

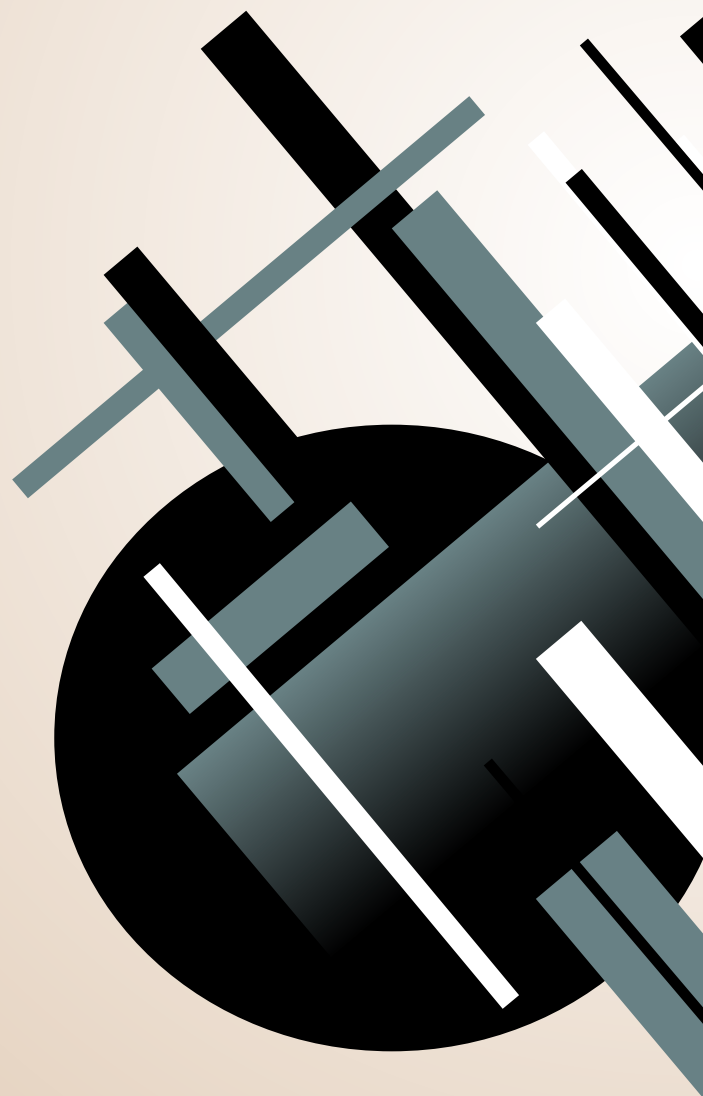
A PLANTER EMPIRE AND THE LAND QUESTION

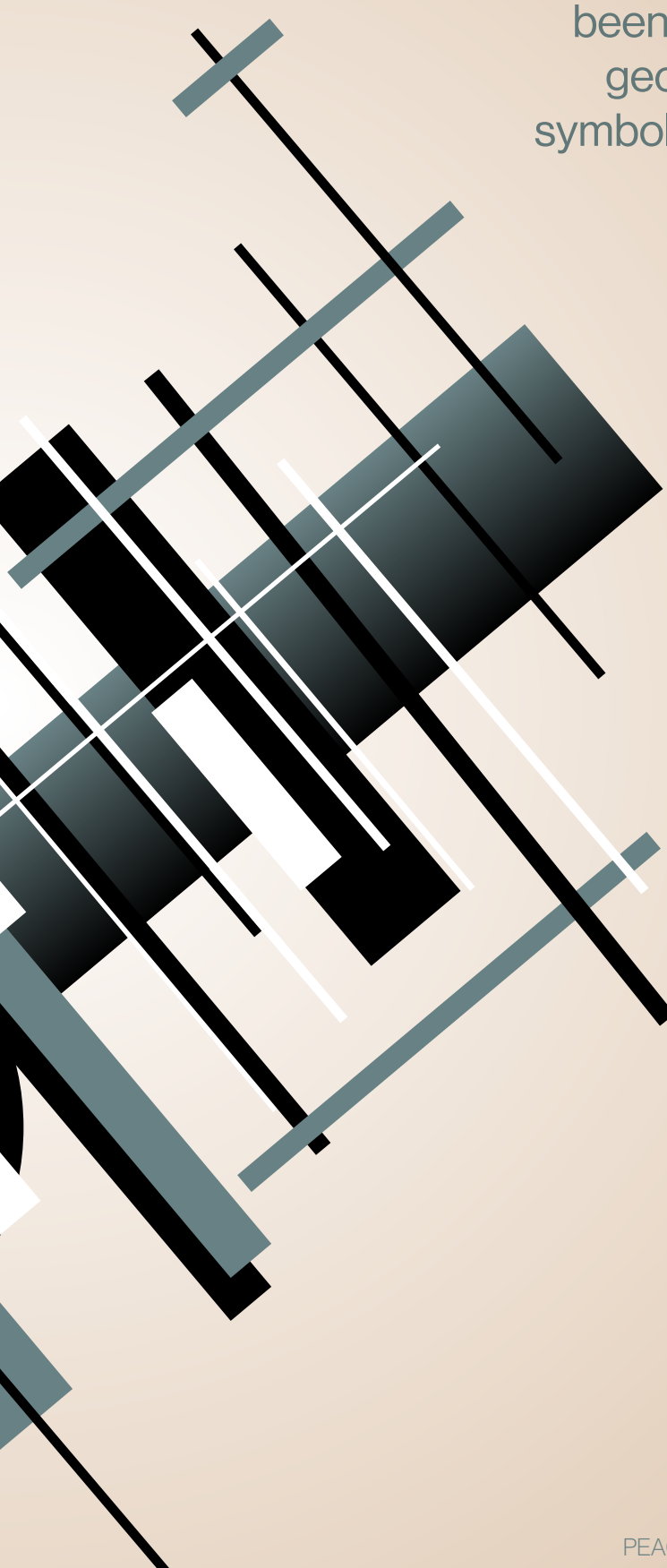
C. Katsfoter

THE U.S. AS A SLAVER OF NATIONS

the US Empire is ruled by the so-called “white” nation. This national formation is composed of a more-or-less unified Euro-American culture that includes formerly oppressed nations such as Italian and Eastern European Americans. This construct is, of course, far from a monolith. It orbits the central, oldest, and most powerful formation: that of the Anglo-American nation. Indeed, one often reads of “Anglo-American legal tradition,” indicating a strong continuity between the old White Anglo-Saxon Protestant nationhood at the heart of the US formation of the ruling class, and the modern category of whiteness. The white nation has absorbed wave after wave of European immigration, but erected walls against the other subject nations within the empire.¹

There are other nations in the empire; there are also national minorities.² The other nations are oppressed, to one degree or another. Some are colonies. All have been caged and trapped within the vast geographical territory of the empire where they are super-exploited and where phenotype itself has come to serve as a marker for nationality, and thus for the property-relations embodied in national oppression. This bundle of oppressions has come to be known as “race.” But “race” issues are really national issues; they are really issues of oppression based on pheno-





The oppressed and the exploited have been caged and trapped within the vast geographical territory of the empire, a symbol of super-exploitation and national oppression.

type and expression of physical and linguistic traits as identifiers of “racial” (really national) boundaries. The exact moment in time when racialization became a material force in the superstructure is up for debate (although a credible argument traces it to the beginning of European colonialism in the 15th century), but the fact remains that “race” preceded capitalist development through the mercantile-colonialist period, and likely found its full blossom in the plantation system of the Caribbean, where the race slave trade and genocide of Indigenous peoples laid the groundwork for planter feudalism.

