

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

DATE: 2/12/2021

SL: The Anti-War Movement and Black Radical Struggle

The Takeaway:

- In honor of Black History Month, we bring a brief (and wholly inadequate) look at the immeasurable contribution of Black anti-racist movements to the fight against U.S. militarism.
- From W.E.B. Du Bois' opposition to imperialism, to Black socialist resistance to World War I — from the Black Panthers to the Movement for Black Lives — Black activists have consistently connected the struggles against racism at home and U.S. warmaking abroad.
- Remembering this often-ignored history is a start, but it's not enough. We must also learn its lessons, and continue its fight.

This Black History Month, We Celebrate Black Anti-Militarism Activism

Racism and militarism go hand in hand. From the [exporting](#) of police violence around the world, to the targeted military [recruitment](#) of communities of color, to the systematic [devaluing](#) of BIPOC lives in the decision of when and where to wage war, we cannot dismantle the U.S. war machine without also dismantling white supremacy, and vice versa.

To the Black activists and organizations leading the struggle against white supremacy, this has never been a secret. Their tireless efforts to break down the false silos between U.S. policy abroad and race relations at home have long been, and continue to be, indispensable to the anti-war movement. This week, in honor of Black History Month, we pay tribute to this often-ignored contribution of the Black U.S.-American radical tradition to the struggle against militarism, sharing just a brief overview of this long and storied history.

Anti-Imperialism

There is no single starting point to the modern history of Black U.S.-American opposition to war, but much can be traced back to the scholar and activist W.E.B. Du Bois. A committed anti-imperialist, Du Bois and the movement he represented identified a shared struggle between Black people in the United States and the people of color living under U.S. imperial rule in the aftermath of the Spanish-American war. Du Bois spoke out against the brutal U.S. occupation of

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the [Philippines](#), the invasion and occupation of [Haiti](#), and the entire U.S.-European scramble to divide the world, and specifically Africa, into imperial possessions. Black U.S.-American radicals like Du Bois recognized that the liberation of people of color knows no borders.

“The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in American and the islands of the sea.” — W.E.B. Du Bois, [1903](#)

World War I

Black activists — like much of the left in general — were divided on how to respond to World War I. While some [felt](#) that energies were best directed into the war, in the hopes that participation in a national effort would help win support to the cause of their liberation, others opposed it from the start. Some, like socialists and union organizers A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, recognized the Great War as a contest between white supremacist imperial powers, competing over the spoils of imperial conquest. In their book *Terms of Peace and the Darker Races*, they pulled no punches:

“The object of war is usually largely economic—manufacturers seeking markets for their goods and capitalists seeking investments for their surplus capital... Herein lies the real bone of contention of the world war — darker peoples for cheap labor and darker peoples’ rich lands.” — A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, [1917](#)

The Korean War

As the age of Cold War interventionism accelerated in the early 1950s with the unimaginably brutal [war in Korea](#), Black radical voices like those of Charlotta Bass pushed back. A leading organizer in the Progressive Party, and the first Black woman nominated for Vice President of the United States, Bass made anti-imperialism and opposition to the Korean war a fixture of her platform. With Republicans and Democrats alike falling to the military-industrial complex and steering the United States into a state of perpetual warfare, Bass resisted:

“When they spent the country’s wealth on making war and preparing for war, they could not spend it on the people’s security.” — Charlotta Bass, [1952](#)

The Vietnam War

That the 1960s and 70s saw both an explosion of resistance to white supremacy and an explosion of resistance to the U.S. war machine was no coincidence. From Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous “[Three Evils](#)” speech connecting racism, poverty, and war, to Kwame Ture’s “[We Ain’t Going](#),” from the [National Black Antiwar Antidraft Union](#) to the Black Panthers, it was the Vietnam era that saw the silos between anti-war activism and anti-racist activism break down not only in the minds of leading intellectuals, but in mass popular movements. Few captured this melding of the movements better than scholar-activist Angela Davis:

“We have to talk about what’s happening in Vietnam as being a symptom of something that’s happening all over the world, of something that’s happening in

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this country. And in order for the anti-war movement to be effective, it has to link up with the struggle for black and brown liberation in this country with the struggle of exploited white workers.” — Angela Davis, [1969](#)

Endless Wars and Today

The torrent of intersectional resistance unleashed in the Vietnam era surges on today. Many Black radicals who were prominent in the Vietnam period, like Angela Davis, went on to resist decades of further Cold War brutality, such as the Reagan-era dirty wars in Latin America. When the contemporary anti-war movement emerged to oppose the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Black activist groups were at the forefront — by 2005, in fact, 9 in 10 Black U.S.-Americans [opposed](#) the war. Today, leading anti-racist groups like the Movement for Black Lives defy those who try to limit them to narrowly-defined “issues of race” by including things like cutting the Pentagon budget as a core plank in their [policy platform](#):

“America is an empire that uses war to expand territory and power. American wars are unjust, destructive to Black communities globally and do not keep Black people safe locally.” — The Movement for Black Lives, [2020](#)

On the Shoulders of Giants

The individuals and quotes presented here are but a tiny fraction of the enormity of the contribution of Black U.S.-American movements to the fight for peace. To present a short overview such as this is clearly inadequate. But it’s hopefully a start.

For those who would have us believe that foreign policy is a simply about good and bad “ideas” to be debated among experts; for those who would prefer that movements for peace and liberation divide themselves into narrow “issue-areas;” for those who seek, consciously or not, to perpetuate white supremacy and war, there’s tremendous pressure for us to forget this long history of struggle. Not only during Black History Month, but every day of the year, we must resist.

Connecting Anti-Racism and Anti-Militarism Today

Here are but a few of the many excellent organizations leading at the intersection of anti-racism and anti-militarism today.

- [Black Alliance for Peace](#)
- [Black Alliance for Just Immigration](#)
- [Labor Against Racism and War](#)
- [Women of Color Advancing Peace & Security](#)
- [Dissenters](#)
- [Collective for Black Iranians](#)

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We're thrilled that President Biden decided to end U.S. support for offensive operations in Yemen. But a lot of lives ride on how we define "offensive." **We joined 80+ orgs and experts in identifying [\\$36.5 billion](#) in military support that Biden should cancel to fulfill his promise.**

You probably know that the 2002 AUMF has been used to justify endless war for almost twenty years running. But did you know that it was almost repealed a full decade ago? **[Here's the inside story of how the 2002 AUMF repeal got blocked at the last minute.](#)**

Broad-based U.S. sanctions are devastating at any time. During a pandemic they should be unthinkable. **Hats off to Rep. Ilhan Omar and the other members of Congress [calling](#) for a review, and overhaul, of U.S. sanctions policy during the pandemic.**

It's pretty simple really: the president should not be able to wage endless wars without the debate and approval of Congress. **[Here's a new report](#) by our friends at FCNL outlining a path toward a new balance of war powers.**

Saudi women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul was [released](#) from jail mere weeks after Biden's announcement on Yemen marked a major shift in U.S.-Saudi relations. It's almost as if accountability for human rights abuses is a good thing.

Joe Biden has [announced](#) new, *targeted* sanctions on the individuals responsible for the coup in Burma. It's a start, so long as the sanctions truly are targeted at individuals and don't hurt anyone else. Now, we should cut off military support, hold the generals accountable for the genocide against the Rohingya, and ensure all targeted groups in Burma are protected.

Charges of "anti-semitism" have long been weaponized to silence criticism of the government of Israel. Now, Facebook is [considering](#) making that official policy. That's dangerous.

And finally, **the [courtroom](#) isn't the only place a cat [shouldn't be](#).**