

Black Radical Congress: Summary of Workshop Sessions June 19-21, 1998 University of Illinois at Chicago Chicago Circle Center

Source: *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 28, No. 3/4, THE BLACK RADICAL CONGRESS: 1998 (FALL/WINTER 1998), pp. 43-48

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41068806>

Accessed: 13-07-2017 14:33 UTC

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“Beat ‘em Down and Lock ‘em Up”: State Terrorism, Police Brutality and the Prison Industrial Complex

From Rodney King in Los Angeles to Abner Louima in New York to Jeremiah Mearday in Chicago, police brutality continues to be on the rise in poor Black communities throughout the country. The criminalization of Black poor and working class people has not only led to increased political violence, but to an alarming growth in what some have termed the prison industrial complex. About one third of the Black male population between the ages of 18 and 35 is under the control of the criminal justice system. The rate of Black women’s imprisonment is rising sharply as well. As jobs decrease and the “get tough on crime” slogan gains popularity, prisons are becoming a profitable growth industry. The privatization of prisons is an even scarier aspect of this growth. This panel will explore these developments as well as campaigns, local and national, to oppose them.

Panelists:

Michelle Bonner

Akua Njera

Pat Hill

Keanga Taylor

Lennox Hinds (chair)

Joan Gibbs

Josephine Wyatt (coordinator)

Welfare Reform: The Assault on Black Women and Children

The Welfare Reform Act of 1996 threw one million Black and Latina women into even deeper poverty by forcing them off public assistance without the guarantee of employment at a living wage. Developing a fightback strategy is essential to defending the rights of African American women,

their children and the entire Black working class. This workshop will discuss grassroots mobilization efforts led by Black women in the fight for living wages, health care and other basic human needs. The welfare rights struggle will be linked to other efforts for Black empowerment.

Panelists:

Della Mitchell

Mildred Williamson (coordinator)

Maureen Taylor

Marian Kramer

Deborah Housey

Coalition Work

A sometimes complicated but necessary part of building a movement for social change is linking various sectors of that movement, building alliances that transcend region, race, culture, gender, and generations. This panel will discuss the importance and the dynamics of building principled coalitions, especially multi-racial coalitions, labor coalitions and international coalitions and will outline some of the history of coalition work as well as efforts underway to forge and sustain broad based coalitions.

Panelists:

Fannie Rushing (coordinator)

Charlene Mitchell

Phil Hutchings

James Early

Prexy Nesbitt

The Rich Prosper While the Poor Perish: Economic Justice, Employment and Unemployment

Despite rumors of a healthy economy, tens of thousands of poor and working class people are permanently un- or under- employed. Many are homeless or a heartbeat away from it. Megabillionaires like Bill Gates and media moguls like

Oprah are held up as symbols of this era. Much more common is the experience of families forced to live in shelters, workers losing their jobs as companies race the globe in search of cheaper labor, and senior citizens working in the fast food industry to pay for food and health care that the government is ever reluctant to provide. This session will explore the growing economic disparities in our society, the reality of economic polarization, and campaigns such as The Living Wage Campaign, organizing among former welfare recipients, and the 28th Amendment Campaign, that seek to combat the growing economic inequality. This panel will pay special attention to the problems confronting low-income and working class women.

Panelists:

Lou Turner
Rose Brewer (coordinator)
Rukiyah Dillahunt
Sabrina Coleman
August Nimtz

Environmental Racism, Housing and Neighborhoods

From toxic dump sites in low-income and disproportionately Black and Latino neighborhoods, to issues of unsafe housing, to global issues of environmental abuse. This panel will discuss local and global issues of environmental justice and environmental racism.

Panelists:

Connie Tucker
Angela Brown
Damu Smith (unconfirmed)
Rick Tingling-Clemmons (coordinator)
Cheryl Johnson
Klancy Miller

We Demand Reparations: The Growing Movements for Self-Determination, Redress and Freedom

The demand for Reparations goes back to the initial European wars on the African continent to enslave and colonize Black people. U.S. and European capitalist imperialism was built upon the backs of unpaid and super-exploited Black labor. Since our initial incarceration in the U.S., African people have always demanded, fought for and died in the struggle for Reparations—in the form of freedom from mass imprisonment, land, cash and other material resources, and the right to self-determination (ability to repatriate, separate or integrate). Panelists will discuss past and present organizing efforts to popularize and win our long overdue reparations, and how BRC participants can get involved in this movement.