WHAT IS A NATION?

“[A] nation is not a racial or tribal, but a historically constituted community of people... It goes without saying that a nation, like every historical phenomenon, is subject to the law of change, has its history, its beginning and end.”³

Josef Stalin tackled this subject exhaustively in his pamphlet “Marxism and the National Question.” He demonstrated that there are a number of factors that one must consider when determining whether an ethnicity comprises a distinct nation, and these are:

1. a common language
2. a common territory
3. a common economic life; economic cohesion
4. a common culture or psychological makeup (a common superstructure)

A colony is a discrete geographic territory which is governed by an imperial center for the benefit of the empire. Colonial relations are typified by the presence of a concentration of extractive industries rather than industries that produce finished commodities.

When we speak of colonized and oppressed nations, we have already determined that the membership of each discrete nation shares the four required traits of nationality. Most of the nations inside the empire possess English as a common language, although the Black Belt has its own variation (AAVE, or African-American Vernacular English) and the Indigenous nations have maintained or recovered their own languages. The Black Belt constitutes the territory of the oppressed Black or New Afrikan nation inside the empire, while Indigenous nations retain territory shaped through treaties with the settler state. It is critical to note that the territory of the Black Belt was created by colonial oppression. That is, the territory is not the original territory of the Black nation, but rather situated within the regions of Indigenous peoples who were already subject to colonization. Each of these nations has economic cohesion, that is, they are economically interrelated within their own bounds, and each of these nations have their own common psychological makeup, a common culture.

Identification of the imprisoned nations within the empire has been a constant struggle against white chauvinism. Anglo-Americans and Euro-Americans in particular have often held the viewpoint that, for instance, Black Americans are not a nation but an “ethnic minority” or “national minority” and that the chief desire of this population is assimilation into the Euro-American nation. This chauvinist view flies in the face of the works of Haywood, Nasanov, Lenin,

Stalin, and the members of the Sixth Comintern of 1928 who voted in favor of the Black Belt thesis, but it is a continuous refrain in the right-opportunist strains of communism inside the United States empire—and no wonder! The relations of production are such that the oppressed nations and colonized people provide a super-exploited workforce. White communists who fail to see this ignore the beam in their eye because they refuse to see the benefit they derive from the subjugation of their fellow countrymen.

PROPERTY RELATIONS OF THE COLONY

A colony is a discrete geographic territory which is governed by an imperial center for the benefit of the empire. Colonial relations are typified by the presence of a concentration of extractive industries rather than industries that produce finished commodities. A semi-colony is an ostensibly independent country whose politics are dominated by the interference of an imperial country or a coalition of imperial countries, and which is therefore run, materially, for the benefit of those imperial countries. Colonies may have a settler presence, or may remain majority indigenous.⁴

A colony is a super-exploited region in which the normal productive forces of the bourgeoisie are inhibited. In a colony, the imperial power seeks to dominate labor relations (for access to

Industry in the colonies is in a direct, antagonistic contradiction to the interests of the imperial bourgeoisie. It is this antagonistic relationship that is the primary contradiction of a colonial property arrangement, and absent this relationship a region cannot be said properly to be a colony.

cheap labor), extractive industries (for access to cheap raw material), land relations (to establish colonial offices, and to give land to choice supporters), and markets (to export finished goods and realize profits from manufactories in the imperial core). In traditional colonies, the territory is administered by the colonizing country. This may take the form of imperial governors, boards of control, direct sovereign companies such as the VoC⁵ or the East India Company, etc.

Neo-colonies (or semi-colonies) are subject to the same types of exploitation, but these are overseen by the comprador bourgeoisie who belong to the colonized nation. That is, native institutions are so wholly corrupted by imperial interference that the native government acts in the interests of the imperial populations located in the core, rather than for the native populations in the colonized country. The compradors act as imperial overseers for the oppressor nationalities; they are the agents of the empire, even as they wear the appearance of the national bourgeoisie (bankers, business owners, and politicians). The comprador bourgeoisie does not have an incentive to develop industries that compete with the imperial core, because they receive the benefit of imperial aid to keep their country pacified and line their own pockets. The comprador bourgeoisie surrenders control of their markets, their land administration schemes, and their industrial development in exchange for a portion of imperial plunder which is paid back to them as IMF loans, development loans, foreign aid, even shares in impe-

rial corporations. This is the most common form of imperial domination in the age of neo-colonialism, in which capital is sent into the colonies through private corporations, extraction occurs under the watchful eyes of comprador-governments, and no hateful flag of the conqueror nation is ever seen flying over a government building.

Inside the US territorial empire, the Indigenous nations are administered as colonies. While the empire pays lip service to the sovereignty of these territories, they are not independent of US policy. They remain subject to treaty annulment, land grabs, labor exploitation, and extractive exploitation just as surely as if they were colonies at a geographical remove. We can see the true nature of imperial exploitation of Indigenous territories in the Dawes Act of 1887 and the behavior of the Department of Indian Affairs. Indian agents have attacked formal native sovereignty since the treaties were first signed, and the federal government has been rapacious in its attempts to repossess granted territory, cut services, and otherwise under-develop Indigenous regions. Local American Indian bourgeoisie are discouraged from building up industry.

