. Any idea of secession, or establishing an independent country in the South, was associated with the Confederacy or with the planters' complaints against "Yankee domination." Further it should be remembered that the oppression of blacks took place in the form of racial segregation and any idea of separation in the South was immediately associated with the worst capitulation to Jim Crow.

### The Role of the Black Bourgeoisie in Undermining the Mass Struggle

It is notable that even in this early period, when the black bourgeoisie was only barely emerging, the trend of bourgeois reformism was already in evidence. By the time the Reconstruction governments were formed an embryo of the black bourgeoisie — composed mainly of freedmen from the North and New Orleans who had acquired some education and money and came into the black belt as teachers, agents of the Freedman's Bureau, and other professions — began to dominate the black people's movement. While they fought in the state Reconstruction governments for public education and some social welfare measures, the fledgling black bourgeoisie put aside the demands of the black masses for the confiscation of the land of the former slaveowners to provide the freed slaves 40 acres and a mule. Instead, they recommended various reformist solutions like granting ex-slaves government loans to buy land.

Later, after the defeat of Reconstruction and towards the turn of the century, the trend of unabashed collaboration with Jim Crow and disenfranchisement became, for many years, the dominant trend among the developing black bourgeoisie.

This capitulation to the racists does not mean that the black bourgeoisie promoted no nationalism. Rather its dominant section came to promote what the Communist Party, USA (CPUSA) later correctly labeled as "Jim Crow nationalism." The black bourgeoisie promoted a distrust of white working people and its nationalism could be characterized in five words-- "Buy Black, Build Black Institutions." This was the program of Booker T. Washington.

Lenin points out that the bourgeoisie's national program is based on what is "practical." That is, the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation takes up whatever is in the interest of its own class development, including selling out the masses of its own nation, and it promotes this as the "practical" solution to the national question. The black bourgeoisie, recognizing its weak position and the dangers of any fight against national oppression by the black masses, saw in the segregation of the races enforced by Jim Crow a way to carve out a niche in a captive market.

While unashamed collaboration with the racists became the dominant trend in the black bourgeoisie for a period, bourgeois reformism also continued to operate. Both of these trends still play an undermining role in the black peoples' movement down to the present.

Despite the subversion by the black bourgeoisie, the black masses in the South did not peacefully submit to Jim Crow or the abolition of suffrage. Resistance continued for decades against every step in the development and consolidation of the system of semi-slave reaction.

Finally it should be pointed out that the black bourgeoisie had no interest in raising demands for independence. It was influenced by the factors that we have already mentioned above. As well, it was very weak. It appeared on the scene at a time when all of the commanding positions were already taken by the white bourgeoisie. At the same time, class antagonisms were already quite developed in the U.S. In that situation it feared that any revolt by the black masses could jeopardize the bourgeois social system in which the black bourgeoisie itself had a stake. Thus the black bourgeoisie tended to oppose demands for black national independence and it also promoted reformism and capitulation to undermine any serious fight against the oppression of the black masses. But more on this later.

For all of the above reasons and others, no movement emerged for an independent black country in the black belt.

### The Mass Movement Against National Oppression

Just because there was no mass movement for national independence does not mean, however, that there was no movement of the black masses against their exploitation and national oppression. Nor does it mean that the black people's movement lacked in revolutionary potential. The spirited struggles of the black masses against Jim Crow segregation, lynchings, and other features of national oppression and the battles for land and full equality showed time and again the revolutionary potential of the black people's movement and the possibilities for merging it with the proletarian movement for socialism. Let us just outline various phases in the mass movement of the black people.

In the years following the Civil War there was a powerful demand of the freed slaves for confiscation of the plantations and distribution of the land among the former slaves. In numerous cases the freed slaves simply took over the plantations, squatted, and frequently put up stiff resistance against forcible eviction by federal troops. A large portion of the freed slaves joined in the building of "union clubs." These were affiliated to the Republican Party of Lincoln, which had headed up the Civil War, and were in its left wing. Through these clubs, through state-wide political conventions, and through other forms the black masses voiced their demands including for land, suffrage, the right to maintain their militias as protection against the thugs of the former slave owners, and a federal system of public education. As one can see, in this period the black people's movement was not in the direction of separation but in the direction of agrarian revolution, equality, and full emancipation.

### The Black Workers Were Active in the Workers' Movement

Among other struggles, it is important to note the black workers' active part in the workers' movement. In the 1880's there was an upsurge in the workers' movement in the South and strikes spread across the region. The Knights of Labor, unlike the American Federation of Labor (AFL), did not exclude or segregate blacks. Black workers flocked to the Knights of Labor for a time, actively joined in the organizing drives, and played an important role in the strike movement in various areas.

### The Colored Farmers Alliance and the Populists

In the late 1880's and early 1890's the movement of black tenant farmers and sharecroppers developed in connection with the Populist movement. The Colored Farmers Alliance (CFA) was formed as part of the Populist movement and it waged many battles for the demands of the tenant farmers and sharecroppers and for equal rights for black people.

The Populist movement had a strong influence among broad sections of petty bourgeois and laboring masses, but its leaders were rich farmers. Although this rich farmer leadership was only interested in lower rail and bank rates, they felt the pressure of the poor tenant farmers and sharecroppers who were demanding a more radical program.

