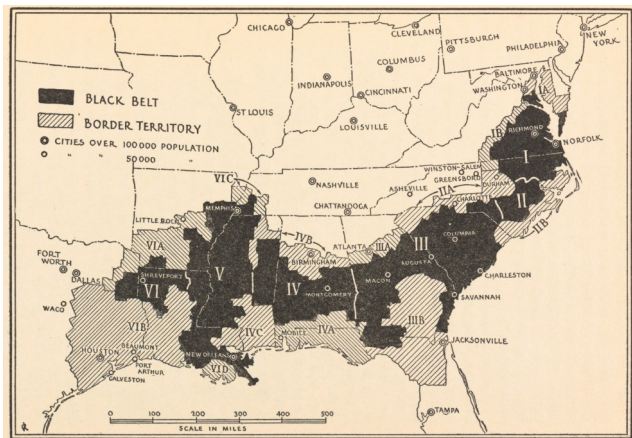


## Black Nationalism and the Labor Movement

The American labor movement has historically been dominated by national chauvinism. Many American unions in the past held openly segregationist policies or outright excluded Black workers. Even today, the state unions enforce inequality. In 2025, Black workers represented by unions receive an average salary of \$1,136/week compared to \$1,433/week for their white counterparts.<sup>8</sup>

However, this national chauvinism has not gone unchallenged. The most significant challenges from Black workers have come from independent labor organizations such as the Croppers and Farm Workers Union, the Sharecroppers' Union, and the Revolutionary Union Movement.

The Croppers and Farm Workers Union was an attempt in 1931 to unite poor rural white workers and Black sharecroppers into one agricultural labor organization. However, while the organization quickly became extremely popular among Black farmers, the white farmers were slow to join due to entrenched racist attitudes. The CFWU would be violently repressed by white supremacist vigilantes and subsequently reorganized into the Sharecroppers Union shortly after its creation. The SU led important strikes throughout the South, and to this day remains one of the most militant labor organizations the country had ever seen, with members carrying guns to meetings to protect themselves and the organization from white supremacist vigilantes.



BLACK BELT AND BORDER TERRITORY

Even though the organization was intended to be multi-racial, they could not retain a single white member due to the racism of Southern workers. Due to this fact, the SU was unfortunately liquidated by the revisionist CPUSA leadership into the National Farmers Union which was dominated by racists.<sup>9</sup> More recently, the Revolutionary Union Movement was an attempt to organize Black auto workers in the 60s and 70s who were failed by the UAW. The RUM was eventually consolidated into the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, and ultimately collapsed due to leadership differences between petty-bourgeois intellectuals from the New Left and the Black proletarians in the shops who had built the org.<sup>10</sup>

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## Black Workers Unite During

# BLACK AUGUST



# Black Workers Unite!

Black August started as a commemoration of Black political prisoners in the US, in particular Black freedom fighter George Jackson who was killed in 1971 while attempting to escape San Quentin Prison. The NLOC celebrates Black August as a month to remember the sacrifices of Black revolutionaries and the continuing struggle for the freedom of all political prisoners and the Black nation, and the Black working-class in particular.

## Economics of the Black Working-class

The Black working-class is notoriously the most impoverished section of the American working population. Racism has long been used by imperialists to organize and enforce national oppression. Fully one-quarter of Black households have zero or negative wealth, as compared to 1/12 of white households. White households have on average ten times the wealth of Black households, who are also more likely to hold debt.<sup>1</sup> Black Americans are actually paid less than white Americans *at every education level*. Black workers without a high school diploma are paid on average \$11.25/hour compared to \$13.57/hour for whites without a high school diploma. For Black workers with advanced degrees, this gap expands to over \$6/hour.<sup>2</sup>

The poverty is even more pronounced in the Black Belt. The Black Belt are those areas in the South that have plurality or majority Black population, and is historically the area that makes up the territory of a proposed Republic of New Afrika.