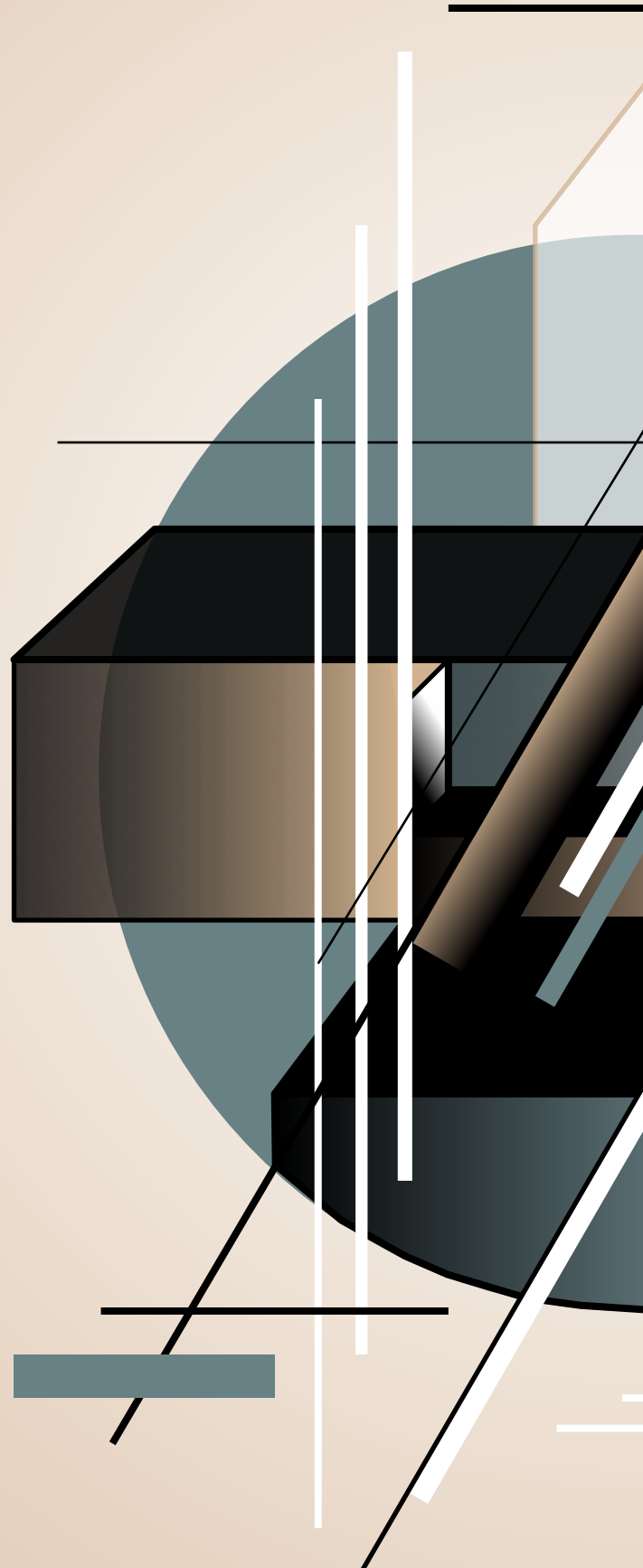
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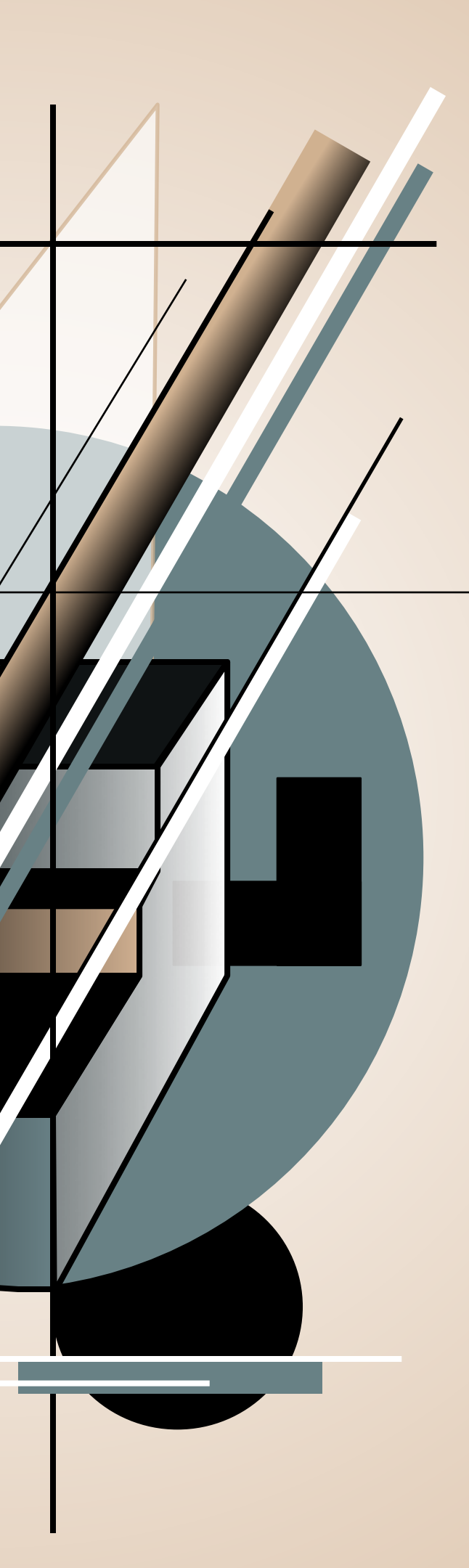
The Antagonism of Industry. Why is industry in a colonial region antagonistic to the imperial core? This question is of great import. If we could say “it is not,” then it would be possible for the imperial core to develop the colonies as it claims to do, to raise them up to the same standard of living as the imperial core, and for imperialism to proceed in a friendly manner to all nations, a rising tide that lifts all ships. This is demonstrably not the case. We have merely to look at the history of brutal colonial exploitation to understand that this cannot be. But why?

In order to answer this question, we must substantially understand the functioning of imperialism itself. Surplus capital is not directed to raise the standard of living of farmers, peasants, etc. in exploited countries, but rather to make use of the higher rate of profit in the “backward” colony. Of course, the colony is only “backward” because it was intentionally underdeveloped – through embargoes, war, export of its chief goods, and concerted imperial attacks on its home industries! Capital is not put to use in granting the colonies actual development, but rather in creating sites of extraction. These are loci where profit is gathered and siphoned off by the imperial power and its bourgeois agents.

Let us, for example, examine the imperial conquest of Iraq and its subsequent administration under the servant-government of the US bourgeoisie. The devastation of the imperial war reduced real wages in Iraq, and turned over the key oil fields to US imperial exploitation. The result:

In 2002, on the eve of the Second Gulf War, the GDP of Iraq was \$59 billion. Its per-capita purchasing power was roughly \$2,500. US exports comprised 46% of all exports, and US imports were less than 1%. The country had \$62.2 billion dollars of debt and received \$327.5 million dollars in economic aid. In 2004 the GDP had been reduced to \$37.92 billion. Per capita purchasing power was roughly \$1,500. US exports were 48.8% and US imports were 6.9% of total exports and imports respectively. The debt had ballooned to \$93.95 billion dollars, and aid was an amazing \$33 billion, billions of dollars higher.⁶





The complete destruction of Iraq and the influx of “aid” and US capital, alongside a substantial (nearly 3%) increase in US exports and very substantial (7%) increase in US imports represents the imperialist underdevelopment of a colony. The invasion collapsed the wage, transformed Iraq into a colony, and permitted US capital to “develop” its key extractive industry (oil). Crippling IMF loans, which are part of the modern US/NATO colonial order, ensure continuing government compliance.