The Populist movement was divided geographically into a Northern and a Southern Alliance, having their own separate histories and politics. Parallel to the white Southern Alliance, the Colored Farmers Alliance was formed and is reported to have had as many as 1.25 million members. In 1891 the CFA called for a national sharecroppers strike to force a higher price for cotton from the planters and merchants who controlled crop marketing. This strike failed because the leaders of the white Southern Alliance came out against it. However the pressure of the black masses did force the Populist Party in a number of states to take up a number of their demands against lynching, discrimination, Jim Crow, and the denial of suffrage.

The Populist movement was ruthlessly suppressed by the planters and their sheriffs and the blacks bore the brunt of the repression. Once a few reforms of advantage to the rich farmers were won, many white leaders of the Southern Alliance such as Tom Watson quickly abandoned the blacks and turned into the most virulent Klansmen themselves.

### A New Wave of Struggle After World War I

The next major wave of black struggle arose during the post-World War I period. This was a time of enormous clashes between the working class and the capitalists. The expansion of industry during the

war drew many blacks out of the black belt and into the sweat shops in the big cities around the country. There they quickly joined up with the workers' movement. In an effort to maintain the superexploitation of the blacks, to split the workers, and to smash up the strikes and organizing drives, the capitalists unleashed racist pogroms and lynching. In 1919 there were, according to bourgeois sources, at least 26 "race riots" across the country. But what began as racist pogroms frequently turned into armed mass resistance by the aroused black masses.

One of the biggest struggles took place in Chicago. It began as a fight against segregation of public facilities, but soon escalated as the capitalists organized racist mobs to attack the black communities. The black masses fought back valiantly. It took a week, and the calling in of the state militia and 3500 city police, to finally put down the black struggle.

Other major black resistance took place in Philadelphia; Baltimore; Coatsville, Pennsylvania; New London, Connecticut; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Bisbee, Arizona; Washington D.C.; Longview, Texas; and Knoxville, Tennessee. Two battles, one in Arkansas and one in Georgia, began with racists killing leaders of black sharecroppers unions. It is notable that the black bourgeoisie through the NAACP and the Urban League toured the country calling for calm and a return to work. In a number of cases they counseled the city authorities to call out state troops against the black masses for fear that the use of the hated racist city police departments would incite the masses to further struggle.

### The Late 1920's, the 1930's, and the CPUSA

The movement ebbed for a period, but rose again with vigor in the late 1920's and through the 1930's. Numerous fights developed in the cities against police brutality, job discrimination, and segregation. Black people also took an active part in the unemployed movement, in union organizing and in the strike movement. As well, the struggle of the tenant farmers and share croppers in the black belt grew and there were further fights against Jim Crow laws and practices.

During this period the CPUSA played a big role in unleashing the energy of the black masses and organizing their struggle. The famous 1929 textile strike led by the communists in Gastonia, N.C., fought against racist practices, united the white and black workers, and inspired a series of strikes and organizing drives elsewhere in South Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia. Similarly, the communists led the formation of the sharecroppers union which grew to 12,000 members and waged significant battles against the plantation owners. The communists also developed the struggles against racist terror and persecution. The broad mass actions that the communists organized in defense of the Scottsboro boys

became a symbol of the struggle for the rights of the black people.

This outline of the black people's movement through the 1930's shows something of the fierceness of the battles for agrarian reform and equal rights. And it gives some indication of the revolutionary potential of the black people's movement and of the possibilities for drawing together the struggle for the full emancipation of the black people with the revolutionary struggle of the working class for socialism.

On the other hand, the history does not show any trend in the direction of a fight for national independence in the black belt South.

### The Garvey Movement

In this regards, it is necessary to touch briefly on the Garvey movement because there have been various claims that it represented a movement to form a separate black country in the black belt or that it was a precursor of such a national independence movement among the black masses.

The Garvey movement took on a mass character during the fierce anti-racist struggles in the post-World War I period. Led by Marcus Garvey, it was a militant Pan Africanist cultural nationalist movement.

The Garvey movement attracted masses of black people who had left the South in hopes of finding freedom, but who only found that Jim Crow had ridden the train North with them. The main thing that attracted black people to this movement was Garvey's militant denunciation of the oppression of the black masses, his advocacy of militant struggle for equality, and his bold assertion of the dignity of the black race. The other aspect of Garvey's policy, his anti-white rhetoric and his back-to-Africa black Zionist schemes, had less attraction among the masses and was originally kept in the background of the Garveyite agitation. But gradually Garvey's extreme cultural nationalism came to the fore and he increasingly dropped the appeals for a militant struggle for equality. The more that this took place the more the black masses fell away from the Garvey movement. His black Zionist schemes appealed mostly to a section of black people who had begun to despair about the possibilities of winning equality in the U.S.

It has been claimed at various times that the Garvey movement was a distorted precursor of a genuine movement for national independence in the black belt South. This appears to be stretching things too far. No faction of the Garvey movement had any sympathy for the idea of creating an independent black country in the black belt. And we can find no signs of the Garvey movement in the South. Although some have claimed that there was sympathy for the Garveyites in the South, it is certain that the Garvey movement itself did not strike roots there.

Of course it cannot be ruled out that, had the development of the national features in the black belt gone further, a movement like the Garvey movement could possibly have fed into a national independence movement. But history did not take such a course.