Panelists:

Jahahara Armstrong (coordinator)
Ahmed Obafemi
Adjoa Aiyetero

Feminism and the Black Liberation Agenda

How do issues of patriarchy, sexism, and gender inequality relate to the Black struggle for freedom? Stereotypes about “lazy” and “promiscuous” Black women have become the battle cry in the attack against welfare rights. Those who seek to dismantle welfare and other services to the poor, do so in part by tapping racism and sexist stereotypes about poor Black women’s sexuality. Some of these stereotypes date back to the time of slavery. Some of these negative attitudes exist in our own community as well. Sexist abuse and oppression occurs on the job, in the home, in prisons and other institutions, and on the street. This session will address issues of gender and sexuality as they effect women and girls, as well as how narrow definitions of manhood and masculinist violence endanger the lives and prosperity of all Black people, including men and boys.

Panelists:

Linda Burnham
Diane Harriford
E. Frances White
Leith Mullings
Lynette Jackson (coordinator)
Asinamata Umoja

Our Children Are Not Expendable: The Struggle for Quality Accessible Education

There is a crisis of public education in this country. Increasingly more funds are being spent on jails than schools, and we are told that many of our children are “unteachable.” At the same time, colleges and universities are abandoning African Americans and closing their doors to students of color. On yet another level, parents are blamed and in some cases jailed in response to juvenile truancy problems. This session will analyze the situation, explore how parents, students and teachers can fight back against this reality.

Panelists:

Debbie Bell (coordinator)
Brenda Randolph
Maria Ramos
Doug Gills
Rose Saunders
Monique Washington

Racist Ballot Measures in California: Lessons for the National Black Liberation Struggle

The main purpose of the workshop is to underscore the general assault on key components of a

progressive/radical/left strategy for democratic social transformation, i.e., the political role of the working class and its institutions, the national and racial questions, and the importance to African Americans of building strategic alliances among peoples of color. A brief overview of the California Initiative process will be given, the history and significance of the Initiative, and how it endangers the struggle to build a radical presence in the Black community will be discussed.

Panelists:

Fran Beal (coordinator)

Phil Hutchings

Cheryl I. Harris

Amaha Kassa

Karenga Hart

Global Issues Are Black Issues: Framing Our Struggle as International and Anti-Imperialist

U.S. foreign policy towards Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean has always been fueled by greed and racism. An extension of the oppression of people of color in the U.S. has been the pursuit of policies of domination and control elsewhere. This panel will not only critique U.S. policy but will also explore some of the strategies of resistance and liberation that have emerged within Black and other oppressed communities around the world, often in conjunction with larger struggles for freedom and justice. The session will focus on the Black Diaspora but will draw the relationships with diverse struggles against Imperialism around the globe.

Panelists:

Horace Campbell (co-coordinator)

Gerald Horne (co-coordinator)

Angela Gilliam

Ilombe Braith (unconfirmed)

Organizing the South

The southern U.S. has been a locus of Black culture and struggle since the days of slavery. Historically, it is the region where the largest Black population has been concentrated. Today struggles in textile, tobacco, food production industries are key battle fronts. This panel will discuss the historic role of the Black South in the larger history of Black exploitation and the struggle for Black freedom.

Panelists:

Ashaki Binta

Chokwe Lumumba

Ajamu Dillahunt (coordinator)

Gary Grant

Latosha Brown

Socialism and Black Liberation

From Amilcar Cabral, to C.L.R. James to Walter Rodney to Paul Robeson to Claudia Jones, Black activists have embraced socialism as part of a vision for the liberation of Black people around the world. If any group has suffered from the brutality and injustices of capitalism, it has been the people of African descent in the U.S. and Blacks worldwide. The break-up of the Soviet Union, the attempts to strangle Cuba and the difficulties of socialist experiments in the world create a situation today in which we have many questions to explore in terms of how to create viable alternatives to capitalism in the socialist tradition. This panel will discuss how socialist and communist organizations see these issues today.

Panelists:

Joe Sims (coordinator)

Ahmed Shawki

Cameron Barron

Denice Miles

John Woodford (chair)

Sustaining Community Groups and Institutions

A powerful movement for social justice needs healthy and effective organizations. This workshop will focus on the elements which can make the difference between success or failure, including alliance-building, leadership, organizing and management skills, and resources. In small-group conversations, participants will share practical tips and strategies, and brainstorm about ways to strengthen African American grassroots organizations.

Panelists:

Jerome Scott (chair)

Sharon Powell

Van Jones

Jennifer Henderson

Judy Hatcher, (coordinator)

Media Workshop Screening and Discussion

CommFilm Workshop "Flame" (Ingrid Sinclair, 85 minutes)

Faith as a Weapon: Spirituality and the Role of the Church in the Radical Movement

What are the lessons we can learn from Nat Turner, Absalom Jones, Sojourner Truth, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr. and other Black ministers as leaders in the struggle? What is the history of spiritual motivation in the radical/liberation movement? How can faith be used as a weapon in building our movement? These are some of the questions that will be explored by our panel of religious scholars and activists.