The interim government of Iraq, installed in 2004, was headed by Jalal Talabani, a former organizer for an independent Kurdistan. In 1990 he traveled to the United States to offer his aid to the US imperial forces in exchange for support for Kurdistan. In 1991 he worked closely with the imperial powers of the US, UK, and France to establish a “safe haven” in the Kurdish region. The fate of Kurdistan has been repeatedly used as a wedge by the imperial powers to develop its presence in that region; the Iraq war and the subsequent establishment of a semi-colony was no exception. Under the guise of “humanitarian aid to the Kurds,” the US has kept its troops on the ground in the region for 16 years.

The Indigenous Nations. Let us take a single Indigenous nation, the Mashantucket Pequots, as an example so we can better understand how these internal Indigenous colonies have been treated by the encroachment of capital.

At the time of the first colonists landing in the Pequot area, the nation controlled 160,000 acres of territory. By 1855, the State of Connecticut had reduced the Pequots’ holdings to 204 acres (a loss of 159,796 acres, 99.985% of the original territory). The land left to the Pequots was mostly unusable swamp. The Pequot Nation was essentially eradicated from its former territory and suppressed from 1638 (the end of the Pequot War) until 1983, when the nation was recognized after a protracted struggle with the US legal system. To this day, Anglo-Americans in Connecticut refer to the Pequots as a “fake tribe” who were “just after the money.” The process of genocide had almost been completed and its perpetrators had

forgotten about the Pequots, whose territory had been given over to the settlers wholesale.⁷

This created a federal land trust in the name of the Pequots and allotted \$900,000 to the tribe to acquire territory. It also legally extinguished the claims of the Pequots on any territory other than what it acquired by “normal”, settler land relations (purchase from Anglo-Americans) henceforward. Of utmost importance is the fact that the Pequot territory is held in federal trust.

These federal land trusts mark out a legal regime instituted under the Indian Reorganization Act and the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. These trusts are administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This trust is a form of “white man’s burden.” This was articulated as late as 1942 as a “moral obligation[...] of the highest responsibility and trust” toward Indigenous nations. *Seminole Nation v. United States*, 1942. Although there is technically a fiduciary relationship between the Bureau of Indian Affairs (as representative of the US imperial government) and the nations whose lands are placed into trust, it is possible for Congress to “disestablish” any Indigenous nation’s land trust by vote, and for the federal/state judiciaries to do the same by interpreting treaties as “demonstrating a clear congressional purpose to disestablish or diminish” a reservation. *City of Sherrill, N.Y. v. Oneida Indian Nation of New York*, 544 U.S. 197, 212 (2005).

This conditional right to self-determination (conditioned on the Congress’ continued recognition of that right and decision not to disestablish the tribe) is only one of the many levers held over the Indigenous nations by the colonizers.

The Pequots, like many of the tribes of the northeast region of the empire, have essentially no industry. Their livelihood is entirely dependent on the parasitic “Indian Casino” model. The tribe is the 8th largest employer in Connecticut, serving as a locus of profit-extraction from other states. Three quarters of the Pequot casino revenue is extracted from out-of-state visitors.

The new Pequot territory is a rump-colony; it is politically isolated, its sovereignty is contingent on the good will of capital, and it was completely, physically colonized by settlers in the recent past. This is the end result of settler colonialism. “Territory is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element.”⁸ The remainder of the Pequot territory is administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, host to a pair of casinos, and without any productive industry. Gambling, by its nature, cannot valorize capital⁹; rather, the establishment of Indigenous gambling centers parasitically remove money from other productive circuits. The Pequot casinos pay \$228 million in taxes to the State of Connecticut and the Federal Government each year as a result of various agreements.

The unproductive labor in the Pequot casinos at one time produced a dividend per-capita payout to each of the members of the nation (of which there are some 1000). That was brought to an end in 2010. There are no productive industries in the Pequot nation; rather, they are paid low wages to help extract profit from the settler labor aristocracy and the petit-bourgeoisie who visit the casino. These funds are divided between the settler looter class in the form of the Connecticut State Government and the Mashantucket Pequot Endowment Fund, of whom the tribal council serves as the board. Indigenous casinos are a method of discouraging productive labor on Indigenous land; they do not serve to develop the capital of Indigenous people--the revenue, by law, must be used to fund tribal operations and government programs, to provide for general welfare of the tribe, and to make donations to charitable organizations, and these revenues must be distributed by the Board of the Trust.

The Mashantucket health services, post office, and transport services are all contracted out to the Federal Government, meaning a portion of the tribe’s income through the casino is paid back into the settler government itself. The CEO of either casino makes somewhere on the order of \$200,000 a year from their managerial capacity, clearly a petit-bourgeois position. This position has not historically been held by a

Subject nations are distinguishable from colonies by the fact that the development of industry in those nations is not in direct contradiction with the development of industry in the imperial core; the primary property relationship is not a land relation but rather a complex of judicial, legal, and property relations.

member of the tribe, although the current chairman of the tribe, Rodney Butler, worked for a year from 2017-18 as the interim CEO of the Foxwoods Casino.

Firmly integrated into the system of capital circulation, the casinos do not provide capital accumulation for the tribe; they provide money directly into lawmakers' pockets, and may in fact have established a comprador bourgeoisie among the tribal leadership (although this may be mitigated by the fact that they are subject to a radically democratic voting process every three years). This colony cannot develop industry, and is prevented from developing productive industries; to do so would put it into direct antagonistic conflict with the Connecticut Anglo-American industries.

While this is clearly tied to the material conditions of the Pequot people in the imperial northeast and those conditions are not replicated anywhere else, all colonized tribes are subjected to some forces that prevent them from material self-determination, through a combination of purposeful underdevelopment (either by the lure of casinos or through another mechanism) and legal disenfranchisement through trusts and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The same cannot be said of the Black Belt or the other subject nations.

Navajo Mining of Uranium. In 1990, the settler government in the United States passed the Radiation Compensation Act, formally and officially acknowledging its responsibility for the historical mistreatment of uranium miners.

