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"Put One More 'S' in the USA": Communist Pamphlet Literature and the Productive Fiction of the Black Nation Thesis

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“PUT ONE MORE ‘S’ IN THE USA”: COMMUNIST PAMPHLET LITERATURE AND THE PRODUCTIVE FICTION OF THE BLACK NATION THESIS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HISTORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS
with an emphasis in FEMINIST STUDIES

by

Trevor Joy Sangrey

June 2012

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ABSTRACT

Trevor Joy Sangrey

“Put One More ‘S’ in the USA”: Communist Pamphlet Literature and the Productive Fiction of the Black Nation Thesis

In 1928 the Communist Party USA developed an unconventional and intriguing proposal that black people in the Black Belt of the Southern United States were an unrecognized national group and should have rights to self-determination, a move later called the “Black Nation Thesis.” Using this proposal the CPUSA impacted the highly contested discourse around race in the 1930s, in the North and the South. This dissertation brings together social movement studies with insights from critical media, ethnic, and gender studies to interrogate the rhetoric of the CPUSA’s Black Nation Thesis. The work extends the growing scholarship on black radical organizing by looking at the archived ephemera of the period, specifically a collection of over 300 pamphlets, to probe how radical visions and dreams grow and spread, analyzing pamphlet literature as an imaginative and pedagogical space for social movements.

Using analytical close reading techniques, I demonstrate how CPUSA pamphlet literature on the Black Nation Thesis functions as a productive fiction, signaling both the dreams that compel social movements as well as the working out of ideological issues and concerns. The Party used the Black Nation Thesis as a productive fiction to work through various political and policy issues as well as to galvanize membership and invigorate anti-racist struggle, laying the groundwork for the later intersectional analysis of race, class, and gender. Looking at pamphlets on the Scottsboro Nine trials, CPUSA presidential elections, and black women’s labor, among others, I note how pamphlets function as speculative spaces for social movements.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible but for many thoughtful and dedicated packrats. Analyzing ephemera, the junk most people would throw in the recycle bin, is a hit-or-miss affair only made possible by fiendish collectors, archivists, and librarians. Indeed, my work was greatly facilitated by the Inter-Library Loan service provided by the University of California Libraries, particularly the staff at the UC Davis Walter Goldwater Special Collections Library, which first sent pamphlets my way. Many collectors, depositories, and archives have helped me catalogue Communist Pamphlets on the Black Nation Thesis: the folks at Bolerium Books opened up there store to me, not to purchase book (which I did) but just to take notes; the Schomburg Center for Research on Black Culture in Harlem and the Library of Congress, provided important background information; and the National Museum of African American History & Culture at the Smithsonian Institution, particularly Professor Maurice Jackson, allowed me to access their exciting pamphlet exhibit before its public debut. I did the majority of my research at the New York University Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives and I can not begin to express my thanks to their spectacular staff, particularly Dr. Michael Nash, Peter Filardo, Adrien Hilton, Donna L. Davey, Jillian and Dan.

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I argue in Chapter three that the Communist Party did not really produce actual monographs; nor do I think that any academic, let alone graduate student, does. This work is in great part due to the care and attention I received from both my graduate student peers and my patient and kind faculty advisors. I offer special thanks to my faculty advisors: Barbara Epstein, Bettina Aptheker, Angela Davis, Eric Porter, and Megan Thomas. I have benefited greatly from their probing questions, unflagging support, and sage advice. Sheila Peuse, Cheryl VanDeVeer, Anne Spalliero and Melanie Wylie have, with grace and consideration, helped me navigate the ins and outs of the bureaucratic labyrinths of the university and always had a smile and a nice cup of tea. Not traditionally trained in visual studies, for many years I worked for the UCSC Visual and Performance Studies Research Center and TAed for the UCSC Film and Digital Media Department, experiences which continue to enrich my academic practice. Thank you particularly to: Catherine M. Soussloff, Peter Limbrick, Amelie Hastie, Caetlin Benson-Allott, Mark Franko, Darshan Campos, Boreth Ly, Tyrus Miller, Deanna Shemek, Nina Treadwell, and Karen Bassi. Finally, a tremendous thanks to my various writing group colleagues: Adam Bush, Alexis Shotwell, Apryl Berney, Courtney Rivard, Gerwin Gallob, Jasmine Seydullah, Jen Gray-O’Connor, Jin You, Natalie Loveless, Nick Mitchell, Nicole Archer, and Sha La Bare.

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braces me when I am about to fall over, and comforts me when I think all is lost. Words
aren’t enough: Thank you.
Put one more "s" in the USA
To make it Soviet;
Put one more “s” in the USA
Oh! We’ll live to see it yet!

When the land belongs to the farmers
And the factories to the working men,
The USA when we get control
Will be the USSA then!

- Langston Hughes, The Daily Worker, April 2, 1934
INTRODUCTION

OccupyWallSt.org is the unofficial de facto online resource for the growing occupation movement happening on Wall Street and around the world. We’re an affinity group committed to doing technical support work for resistance movements.

- OccupyWallStreet.org

“We have talked of the rhetoric of confrontation, not merely confrontation, because this action, as divisive as its manifestations may be, is inherently symbolic.”

- Robert L. Scott and Donald K. Smith, “The Rhetoric of Confrontation” ¹

In September 2011, as I was finishing the research for this project at the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Archives at New York University, newspapers began to pay attention to a small group of activists squatting in Zuccotti Park, near Wall Street. The park, formerly called Liberty Park Plaza, became, in the interceding months, the home ground of the movement known widely as “Occupy Wall Street,” or, as protests spread across the globe, “#Occupy”. The Wall Street protests, and the similar groups the movement spawned across the country, profoundly impacted political discourse in the US.²

The Zuccotti Park occupation, started on September 17, 2011, was originally fairly small, numbering a few hundred.³ The occupying group grew as other protest

movements joined the squatters: I stumbled upon the occupation at the tail end of a protest over the state of Georgia’s execution of Troy Davis on September 21, 2011. The Troy Davis march brought me, a bleary-eyed white academic stumbling from the archives, and many young people of color to the fairly white Zuccotti Park encampment. With the influx of other protestors and increasing media attention, the numbers in Zuccotti Park began to swell, and similar squats emerged elsewhere in the US and in other countries.

Many small left-leaning protests enjoy little local media coverage and no significant national news coverage. However, Occupy Wall Street bucked the trend as the news media quickly honed in on the protests. Importantly, the news media reacted mostly to police violence and arrests on September 19th and then more arrests on September 24th. Galvanized by the media attention, specifically coverage in newspapers, television and radio news programs, and countless blogs and on-line news sources, the movement grew and arrests continued. When, on October 2, thousands were arrested in New York, national and international news media was on scene, and many news commentators were horrified and voiced their criticism in their programs. Similar

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4 Troy Davis was an African American man found guilty of murdering a white police officer and killed by the State of Georgia on September 21. The snake-march protest to mark his execution, which found me and many others in Union Square, appeared to be organized by various ethnic student organizations and was about half white students and half students of color, whereas the Occupy Wall Street camp was more predominantly white.

5 This is, necessarily, a limited and incomplete portrayal of the #Occupy movement, which had, and continues to have, many specific local contexts, many organizational foci, and a rich array of tactics, strategies, and goals.

dynamics played out across various Occupy protest sites, where increased news coverage, especially of violent police tactics, increased the visibility of the movement.\footnote{I do not mean to suggest that the only way to have a successful protest is to have national news coverage. Indeed, many, if not most, important cultural and social changes happen over time and are not covered in a headline. However, the national and international news coverage was very important to the growth of the #Occupy movement, especially in the early days of the protest. However, it is interesting to note that violence against the movement resulted in media attention, whereas the movement's critique of social inequality had not been taken up as valuable news in many national sources.}

Occupy Wall Street was also unique for how they used media to brand themselves and increase participation. From early on in the movement, Occupy Wall Street used new social media tools to communicate. #Occupy, a Twitter thread, and Facebook sites were often used to share information. Many protestors held signs of the hashtag (#), making the hashtag sign, in the fall of 2011, synonymous with the protestors and the movement.\footnote{More information see the video clip from All Things Digital included below - particularly interesting is the reference to “The British Are Coming!” See: http://allthingsd.com/20111115/why-occupy-wall-street-and-twitter-were-made-for-each-other-video/.} Many commentators noted that the social media presence, alongside national news coverage, helped buttress the #Occupy movement.

This engagement with social media sites and specifically Twitter and Facebook was one of the many links between the Arab Spring uprisings and the protests in the US.\footnote{Apps, “Wall Street action part of global Arab Spring?” \textit{Reuters}, “Occupy Wall Street’ to Turn Manhattan into ‘Tahir Square,’” \textit{IBTimes New York}.} Uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, civil unrest in Bahrain and Syria, and major protests in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Oman caused dramatic media storms starting in December 2010. Though many of the protest movements engaged social media, the use of Facebook by participants in the Egypt uprising to connect and coordinate their activities received the most comments.

The protests in Egypt that began in late 2010 caused ripples across the world and involved many unparalleled maneuvers on the part of the government, the protestors,
and in the social media universe. One of the unprecedented actions was the former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak’s shutting off all internet connections within and to the country for five days. As Amir Hatem Ali argues:

His [Mubarak’s] reason for doing so was simple: to halt the flow of communication and coordinated assembly taking place over social media platforms, like Facebook and Twitter. That Mubarak took this desperate step — which cost Egypt an estimated $90 million and outraged the international community — demonstrates the incredible power of social media.10

The goals of the Egyptian protestors were many, but the removal of President Mubarak, and outrage against police brutality and unfair elections were primary concerns. Various political groups, including the April 6 Youth Movement, We Are All Khaled Said, National Association for Change, and Kefaya led online protest efforts. Indeed, many of the young, well-educated protestors developed their own groups using Facebook, especially the April 6 Youth Movement and We Are All Khaled Said.11 The international press discussed the connections between the protest movements and Facebook widely;12 as Ali summarizes: “The role that social media played in the Egyptian uprising is striking.

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11 The April 6 Youth Movement is an Egyptian Facebook group started in Spring 2008 to support the striking workers in an industrial town, El-Mahalla El-Kubra. It is recognized as hosting some of the most dynamic political debates in Egypt on its Facebook page. Khaled Mohamed Saeed was a young Egyptian man who was beaten by Egyptian police and subsequently died. Photos of his disfigured corpse spread throughout online communities such as the Facebook group “We are all Khaled Said” and incited outrage in the weeks leading up to the Egyptian uprisings. In October 2011, two Egyptian police officers were found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to seven years in prison for beating Saeed to death. For examples and information see: http://www.facebook.com/shabab6april, and “Who is Wael Ghonim?” *CBC News*.

Social media brought to the Egyptian people a sense of self-empowerment – through the capacity to speak and assemble – that was previously not there.”

Both the #Occupy and the Egyptian protest highlight the role of social media in revolutionary uprising. Analysis of these protests will fill volumes, and I anticipate that the use of social media as an organizing tool will be a key component of these protests’ legacies, but will also lead to critical analyses of the role of social media as diverting active participation in movement organizing on the ground. Notably, some analyses have already begun to link the use of social media for recent protest activities to the analysis of cell phone use in the Seattle WTO protests, which points to an ongoing trend in social movement structures. Some protestors in Seattle commented on the use of technology and, more broadly, websites dedicated to an analysis of the use of media in the Seattle protest conclude that: “The internet and digital media played an important role in facilitating the organization and coverage of the transnational, multi-issue protests during the 3rd WTO Ministerial Conference held in Seattle.” Cell phone use in protests received even broader attention in the protests in the Philippines to overthrow President Joseph Estrada in favor of the presidency of Gloria Arroyo.

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14 See, for instance, Gladwell, “Small Change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted,” *The New Yorker*.