Wages in the South are consistently lower than other regions in the country. The share of workers who make less than \$15/hour—the minimum wage in some Northern states—is substantially higher than anywhere else in the country, recorded at 22% in 2021.<sup>3</sup>

This all naturally applies to employed Black people. In reality, discrimination in employment and education greatly hinders the ability of Black workers to find gainful employment. The unemployment rate among Black workers is 6.6% compared to 3.6% for whites.<sup>4,5</sup>

One other feature that must be discussed in the context of the Black working-class is the exploitation of prisoners. The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, known for abolishing slavery, in actual fact retained slavery within the context of the penal system. It is well-known that the penal system in the US is heavily biased against Black people, who receive harsher sentences for the same crimes. The U.S. Sentencing Commission found that Black convicts on average received 19% longer sentences than similarly situated white convicts.<sup>6</sup> This allows the state to exploit Black prisoners for free or near-free labor that is compensated far below the minimum wage. Prison labor in the US produces billions of dollars worth of goods and services every year, chiefly through UNICOR which is the trade name of the Federal Prison Industries, although some prisoners are also exploited by state level agencies or contracted out to private corporations. UNICOR pays prisoners from \$0.23 up to \$1.15 per hour. UNICOR's largest customer is the Department of Defense, who receives a majority of UNICOR's sales. Major retailers such as Walmart, McDonalds, and Target have also incorporated prison labor in their supply chains.<sup>7</sup>

## The Way Forward

Every few years, the struggles of the Black people give rise to mass, militant uprisings. From Ferguson in 2014 to the George Floyd protests in 2020 to the recent anti-ICE demonstrations, it has been consistently shown that the Black workers are by far the most militant section of the American working class. At the same time, the treachery of opportunist Black leaders, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Black Lives Matter Foundation has prevented these movements from making any real gains for the Black workers. Black revolutionaries have always asserted that the historical process of slavery produced a Black nation in the South and that the Black workers possess immense potential for revolutionary struggle. Labor organizing is how Black workers can assert themselves, not just in the labor movement, but in the struggle for self-determination. Self-determination means the right of a people to decide their own affairs, including the right to secede and form an independent state. The Black bourgeoisie and reactionary petty-bourgeoisie reject this demand and

instead seek a better position for themselves within American imperialism, which makes a well-organized Black working-class all the more vital for Black liberation.

In fact, labor organizing has been and will continue to be a vital part of the struggle for national liberation. The United States is a highly industrialized imperialist power that holds millions of nationally oppressed workers hostage—not just the Black workers who reside in the South, but also the Chicano nation from Baja California to Texas, the various Indian reservations throughout the country, Alaskan natives, Puerto Rico (Boricua), Guam and the Pacific islands including Hawai'i, and so on. The state unions attempt to stifle the struggles of the workers of these nations by confining them to special interest groups within their 501c structure, such as the Teamsters National Black Caucus, the AFL-CIO's Task Force on Racial Justice, and the National Education Association's Black Caucus. Instead of developing labor organizations specifically tailored to meet the needs of the nationally oppressed workers by incorporating the demands of the respective national liberation movements, the state unions deny the existence of national oppression altogether and promote a false image of a “progressive” US imperialism.

This in turn has hindered the development of working-class leadership to carry out the national liberation movements within the US. The labor movement and the national liberation movement are dialectically connected in this way. Karl Marx said of the relationship between the white working class and the Black slaves, “Labor with a white skin cannot emancipate itself where labor with a Black skin is branded.” The objective basis for their unity is in their mutual struggles against US imperialism; but unity does not proceed “automatically”. It can only come about through fierce line struggle and concrete struggles for demands. This means in the labor movement fighting for the recognition of the oppressed nations and organizing those workers, chiefly the lowest, most exploited sections. This is why during Black August, the NLOC says,

*Workers and oppressed nations of the world, unite!*