The US government was the sole purchaser of uranium within the empire from 1948 to 1971.¹⁰ The existence of radiation poisoning was known and observed long before 1948; uranium-bearing ores had been mined for centuries in Schneeberg Germany and Jachimov Czechoslovakia for metals and manufacture of uranium dyes. An association between these mining sites and the prevalence of lung disease was first reported in detail in 1879.¹¹

Though the uranium mines in operation from 1948 to the present within the empire were private commercial concerns, the US government guaranteed purchase of the uranium ore and was the sole available legal purchaser. The location of the ore was concentrated on the Colorado Plateau in New Mexico, Utah, Colorado, and Arizona.¹² The Navajo reservation was located at the edge of the uranium mining belt. This drew Navajo men to work in the mines. The reservation had little industry of its own, being a colony, and the cheap labor of the Navajo men was exploited in the grim, poisonous circumstances of the uranium mines.¹³

Miners were paid minimum wage or less. In 1949 one Navajo miner was earning an hourly wage of 81 cents.¹⁴ This is typical of the imperialist exploitation of a colony. Here we see the two major functions of imperial governance in the colonies: the super-profits garnered from low wages and the extraction of natural resources from the colonized territory into the empire for the benefit of the imperial bourgeoisie.

Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico, now governed by a strict Board of Control, is the archetypal geographically separated “external” colony of the United States empire. It was openly colonized under a US military governorship. The US provided it with a limited form of home governance, but when, in 1914, the Puerto Rican House of Delegates (unanimously) voted for independence, the US Congress denied them. In 1917, the US Congress “granted” Puerto Ricans status as citizens (if they were born after 1898). The entire Puerto Rican House of Delegates voted against it, and warned that it was an imposition in order to draft Puerto Rican men into the army for a US entry into World War One. Although Puerto Ricans can currently vote for their own governor, Puerto Rico is now under the real control of the Control Board, established by PROMESA (H.R. 5278). The Control Board is appointed by the president and can overrule all decisions of Puerto Rican public authorities.

Puerto Rico is heavily in debt as a result of the US imperial government withdrawing federal subsidies and favorable tax laws in order to better control the colony and open it further to capital development. It had the intended effect: it destroyed the Puerto Rican government’s ability to issue bonds, sent the economy spiraling into a depression, and has resulted in such neoliberal endeavors as the privatization of the former state electricity monopoly.

The lesson of the state electricity monopoly perfectly demonstrates the contradiction between the development of national industry in the colonies and the need for national industry to remain under-developed to provide cheap labor, markets for imperial corporations, and cheap natural resources. Using its colonial control measures, the US forced Puerto Rico to sell its electrical monopoly to private bidders. Rather than permitting the wealth of Puerto Rico to flow to its people, it is siphoned off through this and countless other destructive actions by the US imperialists.

PROPERTY RELATIONS OF OPPRESSED NATIONS

The CPUSA expressed the national question in the words of Harry Haywood thusly: “[i]ndustrialization in the Black Belt is not, as is generally the case in colonies properly speaking, in contradiction with the ruling interests of the imperialist bourgeoisie, which has in its hands the monopoly of all industry; but insofar as industry is developed here, it will in no way bring a solution to the question of living conditions of the oppressed Negro majority, nor to the agrarian question, which lies at the basis of the national question. On the contrary, this question is still further aggravated as a result of the increase of the contradictions arising from the pre-capitalist forms of exploitation of the Negro peasantry and of a considerable portion of the Negro proletariat (miners, forestry workers, etc.) in the Black Belt, and, at the same time, owing to the industrial development here, the growth of the most important driving force of the national revolution, the Black working class, is especially strengthened.”¹⁵

Subject nations are distinguishable from colonies by the fact that the development of industry in those nations is not in direct contradiction with the development of industry in the imperial core. For example, Latin-American and Black industry does not threaten the development of Anglo-American industry. The primary property relationship between those nations and the Anglo-American nation is not a land relation (unlike the Indigenous nations) but rather a series or complex of judicial, legal, and de facto property relations.

The Black Nation. New Afrika, the Black Belt, whatever name we wish to give it: there is, contained within the US settler empire, in the regions of old planter domination, a cohesive nation that remains in chains to this day. The legal forms have changed, but the material reality remains the same. Although the the Sharecropper’s movement of the 30s and the Black Power movement of the 60s both won concessions, those gains are now being walked back and overturned by the planter governments.¹⁶ The

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oppression of chattel slavery has been substituted by debt peonage, mass incarceration (and the accompanying judicial slavery), uneven loan application/relief, uneven deployment of federal funds, ghettoization programs like redlining, and so on and so on. This new complex of property relations replaces the slave relation in form, but preserves the slave relation in function: to make Black property bear the brunt of capital appropriation, to make Black labor power cheap and bountiful for capital exploitation, and to keep Black communities from developing national consciousness and rising in an empire-wide rebellion. The specter of Black rebellion has driven Bourbon planter reaction since the foundation of their class: the ghosts of Nat Turner and Toussaint L'Ouverture weigh heavy on the minds of the southern garrison-police.

The Black Belt, a swathe of territory that describes a sickle-blade across the US south, is home to over half of the Black citizens of the empire. The original slave population was not a nation when it was transported. Those slaves were the children of many African nations, sharing no common language, culture, or geography. However, through the very act of bringing these people into the US south, the old planters forged a new nation. It is through the shared hardship of the slave relation that diaspora of disparate African nations were forced to share a geographical territory, to develop a common language, to share their economic relations. The free labor of this new nation was used to raise huge plantations; the slave power was the foundation of the entire southern planter way of life. In the north, the slave trade

was the basis of Bostonian prosperity. Without the slave trade, the settler colonies would have remained backward and undeveloped, mere sites of resource extraction for their European masters.

This nation was historically constituted by the conditions of transplantation into the US south; forged from a dozen home nations, tempered by the transport through the West Indies, and molded by the century and a half of chattel slavery through which its people suffered. This was the genesis of the Black nation, which was a nation in chattel slavery's chains. Even after the end of chattel slavery, this nation was singled out by the repressive apparatus of the post-Reconstruction Jim Crow period and the new legal environment that now prevails.¹⁷

In 2017, 58% of Black Americans lived in the south. Although this is substantially reduced from the height of the Black Belt (during Reconstruction over 2/3rds of the Black population was concentrated in the Black Belt), it remains the national territory of the Black nation. Outposts in the north were established after Reconstruction through migration away from the pervasive lynch terror of the Redeemers, the Klan, and their planter masters. These outposts were primarily industrial through the early and middle 20th century, focused in New York, Chicago, and California.