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#Occupy, the Arab Spring, the demonstrations against the WTO in Seattle, and the protests in the Philippines all speak to the important role of media for social movements. Academics have theorized these relationships in many ways over many decades and across many fields and disciplines. Sociologists, political scientists, literary and cultural critics, psychologists, and communication scholars all offer insights into what has broadly become known as Social Movement Studies, a part of which is the study of media and social movements. This dissertation participates in these debates by looking at the pamphlet literature produced by the Communist Party USA around the Resolution on the Negro Question in the late 1920s and 1930s. While comparatively old-fashioned in their use of printed-paper instead of cell phone and internet platforms, these pamphlets were crucial organizing tools and spread information and knowledge essential to a movement organizing around the Black Nation Thesis at the time.

The Communist Party USA and the Black Nation Thesis

In the epigraph, Langston Hughes indicates the joy and hope that the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA), through its ties to the successful Communist Revolution in Russia and the establishment of the USSR, brought to struggling workers and, especially in the 1930s, struggling black workers in the United States. Hughes, a black, probably bisexual, poet during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s, was a sympathizer of the CPUSA and often published in the Communist press.\footnote{For a beautiful rumination on Hughes’ sexuality see Isaac Julian’s film \textit{Looking for Langston}.} Indeed, this poem was first published in the CPUSA’s main daily newspaper, the \textit{Daily Worker}, on April 2, 1934, and re-printed in prominent black
Communist Harry Haywood’s autobiography, *Black Bolshevik*. Suggesting the benefit for black people available in the United States of Soviet America, the poem speaks to the budding hope of the black Communist organizers.

In 1928, at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International (Comintern), the worldwide Communist organization, the Colonial Commission issued the Resolution on the Negro Question. Among other things, this Resolution declared that black people in the Black Belt of the United States were an unrecognized national group and deserved rights to self-determination, a move later called the Black Nation Thesis. In the United States, the CPUSA used this resolution to foment organizational activity around issues facing black communities such as segregation, unemployment, lynching, chain gangs, and civil rights. As part of this process the CPUSA produced a large number of pamphlets discussing the Black Nation Thesis.

My research analyzes the Communist Party USA’s Black Nation Thesis pamphlets to think about how social movements educate their participants and supporters and impact cultural conversations about race. The CPUSA printed pamphlets averaging around 40 pages, on standard bond paper, with simple stapled or glued spines. Pamphleteers addressed a variety of causes and the pamphlet form and content shifted to suit different messages and audiences. I interrogate social movement small press literature and ephemera, such as CP pamphlets of the 1930s, to probe how radical visions and dreams grow and spread; specifically, I examine how pamphlet literature functions as an imaginative and pedagogical space for social movements. Pamphlets, I argue, offer a place for internal critical thinking and stimulate movement participants to develop their own visions.
Looking at pamphlets enables a rhetorical assessment of the Black Nation Thesis, but not an analysis of concrete Party actions or policy outcomes. Thus, this is a rhetorical analysis of the Black Nation Thesis, not a history of the CPUSA’s work with black organizers and activists or on issues of importance to black communities. More specifically, the following dissertation interrogates large-scale cultural change as wrought by a social movement and the acts of speculative imagination that are needed to create such change. I offer a case study of the Communist Party USA’s Black Nation Thesis as an instance that changed how race and class were perceived in the US. This change was facilitated, I argue, by the productive fiction of the Black Nation Thesis.

Originally proposed in 1928, the Black Nation Thesis argued that black people in the Black Belt, an area of the Southern United States where black people comprised a majority, constituted an oppressed nation and were therefore entitled to “self-determination” including political power, control over the economy, and the right to secede from the United States. Critics argue that the Black Nation Thesis failed, or that black people in the South exercised self-determination by choosing to stay with the US and thus the Communist International’s 1928 Resolution on the Negro Question for self-determination became moot.\(^{19}\) I am not interested in assessing how and where the Black Nation Thesis was successful; I take it as a given that there were significant changes wrought by the activism that the Black Nation Thesis spurred, though there is great debate as to whether the rhetoric of self-determination directly affected the life of black people in the South, or even in the North.\(^{20}\) Rather than add my voice to this well-


\(^{20}\) Glenda Gilmore, Mark Naison, Robin D.G. Kelley, Mark Solomon, and Erik McDuffie’s work all demonstrate the importance of the Black Nation Thesis for African-American and black organizing in the US; please see their excellent and detailed accounts for more information.
established debate, I propose to look at the Black Nation Thesis as a productive fiction. I use the term productive fiction to signal both the dreams that compel social movements as well as the working out of ideological issues and concerns. I contend that productive fictions are never “merely utopian” but also serve as exercises of the imaginary that are not only ideologically driven but do engage ideological issues. Thus, I argue that the Black Nation Thesis was such a productive fiction, used by the Party to work through various political and policy issues as well as to galvanize membership and invigorate anti-racist struggle. As a piece of fiction, an idea, excitement, or an incitement, the Black Nation Thesis did a lot of productive work in the US.

I offer the term productive fiction to suggest both the speculative and imaginary aspects of the rhetoric offered while highlighting its importance and utility. Productive fictions are ideas that speculate on a potential future, offering dreams of change that can and do propel movements, buttress campaigns, and encourage organizers. I look to both scholarship on utopia and social science fiction to reflect on how these pamphlets unite critical analysis of society with a reflection on social and cultural issues. These speculations need not be true in the strictest sense of the word, but must be credible, building on real experiences, histories, and challenges. As such, productive fictions can help to gather, shape, and organize social movement activity. In the case at hand, the CPUSA used the notion of a new nation in the Black Belt to focus attention on the struggles of black communities across the continent, though no direct organization happened to make such a nation a reality. The rhetorical importance of the Black Nation Thesis, however, was that it provided an important productive fiction for the CPUSA and laid the groundwork for social and cultural changes around race by suggesting “it could be otherwise.”
Academics have written volumes on the history of the CPUSA, addressing the histories and legacies of the CPUSA’s birth, relationship to Russia, involvement in World War II, and negotiations throughout the Cold War.\textsuperscript{21} However, comparatively little has been written about the Communist Party organizing with black people prior to World War II, with the majority of the scholarship available very critical of the CPUSA.\textsuperscript{22} Only recently have exceptions to these two trends emerged in the works by Carole Boyce Davies, \textit{Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones}, Glenda Gilmore, \textit{Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950}, Robin D.G. Kelley, \textit{Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression}, Glenda Gilmore, \textit{Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950}, Robin D.G. Kelley, \textit{Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression}, Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination, and Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class, Cedric Robinson, \textit{Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition}, Nell Irvin Painter, \textit{The Narrative of Hosea Hudson His Life as a Negro Communist in the South}, Erik McDuffie, \textit{Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism}, Mark Solomon, \textit{The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-36}, James Forman, \textit{Self-Determination and the African-American People}, and Mark Naison, \textit{Communists in Harlem During the Depression}. These authors, building on post-1960s work that bucks the US tradition of knee-jerk anti-communism and racism, which prevented mainstream historians from attending to either the CPUSA or traditions of black radical organizing, are part of a resurgence of attention to radical histories. My work builds off the strong foundation of these scholars and expands their analysis by looking at the archived ephemera of the period, particularly pamphlets.

\textsuperscript{21} For examples see: Foster, \textit{History of the Communist Party in the United States}; Draper \textit{The Roots of American Communism} and \textit{American Communism and Soviet Russia}; Klehr, \textit{The Heyday of American Communism}.

\textsuperscript{22} For examples see: Record, \textit{The Negro and the Communist Party}; Cruse, \textit{The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual}.
Pamphlets are small, unbound, paper booklets with stitched, glued, or stapled spines. Popular from the 15th through the 19th century, pamphlets were effective and inexpensive ways to distribute printed material. As Carl R. Burgehardt notes in his limited study of American Communist pamphlets in the 1930s, “By the twentieth century the pamphlet has long since lost its role as a principal means of dispersing information and opinion to large groups of people.” Indeed, by the 1930s, both radio and cinema would have been a better choice to galvanize people, but both required access and capital that the CPUSA did not enjoy. Lacking capital to invest in new media forms, and organizing in communities that did not often have the ability to consume them, the Communist Party, printed many pamphlets in the 1920s and 1930s. The CPUSA also used pamphlets because, since they were cheaply produced, they could also be cheaply distributed. This was particularly important in the South, as James S. Allen notes of his weekly newspaper *The Southern Worker*; few had money for expensive subscriptions, surveillance was high so papers had to be sent in plain first-class envelopes, and publicity budgets were often overtaxed with distribution let alone production.

One of the benefits of pamphlets, Herbert Pimlott argues, is that: “the pamphlet is one of the most suitable forms of disposable literature for presenting and sustaining in-depth arguments, histories and narratives, which is a unique advantage provided by print; the pamphlet has the space to develop the arguments that can really only be

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25 Citing census data from 1930, Robin Kelley also notes that only 3 percent of Birmingham's black community owned a radio making pamphlets a much more effective source for spreading news. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 94.
26 Allen, Organizing in the Depression South, 43-44 and 52-53.
touched upon in leaflets and fliers.”

Burgchardt disagrees, however, noting that multiple page, small-print treatises severely limited the efficacy of pamphlets for revolutionary aims, if only because people were less likely to read the often long-winded and detailed arguments. Though no records remain of the number of printed pamphlets, collections of Communist Party USA pamphlets from the 1920s and 1930s housed at archives in the US number well over 2500.  


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27 Pimlott, “‘Eternal ephemera’ or the durability of ‘disposable literature’: The Power and persistence of print in an electronic world,” in Media, Culture & Society, 520.
29 This estimation is based on my research in the archives at the Walter Goldwater Radial Pamphlet Collection at UC Davis, the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University, the New York Public Library’s Schomburg Center for Research on Black Culture, the Library of Congress, and the Smithsonian Museum on African American History. The Tamiment Library also has microfilmed copies of the Labadie Collection, University of Michigan, with 1,245 pamphlets. The HUAC Collection housed in the Rare Books and Special Collections Division of the Library of Congress includes 3,504 pamphlets, not all of which are CP related. The Tamiment Collection holds the Reference Center for Marxist Studies including the pamphlet collection from the former Communist Party Library with more than 10,000 pamphlets, not all of which are from the US.
Shapiro’s *American Communism and Black Americans: A Documentary History, 1930-1934*, collect some pamphlets and offer introductory material and limited analysis. Of these limited sources, only the Burgchardt article offers any sustained analysis of CPUSA pamphlet literature, and his work is limited to 43 pamphlets and does not address any CPUSA pieces predominantly discussing race or racial discrimination. With this sample he argues that Communist Party pamphlets were limited by their need to adhere to the dictates of the Comintern and were unable to maintain a readership because of the starkly contrasting arguments presented across texts. The CPUSA Black Nation Thesis pamphlets challenge Burgchardt’s analysis and are an untapped wealth of primary source documentation of early twentieth century radical organizing around race.

Pamphlets were often used as organizing tools for the CPUSA. Archived Party records indicate that pamphlets were regularly distributed as educational tools through the Education and Agit Prop (Agitation and Propaganda) department. Indeed, archived Education and Agit Prop Committee materials suggest that particular pamphlets were circulated to help lead discussions on race, such as James S. Allen’s pamphlet *The American Negro* or Harry Haywood’s *Lynching*. Robin Kelley, in his book *Hammer and Hoe*, shares anecdotes of sharecroppers reading pamphlets and newspapers aloud to begin meetings.\(^\text{30}\) Though not as regularly printed as the CPUSA daily newspaper *The Daily Worker*, pamphlets often enjoyed second and third printings and were regularly archived. Pamphlets, perhaps, also begin to fill the gap in interesting proletarian literature identified by Eric Schocket. He argues that between the wars there was a dearth of cheap

\(^{30}\) Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 93-94.
literature or political information available to the interested leftist public, and in particular a lack of such material in the Mid-West and South.\textsuperscript{31} Schocket traces the publication of the Little Blue Books to fill these literature gaps. But CPUSA pamphlets, targeting Party members as well as allies and potential sympathizers, would have also been useful fodder for leftists.

