

The Deepening Crisis of Blacks in Sociology:
An Ideological Struggle to Reform Capitalism
or Join the Fight for Socialism

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From my vantage point the most important issue for Black sociologists to be discussing today is the deepening crisis of ideology that continues to influence all aspects of the Black liberation movement. This ideological crisis is the choice between two roads, to pursue the reform of capitalism or the fight for socialism.

In the last 15 or 20 years, in the factories, mines and fields, in the schools, prisons, and communities mass struggles have increasingly raised the issue of Black liberation and increasingly this has been joined with the interest of the working class, until today we have the beginnings of a merger between some forces fighting for Black liberation and some of the forces representing the militant rank and file workers movement. This is a situation that closely resembles the courageous fight against repression and exploitation that occurred during the great depression. Then, as now, the burning desire of Black intellectuals to serve the interests of their people can not begin to be fulfilled until the dominant ideological position rejects capitalism and accepts the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism.

This view is contrary to those sociologists who for some time now have bellowed loud and long for an "end of ideology" perspective, those who would argue for a value free social science, and those who would blatantly defend a careerist line of pragmatism.

But my goal is not to defend capitalism, it is to struggle for the liberation of Black people in a society free of exploitation. Therefore the question I raise here is "How can Black sociologists contribute to solving the deepening crisis of ideology facing Black people and this entire society?"

Our starting point must be to understand the social transformation of the material condition of Black people, and then show how this transformation has led to a deepening of the ideological crisis: first in terms of the Black liberation movement, and then for Blacks in sociology.

We can begin by reminding ourselves that the success of the October Revolution in 1917 and the devastating Great Depression in 1929 thrust the world capitalist system headlong into a general crisis. With World War II profiteering, and Keynesian deficit spending, USA imperialism (free from serious internal disruption) was able to gain supremacy among capitalist countries. Its rise to dominance was challenged only by the still proletarian-led Soviet Union.

Since the war, the national liberation struggles have been leading the opposition to capitalist domination, and the US has been no exception, especially in Cuba, Vietnam and Angola.

After World War II the Black community experienced a qualitative transformation. We had become an urban people,

rooted in the industrial heart of America and were finding a place in the clerical ranks of the government bureaucracy. Black people had momentum. We must borrow a phrase and call it a leap through the centuries: from semi-slave peonage on the land to the modern urban proletariat, from servile submission to fighting with modern weapons against White people to save the world for democracy.

By the transformation of the main economic role of Black people from agriculture to industry, from rural areas to cities, the post-war years resulted in a series of political and social movements that challenged all of the societal arrangements that maintained the brutal oppression of Black people.

The major underlying motion has been the increasing militancy of the working class forces, especially in the Black community. These were the forces who spontaneously waged militant armed defense against large scale racist attacks, what have been called race riots. These occurred particularly in the cities of proletarian concentration - Chicago, Detroit, etc.

And as we all know, the 1954 Brown decision led to the sit-ins.

For a long time the ideological dilemma facing Blacks that has developed for over the last 100 years has been characterized as one between integration and nationalism.

Indeed, the dialectical notion of this post war generation is no exception: from slogans of "Freedom Now, One Man One Vote, We Shall Overcome, Black & White Together." The mid-sixties witnessed the ritual deification of Black - Black Power, Black is Beautiful, Black Nationalism and devotion to the glory of Africa.

To a great extent it was the success of the integrationist movement (which benefited the more privileged elements) that led to the nationalist movement's rise - in part, it was the defense reaction of an unstable insecure newly-arrived elite and in part a necessary move by them to serve their position to win the allegiance and support of the masses of Black people who never really reaped much material reward from the civil rights breakthroughs. Here a key test is provided in Watts, Newark and Detroit where petty bourgeois elites adopted a super Black Nationalist stance to coopt the masses (Karenga, Baraka, Omari).

What I am suggesting to you is that the choice between integration and nationalism must be judged by whether it upholds or rejects capitalism, whether it has rushed our struggle forward ultimately to proclaim socialism as our goal or whether it has held it back. The question of class struggle has always been the key, the essence of our struggle.

Our ideological crisis then has an objective basis to it. And the inclusion of Black people in the industrial proletariat has resulted in totally new conditions. The defense of capitalism can no longer go unchallenged. The crisis is deepening.

My position is that just as it was traumatic for the mid-sixties nationalism to be fully articulated, so it is now even more so for M-L to be brought to center stage. But we cannot divorce ourselves from Black people. Today there is (1) a growing alienation from the government, both political parties, and the corporations. (2) Also, everywhere that oppression and exploitation exist the masses are taking up M-L as the only proven weapon for liberation and freedom. I am convinced that the USA is no exception, nor are Black people an exception. It is very plain for everyone to see that the capitalist system, including all of its ideological apologists, is only in a position of selling Black people a con.