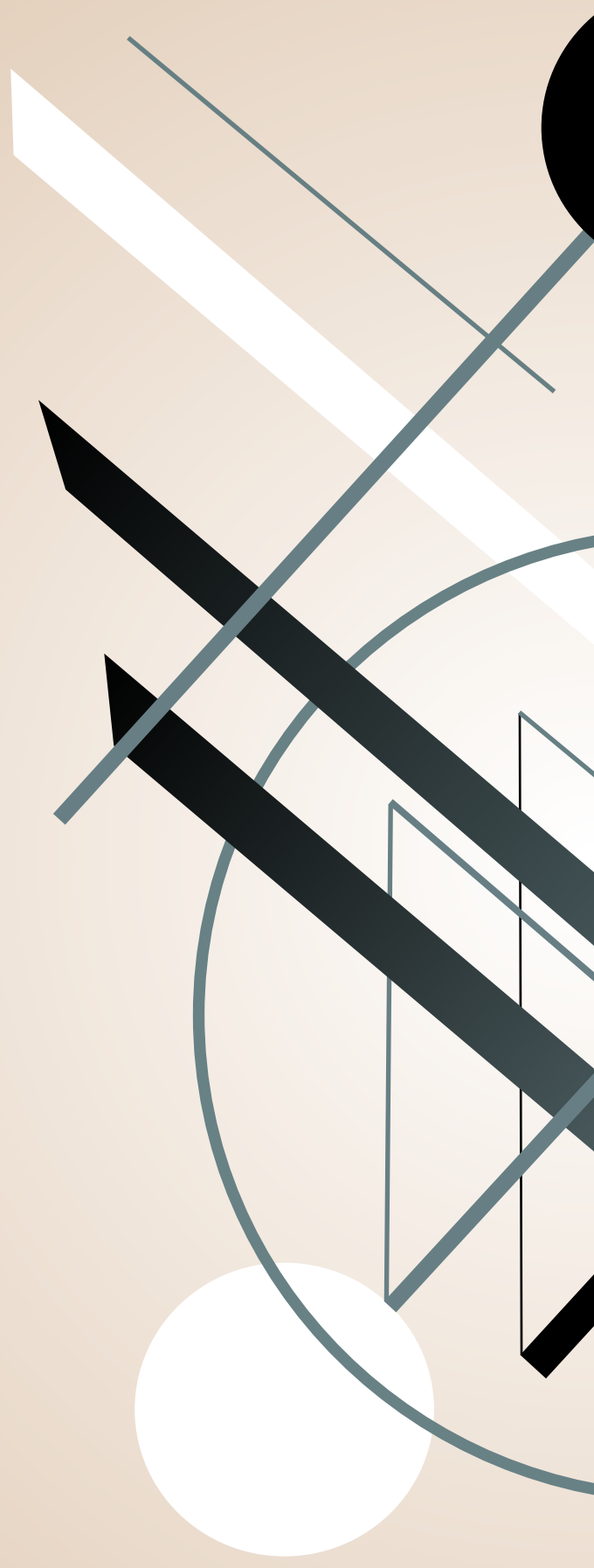
Race in the US empire is based on a phenotypical phenomenon; that is, the ruling powers want to know what you look like. Once they have determined your phenotype, they can feel comfortable sorting you into a racial-legal category, which determines your property relation-

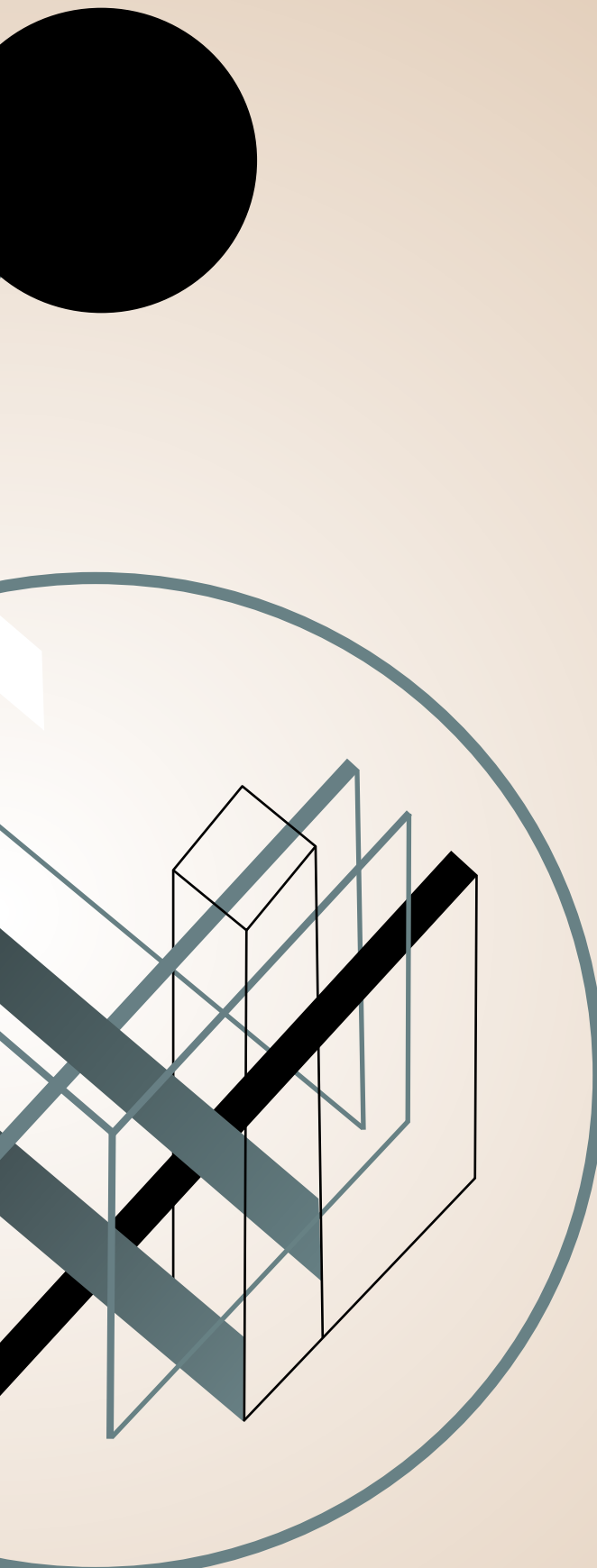
ships to other races. The racial-legal category hardened after the end of overt racial slavery, integrated directly in the superstructure of US law, rather than the economic bondage of the slave, which exists in the base. Throughout the period of judicial segregation, this was encoded in the law. Jim Crow was not merely a psychological terror, but primarily an economic terror designed to make the vast swathes of “dangerous” former slaves into economic subjects of the ruling planter class. In fact, the primary mode of the economic terror exerted in the US settler empire is racial terror, and the primary method of digestion of recalcitrant populations is through colonial power and the further subjection of oppressed and colonized nationalities.