Herbert Pimlott argues that ephemera, fliers, leaflets, and pamphlets, or what he calls disposable literature, are an enduring and important form of communication, even in the rise of digital communication. He offers two definitions of pamphlets, the second of which foregrounds the political nature of the small, unbound booklets. He argues that pamphlets “are used more extensively by trade unions, political parties and think-tanks to circulate ideas and make public interventions.”\textsuperscript{32} He traces the history of pamphlets to the 15\textsuperscript{th} century and argues that as one of the earliest forms of material produced on the early printing presses, pamphlets have been used for political and satirical means. Citing James Jupp’s work, \textit{The Radical Left in Britain, 1931-1941}, Pimlott notes the use of pamphlets in the Communist Party of the United Kingdom in the 1930s and 1940s and argues that the use of pamphlets “was effective in reaching out beyond the Party and influencing the broader Left, including that of the Labour Party, on a number of issues.”\textsuperscript{33} He also notes that the distribution of pamphlets was often wider than the \textit{Daily Worker}; as wholesale distributors for the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century boycotted the newspaper. Indeed, he concludes his study arguing “disposable literature’s

\textsuperscript{31} Schocket, “Proletarian Paperbacks: The Little Blue Books and Working Class Culture,” in \textit{College Literature}, 68.

\textsuperscript{32} Pimlott, “‘Eternal ephemera’ or the durability of ‘disposable literature’: The Power and persistence of print in an electronic world” in \textit{Media, Culture \& Society}, 516-517.

\textsuperscript{33} Pimlott, “‘Eternal ephemera’ or the durability of ‘disposable literature’: The Power and persistence of print in an electronic world” in \textit{Media, Culture \& Society}, 517-519.
continued relevance as one of the most cost-effective vehicles for political-ideological and commercial communications is integral to recognizing and understanding its influence in local advertising strategies, political campaigns and social movements.\footnote{Pimlott, “‘Eternal ephemera’ or the durability of ‘disposable literature’: The Power and persistence of print in an electronic world” in \textit{Media, Culture \& Society}, 528.}

Following Pimlott’s lead, this dissertation takes up CPUSA Black Nation Thesis pamphlets and examines them as important transmitters of social movement rhetoric.

**Social Movement Rhetoric**

Many disciplines claim social movements as part of their field of study and thus define social movements in disciplinary terms. Regularly these definitions work to delineate social movements too narrowly, declaring the movements must have identifiable leaders, clearly stated aims, etc.\footnote{One example is Stewart, Smith, and Denton, Jr.’s book \textit{Persuasion and Social Movements} which debates the definition of a social movement as an organized, uninstitutialized, large collectivity, but also stresses the need for identifiable leaders, clear goals, and a particular relationship to institutional power, see: Chapter one: The Essential Characteristics of a Social Movement.} Often, these definitions buttress the disciplinary structures they come out of: sociology’s definitions of social movements necessarily foreground social forces, actors, and causes, while psychology’s definitions emphasize group behavior and motivations.\footnote{Textbooks on social movements show this most clearly, where sociologists and psychologists have developed various theories to explain and analyze social movements such as: collective behavior/collective action theories, relative deprivation theory, value-added theories, resource mobilization, frame analysis theory or social constructionist theory, new social movement theory, political process theory. See: Smelser, \textit{Theory of Collective Behavior}; Snow, Soule and Kriesi, ed. \textit{Blackwell Companion to Social Movements}; Staggenborg, \textit{Social Movements}; Tarrow, \textit{Power in Movement: Collective Action, Social Movements and Politics}; and Tilly, \textit{Social Movements, 1768–2004}.} For this study I will offer the definition published by David Snow, a sociologist, and Sarah Soule, who teaches in business; their definition is both narrow enough to be useful while not leaving too many groups outside of the defined space. They argue:
social movements are collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity, partially outside institutional or organizational channels, for the purpose of challenging extant systems of authority, or resisting change in such systems, in the organization, society, culture, or world system in which they are embedded.\textsuperscript{37}

They proceed to clarify their arguments and expand on all five parts of their definition, adding nuance and breadth. This definition works, in my opinion, partially because it is couched in a partiality that is refreshing. Snow and Soule do not declare what social movements are, and will always be, but offer guidelines for how to think about social movements. Their book, however, is dedicated to the “character and operation” of social movements, which this study is not.\textsuperscript{38} Rather, I take for granted that the CPUSA was a social movement and I look to how it used pamphlet literature and rhetoric to reflect on and impact ideas of race, class, and gender.

The study of social movement rhetoric, to which this dissertation at least loosely belongs, is often grounded in the work of Leland M. Griffin, especially his article “The Rhetoric of Historical Movements.” This essay, first appearing in the \textit{Quarterly Journal of Speech} in April 1952, is an overview on how to study the rhetoric of social movements, offering unidimensional directives on the general study of movement symbolic and speech patterns. Through the medium of answering focused questions, Griffin gives guiding answers to the study of social movement rhetoric. He suggests that movements are dynamic, and thus so must be the study of their rhetoric. He notes that the students should be “interested not so much in the accomplished change of opinion as in the attempt to effectuate change, we should find the rhetorical structure of the lost cause as

\textsuperscript{37} Snow and Soule, \textit{A Primer on Social Movements}, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{38} Snow and Soule, \textit{A Primer on Social Movements}, 21.
meaningful as that of the cause victorious.”

While offering principles to define and identify the rhetoric of social movements, the essay goes on to outline the proper criteria and process of synthesis needed for rhetorical analysis. Other authors take to task Griffin’s overly formal analysis protocol for social movements, offering more nuanced criteria for the study of social movement rhetoric. For instance, Malcolm O. Sillers argues that Griffin’s work is too linear, relies on unchallenged notions of cause and effect, assumes intent, and, therefore, is excessively rigid in its definition of social movements and social movement rhetoric.

Scholars often focus on persuasion or confrontation when thinking about the rhetorical tools and aims of social movements. Robert S. Cathcart suggests that there are two kinds of rhetoric in social movements, confrontational and managerial. It is confrontational rhetoric, he argues, that is the most remarked upon as potent to social change. He notes: “It is this confrontational aspect – the questioning of the basic values and societal norms – that makes true movements a real threat that can not be explained away as a temporary malfunction of the system or as the conspiratorial work of a handful of fanatics.”

The other type of movement rhetoric is managerial, where the movement works within expected symbolic frameworks. Cathcart effectively argues that social movements often use both kinds of rhetoric and it is often their combination that is most effective for change. Indeed, the CPUSA’s Black Nation Thesis employs rhetoric

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41 For example the textbook, The Persuasive Function of Social Movements by C. Stewart, Smith, and Denton, focuses on persuasion as a key element in analyzing social movements while Robert S. Cathcart and others in Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest highlight the important of confrontation as a rhetorical strategy.
that is managerial, in Cathcart’s sense, working within the system for reforms such as increasing the pay for black workers in the South under the National Recovery Act. However, most of the rhetoric explored in this dissertation is confrontational, “questioning the basic values and societal norms” such as legal lynching, black land ownership, and self-determination.

Robert L. Scott and Donald K. Smith suggest “the possible use of confrontation as a tactic for achieving attention and an importance not readily attainable through decorum.” The Communist Party pamphlet literature reflects this idea, often using the brutal, the horrific, and the fantastical to confront the reader and demand attention for the ills addressed in the pamphlets. However, as Scott and Smith also note, this is particularly true in the “rhetoric of confrontation, not merely confrontation, because this action, as divisive as its manifestations may be, is inherently symbolic.” And, indeed, the CPUSA literature is confrontational in its rhetorical choices, often, more so than its activism. The Party would claim ideas and principles on paper that were never followed through in direct action, such as the Black Nation Thesis. As other authors have demonstrated, the CPUSA was influential in the organization of sharecroppers, in anti-lynching activities, and in tenants rights and unemployment relief targeting black folks, especially in larger cities. However, this organizational work, though often rhetorically tied to the Black Nation Thesis, did not directly work toward the creation of a separate

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45 On organizing in Harlem see: Naison, Black Communists in Harlem During the Depression; on Southern sharecroppers see: Kelley, Hammer and Hoe; and on national black organizing see: Solomon, The Cry Was Unity.
nation for black people in the Black Belt. As such, the claims of the Black Nation Thesis were primarily rhetorical and symbolic, though no less important.

This dissertation attempts to enter a conversation on social movement rhetoric, looking at how social movements use media to impact long-term change. It is too soon to judge the long-term change wrought by the Egyptian and #Occupy protest, but it is safe to say that the impacts will be lasting. Noting the rhetoric the #Occupy movement employs might be useful. Rhetoric, as discussed, is important for social movements; indeed, it shapes social movements in important ways. Looking at the rhetoric of the Communist Party USA's pamphlets produced around the Black Nation Thesis enables an analysis of the meaningful shifts in the discourse of race and class. These shifts, though small, are significant. Perhaps the seeping of #Occupy rhetoric of “the 99%” into campaign literature and popular media will help to move the political conversation in ways that will attend to the exploitation of the poor and working class to benefit the rich and corporations. Indeed, such a shift in the conversation on class would be revolutionary, dynamically changing the entire perception of class, of justice, of rights in the US. This might seem utopian, and perhaps it is. But the desires for such change, the dreams of such change, are important steps in achieving such change.

Race and Self-Determination

My work directly engages the history of educating about race in the US. As Robin D.G. Kelley and others have persuasively argued, with the introduction of the Black Nation Thesis the Communist Party significantly changed the way that race was
thought about in the United States. In the 1920s the understandings of race were hotly contested; the social changes wrought during the Civil War and the period of Reconstruction, as well as the changing ideas about ethnicity and citizenship, had developed a new racial discourse in the United States. Race was still a salient social concept, however, and many competing theories of race were presented and circulated.

Combining the legacy of Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), the ideas of nationalism propagated in the Soviet Union under Stalin’s influence, and a long history of Marxist analysis, the CPUSA developed an idea of race and racial injustice that was both grounded in the history of slavery and exclusion in the US, while also cognizant of the larger global patterns of colonialism and nationalism. Deeply engaged in exposing the economic oppression under which most black people in the US suffered, the CPUSA further highlighted the unfair treatment of black people by the judicial system and demonstrated how this state sponsored violence reshaped the contours of racism in the US, and especially in the South. As the CPUSA developed a new concept of race, it was also interested in educating its growing support base, both members of the Party and the allies and sympathizers with which the CPUSA had significant influence. It is here that my dissertation work engages the various methods the CPUSA employed to educate about race, specifically focusing on the small press literature about the Black Nation Thesis produced in the 1930s and the influences of these pamphlets on decades of thinking and educating about race.

A central argument of this dissertation is that the CPUSA’s Black Nation Thesis changed the discourse on race in the US by linking race to class, specifically through the

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formulation of self-determination. The new formulation began a process of thinking about race, class, and gender, allowing for, in the 1940s, Claudia Jones’ articulation of the superexploitation of black women. Another important impact of the Black Nation Thesis was a nuanced idea of a black nation, which furthered both conversations about race and class but also about self-determination and nationalism.

James R. Forman, in his book *Self-determination and the African-American People*, demonstrates the importance of the concept of self-determination, noting how it is used globally to cement the understanding of nations and international work. He continues that the concept of self-determination can be traced to the work of the Comintern and the 1928 and 1930 Resolution on the Negro Question, especially for how it relates to oppressed peoples and specifically African Americans. Other critics note that self-determination has a long history out of the Western Enlightenment. They argue that the Communists idea of self-determination develops from this tradition but concede that the Communist articulation was unique and important, particularly for how it conceptualized racial/national minorities. V.P. Franklin’s *Black Self-Determination: A Cultural History of African American Resistance* notes the development of self-determination through Marcus Garvey’s UNIA as well as the African Blood Brotherhood, collecting evidence of the importance of self-determination by looking at the cultural production and narratives of black people, especially during slavery. He agrees with Forman, however, that the CPUSA’s work on self-determination was foundational to the flourishing of these cultural trends and ideas. After World War II, as Forman asserts and

Franklin’s book testifies to, the idea of self-determination was extremely important to the development of black radical traditions and specifically the articulation of race and class together.