Although the Garvey movement does not indicate that there was any mass sympathy for a black national independence movement in the South, it does show that the black masses can be attracted to nationalist politics. It is also a fact that the Garvey movement was quite weak in those cities where trade unions were organized on an integrated basis. This indicates that the strength and influence of nationalist politics is conditioned by the extent of unified class struggle and class organization among the workers.

### What Did the Existence of a Black Nation Imply for Communist Policy?

Such is the history of the national development and of the mass movement of the black people up to the period before World War II. It is on the basis of this history and the principles of Marxism-Leninism that we conclude that the correct communist policy in the earlier period would have been to recognize the right to self-determination for the black belt but not to advocate secession. It would have meant guiding the black people's struggle along a bold fight against Jim Crow and for agrarian reform and along the road of the proletarian socialist revolution. Let us go into this briefly.

Marxism-Leninism proceeds from the standpoint of internationalism, from the point of view of uniting the toilers of all nations against capital and advancing from the overthrow of capitalism in each country to the eventual merger of nations. But the unification of the toilers and the preconditions for the eventual merger of nations can only take place on the basis of equality. It must be voluntary.

Thus Marxism-Leninism teaches us that the proletariat must be absolutely hostile to all national oppression and national privileges. National oppression dopes the workers of the oppressor nation, helps promote chauvinism among them, and thus blunts the development of class consciousness. It strengthens the most reactionary sections of the ruling classes. As Engels declared, no nation which oppresses another nation can itself be free.

National oppression also retards the cultural and political development of the proletariat of the oppressed nation. And, as Stalin points out, it also is dangerous to the masses of the oppressed nation because it obscures the class struggle in that nation. (Marxism and the National Question, Sec. II, "The National Movement") The conditions of national oppression tend to blur class distinctions and tend to encourage the oppressed nationality workers to see their problems as stemming solely from the deni-

al of national rights rather than from capitalist exploitation.

Thus the proletariat must fight national oppression to win a wider and clearer field for the class struggle, which is vital for the development of the socialist revolution. The proletariat must demand and must fight for the absolute equality of nations and nationalities as part of its class struggle.

But if nations are to be completely equal then each must have the right to decide whether or not to form its own state or to decide what state it will join. To say otherwise means that only certain nations should have state privileges. As Lenin said, **"the working class should be the last to make a fetish of the national question. The development of capitalism does not necessarily awaken all nations to independent life. But to brush aside the mass national movements once they have started and to refuse to support what is progressive in them means in effect to pander to nationalistic prejudices, that is, recognizing one's own nation as a model nation (or we would add, one possessing the exclusive privilege of forming a state)."** ("The Right of Nations to Self-Determination", Collected Works, Vol. 19, sec. 7, p. 437)

Thus as long as a black nation had come into existence in the black belt, even though some of its features were not stable or as accentuated as with most nations, it was necessary to recognize the right of that black nation to self-determination. But what does this mean practically?

Lenin says that the recognition of the right to self-determination means: 1) fighting against the use of force by the dominant nation to suppress a movement for secession by a weaker nation; 2) advocating that the question of secession can only be decided by the people of the given territory; and 3) fighting against all propaganda of the ruling classes justifying national oppression in general and the denial of the right to self-determination in particular. (See the third thesis in "Theses on the National Question," Collected Works, vol. 19, p. 244)

Although a movement for secession did not arise, it was important to uphold the right of self-determination. Recognizing the right to self-determination, despite the lack of sentiment among the black people for secession at that time, clearly had importance for insuring that the Communist Party would not be caught by surprise by events and in general for strengthening the struggle against oppression of the black people. The struggle against the racist propaganda was also of paramount importance. Through this entire period there was constant propaganda of the most vile form justifying the oppression of the blacks. For example, the racist bourgeoisie maintained that blacks must be denied the right to vote in the South otherwise they would take over and ruin everything. The whole history of Re-

construction was rewritten to propagate this line. Similarly, every sign of resistance by the blacks against Jim Crow or lynching and every demand for equality in the deep South was portrayed as the beginnings of a black uprising in which blacks would take over and wreak havoc on the "good white people." Opposing this hysterical chauvinist propaganda and exposing the interests of the plantocracy was a necessary part of the democratic training of the white toilers. And explaining the principle of the right of self determination might have played some role in this training.

#### Recognizing the Right To Self-Determination Need Not Mean Advocating Secession

At the same time, recognition of the right to self-determination need not mean advocating secession. And in states where the oppressor and oppressed nations inhabit a contiguous territory and have many close connections among them, Lenin pointed out that, generally speaking, the Marxists do not advocate secession. Lenin stressed that the advisability of secession must be determined separately for each nation and he pointed to a number of factors that should be considered in deciding whether or not to advocate secession in each individual case. He raised the necessity to consider the conditions of capitalist development of the oppressed nation and he emphasized that, except in extreme cases, Marxists favor larger states because they accelerate economic development and provide a better field for the class struggle. He also pointed to the oppression of the proletariat of the various nationalities by the united bourgeoisie. And he stressed the issue of the united class struggle of the proletariat for socialism.