However, the efforts at stunting the development of the Black nation and deforming its shape ironically stimulated its cohesion. Jim Crow created a forced economic interrelationship; slavery forced a common culture; redlining and predatory lending practices have forced the creation of a Black national territory.

Why Is the Black Belt Not A Colony? What is the difference between the Black Belt and other Black national territories, and the colonized nations and semi-colonized nations that the US holds as imperial subjects? The Black labor force is not primarily used in extractive labor; that is, there is no contradiction between the development of industry in the Black national territory and the interests of imperial capitalists in the rest of the US empire. In fact, Black labor has been critical to spurring industrial development in Alabama, Chicago, St. Louis, and elsewhere.

In a colony, the creation of industry controlled by the national bourgeoisie is a revolutionary act. In the Black national territories, the national bourgeoisie have a much more complex relationship with the imperial bourgeoisie. They can not merely be divided into those compradors who serve imperial interests and the national bourgeoisie who can be harnessed for revolutionary ends. In the Black national territory, the national bourgeoisie can be either progressive or reactionary. There is a reactionary nationalism





that flowered in Garveyism and other separatist movements; these seek total withdrawal from the imperial territory.

In an oppressed nation, national self-determination must be safeguarded not only from right compradors, but also from right national bourgeoisie. Petty bourgeois nationalism is opposed to the proletarian nationalism of the Black nation. Correct analysis and correct theory will allow us to identify the most revolutionary tack to take in any given situation. Failure to adhere to correct analysis and failure to produce correct theory will permit the retrenchment of reaction or “great nation” chauvinism. We must fight both the assimilationist strain and the reactionary strain; these both arise from the relationship between the Black petit-bourgeoisie and the settler bourgeoisie.

THE CREATION OF INDUSTRY IS REVOLUTIONARY IN THE COLONIES

The establishment of national industries and the national control of markets inside colonies are revolutionary acts. This is because the national economy of a colony is in direct contradiction with the driving forces of the imperial economy. The imperial economy cannot permit national economies to develop, or else the profits the nation reaps will accelerate. Thus, all national ownership of industry, all national bourgeois accessions in colonies is inherently revolutionary because it challenges the world-imperial system of capital. It is the function of imperialism to export capital into the colonies in order to make use of the cheap labor. The development of national sources of capital challenge this, restrict markets for the imperialists, improve the living conditions of workers (and therefore raise the costs of operation within the colony, as the socially average labor reproduction cost rises). This, in turn, threatens the rate of profit.

Self-determination for the colonies includes control of the markets, the labor force, and industries to reside in the national bourgeoisie and to be taken from the compradors, foreigners, and imperial governors.

The same cannot be said for the oppressed nations; because industry and commerce in oppressed nations are not in contradiction with the imperial order, but rather are under the constant threat of imperial appropriation, subject nations develop two strains of reactionary ideology: reactionary assimilationism and reactionary nationalism. These must be counterposed with the one true revolutionary tack: proletarian nationalism and an answer to the Agrarian Question.

WHERE IS THE LUMPENPROLETARIAT?

The classical Marxist category of the lumpenproletariat is analytically incoherent. It represents a misstep in the theory of Marxism that has inhered in analysis for a century. To contest this, we must understand what we mean by class and quasi-class. A class is a group of people who share common interests based on their relationship to the means of production; a quasi-class is a cross-class group that share common interests based on their property relationships as they are codified in juridical and social structures. Marx argued that industrial society had reduced the complex network of classes down to three: the proletariat, the petit-bourgeoisie, and the haute bourgeoisie.¹⁸

The classes of prior economic modes persist even in industrial capitalism and certainly tend to dominate in the peripheral regions where capitalism has, through its own actions in the core, failed to develop. Slaves, serfs, peasants, debt peons, all continue to exist, partially digested, within the capitalist world.¹⁹

The lumpenproletariat was identified as that portion of the proletariat that is de-classed, turned into a semi-permanent surplus population, the standing ranks of the reserve army of the unemployed. To 19th and early 20th century theorists, these included the disabled, the unhoused, criminals, and other populations that they believed could not develop class consciousness. This is essentially a racist, ableist, relic. These surplus populations are part of the

class of people who would otherwise sell their labor for a wage. They are firmly proletarian. Their revolutionary potential is not only present, but heightened, due to the subjection of these groups (prisoners, unhoused, etc.) to additional outside pressures in addition to class.

Where apparent members of this class are not proletarian because they do not need to sell their labor, they belong to another class; powerful criminals that operate many criminal enterprises are bourgeoisie. Mid-level criminals may be petit-bourgeois. To classify all these groups as “lumpen” is analytically incoherent, a rewriting of theory to fit an ideological purpose, to exclude these groups from those with revolutionary potential. It is a form of begging the question that damages the analytical capacity of theory that attempts to deploy it.

This group is drawn overwhelmingly from the doubly oppressed proletarians of the colonized and oppressed nations. Criminalization along racial lines creates these conditions and acts as a radicalizing lever. The national proletarians are the heirs and inheritors of the national question – and it is their revolutionary nationalism that must drive the progress of national self-determination in the oppressed and colonized nations.

THE AGRARIAN QUESTION IS REVOLUTIONARY IN THE OPPRESSED NATIONAL REGIONS

“The [Black Belt] Question in the United States is agrarian in origin. It involves the problem of a depressed peasantry living under a system of sharecropping, riding-boss supervision, debt slavery, chronic land hunger, and dependency—in short, the plantation system, a relic of chattel slavery.”²⁰

In the period following the Civil War, 14% of the farmland in the US was owned by the Black nation. Black ownership of farmland is less than 2% throughout the US today.²¹ Most of the agricultural land in the Black Belt is owner-operat-

The COVID pandemic has increased the level of expropriation by disproportionately granting relief to Euro-American businesses. In material effect, this represents a massive shift in wealth.

ed.²² This statistic disguises what is essentially a Euro-American petty bourgeois relationship to the land, because these so-called owner-farmers, while they may be “operators,” employ farmhands, harvesters, and a great deal of labor outside of their own. The data provided by the USDA does not distinguish between one-family farms, in which the majority of work is done by the owners, and large-scale planting operations. These owner-operated farms make up 62% of the farms of the Black Belt, with the rest being landlord-owned farms. In both cases, these form the basis of power of both a Euro-American petty bourgeois and a Euro-American corporate bourgeois planter class, respectively. The farmland is firmly in the hands of two strata of the imperial oppressor nation.

The promise of Black land ownership may have completed the bourgeois revolution in the south after the Civil War – this was certainly its intention. The promise of Black land ownership was never carried out. The Union Army promise of “40 acres and a mule” never materialized. The lack of access to land has created a situation in which the Black nation cannot reproduce itself without going directly to the oppressor nation for the viands upon which it must live. It is cut off from the very lifeblood of social reproduction. In order to strike at this critical deficiency in the heart of the Black nation, we must support a program of land reform.