Prior to the CPUSA’s Black Nation Thesis there were many contending theories about race suggested by prominent black cultural theorists, critics, and writers. W.E.B. Du Bois, though regularly lampooned by the CPUSA in the early 1930s, had been working for decades to argue against the theories of biological “race” and had offered concepts such as “double consciousness” to further explore ideas of race, citizenship, and nationality.\(^\text{50}\) Du Bois offered an idea of race that was particularly slippery and agile, able to link colonialism, imperialism, peace, and geography.

Finally, race and sexuality were often and importantly considered together. As Part III will discuss in greater detail, anti-lynching crusaders, Ida B. Wells-Barnett most famously, argued that lynching organized worries around race and sexuality, usually the sexual liaisons between black men and white women. However, Wells-Barnett argues that sexuality, the alleged rape of white women, was only used to cover up the real reasons for lynching: white people’s desire to maintain white supremacy in economic, cultural, and political spheres.\(^\text{51}\) Thus worries around lynching demonstrate yet another facet of thinking about race alongside gender and sexuality, while highlighting the importance of maintaining white supremacy.\(^\text{52}\)

\(^{50}\) For more on Du Bois’ work criticizing biological conceptions of race see the early essay “The Conservation of Races.” Also see Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race,” in *Critical Inquiry* for his important critique of Du Bois’ early work on race and biology. For more on double consciousness, see: Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

\(^{51}\) Wells-Barnett, *On Lynching*.

\(^{52}\) See Hale, *Making Whiteness*.
On the left, and especially in the labor movement, concepts of race were not widely discussed. However, as Part I will demonstrate, many leftist groups considered race to be second to class. Racism, so the common line went, would go away once class oppression was destroyed. This idea of race allowed for the common practices of segregated unions and the unwillingness of many leftist groups to push for integrated unions and for race-conscious labor organizing.

Concepts of race leading up to the 1928 and 1930 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question offered many important insights, but did not concretely link race and class. This changed significantly in the 1930s when many thinkers would begin to think about race and class together. Though the CPUSA was arguably part of this trend, it cannot be credited with all of these changes. Indeed, W.E.B Du Bois’ foundational and excruciatingly detailed study, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, was published in 1935 and carefully outlined how class and economics led to the betrayal of Reconstruction.\textsuperscript{53} Similarly, Ralph Bunche, a political theorist from Harvard who was the first black man to receive a PhD in the field, was working on the relations of race and class. He organized, with John P. Davis, a major conference on “the Position of the Negro in the Present Economic Crisis,” which included many delegates, such as organizers from the CPUSA, and published works that showed important connections between race and class.\textsuperscript{54} E. Franklin Frazier’s *The Negro Family in the United States*, published in the late 1930s, likewise connected ideas of race and class through a detailed sociological study of the family.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{53} Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*.


\textsuperscript{55} Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States*. 

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Delineating the CPUSA’s direct impact on concepts of race over the past eighty years would be almost impossible. However, the CPUSA’s tireless articulations of race as linked with class, and its analysis of the importance of self-determination, have clear repercussions even in material produced in the same decade. A brief coda to this work, outlining further research goals and questions, offers insight into some of the impacts the CPUSA’s linking of race and class had on the Party and other leftist social movements. The rhetorical effects of the Black Nation Thesis can be seen in the work of Claudia Jones, a major CPUSA pamphleteer and organizer in the 1940s, and in the many works of Communists theorists in the US such as Herbert Aptheker, Ben Davis, Henry Winston, and William Patterson. Looking further to 1970 reprintings of 1930s pamphlets, to the rhetoric of the Black Panther Party, and to the rise of Black Power, the resonances of the important articulations of race, class, and imperialism demonstrate the lasting power of the CPUSA’s Black Nation Thesis.

Sources and Analytical Frameworks

I have completed significant archival research, gathering pamphlets and other ephemera from collections housed at the Schomburg Center for Research on Black Culture in Harlem, New York University’s Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, the Library of Congress, the National Museum of African American History & Culture at the Smithsonian Institution, and the Walter Goldwater Radical Pamphlet Collection at the Special Collections Department at the University of California, Davis. I have developed a bibliography of CPUSA pamphlets on the Black Nation Thesis with over 300 pamphlets, including over 75 pertaining directly to the Black Nation Thesis and its development in the 1930s. I have also collected pamphlets
produced by non-communist groups on the radical left through the mid-1970s to analyze reverberations of the 1930s Black Nation Thesis.

The Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wager Labor Archives have provided the bulk of the pamphlets I analyze. As director Michel Nash concisely states in his article offering an overview view of the Communist holdings at the Tamiment Library: “Since the Tamiment Library began collecting radical pamphlet literature in the 1920s and acquired so much of this material as it was being generated, it now has one of the finest collections of Communist Party newsletters, broadsides, journals, and leaflets in the United States.”\textsuperscript{56} The library also holds microfilmed copies of the Labadie Collection, University of Michigan, with 1,245 pamphlets, and the HUAC Collection housed in the Rare Books and Special Collections Division of the Library of Congress with 3,504 pamphlets (not all CP related). The Tamiment Collection also holds the Archive of the Communist Party and the Reference Center for Marxist Studies, the reference library and complete pamphlet collection from the Communist Party library in New York City. The Reference Center for Marxist Studies pamphlet collection, with over 10,000 pamphlets, arguably holds almost all of the pamphlets produced by the CPUSA, as well as many from other parts of the world.\textsuperscript{57} I have combed through this collection for pamphlets relating to the Black Nation Thesis. The list of pamphlets is included as Appendix 1 at the end of the dissertation. I have cross-referenced this list with pamphlets housed at other libraries.

Also held at the Tamiment Library and at the Library of Congress are the Communist Party Records from 1920-1936, which had been shipped to the Soviet Union

\textsuperscript{56} Nash, “Communist History at the Tamiment Library,” in American Communist History, 268.

in the 1940s and were therefore not destroyed with many of the other CPSUA archives during the heights of the Red Scare.58 The Tamiment collection has the few remaining documents not sent to the USSR or destroyed in the 1950s. These records, particularly the Education and Agitation and Propaganda folders, have provided important background for my research.

Employing analytical close reading techniques, I look to the pamphlets to identify trends and inconsistencies in the text, aiming to open up questions about the development of the Black Nation Thesis and its larger pedagogical impact on race education in social movements on the Left. Specifically, I note how the CPUSA pamphlets create a productive fiction that both enables social movement participants and supporters to engage new ideas of race and class, but also provides a critical space to imagine possible anti-racist futures. At the end of the dissertation, I offer a brief coda outlining further work to gauge the impact of pamphlets and the pedagogical experiment they imply by tracing both the reverberations of the central claims of the Black Nation Thesis in other printed material and also looking to the development of later movement praxis, specifically working with studies of the US Civil Rights and Black Power movements.

An interdisciplinary project, my work draws from many different academic disciplines and fields. I couch my work within a tradition of transnational American studies, where the culture, ideology, and political economy of the United States is understood alongside and within larger transnational interplay. This project is concretely concerned with social movements and more specifically social movement rhetoric.

58 For more on the documents of the early CPUSA and the Soviet Archives see: Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, Introduction.
Engaging critical media studies, visual studies, and the burgeoning study of print culture, my project takes as its object the printed ephemera of the CPUSA.

Taking ephemera seriously, and thereby tracing the movement of ideas through a medium that is often swept into the recycling bin, is a feminist practice. Jose Muñoz, writing about queer performance art, explicates the study of ephemera. He states: “Work that attempts to index the anecdotal, the performative, or what I am calling the ephemeral as proof is often undermined by the academy’s officiating structures.”

This project attempts to trace ephemera as proof and look where one is not supposed to find answers. As examples of this looking, Muñoz holds Marlon Riggs’ work on black male queer sexual subjectivity and identity, to which I would add Issac Julian’s work on Langston Hughes mentioned earlier.

Though these works inspire me, my project could not even walk in their shadow. However, their turn to the ephemeral, to look at the traces of things to understand the echoes they cast, is key to my study here. To again rely on Muñoz:

The presentation of this sort of anecdotal and ephemeral evidence grants entrance and access to those who have been locked out of official histories and, for that matter, “material reality.” Evidence’s limit becomes clearly visible when we attempt to describe and imagine contemporary identities that do not fit into a single preestablished archive of evidence.

Though not looking at identities, the politics and speculations presented in these pamphlets have likewise been “locked out of official histories.” Bringing them to light for further examination, my work engages critical media studies, to both understand what makes the media and how media remakes social movements.

60 Muñoz, “Ephemera as Evidence” in Women and Performance, 9.  
Chapter Outline

The dissertation unfolds in four parts of two chapters each and ends with a concluding chapter that addresses ideas broached throughout. Chapters in each section build on each other and have similar stakes and location within the project. Part I outlines the history of both the Communist Party USA and the traditions of black radical organizing in the 1920s and early 1930s. Part II looks to the development of the Black Nation Thesis, discusses pamphlet literature more broadly, and takes up the theoretical contestations of the Black Nation Thesis. Part III details the Scottsboro trials and their coverage in CPUSA and Scottsboro Defense Committee literature, while looking to the role of gender in those pamphlets. Finally, Part IV includes the concluding chapter where I offer an account of the Black Nation Thesis pamphlet literature as a productive fiction, suggesting how the Thesis was used by CPUSA authors to account for and impact changing ideas about race, class, and, to a very limited extend, gender.

**Part I: Communists and Black Radical Organizing** introduces two intertwined histories: the black radical tradition in the US, heavily influenced by intellectuals and organizers from the Caribbean, and that of Communist organizing in the US after 1919. Chapter one, “Radical Histories of the Red and Black: The Founding of the Communist Party in the US, Black Radical Organizing, and the Comintern, 1919-1928” notes how these organizing traditions related to one another, as well as their points of divergence and collaboration. Chapter two, “The Resolution on the Negro Question: The Sixth Congress and the Development of the Black Nation Thesis, 1928-1930,” notes specifically the CPUSA's sometimes uneasy uniting of black and Communist organizing. Together these chapters provide a history of the CPUSA and black organizing leading
up to the 1930s Black Nation Thesis. These chapters also trace some of the contemporary debates about this history, noting the influence of Cold War intellectual currents on the analysis of the CPUSA’s work with black organizers and on issues of race.

**Part II: The Black Nation Thesis** includes two chapters on the Black Nation Thesis itself and its development in pamphlet literature. Chapter three, “Binding the Message: Black Nation Thesis Pamphlets and Pamphleteers,” introduces the CPUSA pamphleteering tradition and the leading pamphleteers on the Black Nation Thesis. These men, for the writers were mostly men, had significant influence on the ideas about race and class as it was developed in the US. The chapter looks at the various types, styles, and forms of pamphlets produced around the Black Nation Thesis, specifically noting campaign material and local pamphlets as two models of pamphleteering. This chapter also looks at the issues that were not discussed, namely the exploitation and oppression of black women. The chapter ends with an analysis of the 1935 pamphlet *The Position of Negro Women*, noting its limited distribution and acknowledgement and the impact on the CPUSA’s discourse on race through the 1930s.