When we consider that the area of black majority in the U.S. was a small, economically undeveloped region surrounded by the rest of the U.S., which was more developed; when we consider that these economic conditions would have created extreme hardship; not to mention a very difficult military situation, for an independent black nation; when we consider that a large portion of the population in this region was made up of white toilers; when we consider that the semi-feudal social and economic system radiated out from the black belt, held back conditions widely through the South, and created a common basis of struggle for the blacks, and, to a certain extent, also for the white toilers through much of the South; and finally when we consider that there was absolutely no sentiment among the black masses for a separate nation state — then we must conclude that it was not only wrong to advocate secession, but also, that it would have been necessary to argue against secession if the issue had come up.

The fact that the black people themselves had no desire for a separate nation state was progressive;

it was a factor which worked to facilitate the unity of the black and white proletariat. To have tried to build a movement for secession would have put one on the sidelines of the actual black peoples' movement which was fighting vigorously for agrarian reform, equality, and full emancipation. And more, it would have meant turning aside from internationalism and towards promoting narrow nation-building schemes among the black people.

In other words, one should have recognized the right to self-determination but not advocated secession. One should have worked for a revolutionary struggle for equality, against exploitation, and for the building up an agrarian revolutionary movement. And one should have worked to use this struggle as a lever for proletarian socialist revolution.

This is not to say that it would have been impossible for a situation to emerge where it would have been right to advocate secession. One can not rule out in principle the possibility of major developments that would have changed the situation and made support for secession correct. Such a thing depends on concrete circumstance, not general arguments on the national question. But in the case of the black nation in the black belt, the changes would have had to be really drastic. Even if a mass movement for secession had arisen, one would probably not have advocated secession, but would have fought that much harder for the right of the black nation to secede.

In the actual situation in the 1920's and 30's, the communists, by recognizing the black nation's right to self-determination but not advocating secession, would be prepared for all eventualities while, at the same time, avoiding the dangers of narrow nationalism.

#### **The Dispersal of the Black People Out of the Black Belt**

Such was the situation into the 1940's. Now we come to what course history has taken since then.

Capitalism not only has the tendency to arouse people to life as independent nations, but capitalism also has a tendency to break down national barriers and to disperse and assimilate nations. One can see today that while imperialism has meant the intensified oppression of nations by the imperialist powers and the proliferation of powerful national liberation movements, capitalism has also tended to internationalize economic life, politics, science and culture. Moreover, this internationalizing of economic life brings about the massive migrations of workers and the intermixing of populations. No matter how much some people think that it is very "Marxist-Leninist" to rail against mixed marriages and assimilation, it continues to go on. And such intermixing assists the uniting of the workers of all nationalities and helps prepare the ground for the socialist revolution. As Lenin stressed,

**"...capitalism's world-historic tendency to**

**break down national barriers, obliterate national distinctions, and to assimilate nations...is one of the greatest driving forces transforming capitalism into socialism."**  
("Critical Remarks on the National Question," Section 3)

This process of capitalist development has resulted in the dispersal of the black population from the black belt. Of course under capitalism that has been an extremely painful process. Although it was the labor of black people that had produced almost everything that existed of value in the black belt, they were driven off the land, sent penniless to travel vast distances, and forced into poverty-stricken ghettos in the big cities across the country. Let us trace the historic dispersal of the black people out of the black belt South.

Elsewhere in this issue of **The Workers' Advocate Supplement** you will find maps which show the degree to which black people were concentrated in the black belt South in 1880 and how they have been dispersed out of that region up to 1980. The counties colored solid black are the ones with 3 to 1 black majority or better; they actually average about 4 to 1. The counties marked with crosshatching are counties with a 2 to 1 black majority. The counties marked with horizontal lines are 50-60% black, and the counties marked with vertical lines are 40-50% black; taken together they are the area where the population of blacks and whites is roughly even.

In 1880 the high concentration of black people in the black belt is indicated by the nearly solid band of counties marked with crosshatching and black color from South Carolina to Louisiana and Arkansas. In that year black people were over 60% of the population in the black belt and some 53% of all black people in the U.S. lived in this region.

This concentration of blacks remained basically unchanged until World War I. By the time of World War I cotton production in the South was suffering serious international competition as well as competition from more mechanized farms in Texas, and the conditions of the sharecroppers were becoming unbearable. When the World War I expansion of industry provided an opportunity to escape the plantations, over a million blacks did so.

The effects of this migration can be seen in the map of 1920 which shows a definite thinning out of the areas of black majority. Still, the concentration of blacks in the black belt South was enough that Mississippi and South Carolina remained majority black. By the mid-1920's the migration slowed to a trickle and remained that way through the Great Depression of the 1930's and World War II.

In 1935 the mechanical cotton picker was invented. It was not immediately introduced into use due to the depressed state of agriculture. However, after the war, it was introduced on a massive scale starting in Texas and moving eastward. This process of mechanization of agriculture led first to the

devastation of the black farmers and then to their eviction from the land. In 1920, 50% of the black population lived on farms; today there are only 220,000 black people, or under 1% of all blacks, still living on farms. Between World War II and 1970 one million blacks left Mississippi; all told 4.1 million blacks migrated out of the deep South in this period. At the same time within the South there was a massive migration from the rural areas of the black belt to the big cities outside of it.

As a result of these migrations, the number of counties in the South in which the black people were the majority has decreased from 214 in 1920, to 138 in 1960, to 104 in 1970, and to 86 in 1980.