Panelists:*Michael Eric Dyson**Cornel West**Rev. Jeremiah Wright**Linda Thomas**Kevin Tyson (coordinator)***Black Radicalism, Black Workers and Today's Labor Movement**

This session will explore new possibilities for building united efforts for jobs, equality and workers rights. Black radicals, especially Black working class radicals can play a decisive role in supporting an advanced agenda of struggle for labor and a pro-working class agenda for the African American movement.

Panelists:*Saladin Muhammad**Lou Moy**Frank Lumpkin**Jim Wilkerson**Theresa Polk-Henderson**Jarvis Tyner (coordinator)***Youth and Student Organizing: Supporting Those "...Who Have the Courage to Run Against the Storm": The Next Generation**

On college campuses, in high schools and in the streets, young people have historically joined with others on the forefront of the movement to change the world. This has been true from South Africa to the U.S. South. There has been a systematic attempt, stepped up in recent years, to criminalize and imprison Black youth, to vilify young people as gang bangers and so-called promiscuous teens, and to close the doors to schools, colleges and jobs. Young people are fighting back against cuts in scholarships, attempts to eliminate public universities, and attempts to put more and more working class youth under the control of the criminal justice system. This session will talk about those struggles and ways for youth to link up with one another across the country.

Panelists:*Jonathan Peck (coordinator)**Kofi Taha**Clarence Lang**Charlene Allen**Malika Saunders***Fighting Homophobia—Lesbian and Gay Rights**

Homophobia in the society at large and within the Black community itself reinforces a larger conservative agenda that celebrates a narrow definition of heterosexual male-headed families, and helps to justify attacks on all oppressed people. The same peo-

ple who burn churches, lynch Black men and women, and want to imprison socialists and communists, also want to persecute lesbians and gays as a group. Some so-called Black leaders have defined lesbians, gay men, bi-sexuals and trans-gendered people as external to or excluded from the "authentic" Black community. The politics of the BRC, and the emphasis of this session, will be to turn that assumption on its head. Panelists will articulate the ways in which homophobia, gay bashing, and "privileges" enjoyed by heterosexuals, and denied to lesbians and gays, actually compromise the struggle for Black liberation. So, it is homophobia and not lesbian and gay people, which is an enemy to a larger Black freedom movement. Activists will talk about the history of Black lesbian and gay organizing and some of the struggles and challenges going on today.

Panelists:*Mandy Carter**N'Tanya Lee (coordinator)**Deborah Benford**Tamara Jones***From Mandela to Mumia: Political Prisoners Past and Present**

Nelson Mandela was at one time the most famous political prisoner in the world. Less well known is the fact that over the years, this nation has jailed hundreds of men and women largely because of their political beliefs and opposition to the status quo. Today, the case of Philadelphia activist and death row inmate Mumia Abu Jamal has gained international attention and support. Political prisoners released over the past decade include: Ahmad Rahman, Dhoruba bin Wahad, and Geronimo Pratt, all imprisoned for decades because of their involvement in the Black Panther Party. This session will explore the cases of current and past political prisoners, COINTELPRO, the Jericho 98 Movement, the larger reality of Black political prisoners and movements to bring them justice.

Panelists:*Ahmed Obafemi (coordinator)**Hondo Tchiwa**Safiya Bukhari**Kahri Akinsheye***Health Care and AIDS**

Health is an important site of struggle in the Black Community. AIDS, mental illness and stress disorders, nutritional deficiencies and rising rates of asthma, diabetes, cervical, breast and prostate cancer, are all symptoms of what ails Black and poor communities. While the demise of community based institutions and support mechanisms

have increased our community's susceptibility to ill health and disease, the state and corporate capitalism have made the largest contribution to production of this ill health and continue to place obstacles in the way of those attempting to eradicate or simply alleviate the situation. The privatization of health care, government neglect, the general defunding of the public sector, deregulation of corporations and U.S. drug policy are all obstacles in the way of restoring health to Black communities. Participants will discuss: Universal health care, more community control of health care institutions, greater investment and commitment to women's health issues, maternal and child health, mental health, environmental justice, reproductive rights. The health panel will discuss the state of Black health and current struggles, and set priorities and targets for health care in the 21st century.

Panelists:

Amadee Braxton

Bob Moore

Nadia Marsh

Lynette Jackson (coordinator)

Assata Zerai

Blanca Velez

Kim Smith

African American Empowerment and Alternative Electoral Strategies

This session will explore the potential and the limits of electoral politics as an arena for struggle. Participants will offer insights about patterns of Black political participation, experiences in campaigns, and third party developments.