Chapter four, “Building the US’s Black Nation: White Chauvinism, the Black Belt Nation, and Internationalism,” offers a focused analysis of the Black Nation Thesis itself and its anti-imperialist and internationalist sentiments. Looking at four of the most widely distributed pamphlets on the Black Nation Thesis, the chapter charts the development of the Thesis and argues for its “Americanization” through concrete engagement with issues and debates germane to the US. Specifically, the chapter looks at an early pamphlet on White Chauvinism as grounding the Black Nation Thesis in an attack on racial privilege and the dominant ideology of white supremacy. Through the
delineation of the Black Belt in the South in James Allen’s influential pamphlet *The American Negro*, the Black Nation Thesis was given geographic specificity. This geographic specificity enabled yet other pamphlets to develop sophisticated arguments about the forms of nationalism desired in the Black Nation Thesis. This nationalism, combining national conceptions of the Soviet Union, Western ideas of the nation-state, and Black Nationalist traditions, further engaging the Black Nation Thesis as useful in a US context, and simultaneously engaged a critique of imperialism that connected the struggles of black people in the US to others fighting colonial and imperial oppression.

**Part III: The Scottsboro Case** returns to the US and looks at the popularization of the Black Nation Thesis through the highly publicized Scottsboro trials. Chapter five, “The International Labor Defense: Propaganda and the Radical Imagination, 1931-1933,” traces the CPUSA’s early work on the trials through the International Labor Defense organization (ILD). This chapter accounts for conflicts with other black organizations over the case and notes the Party’s emphasis on a large global campaign. Alongside an analysis of the Scottsboro Nine trials, the chapter notes other Party work on lynching in the South and offers a critique of Southern legal practices of convict labor and chain gangs. Noting the specifics of the Scottsboro trials, the chapter also continues an analysis of race, class, and gender in the Depression South.

Chapter six, “The Scottsboro Defense Committee: Gender and the Development of a Form, 1934-1937” chronicles the later years of the Scottsboro trial and the coalition work of the CPUSA in the mid-1930s. Following from the analysis in chapter four of the shifting nature of the thesis under the Popular Front, this chapter looks at how coalitional work impacted the arguments the CPUSA developed and supported around the Black Nation Thesis. Continuing the conversation about the lack of a concrete
analysis of gender in the Black Nation Thesis, this chapter looks specifically at the
gender relations supported by the Scottsboro trial pamphlets. Finally, this chapter looks
to how the Scottsboro Nine pamphlets became a model for other CPUSA trials agitating
for racial and social justice.

The dissertation concludes with **Part IV: Conclusions**, which combines the concluding chapter and a coda outlining further work. The seventh chapter, “*In a Soviet America: Productive Fictions about Race and Class,*” looks to the 1935 pamphlet *The Negroes in a Soviet America*, part of the larger *In a Soviet America* series, to think about how pamphlet literature was used by the Party. Many pamphlets produced in the Third Period of the CPUSA, when the Black Nation Thesis was being most strongly supported and written about broadly in the US, end with a call to the correctness of the USSR in issues such as race, women’s rights, mining, farming, and social security.\(^{62}\) Though easily dismissed as propaganda in favor of the USSR, this chapter offers an alternative reading of these classic pamphlet endings. Rather than being prescriptions for the future, these references to the USSR are read as productive fictions. I argue that the Black Nation Thesis was useful, not because black people in the US would actually secede from the Union, but because it offered a new way to think about race. These spectacular endings are exercises of the imagination, important to both social movement development and cohesion. The Coda, “*The Legacy of the 1930s Pamphlets: Reverberations and Reprintings from 1940 to 1975,*” looks forward to echoes of the Black Nation Thesis in Communist Party organizing in the 1940s and 1950s. Noting the continuation of trends

\(^{62}\) In the USSR “race” was not the term used to talk about ethnic, cultural, or skin-color differences; rather, the Soviets used “nationality” in somewhat similar ways to talk about cultural, ethnic, and religious differences. The differences and similarities of discourse of “race” in the USA and “nationality” in the USSR are further explicated in Chapter 4.
from the 1930s, specifically work on trials and elections, the coda also outlines the other important theoretical and practical changes in the Thesis over many decades, finally suggesting its reverberations in organizing in non-communist groups in the 1970s and the reprinting of 1930s pamphlets.

Social movements use the media available to them to spread ideas to an audience as large as possible, to engage that audience in thinking about social and cultural change, and to speculate about the future. It is important to look at these social movement media forms and take them seriously as deliberate choices of activists and organizers to help advance their cause by emphasizing what is wrong and offering a vision that would make it better. Such speculations, what I call productive fictions, are useful tools to examine how social movements engage larger cultural rhetoric. In what follows, I analyze the Communist Party USA’s Black Nation Thesis pamphlets as one of these important social movement media tools to reflect on changing ideas of race, class, and gender.
PART I

COMMUNISTS AND BLACK RADICAL ORGANIZING
CHAPTER 1

Radical Histories of the Red and Black:
The Founding of the Communist Party in the US, Black Radical Organizing, and the Comintern, 1919-1928

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.

If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!

O kinsmen we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!

What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

-Claude McKay, If We Must Die, 1919

“Communist propaganda among the Negroes is hampered by the lack of publicity carrying a special appeal.”
-Lovett Fort Whiteman, 1924

Racial tension and widespread poverty marked the years between the First and the Second World Wars throughout the United States of America. These factors, combined with the Great Migration of blacks from the South to the North and changing social expectations after the First World War, led to the formation of many new radical

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63 Speech of Lovett Fort Whiteman, alias Comrade Jackson, at the Fifth Congress of the Comintern, 1924. Collected in Foner and Allen, American Communism and Black Americans, 70.
social movements and the dynamic change and reformation of previously existing movements.

Harry Haywood, a prominent black Communist of the 1930s, speaks of his experience coming back from the Great War in his autobiography, *Black Bolshevik*. Echoing other black servicemen’s accounts of coming back from European campaigns, he details his treatment in France as a stark contrast to the racial segregation of his Chicago home or his youth in the South, noting the racial segregation of the US alongside the rhetoric of “democracy” difficult to stomach after serving in Europe.64 Even though the military remained segregated, war experiences in Europe often exposed black men to social situations without the impediments of Jim Crow laws or racist attitudes of the US.65

Between 1910 and 1930, more than one million black people moved from the rural South to the urban centers, first in the South and then in the North and West, looking for jobs and an escape from Jim Crow.66 This phenomenon, later called the Great Migration, had a huge impact on black communities in the interwar years. East Coast cities also saw a huge influx of immigrants from the Caribbean, forty five thousand estimated immigrants in the teens alone, many of them settling in New York, often in Harlem.67 Migrants moved for a myriad of reasons and met with varied experiences in the North. As the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), a radical black organization committed to racial equality and the end of capitalism, noted in 1923:

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64 See Haywood’s description of his service in WWI and coming back to the US, *Black Bolshevik*, chapter 2.
65 This is not to suggest that European societies were not also racist, but that the racial prejudices and oppression in Europe different greatly from those of the US and were therefore experienced differently.
66 For more on the Great Migration see: Trotter, *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective*.
“Negro workers are pouring into the North to escape the hellish conditions [in the South] and in search of higher wages and better living conditions.”

Although they were looking for better prospects in the North, most migrants met with continued struggles, suffering from cramped conditions in Northern cities and lacking work, food, and often family or community ties.

As migrants gathered in Northern urban centers, new social movements emerged and existing social movements changed to better address the needs of the new arrivals. The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), for example, experienced rapid growth in various US chapters as it addressed the needs of both migrants and immigrants. Migrants developed other organizations, such as the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, to address labor inequalities and organize black workers. Prominent black organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Urban League, and the UNIA, headed by Marcus Garvey, organized around social issues intensified by the Great Migration of black people, as well as the ongoing struggles against Jim Crow and racial segregation.

At the same time, the New Negro Movement emerged in black cultural communities, most notably in New York. The artistic, literary, and social movements later discussed as the Harlem Renaissance blossomed in the growing communities in Northeast cities. The movements brought a greater social prominence to the writing of radical, many communist-leaning, artists and poets, including Claude McKay, Jessie Fausette, Nella Larson, Jean Toomer, and Paul Robeson.

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69 The New Negro Movement took its name from the 1925 book *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, an anthology of fiction, poetry, and essays on African and African American art and literature edited by Alain Locke. Locke’s essay “The New Negro” was also foundational to the self-understanding of many of the artists and activists of the time.
engagement opened by the Harlem Renaissance enabled some of these writers and poets, like Langston Hughes, to have a lasting impact on social and political organization, influencing and being influenced by the growing political campaigns.

Progressive political and social organizations in black communities brought black people into contact with anti-capitalist social movements that were often centered in the North. One such movement was the Socialist Party, well established by the teens, especially in the North. By 1919, the two new Communist Parties, the Communist Party of America and the Communist Labor Party, emerged as another anti-capitalist movement, also mostly focused in the North, with major centers in Chicago and New York City. The tensions and eventual split in the US Socialist Party and the emergence of the two US Communist Parties reflects only a small section of the radical labor activism that shook the late teens and early twenties, which also included the Industrial Workers of the World and other anarchist organizing as well as progressive religious organizing and a growth in unions.70 Though very few of the thousands of migrants came into direct contact with the Communist Parties or other anti-capitalist groups, the Parties’ and other radical organizations’ influence was substantial and would continue to grow.71

Finally, the interwar years began with an upsurge of violence, often along racial fault lines. In the Red Summer of 1919, over 76 black men were lynched.72 Race riots rocked the entire country. Some of the largest riots were in Washington D.C., Chicago, Illinois, and Omaha, Nebraska. As in Omaha, authorities in Norfolk, Virginia, and Charleston, South Carolina, called the armed forces or declared martial law to regain

70 For more on IWW see: Flank, *IWW: A Documentary History.*
71 For more on the Party’s influence in Harlem among migrant communities, see: Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression.*
In Omaha a white mob burned the courthouse in order to lynch a black man accused of raping a white woman. The pattern of white gangs attacking black men, such as in Omaha and D.C., often sparked riots and the racial tensions were palpable. In a letter that appeared in 1919, in the *Crisis*, the organ of the NAACP, “A Southern Colored Woman” who does not give her name out of fear of reprisal, said after witnessing the Chicago riots in July of 1919: “at last our men had stood like men, struck back, were no longer dumb, driven cattle. [sic] The pent up humiliation, grief and horror of a lifetime – half a century – was being stripped from me. Only colored women of the south know the extreme in suffering and humiliation.”

Echoing the sentiment expressed so eloquently in Claude McKay’s famous poem “If We Must Die,” this anonymous black woman described the importance of the riots to a changing black community, while also noting the horror of the violence erupting in the city. Violence in response to the decades of oppression and humiliation caused a great stir and, Mark Solomon argues, was “pivotal for the fusion of black radicals and the Communists.”

In what follows, I sketch both the history of the Communist Party in the US, from its birth in 1919 through the beginning of the Third Period in 1928, as well as the history of radical black organizing in urban centers such as Chicago and Harlem, New York, and in rural areas of the South. I detail how these two activist communities, the early US Communists and black radicals, found and created common ground through the Communist International and the discussion, in Russia and the US, of the Negro Question, noting particularly the few organizers who worked between these groups such

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73 For more on race riots in the teens, see: Boskin, *Urban Racial Violence in the Twentieth Century.*
74 Aptheker, *Documentary History of the Negro People of the United States*, Volume 3, 278.
as Cyril Briggs and Otto Huiswoud. These discussions, in part, led to the resolution on
the Negro Question in 1928 and the beginning of organizing around the Black Nation
Thesis in the US. In my discussion of these two groups of activists and their work, I
establish the history and chronicle the values and goals both groups brought to their
collaboration. Although my work in Part I is primarily based on secondary literature, I
offer insights from the pamphlets and small press literature available. Indeed,
newspapers, reprinted speeches, Party platforms, and informational bulletins serve as
important source documents alongside the secondary histories of the period.

In this chapter, I look at many of the published works on black organizing
within and by the Communist Party in the late 1920s and early 1930s to outline and
understand the early history of the CPUSA, the prominent black organizations working
with and alongside the Communists in the US, and the specific tensions that led up to
the development of the two Comintern Resolutions on the Negro Question. Rather
than offering a traditional literature review, I use this chapter, and the following one on
the development of the Thesis itself, to weave an analysis of the histories of the
CPUSA, black radicalism, and the work around the Black Nation Thesis, with a narrative
of the history of Black and Red organizing.