In 1920 nearly 46% of the black population in the U.S. lived in a continuous area of the black belt where they made up nearly 54% of its population. By 1980 there was no longer a single continuous area in which the black people are a majority of the population. The black majority areas have been reduced to about five small regions and these regions have quite a small population. Even if we add these five separate areas together we find that the number of blacks living there count for less than 4% of all the black people living in U.S.

There had been some thought that the trend of migration back into the South which developed in the 1970's might reverse the dispersal of the black people out of the black belt South. But as things have turned out, black people are not moving back into the black belt itself but rather into big Southern cities. This is demonstrated by the further reduction of counties which have a black majority from 104 in 1970 to 86 in 1980.

The largest area of black majority remains in the Mississippi Delta region, where 470,500 blacks constitute 54% of the population. The radical economic changes in the black belt can be seen by examining the occupations of the people of this region which was once the area of the largest concentration of black sharecroppers in the country. In this area today there are only about 1,300 black farm operators and 9,000 agricultural laborers, but there are about 38,400 unskilled black factory workers. Clearly even the majority black counties are no longer primarily agricultural. Also these statistics show that semi-feudal sharecropping has been replaced with straightforward large-scale capitalist farming. The number of sharecroppers in the South has dropped to an insignificant number.

Now it is probable that there has been some undercounting of the number of blacks in the census statistics. But even if one takes into consideration that there is a certain amount of undercounting, it would not be enough to offset the trends that have been going on in the deep South or to affect the geographical distribution.

These profound demographic and economic changes mean that one can no longer speak of the existence of a black nation in the deep South. Of course one

cannot rule out that cataclysmic changes sometime in the future, involving wars or extreme reaction, may turn out to create again a concentration of blacks in a certain part of the country, possibly in the black belt, and that conditions might then again be created for the crystallization of a black nation. But this would require cataclysmic changes and would be out of the present way of development. And, moreover, such catastrophies are not exactly changes that one would hope for.

It should also be pointed out that the replacement of the semi-feudal plantation system with large-scale capitalist agriculture and the migration of the blacks to the cities means that, under present conditions, there is no longer the possibility of a bourgeois democratic revolutionary movement on the land question in the South.

Today the black people in the U.S. exist as a national minority concentrated in the urban areas throughout the country. While some narrow nationalists may wish for "the good old days" when the black people were concentrated in the black belt, the fact is that the dispersal, and the consequent urbanization and proletarianization, have created much better conditions for the emancipation of the black people from the brutal national oppression they suffer at the hands of the American bourgeoisie. The proof of this fact is the great force with which the black movement broke out in the late 50's and 60's.

As for the South today, it should be stressed that it still remains an area of especially heavy oppression for the black people in the U.S. This has a lot to do with the way developments took place in the South. The movement of the 1960's did smash some of the worst features of Jim Crow segregation but, since the movement did not lead to a revolution, it did not root out reaction. It did not wipe out the Klan or the reactionary Southern bourgeoisie. In addition the economic changes in the South — the doing away of the plantation system — did not take place in a revolutionary manner from below but through the most painful evolutionary development from above. As a result of all this, the fight against Klan and police terror, the fight against racial discrimination, and the fight against other features of the brutal oppression of the black people continue to be very important and pressing issues.

### In Conclusion

Leninism teaches us that imperialism means the negation of democracy and the intensification of national oppression. Lenin also draws this connection with particular regards to blacks in the U.S. Speaking of American blacks, he said:

**"They should be classed as an oppressed nation, for the equality won in the Civil War of 1861-1865 and guaranteed in the constitution of the Republic was in many respects increasingly curtailed in the chief Negro areas (the**

South) in connection with the transition from the progressive, pre-monopoly capitalism of the 1860-1870 period to the reactionary monopoly capitalism (imperialism) of the new era." ("Statistics and Sociology", Collected Works, vol. 23, pp. 275-6)

From the fact that imperialism intensifies reaction and national oppression in particular and the fact that the imperialist bourgeoisie is the main basis of national oppression in the modern era, Lenin concludes two things. First, it is all the more necessary to fight national oppression -- and not just on the front of the denial of self-determination -- in a revolutionary way, and secondly, that the fight against national oppression is and must be developed as part of the world socialist revolution.

This leads us to our last conclusion. Whether we are talking about the period when most blacks were oppressed farmers and sharecroppers and when a black nation had come into existence in the South, or whether we are talking about the present period when the black people exist as an oppressed national minority concentrated mainly in the cities, the

fight against the oppression of the black masses must be waged in a revolutionary way. The contradictions that break out on this front, as shown by the 60's rebellions, have great revolutionary potential and they must be used for launching revolutionary assaults by the proletariat on the power of the bourgeoisie. We must orient the black people's movement on the path of the socialist revolution. The struggle against the oppression of the black people must be guided along a road which brings out to the masses that the source of racist and national oppression is capitalism and the racist capitalist class. It must be guided along the road which mobilizes the fight against the national oppression of the blacks as part of the class struggle of the entire working class, along the road of mobilizing the working class of all nationalities as the main force and vanguard of the struggle against all national oppression, and as part of the socialist revolutionary movement of the proletariat. The complete emancipation of the black people will only be won through the socialist revolution, through overthrowing the exploiters who have sat on their backs for over 300 years. <>

**FIGURES ON THE DISPERSAL OF THE BLACK PEOPLE FROM THE BLACK BELT SOUTH**

James Allen, a theoretician of the Communist Party, USA, drew out his concept of the maximum area of black majority in the South for the year 1930. This included 321 counties in 12 states. He described this as being essentially the area of the black nation in the black belt South. At this time, he was an ardent supporter of the analysis that a black nation existed in the South.