The M-L ideological position leads to the recognition that the gains to be made in social terms can only be won and consolidated on the basis of a fundamental change in the material condition of Black people, which means defeating capitalism and fighting for socialism.

Now for Black sociologists, this basic transformation in the material conditions of the Black community has resulted

in a special case of this ideological crisis. For the last fifty years there has been a two line struggle among Black intellectuals, including Black sociologists, over the capitalist road or the socialist road. The dominant line has been to support capitalism. However, we have had a break in this dominant tradition, i.e., the group of major Black sociologists from the 20's, 30's and 40's has not been allowed to build strong lines to the succeeding generations in an organized purposeful manner. Basically this means that the changes Black sociologists earlier in this century have gone through are being repeated rather than being built upon.

Until the explosion of Blacks into higher education, Black sociologists were concentrated in a few schools, and they in turn were connected to a few major graduate schools where they had been trained. This provided the basis for something that at least approached a tradition (in theoretical orientation and methodological approach). The Fisk - Howard - University of Chicago triangle represents this pattern. With the current dispersal of the greatly increased numbers of people involved, these centers of concentration have lost their relative significance. Also, the increase in people generally has not been followed by an increase in money so that these traditional centers are able to offer graduate training but not to the extent of competing with the major centers which continue to rule unchallenged.

In the main, this tradition represents the critical support of capitalism. However, we have never really given a fair hearing to the socialist ideological content of DuBois, Frazier & Cox, nor the early Marxist content of Ralph Bunche, or Abram Harris. So, from my point of view many will repeat their errors decades later.

A tradition of Black people who have taken up the fight for socialism has never been established, and those fore-runners who have emerged (Cyril Briggs, Harry Haywood, Paul Robeson, young Angelo Herndon) have been assigned to the dust bin of history.

So we have the two lines. The two points I've made about the dominant tradition is that, (a) it has been broken, and (b) it always had socialist ideas inside of it. On the other hand the experience of Blacks in the left has to be criticized due to the failure to consistently uphold the ideology of Marxism Leninism. This is based on the class capitulation to the support of capitalism by movements and organizations like the CPUSA, the trade union movement, and the civil rights movement. This took the form of revising Marxism-Leninism, allowing bureaucratic methods to dominate, and failing to have faith in the masses.

In any case, the most elementary fact remains that Black intellectuals, and Black sociologists in particular, have always had some concern with this struggle between

capitalism and socialism. But we have not made this concern as central to our work as we must in this current period.

So when the ideological crisis deepens we must be sufficiently prepared with a firm grasp of the extent to which we do have a history of defending socialism, using the concept of class struggle in our analysis, and holding strong to the democratic stance of uniting with all who will unite against capitalism, although we have yet to shake off the eclecticism of most of our training and seriously pursue the study of scientific socialism.

If we sum up the Black liberation movement in the last 4 years, the most heated and basic division has been over the ideological crisis, whether Black liberation can occur under a reformed capitalism or whether we must fight for socialism. We can list them

- (a) African Liberation Support Committee
- (b) National Black Assembly
- (c) Boston Bussing
- (d) Coalition of Black Trade Unionists
- (e) Black Auto Workers in Detroit
- (f) African Heritage Studies Association
- (g) National Conference of Black Political Scientists
- (h) Black Scholar
- (i) Black World, and others

Under these circumstances, our contribution to resolving this ideological crisis, to begin making steps toward the fight for socialism can best begin with three basic lessons on how to further ideological development and correctly sum up the objective process of history.

A fitting slogan for Black sociologists is: Fight For Unity On Three Fronts

- (a) seek unity with all other sectors of Black intellectuals
- (b) seek unity with groups and journals in the developing Marxist-Leninist movement in the USA and other parts of the world
- (c) (most importantly) seek unity with the concrete movement fighting for change - the Black liberation movement and the militant struggles of the rank and file workers movement

Maintaining three fronts of unity can provide the context for active ideological struggle and development. The key front is the front of theory, the active study of M-L and active association with others who are putting this theory to the test of practice.

What I have tried to briefly sketch, concerns how we can make a significant contribution:

- (1) The most important problem is the deepening ideology crisis.

- (2) The deepening of crisis is based on the proletarian class transformation of Black people.
- (3) While the dominant trend of Black sociologists has been critical support for capitalism, there have been active Black Marxist Leninists including some early work by very prominent Black Social Scientists.
- and, (4) At this time our work can be advanced by Fighting for Unity on Three Fronts.