There was a minor shift in fortunes for the Black nation, and some families did manage to retain their farmland through the worst of the sharecropper years, the Depression, the bull weevil infestations, and the other crises (both manu-

factured and environmental) that beset Black land ownership in the south. But since 1950, 98% of Black landownership has been expropriated by banks, planters, and governments.²³ This represents the loss of 12 million acres of farmland. This expropriation was begun by illegal USDA pressures and loans, as well as loan denial by Euro-American controlled federal subsidy boards. By 2008, the process was completed with the mass-purchasing of land by enormous pension funds that put small farms out of business.

There were one million Black farmers in 1914. By 1992, that number had decreased to 18,000. Black Belt counties tend to be poorer than those around them, due to the expropriation, lack of federal services, etc. The COVID pandemic has increased the level of expropriation by disproportionately granting relief to Euro-American businesses. In material effect, this represents a massive shift in wealth. Black and Euro-American wealth has been fed into the government and then redistributed only to Euro-Americans. Nearly half of Black petit-bourgeois businesses have closed as a result of the crisis.²⁴ The number of total active business owners fell by 22%. Black business owners fell by 41%. Latinx business owners fell by 32%. Asian business owners dropped by 26%.²⁵ This is the property relation of race expressed by vicious action of the US government in response to the COVID crisis.

While the Black nation has been subject to vicious expropriation like the Indigenous nations, there has been no effort to liquidate the Black population in the same settler colonial manner. This is because Black labor is valuable

Self-determination is the rallying cry.

to the planters and their northern industrial allies. The use of Black labor to break white strikes throughout the 20s and 30s is a historically documented source of racial tensions. Development of national industry and national control of markets is not revolutionary in the oppressed nations; the oppressed nations are not limited to extractive industry by the oppressors, and development of national markets does not challenge the supremacy of the oppressor nation's economy. While the oppressed nations have their own economic life, it is not as subjected to the control of the oppressor nation; while they are subject to oppressor expropriation, that expropriation is not directed at extractive labor-power or direct land expropriation. Instead, the revolutionary position is to demand self-determination and land distribution to the oppressed.

The agrarian question can only be answered by giving soil to the tillers; the land within the national territories must be turned over to the oppressed nations. This would likely come as a step prior to collectivization. The Black nation and other oppressed nations must not be severed from the support of the earth and its fruits, or it can never know self-determination.

NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION FOR COLONIES AND OPPRESSED NATIONS

Self-determination is the rallying cry. Political self-determination is the same among the colonies and oppressed nations, but how that political self-determination will be realized is not uniform across colonies and oppressed nations. We must be careful to attend to the contradiction inculcated by the actions of the US empire as well; the Black nation, like the other oppressed nations (but not the colonized Indigenous nations) was created by imperial oppression. These nations were given a common

economic life and culture by virtue of the deformations imposed on them from outside. But these nations are still occupying a territory that is, or should be, under the sovereignty of Indigenous nations from whom it was stolen. This contradiction presents a point of tension that may yet prove to be non-antagonistic, but which must be carefully attended to.

ENDNOTES

1. The European immigrants of the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century comprised their own national minorities and even national enclaves until they were agglomerated into the Anglo-American nation; they now form a single national identity with ethnic variation; that is, the Euro-American nation.
2. The difference between a nation and a national minority is elaborated below, but turns on whether a cohesive common language, territory, economy, and culture exist for the national group. For example, Chinese nationals in the United States may be part of a coherent but vanishing nation in the form of the old segregated Chinatowns of San Francisco, New York, Boston, etc. Like the Black nation, the Chinese population in the west was imported for labor purposes by big bourgeoisie, in this instance railroad barons.
3. J.V. Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question* (Rus. 1913, Eng. 1935)
4. The theory of semi-colonies was most fully articulated during the Comintern sessions, and ultimately in the CPSU. See, e.g., J.V. Stalin, "Political Report of the Central Committee," *Fifteenth Congress of the CPSU*.
5. Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, or the Dutch East India Company.
6. Data taken from the CIA World Factbook.
7. The refoundation of the tribe was undertaken after the last member who lived on the old Pequot reservation died, and the Anglo-American settlers of the northeast have a lot to say over whether her grandchildren, who refounded it, are "legitimately"

natives. No surprise that the settler nation wants to litigate who actually belongs to the oppressed nations and who's "just faking."

8. Patrick Wolfe, Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native, *Journal of Genocide Research* (2006), 8 (4), December, 388.

9. To valorize capital, the capitalist invests an initial amount to purchase labor power, the labor power throws capital into motion, and then the product of that labor power is sold for more than combined material costs, capital exhaustion, and wage paid, thus taking into itself a portion of the value of the labor power that it does not pay for.

10. PH Eichstadt, *If You Poison Us* (Red Crane Books, 1994).

11. Doug Brugge, *The History of Uranium Mining and the Navajo People*, Am. J. Public Health (Sept. 2002).

12. Id.

13. Id.

14. Id.

15. *The Communist*, Feb. 1931

16. The Voting Rights Act was recently made toothless by the removal of its pre-clearance provisions, for example. The garrison-police continue to terrorize Black communities across the country, but primarily in the Black national territories.

17. Obviously, like any struggle, there has been an uneven and staggered development in the Black Belt. The 60s saw an upsurge of revolutionary fervor and national consciousness won critical reforms – the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, Brown v. Board. However, those reforms have been systematically stripped away as the national consciousness faded (or rather, was suppressed by the state murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X., Fred Hampton, and countless other powerful Black nationalist voices – the ghost of Nat Turner rising from the grave!)

18. Quasi-classes include race, sex, and sexuality.

19. The uneven development of capital means that modern configurations still hold remnants of past classes that have yet to be fully integrated or proletarianized. The lessons of every successful revolution teach us this understanding: the USSR, PRC, Laos, Cuba, etc. all had more than the traditional three Marxian industrial classes.

20. Harry Haywood, *The Negro Question*, 11 (International Publishers, 1948).

21. Leah Douglas, "African Americans Have Lost Untold Acres of Land Over the Last Century," *The Nation*. Retrieved 18 November 2020.

22. Data from the USDA.

23. "One Million Black Families in the South Have Lost Their Farms," *Equal Justice Initiative*, October 11, 2019.

24. Pedro Nicolaci da Costa, "The Covid-19 Crisis Has Wiped Out Nearly Half Of Black Small Businesses," *Forbes* (Aug 10, 2020).

25. Claire Kramer Mills and Jessica Battisto, *Double Jeopardy: COVID-19's Concentrated Health and Wealth Effect in Black Communities*, Federal Reserve Bank of New York (Aug., 2020).

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