But tracing the evolution of this area verifies

the dispersal of the black people away from it, especially after World War II.

Below are the population statistics for these counties over a 110 year period. The figures for 1860 through 1940 are from James Allen (The Negro Question in the U.S., 1936, and an article in the Nov. 1946 Political Affairs). 1970 figures were tabulated from the 1970 census.

Census Year	Total Population	Black Population	Black %	% of all US Blacks
1860	4,362,009	2,461,099	56.4%	55%
1880	5,750,410	3,466,924	60.3%	53%
1910	8,387,958	4,842,766	57.7%	49%
1920	8,968,132	4,806,565	53.6%	46%
1930	9,525,865	4,790,049	50.3%	40%
1940	10,256,289	4,993,612	48.7%	39%
1970	11,037,426	4,288,911	38.5%	19%

Today it is impossible to draw a continuous area of black majority as James Allen did. Instead there are roughly five separate groups of counties with a majority black population. These are drawn up by combining counties with a majority black population with some with less than a black majority to get a continuous zone in each of the five areas. As well, commercial centers have been included such as Warren County (Vicksburg), Mississippi which is 37% black; Hinds County (Jackson), Mississippi which is 45% black; and Montgomery, Alabama which is 39% black.

Taken together the five areas include a total of 82 counties of which 74 are black majority counties. There are 1,095,727 black people concentrated in these areas making up about 51.1% of its population. The black population in these areas is about 4.1% of the total black population in the U.S. Together the blacks in these five areas number fewer than the number of black people in either New York City or Chicago. The figures below were tabulated by the MLP from the 1980 Census.

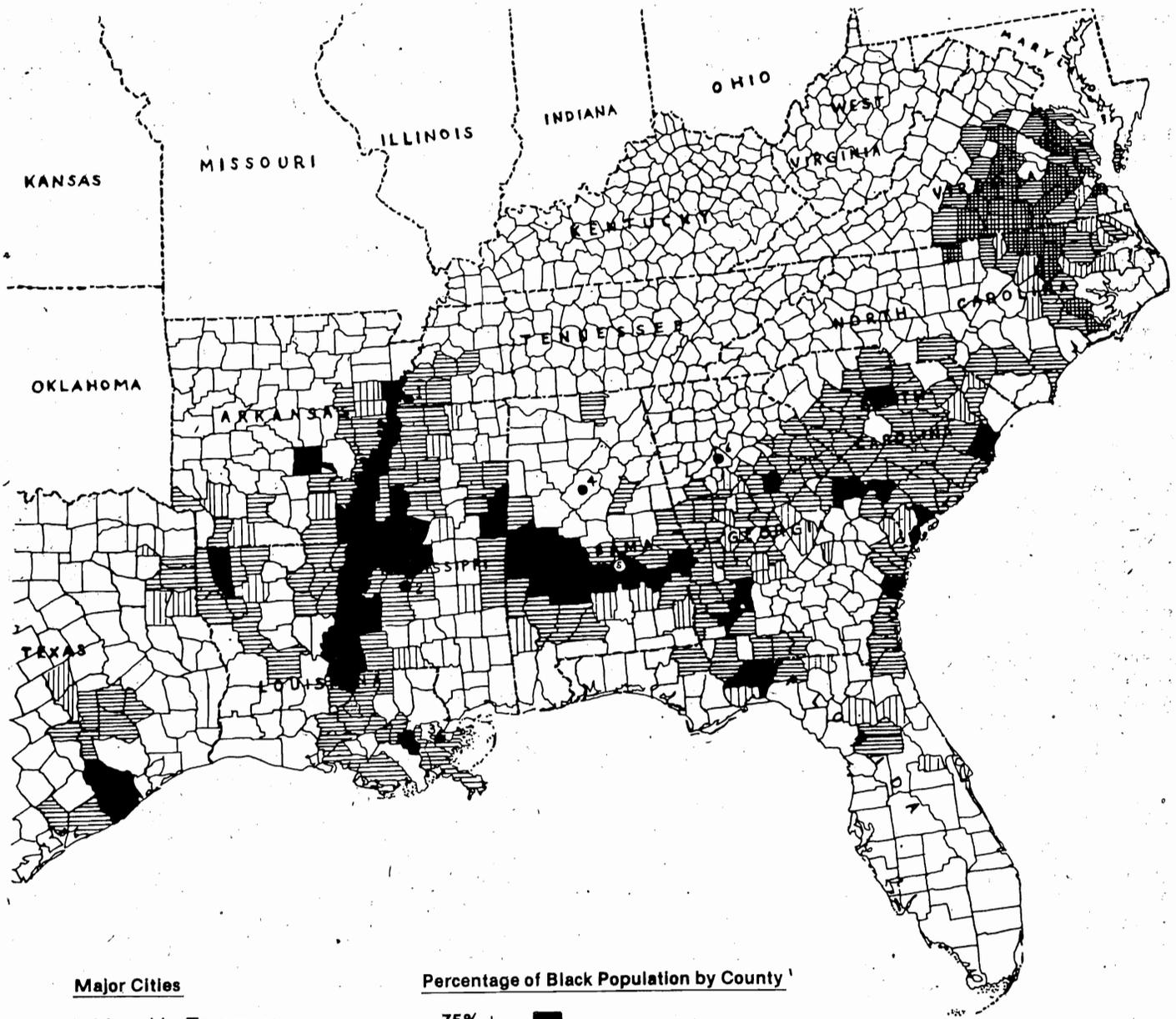
**Rough Area of Black Majority in the South in 1980**