Books from various political and social outlooks chronicle the histories of the
Communist Party USA, noting the positive and negative effects of Party organizing and
the naiveté of Party activists. These books give careful attention to the histories and
legacies of the CPUSA’s relationship to Russia, involvement in World War II, and its
negotiations with European, Soviet and US governments throughout the Cold War.76

76 Cruse, Crisis of the Negro Intellectual; Draper, The Roots of American Communism and American Communism and
Soviet Russia; Foster, History of the Communist Party in the United States; Klehr, The Heyday of American
Communism.
However, comparatively little has been written about Communist Party organizing with black people prior to World War II. In order to engage this period of Communist organizing in the US, and to analyze the written material created by the CPUSA, I focus on print material developed under the rubric of the Black Nation Thesis, particularly the rhetoric of race and the performative nature of pamphlet literature. The bulk of this dissertation will turn to the pamphlets produced by the party to foreground strategy, shifting racial formations, and the dynamics between individual activists and the central Party; however, to preface this discussion, I offer a brief analysis of the historiography of the CPUSA, opening a space to not only engage the politics of the movement but also to analyze Party literature and attend to the long histories of debate over the role of the CPUSA in US American racial politics.

**Communist Party History and Historiography**

The many books dedicated to looking at the CPUSA and black people in the twenties and thirties, detailed in the Introduction, take many different approaches to the subject matter. Many of the early writings, and also the histories by Draper, and later by Harvey Klehr, have a specifically anti-communist lens that colors their larger analysis, focusing it on the Comintern's influence on the CPUSA. More recently, Earl Ofari Hutchinson, in his book *Blacks and Reds: Race and Class in Conflict 1919-1990*, contends that the Black Nation Thesis was particularly unsuccessful at engaging black

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communities. He outlines the development of the Communist Party, offers a quick run-through of other black radical organizations of the time including the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), and finally looks to the development of the Black Nation Thesis in 1928. Hutchinson argues that the articulation of self-determination was an aberration and not a very successful campaign. He does not acknowledge any connection between the rhetoric of black people as an oppressed nation and the organizational gains the CPUSA made in the 1930s in black communities, such as in the context of the Scottsboro Boys and Angelo Herndon trials, campaigns against lynching, and drives to unionize black workers. In this analysis Hutchinson is not alone. Most popular histories of the time completely ignore, cover over, or obscure the role of the CPUSA in black organizing. For example, many accounts of the Scottsboro trials focus on the work of the Scottsboro Defense Committee, a rough coalition between the NAACP, the ACLU, the International Labor Defense (ILD) and others founded in 1935, down-playing the earlier work of the ILD and the CPUSA to provide legal support for the young defendants at the beginning of the trials in 1932.

Other scholarly works from the past two decades try to avoid such blatant partiality by arguing that black organizers and Communists had a different relationship with the Comintern. Mark Naison is one of the first authors to offer this challenge; he argues that even if Comintern policies largely dictated the functioning of the CPUSA, in day-to-day activities in particular black communists were more grounded in local issues in their everyday struggle. Mark Solomon, in his Red and Black: Communism and Afro-Americans, explicitly follows Naison’s argument, broadening his study beyond Harlem.

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79 Naison, Communists in Harlem During the Depression.
80 Solomon, Red and Black, preface.
Both of these lines of reasoning are challenged by Michael Goldfield’s work, as well as Haywood’s autobiography, which draw connections between the work that Party activists did on the ground and the broader arguments and analyses of the central Party. Specifically, Goldfield and Haywood assert that the development of the Black Nation Thesis was not as one sided or top-down as many other histories assume.\textsuperscript{81} Solomon also changes his argument in his later work \textit{The Cry Was Unity} where he purports to follow “another approach to studying American communism: to examine the interplay of national and international forces, of theory and of practice, and of leadership and rank and file in the making and execution of policy.”\textsuperscript{82} By and large, Solomon’s book does just this in providing a carefully researched overview of the organizational development and impact of the Black Nation Thesis.

Though differing in approach, Goldfield, Naison, Kelley, Solomon, McDuffie, and Gilmore all try to tease out the relationships between the CPUSA and black radical groups, and look at the long history of activism that tie together an analysis of race and class.\textsuperscript{83} For example, Robin D.G. Kelley, in his collection of books that touch on the intersections of Communist and black organizing, most notably his full-length work \textit{Hammer and Hoe}, gives a careful historian’s eye to the development of black Communist organizing in Alabama, specifically noting the organizational efforts around interactions between race, class, and gender as well as the new and innovative ways in which

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{81} Goldfield, “The Decline of the Communist Party and the Black Question in the U.S.”: Harry Haywood’s \textit{Black Bolshevik}, 44.
\item\textsuperscript{82} Solomon, \textit{The Cry Was Unity}, xxi.
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Communist (not always, but predominantly, white) leadership worked with black cultural forms and black leaders to facilitate positive social change in Alabama.

Kelley’s work, along with books and articles by Naison, Gilmore, McDuffie, and Solomon, form the basis of my work here. Specifically, in the next chapters I will follow these authors in chronicling the development of the Black Nation Thesis in both the Comintern and in the US Communist Party. In the sections following I will show how the pamphlet material produced in the US demonstrates the complicated interplay between Comintern policy and American politics. For example, the pamphlet material shows how the ideas suggested in the Comintern’s Resolution on the Negro Question are reworked in an American context to make sense of particularly US political formations. This reworking is evident in the discussions of nationalism and lynching, but also in the trials of the Scottsboro Nine and Angelo Herndon. These conversations are prefaced, however, on a thorough understanding of the interplay between the Comintern, black organizers in the US, and the various Communist Parties in the US.

The Early Communists in the US and Organizing on the Negro Question

At the end of World War I, as US troops were returning home, racial tensions were high. Combined with the lack of housing, constant harassment, Jim-Crow laws, and an increase in lynching, these conditions made for volatile times in many major cities and a spat of race riots shook the US. Unemployment was widespread among black industrial workers; there was less demand for labor after the war, and increasingly high inflation. It was in this context of high unemployment, racial conflict, and tension around social class, that the two Communist Parties formed in the late summer of 1919.
According to William Z. Foster’s official *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, in September 1919 just over two hundred estranged former members of the Socialist Party in the United States gathered in Chicago, at two different conventions, to form the Communist Party of America (CP of A) and the Communist Labor Party of America (CLP). The group forming the CP of A represented the large Foreign Language Associations, first- or second-generation immigrants who organized primarily through ethnic/national clubs, and claimed 128 regular and fraternal delegates. Conversely, many of the CLP’s 92 delegates were American-born and considered “native” whites (members not belonging to a Foreign Language Association, many of them earlier immigrants to the US who regularly spoke and organized in English).  

Many authors claim that there were no black delegates in either party’s forming caucus, but Solomon challenges this assumption, arguing that Otto Huiswoud, a prominent black socialist who also worked with black nationalist groups, attended the Left Wing Conference in June of 1919 and “was among the group that met to found the Communist Party [of America] on September 1st, 1919.” According to Gilmore, Cyril Briggs, another Caribbean-born, black radical organizer in the US, was a member of the Communist Party of America. She notes that Lovett Fort Whiteman, a black man from Texas, educated at Tuskegee, who was central in many left organizing circles including the IWW, claims to have been at the conference, but there is some evidence that he was actually in the South at that time. Gilmore speculates that because of his association with

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85 Huiswoud is also spelled Huiswood, I use the former following van Enckevort, *The Life and Work of Otto Huiswoud: Professional Revolutionary and Internationalist (1893–1961)*.

The IWW, Fort Whiteman probably joined the Communist Labor Party, though there are no official records.\footnote{Gilmore, \textit{Defying Dixie}, 36.}

The Communist Labor Party platform did not mention issues facing black people, and the Communist Party of America platform argued a line similar to that of the Socialist Party. As Draper quotes from the Party literature of the time: “The Negro problem is a political and economic problem. The racial oppression of the Negro is simply the expression of his economic bondage and oppression, each intensifying the other.”\footnote{Draper, \textit{Roots of American Communism}, 192.} Such a sentiment, as discussed above, reflected the Party’s position that organized with black radicals only around issues of class and not around issues of race, white supremacy (chauvinism), or nationality.

The two Communist Parties founded in 1919 struggled both with each other and against US government pressure for the first years of their existence. Much of the violence around the Red Scare of 1919 in Chicago, Gilmore argues, was directly linked to the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover’s mission to search out the cause of radical activism; his answer, in part, was Lovett Fort Whiteman.\footnote{Gilmore, \textit{Defying Dixie}, 36.} Under great pressure from the authorities, both Communist Parties functioned as underground movements, hampering broad organizational efforts. There was also a great deal of infighting between the groups and even within the separate Parties as factions struggled to gain leadership positions. Unity was eventually achieved between the Communist Party of America and the Communist Labor Party in May of 1921, through both the prodding of the Comintern and the pressure of rank-and-file activists. The “unity convention” held in Woodstock, NY, in
1921, led to a new Party, called the Workers Labor Party, often shortened to the Workers Party. Solomon notes that the infighting and chaos of building unity meant that black issues were not high on the list of priorities of the new Workers Party, and no specific Negro Demands were listed in the Party platform.\(^90\) Foster also notes that at the time of the Unity Convention “little or no progress” had been made on the Negro Question.\(^91\) Eventually, the Workers Party changed its name to the Communist Party, USA in 1929.\(^92\)

There were some precedents both for black people working in predominantly white radical organizations and for radical organizations working on issues of race. Philip S. Foner, in his book *American Socialism and Black Americans*, argues that black people had been organizing within the Socialist Party in various linked and sympathetic organizations for decades. Foner is careful to point out that the participation of black people was often limited by the dominant Socialist line, which neglected, covered over, or blatantly misunderstood the position of black people in the US by ignoring race in its organizing platform. For example, the Socialist Party articulated that the solution for black workers was the same as for white: socialism, and refused to engage with race specific organizing principles.

Trying to understand the situation of black socialists and socialist sympathizers before 1919, James Weinstein, in his book *The Decline of Socialism in America*, argues, “Negroes were virtually ignored by the Party officialdom.”\(^93\) He cites various news print sources to claim that: “Within the [Socialist] Party, at least in 1903 and 1904, attitudes

\(^{92}\) When speaking broadly, or across time, about the CPUSA, I will use the acronym. If speaking specifically about the Party between 1922 and 1929, I will say the Workers Party. Both might be shortened to the Party.  
\(^{93}\) Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism in America*, 65.
toward the Negro ranged from the view of a Texas comrade that Socialists in the South should work to wipe out race prejudice, and that segregated locals should not be permitted, to the view that capitalism had produced ‘lynchable degenerates’ among the Negro people.”94 However, as a number of scholars have pointed out, black people were publicly organizing for social and economic liberation and had been doing so for decades, and such organizing often took both socialist and nationalist forms.95

Mark Solomon traces the first serious engagement of Marxists with the Negro Question to a debate during the Seventh Congress of the Second (Socialist) International in 1907 where the question was framed within the larger argument about colonialization.96 He also argues that the International Workers of the World (IWW), of all of the white radical groups, was the most fluent in their work with blacks. “The anarcho-syndicalist content and the ‘one big union’ principle of the I.W.W. put it in the front lines of economic struggle among the unskilled. This, in turn, obliged the movement to call for the organization of black workers.”97 But many unions would still not organize blacks, and the IWW unions that would were few and far between in the South where many blacks lived and worked.