Panelists:

Mike Dawson

Clarence Lusane

Arturo Griffiths

Shafeah M'Balisa

Larry Adams

Kenneth Jones

Jamala Rogers (coordinator)

Media Fighting Back

Journalists and media workers will discuss the negative impact of mainstream media, the ways in which racism, sexism and elitism are promoted, and the power and potential power of alternative media in forging political consensus and motivating people to act. What people see on television or read in the paper often defines the lens through which they see the world. This session will talk about the impact of media on society and the Black community in particular, and ways to address this.

Panelists:

Salim Muwakkil (coordinator)

Herb Boyd

Stan West

Keisha Chambers (unconfirmed)

International Human Rights and Radical Lawyering

The issue of international human rights and the push to have world bodies from the UN to the World Court take up these issues seriously has been a major campaign among progressive lawyers. Many radical Black lawyers have provided legal defense for movement activists, and have raised fundamental challenges to the way in which the issue of crime is treated, the racism in sentencing, especially the death penalty and the underlying assumptions about fairness and justice in our society. An important component of this work has been to link domestic struggles with international ones. Legal activists and scholars will talk about some key struggles they have been engaged in and put these struggles in a larger political and global context.

Panelists:

Sybil McPherson

Lisa Grooms (coordinator)

Gay McDougall

Nkechi Taiifa

Culture and History

This session will explore how radical historians approach analyses of culture and how cultural artists, namely filmmakers, approach representing history. Cultural performance and other cultural interventions have been woven throughout the BRC program. This session will highlight the work of radical historians and a filmmaker, in terms of how they frame their work within a radical political perspective. The panel will explore the ways in which these approaches can contribute to building a radical movement.

Panelists:

Robin Kelley

Lisa Brock (coordinator)

Louis Massai

Chicago's Black Radical Tradition: Living Legends and Future Leaders

This panel will highlight the history of Black radicalism in Chicago going back to the 1930s and 40s through the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement eras and into the present. Organizers who played historic roles in some of the major battles in this city's history will be present. They will speak and interact with current activists: medical students engaged in struggles around the attack

on Affirmative Action, and university workers organizing around labor issues on the city's campuses. This session is an extension of the photo exhibition that will be on display throughout the Congress highlighting the long and rich history of Black radical activism in Chicago, and the city's historic role in hosting gatherings and serving as a model and center for national movements.

Panelists:

- Tim Black*
- Bob Lucas (unconfirmed)*
- Ishmael Flourey*
- Julie Davis*
- Linda Ollins*
- Randy Evans*
- Bill Watkins (coordinator)*

Black Studies in the 21st Century: A Computer Lab Internet Workshop

This workshop will review the efforts being made to utilize the Internet in organizing to fight poverty and oppression of all kinds. The general issue of cyber-organizing will be taken up and plans developed to promote the use of email and internet based websites to organize the Black liberation movement. The website of the BRC will be reviewed and improvements proposed.

Panelists:

- Rodney Coates*
- Debbie Hamilton*
- Ruben Patterson*
- Abdul Alkalimat (coordinator)*

Black Radical Media

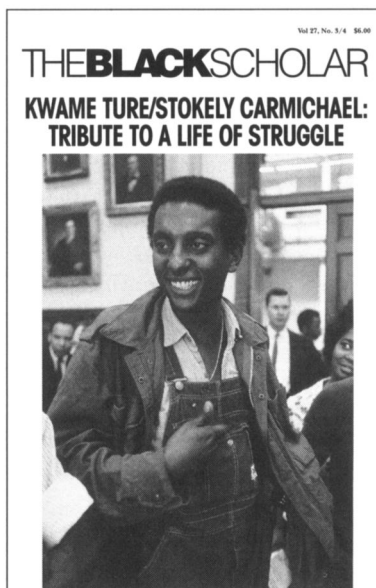
Panelists:

- Barbara Allen, Executive Director, Middle Passage Productions; editor/engineer, WTTW*
- Portia Cobb, Professor of Film, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee*
- Marcia Davis, Senior Editor, Emerge*
- Laura Harris, Professor of English, Pitzer College*
- Elsbeth Kydd, Video Artist, Professor of Film and Video, University of Toledo*
- Cornelius Moore, Executive Director, California Newsreel*
- Louis Massai, Scribe, producer of video on W.E.B. Du Bois*

Workshop: Video Screenings and Discussion

- Cycles (Zeinabu Irene Davis, 7 minutes)*
- Edges (Ayanna Udongo, 5 minutes)*
- No! (Aisha Simmons, 20 minutes)*
- Comrade Sisters (Phyllis J. Jackson and Christine Minor, 60 minutes)*

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