AREAS IN 1980	TOTAL POPULATION	BLACK POPULATION	BLACK % OF AREA	BLACK MAJ COUNTIES	TOTAL COUNTIES
1. Miss. Delta	875,800	470,500	54%	25	27
2. W. Alabama	385,738	193,870	50%	10	11
3. E. Ala/SW Ga	178,000	101,200	57%	12	15
4. E. Ga/S.C.	448,700	243,875	54%	16	17
5. NE N.C./SE Va	256,000	137,700	54%	11	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,144,238</b>	<b>1,095,727</b>	<b>51.1%</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>82</b>

The following three pages show this dramatic dispersal of the black people from the black belt south pictorially. They show the areas of black majority in the South for the years 1880, 1920 and 1980. Also see the discussion of this question in

the section "The Dispersal of the Black People Out of the Black Belt" of the article On the Black National Question and the Right to Self-Determination elsewhere in the Supplement. <>

# Regions of Black Majority in the South 1880



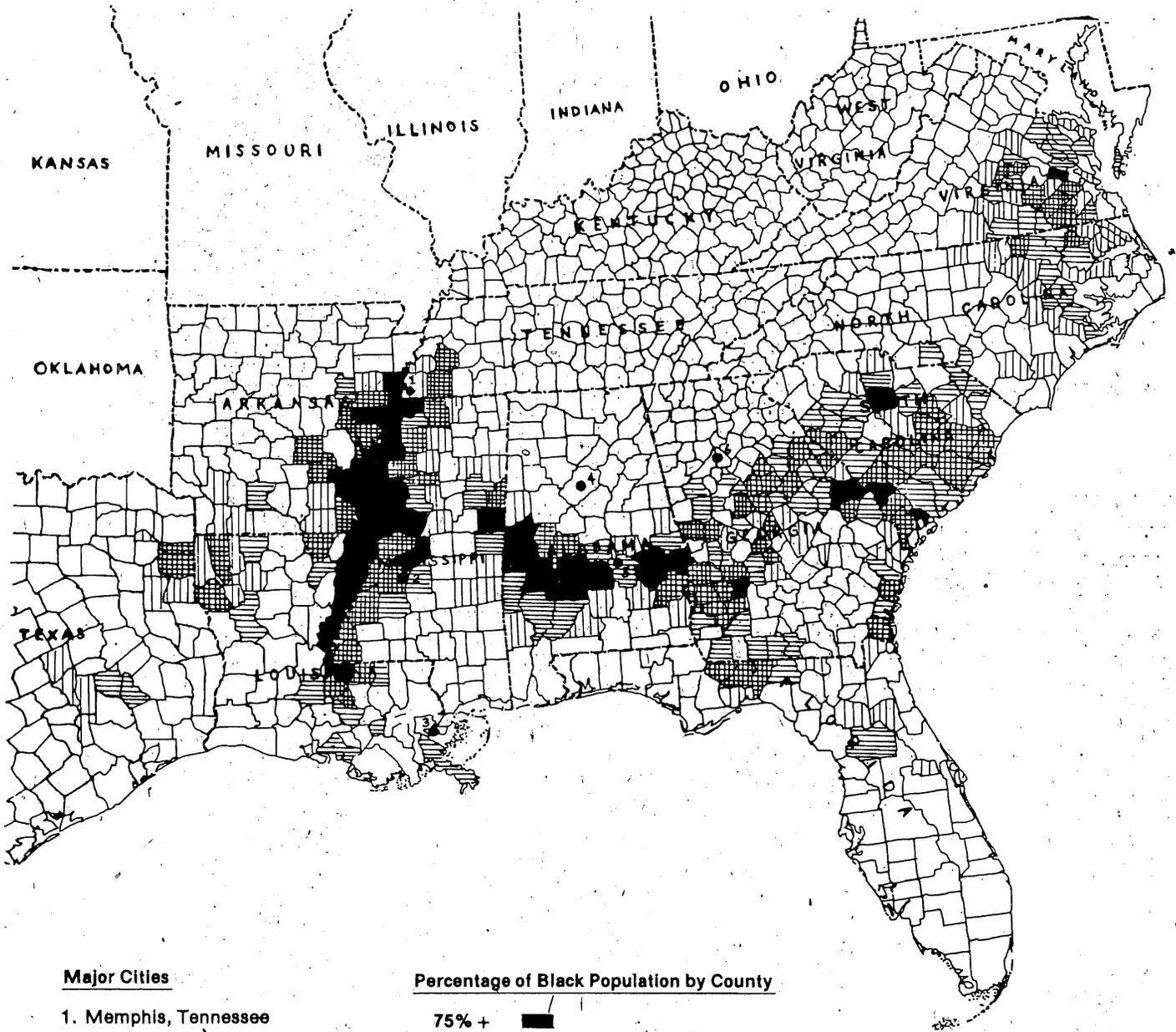
**Major Cities**

1. Memphis, Tennessee
2. Jackson, Mississippi
3. New Orleans, Louisiana
4. Birmingham, Alabama
5. Montgomery, Alabama
6. Atlanta, Georgia