Socialists were better, sometimes, in their theoretical work than in their on-the-ground organizing. Foner makes note of an early reference to a linkage between black people’s struggles for liberation in the United States and the anti-colonialist idea of self-determination:

94 Weinstein, Decline of Socialism in America, 65.
95 For more on pre-WWI black community organizing see: Du Bois, especially Black Reconstruction; Lerner, Black Women in America: A Documentary History; Schechter, Ida B Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930; Aptheker, Documentary History of the Negro People, Volumes 1, 2, and 3; Foner, American Socialism and Black Americans; Kelley, Freedom Dreams and Race Rebels; Robinson, Black Marxism.
96 Solomon, Red and Black, 70.
97 Solomon, Red and Black, 63.
On November 13, 1918, the New York *Call* reported that the Socialist party has concluded that, if the principle of self-determination for subject peoples, races, nationalities, and small nations included in Wilson’s Fourteen Points for the peace program was to mean anything, it should also be applied in the Southern states of the country of which Wilson was president and where in certain areas blacks constituted a majority of the population. Self-determination was called a major way to redress ‘the wrongs of which Negroes complain.’

Thus, currents of socialism, nationalism, and even self-determination were germinating in black radical organizing throughout the early 20th century, though it was to be the Communist Party USA, and especially black organizers within the Party, that would tap these various traditions by the 1930s and lead the largest drive to organize black workers and farmers since Reconstruction.

Earlier efforts to organize around black issues, in the form of a Negro Commission, were undertaken by the Workers Party, but with some of the same limitations and new ones, as the Party was again overwhelmed with internal struggles. The Negro Commissions, started through the Comintern under the leadership of John Pepper (Joseph Pogany), were the Communists’ first attempt to formalize organization with and among black people. Solomon argues that the Comintern was beginning to rethink its position on the Negro Question, going so far as to mention “The Right to Self Determination even to Separation” in a secret memo. The party didn’t even have a chance to respond before Pepper (who was in the US at the time as the Comintern representative and exercised a lot of power in the US Party) formed the Negro Commission. Lovett Fort Whiteman was named as the chief organizer of the commission and tasked with setting up a “communist faction’ that ‘should conduct the

In line with the underground nature of the Party at the time, Fort Whiteman was instructed to ensure Communist support and leadership of the fledgling organization, but it was not, officially, initially a part of the Workers Party. The American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC), discussed in more detail below, managed to bring together some of the various streams of black organizing and propel the Workers Party into more of a leadership role. Some of the groups that were brought together in the ANLC were progressive and liberal black organizations, while other participants were radical black groups, labor organizations, and, of course, the Workers Party. The work of the ANLC was the first major step of the Workers Party’s eventual resolution on the Negro Question and the development of the Black Nation Thesis.

**Radical Black Organizing in the 1920s**

Black organizing in the interwar years had many foci and constituents. More mainstream groups such as the NAACP, the Urban League, and various black churches worked for causes varying from anti-lynching legislation to tenants rights, often engaging white liberal audiences to fight segregation from within the legal system. The NAACP, for example, was influential in winning the right for black men to serve as officers in World War I, and worked in the interwar years fighting lynching within the legal system.

The NAACP was started as an interracial organization by socialists, William English Walling and Mary White Ovington, and engaged a variety of causes directly challenging the racial politics in the South and the North. In the 1920s and 1930s, the

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100 Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*, 49.
NAACP often took a more mainstream approach to organizing, often choosing causes that did not openly challenge the status quo and enabled them to build alliances with a broad base of black and white allies. Even when they focused on more moderate causes, black organizations were often described as radical and targeted by the government and other white authorities. Gilmore notes that in 1919, at the height of the Red Scare, the NAACP was targeted by “South Carolina Congressman James Brynes [who] wanted to suppress ‘radical’ black periodicals” such as the NAACP’s organ, the *Crisis*, A. Phillip Randolph’s Socialist publication *The Messenger*, and Cyril Briggs’ radical newspaper, the *Crusader*.\(^{102}\) The government’s attack specifically citing these periodicals is significant, as such small press literature enabled black organizations, many of which were based in the North, to communicate with blacks across the US and especially in the South. Both mainstream and radical groups used such newsletters, and pamphlets, to share their plans for organized struggle against Jim Crow and lynching, and for unionization and black collective action.

W.E.B. Du Bois started the *Crisis*, the quarterly publication of the NAACP, in 1910. The publication closely followed Du Bois’ politics, as he enjoyed little oversight from the NAACP at large. The journal had a fairly large distribution, but as Du Bois notes “circulation dropped steadily until by 1933 it was scarcely more than ten thousand paid subscriptions.”\(^{103}\) To bolster the flagging publication, Du Bois transferred more editorial decisions over to the NAACP in return for increased funding. As Du Bois’ politics moved toward Pan Africanism and socialism, the *Crisis* remained agitating for civil rights, but aimed at a different audience than the CPUSA publications.

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\(^{102}\) Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 37.

\(^{103}\) Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 295
Following the lead of both Du Bois and the NAACP, the *Crisis* was geared toward an interracial audience. The Social Party’s publication, the *Masses*, also attempted to have such a wide interracial audience. Graphically innovative, the covers of the magazines were moving images, opening to stories about social and economic justice. The paper was widely read during its publication from 1911 through 1917 when Federal prosecutors shut it down. William Patterson mentions it as one of the first radical publications he was introduced to in Harlem.\(^{104}\) Succeeded by *The Liberator* and then later *The New Masses*, it published news, fiction, poetry, and art by the leading radicals of the time. Not all were thrilled with *The Masses* publication. Foner notes that: “a party member sharply criticized ‘the way in which the negro race’ was portrayed in the cartoons.” The editorial board, however, took this criticism into account and issued a statement acknowledging that “special care” ought to be taken in representations of African Americans by the publication.\(^{105}\)

There were also publications aimed more concretely toward a black readership. These journals and magazines were often published in Harlem, but were distributed around the US, especially to other Northern cities such as Chicago. *The Messenger*, started by A. Phillip Randolph and Clyde Owens, had a circulation of 150,000 copies and was influential to many young black organizers who would eventually join the CPUSA.\(^{106}\) Though more of a literary magazine than some of the other publications, the *Messenger* staunchly fought with the UNIA over their “Back to Africa” program and agitated for black unions.\(^ {107}\) Cyril Briggs’ journal the *Crusader* was staunchly nationalist and dedicated

\(^{104}\) Patterson, *The Man Who Cried Genocide*, 83.
to revolutionary overthrow of the current system. The *Crusader* initially was the official organ of a group called the Hamitic League of the World, proclaiming that Africa was the cradle of civilization and arguing the superiority of the black race. Briggs’ politics began to shift and by 1919 the *Crusader* was agitating with a more Marxist analysis. The publication drew in many activists to the African Blood Brotherhood and the CPUSA and was an important site for early debates about black socialist and radical politics.\(^ {108}\) According to Briggs, at its height the *Crusader* reached a total readership of 36,000 persons, mostly in Harlem.\(^ {109}\)

As evidenced by their publications, many black groups focused on nationalist and/or anti-capitalist organizing, creating and drawing from more radical organizing traditions. Some groups were nationalist but not anti-capitalist, such as Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association. Other groups were anti-capitalist, but not nationalist, such as the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters and the aforementioned American Negro Labor Congress. Still other organizations were, in at least some of their rhetoric, both anti-capitalist and nationalist, such as the African Blood Brotherhood. Even in the four groups mentioned here, there was significant overlap of activists and organizational programs. Black radicals, hailing from across the US and from the Caribbean, pushed the envelope of organizing to address issues of race and class oppression.

Many of the black radicals grew up in the Caribbean and moved to Harlem later in their organizing careers, bringing their radical tradition to the US. One such figure, Richard B. Moore, worked with the ABB, the Communist Party, and the International

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Labor Defense before he was expelled from the Party in 1942. An earlier figure on the political scene in Harlem was Marcus Garvey. Garvey, born in Jamaica, founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914 after returning to Jamaica from travels in Central America and England. Traveling to the US in 1916, Garvey founded the New York chapter of the UNIA in 1917 with a few members. The organization grew rapidly with 3,500 members signing up in New York in the first years, and by 1920 growing to over 800 chapters world wide with nearly a million members, and two to three times as many participants in events. Starting in 1918, the UNIA published their weekly paper entitled *The Negro World* out of the New York office, using the paper to spread Garvey’s message of Black Nationalism and general uplift. The UNIA’s platform was to “establish a Universal Confraternity among the race; to promote the spirit of race pride and love; to reclaim the fallen of the race; to administer to and assist the needy; to assist in civilizing backward tribes of Africa” amongst other goals such as fostering spiritual worship, promoting higher education opportunities for blacks, and supporting independent African states. The race-focused program of the UNIA strongly contradicted the class-based program of the CPUSA, and the two organizations struggled against each other and for the attentions of black organizers.

In his official *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, writing with the advantage of hindsight in 1952, Foster highlights the role of black people in the Communist Party, including the Party’s work on behalf of “Negro Rights” and “Negro Organizing.” Foster recognizes the significance and limitations of the Garvey

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movement for the early Communists; stating that at the height of its popularity Garvey’s “U.N.I.A. [Universal Negro Improvement Association] claimed half a million members, and it was by far the largest Negro political organization in the country.” On the other hand, Foster argues that Garvey “had no faith in the possibilities of Negroes securing just treatment in any country” and thus backed a stance of “Back to Africa.”113 Foster claims that the movement eventually yielded to capitalist pressures and degenerated, leaving many of its rank and file members in small organizations or looking for a place to come together to fight for liberation. Again with the benefit of hindsight, Foster highlights the nationalist content of the Garvey movement as an important antecedent to the CPUSA’s organizing. He claims that because the Garvey movement was bourgeois and utopian, it could not follow through with its offers of black liberation. Therefore, Foster argues, it laid the groundwork for the more developed analysis of the Communist Workers Party:

The Workers Party generally adopted a friendly, although critical, attitude toward the Garvey Movement. In 1924 the Central Committee sent a letter to the U.N.I.A., offering the support of the Workers Party and urging co-operation between Negroes and whites. In this letter, however, the Party still handled the question, not from a national but from a class and race standpoint.114

Foster’s analysis, though interesting, shows evidence of its periodization by including in his analysis an attention to race. By most accounts, the Workers Party, by 1924, was still adhering to John Pepper’s view of organizing black comrades solely on the basis of class and reeling from Jackson’s (Fort Whiteman) critique of the Comintern over issues of race as an important lens of analysis and organization.

Also, importantly, the UNIA and the Workers Party did not necessarily mean the same thing by the idea of “black liberation” or nationalism. Garvey’s program offered the liberation of black people though a policy of “racial uplift” that, as mentioned above, focused on a spiritual practice as well as self-reliance of black communities and nationalist sentiments. This idea of racial uplift had deep roots in black community organizing, being a stalwart of the program of the National Association of Colored Women and many other groups.\footnote{For more on the National Association of Colored Women see: White, \textit{Too Heavy A Load}.} The nationalism offered by the UNIA is commonly stereotyped as a “Back to Africa” program; although the UNIA did assist migration to Africa, the slogan also suggested black community engagement and the self-reliance of black communities in the US.\footnote{Vincent, \textit{Black Power and the Garvey Movement}, 107-109.} Even in its later organizing, the Communist Party never suggested a program of nationalism or black liberation that focused on self-reliance or migration to Africa. Though the terminology and the larger goals of supporting black communities and resisting white supremacy were similar, the specific meanings of nationalism and black liberation shifted between groups.

As the Workers Party was not as interested in taking up the challenges of race on its own account, the impact of Garvey’s organizing and the UNIA must be stressed here. Cedric Robinson notes that the UNIA (and the ABB) developed within a particular time and place of black immigration to the US and migration to northern US cities. Immigrants from the Caribbean islands, migrants from Cuba, Puerto Rico and the South, all descended on urban centers, and places like Harlem and the South Side of Chicago began to swell with the new arrivals looking for work. Robinson argues that the “congregating of these people, the deep disruptions that accompanied their
translocation, the persistent hostility with which they were confronted forced them on to each other, politically and socially. As such it became necessary for them to develop social and political forms that would transcend the particularistic identities due to specific historical circumstances.”