**Percentage of Black Population by County<sup>1</sup>**

- 75% + [Solid Black Box]
- 60-75% [Horizontal Lines Box]
- 50-60% [Vertical Lines Box]
- 40-50% [Diagonal Lines Box]

# Regions of Black Majority in the South 1920



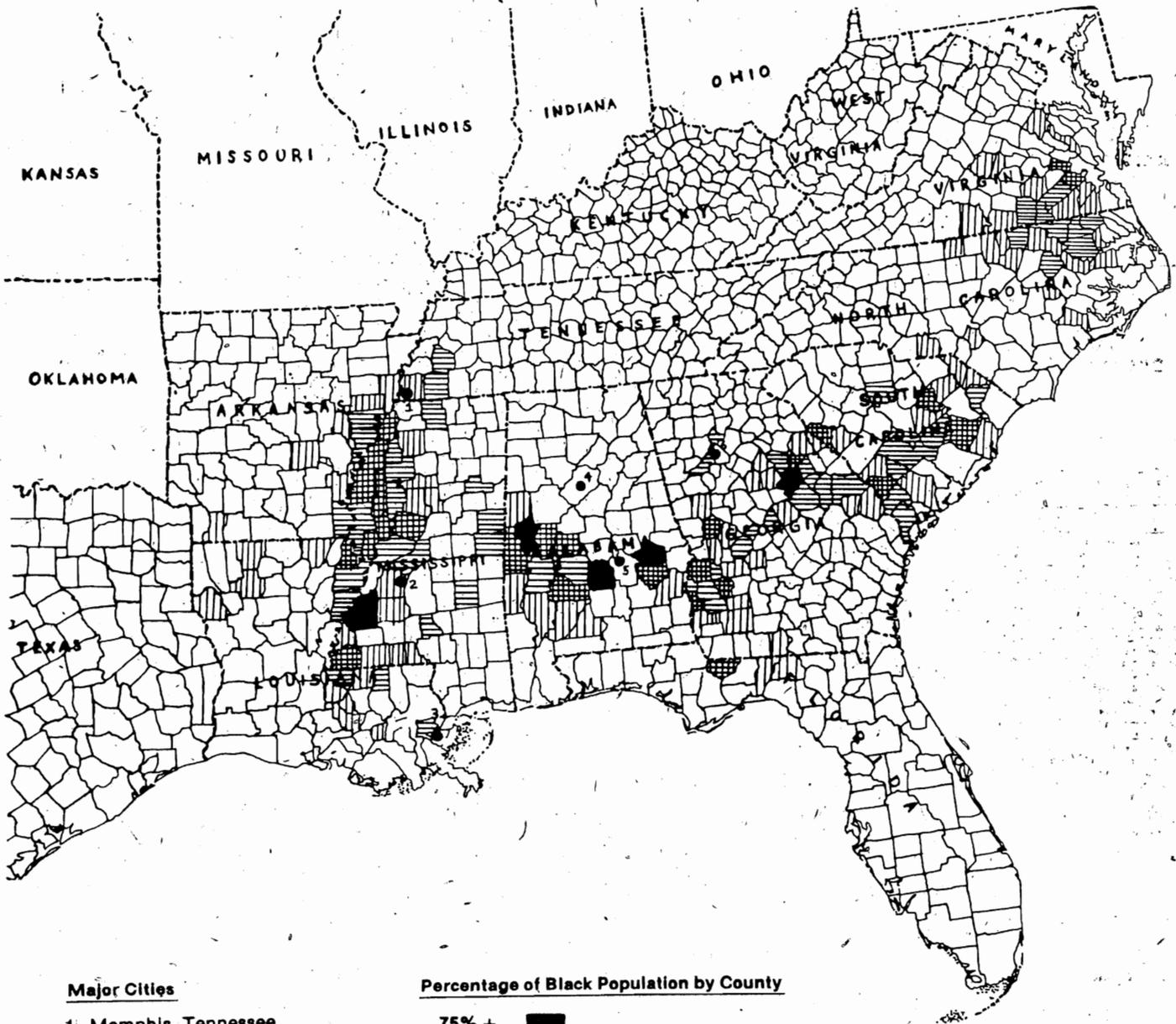
**Major Cities**

1. Memphis, Tennessee
2. Jackson, Mississippi
3. New Orleans, Louisiana
4. Birmingham, Alabama
5. Montgomery, Alabama
6. Atlanta, Georgia

**Percentage of Black Population by County**

- 75% + [Solid Black Box]
- 60-75% [Cross-hatched Box]
- 50-80% [Horizontally Hatched Box]
- 40-50% [Vertically Hatched Box]

# Regions of Black Majority in the South 1980



**Major Cities**

1. Memphis, Tennessee
2. Jackson, Mississippi
3. New Orleans, Louisiana
4. Birmingham, Alabama
5. Montgomery, Alabama
6. Atlanta, Georgia

**Percentage of Black Population by County**

75% +	■
60-75%	▣
50-60%	▢
40-50%	▤