Even William Z. Foster acknowledges the impact of Garvey’s UNIA movement, stating: “The U.N.I.A. took root immediately on American soil and flourished like a green bay tree.” The official Party line in 1924 in regards to the UNIA movement, as stated in a letter signed by Ruthenburg and Foster, was: “We stand for driving the imperialist powers out of Africa and for the right of self-determination of the peoples of Africa. In taking this stand, we point out that it need not and must not involve a surrender of the Negro’s rights and equality in America or any other land.” Though relations were at times strained, the impact of the UNIA on the Comintern’s development of the resolution for self-determination should not be minimized. Harry Haywood, one of the resolution’s main authors, discusses his work on the resolution as directly critiquing the UNIA, but does acknowledge the impact Garvey’s movement had on the development of his analysis of Black Nationalism. Both Solomon and Naison highlight this connection, especially noting the close relationships between UNIA activists and Communists in Harlem and the cross fertilization of the two movements.

118 Foster, *Negro People in American History*, 442.
119 Foster, *Negro People in American History*, 450. It is also important to note that by 1919 Du Bois had formed the Pan African movement organizing toward self-determination and an overthrow of imperialism. Though the CPUSA summarily dismissed the NAACP, their influence on the organizational goals and questions of all black radical organizing of the time should be underscored.
120 For more on the impact of the UNIA see Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity* and Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*. For an interesting comparison of women in both movements see McDuffie, “[She] devoted twenty Minutes condemning all other forms of government but the Soviet: Black Women Radicals in the Garvey Movement and in the Left during the 1920s.”
In 1924 black activists called together the Negro Sanhedrin, also called the All Race Conference, in Chicago to discuss organizing around race. Though many groups were involved in an early call for such a conference, the All Race Conference was publicly first announced by Kelly Miller, who wanted to foster cooperation between black organizations but was not specifically nationalist, anti-capitalist, or particularly radical. Solomon notes that the Conference was not the achievement it could have been for many of the early organizers, such as Briggs, Huiswoud, Richard B. Moore and A. Phillip Randolph; as important early organizers of the gathering they were listed as members, but were not speakers at the conference. However, the Conference did spark a fire under Communist organizers, leading to the founding of the Negro Commission and the strengthening of Communist efforts to organize among black people. Also, despite its limitations in organization and scope, the Conference facilitated the birth of two important black radical organizations, the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters and the American Negro Labor Congress.

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, founded in 1925 by A. Philip Randolph, was the first labor organization led by blacks to work with the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Randolph had been close to Cyril Briggs in the Teens and early 1920s when Randolph was the editor of the Messenger magazine. However, by 1925 he clashed with Briggs over politics and the correct line for radical black organizing: Randolph favored working within unions, and was instrumental for many

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121 Solomon, *The Cry was Unity*, 30-31.
122 Solomon, *The Cry was Unity*, 30-31.
123 Solomon, *The Cry was Unity*, 8-10.
years in the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters, helping to break union segregation and support black railway workers.

Also founded in 1925, the American Negro Labor Congress was one of many domestic organizations of black radicals that developed between 1919 and 1928. Of all of the organizations black radicals formed and worked with, the American Negro Labor Congress had the closest ties to the Communist Party. Hutchinson notes that the American Negro Labor Congress propaganda was very open in its stance, declaring: “The American Negro Labor Congress will fight for the abolition of industrial discrimination in factories, mills, mines, and the railroads, and in all places where labor is employed.” He also argues that “delegates were explicit that race, not class, was the overriding cause of black oppression,” and that this articulation surprised many of the Communist organizers. This idea was not fully incorporated into the organizational program, which was dominated by the Communists who were focused on a class model of oppression. Though not directly started or organized by the Workers Party, as per the directives form the Comintern, the Workers Party had a large influence in the ANLC, especially through the leadership of Lovett Fort Whiteman.

Glenda Gilmore writes at length about the organizing of Lovett Fort Whiteman both in the US and later in the USSR. Fort Whiteman, a Texan by birth, was educated at the Tuskegee Institute and was the first US-born black man to join either of the early Communist Parties. In his position in the ANLC, Fort Whiteman brought black students to Russia to study in the Party schools in Moscow, worked on labor issues (though he was not as successful as Randolph), and agitated about issues of race and class.

124 Hutchinson, Blacks and Reds, 29.
125 Hutchinson, Blacks and Reds, 31.
However, as Gilmore notes, the ANLC was “geographically limited to a few large Northern cities, small in numbers, unaffiliated with the masses of black workers, and unable to penetrate the South.” The Workers Party was more successful in the South through its organizing, in 1928, of the strike in Gastonia, North Carolina, as the Black Nation Thesis was being adopted in the Comintern, and the ideas supported in the Thesis were slowly trickling into the United States.

Undergirding the work of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the American Negro Labor Congress, and other, smaller black radical organizations, was the friendships of early black communists, early radical publications such as *The Messenger*, and particularly the early work of the African Blood Brotherhood. Key members of these groups, Richard B. Moore, A Phillip Randolph, Otto Huiswoud, Chandler Owen, Grace Campbell, Wilfred A. Domingo, Cyril Briggs, and Otto Hall, were often working in multiple organizations and across various platforms of nationalism and anti-capitalism. All were, at some point, also affiliated with the African Blood Brotherhood.

**The African Blood Brotherhood: Black Communist Organizing in the 1920s**

The ABB was on the far left of black organizations from its early formation in 1919. Through various small press publications and newspaper articles the group spread the word about racism and capitalism as twin evils holding down black people in the US and across the world. Communism, from the very beginning, was looked upon favorably by the organization, though their work also engaged other black radical traditions. There

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126 Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 55.
is only scant information available about the ABB; as of yet no definitive history has been written on the group.

In *American Socialism and Black Americans*, the first of his published works of the subject, Foner sets the date for the founding of the ABB at 1917, though this date is later revised to be the founding of the journal *The Messenger* and the ABB is noted to have begun in 1919 at the same time as the splits in the Socialist Party occurred. Regardless, Foner highlights Cyril Briggs’ strong role in organizing both the journal and the semi-secret organization. Briggs, born in the West Indies in 1888, came to the US around the turn of the century and worked with the *Amsterdam News* before joining *The Messenger* journal, started by A. Phillip Randolph and Chandler Owen. Briggs went on to found the journal *The Crusader* and then begin the ABB. The ABB’s main organizing principles were “armed resistance to lynching, unqualified franchise rights for blacks in the South, a struggle for equal rights and against all forms of discrimination, and the organization of Negroes into established trade unions.”

In his later more detailed account written with James Allen, Foner continues his work collecting information about the ABB. Foner and Allen quote an interview with Briggs where he claims that the Brotherhood had a membership of 2,500 at its height with some 50 posts domestically, and a few in “South America and the West Indies.” The ABB was linked with the monthly publication called *The Crusader*. The journal, edited by Briggs, at its peak had a circulation of 33,000 and was a main conduit of leftist news for black audiences.

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127 Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, 309
which often published material developed for *The Crusader*. Erik McDuffie gives a few more details about the ABB drawing on later research. McDuffie highlights the organizing work of Grace Campbell, a strong voice involved in the leadership of the Brotherhood, but notes that there were no other women involved in the leadership of the ABB, or the ANLC.\textsuperscript{130}

A statement of the program of the ABB, appearing in *The Communist Review*, a British Communist Paper, and included in both Aptheker's and Foner and Allen's documentary histories, highlights the prophetic and targeted nature of the Brotherhood's political program on issues of race and class, though not on gender issues.\textsuperscript{131} The program included arguments about the history of African slavery and its links to colonial exploitation and capitalism, the exploitation of the African continent by the ruthless capitalists, the causes for the Civil War in the US, and the disastrous betrayal of Reconstruction which resulted in migration of black people to cities in the South and the industrial centers in the North. The ABB called for “A Great Negro Federation” years before the Sanhedrin, or All Race Assembly, held in 1924, and pushed for the organization of both black workers in service and industry and also of black farmers.\textsuperscript{132} They strove for black unions and co-operation with class-conscious white workers. The program hailed the Third International (Comintern) as the leader of liberation for all people, including black people in the US. Asserting that:

\begin{quote}
To pledge loyalty to the flags of our murderers and oppressors, to speak about alliances with the servants and representatives of our enemies, to prate about first hearing out proven enemies before endorsing our
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{130} McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, 26-38.
\textsuperscript{132} Both of these formations were building on the Universal Race Congress Du Bois helped to organize in 1911, which had as one of its goals debunking the myths of biologically based racial differences.
proven friends is nothing less than cowardice and the blackest treason to the Negro race and our sacred cause of liberation.\textsuperscript{133}

The statement of the ABB concludes with a stern dismissal of the Garvey "Back to Africa" program, calling black people working for the trivialities of intercontinental migration "pure moonshine" when one could be focusing on a serious fight for "Negro liberation."\textsuperscript{134}

However, this statement's clear dismissal might be only one part of a long history of the ABB and UNIA. Mark Solomon's two books on Communists and African Americans in the twenties and thirties are especially valuable in the wealth of information they present on the early black organizing of Cyril Briggs and the ABB. Solomon argues, "the Brotherhood had seen itself as an elite unit of committed fighters, a vanguard of sorts, influencing the mass-based Universal Negro Improvement Association. Garvey's movement, Briggs had declared, was the greatest development in modern racial organization."\textsuperscript{135} This is not to suggest that the ABB always agreed with or supported Garvey and UNIA. On the contrary, the ABB, like the Communist Party more broadly, was wary of Garvey, and though diplomatic relationships were sometimes enjoyed and at times both groups wrote favorably about one another, there were large ideological and practical divisions, not the least of which was UNIA's agitation for a separate Negro Nation in Africa.\textsuperscript{136}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Foner and Allen, \textit{American Communism and Black Americans}, 23.
\item Foner and Allen, \textit{American Communism and Black Americans}, 23.
\item Solomon, \textit{The Cry Was Unity: Communism and African Americans, 1917-1936}, 23.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
J. A. Zumoff argues that the ABB’s relationship with the UNIA was complicated, in part, because of a history of rivalries between group leaders.\footnote{Zumoff, “The African Blood Brotherhood: From Caribbean Nationalism to Communism,” in The Journal of Caribbean History, 206.} Zumoff continues that the ABB was drawn to the CPUSA not specifically because of the personal biographies of CPUSA leaders, but because of the anti-imperialist rhetoric of the Comintern and the Bolshevik Revolution. Citing the Caribbean background of many ABB leaders, including Briggs, Moore, Domingo, and Campbell, Zumoff argues that these activists were particularly attuned to the need for a strong anti-imperialist crusade.\footnote{Zumoff, “The African Blood Brotherhood: From Caribbean Nationalism to Communism,” in The Journal of Caribbean History, 201.} A strong history of anti-war activism, especially by Briggs, the continued conflict with the UNIA and Garvey, and a budding black nationalism that was tied to anti-imperialism brought the ABB into the orbit of the CPUSA. Minkah Makalani supports Zumoff’s argument, noting that the Caribbean migrant Hubert Henry Harrison had brought many of the ABB leaders into the Socialist Party.\footnote{Makalani, “Internationalizing the Third International: The African Blood Brotherhood, Asian Radicals, and Race, 1919-1922,” in The Journal of African American History, 155.} She argues that a larger view of global liberation was important to the ABB leaders, noting: “It was in attending to the intricacies of the African Diaspora that the ABB outlined a radical black internationalism capable of reaching beyond the Diaspora, to articulate black liberation to a range of anti-colonial and anti-capitalist struggles.”\footnote{Makalani, “Internationalizing the Third International: The African Blood Brotherhood, Asian Radicals, and Race, 1919-1922,” in The Journal of African American History, 158.} Part of this linking was the rhetoric of self-determination, which Briggs and Domingo noted had, under the Bolsheviks, been extended to the peoples of “Africa, Asia, and all of the colonies.”\footnote{Makalani, “Internationalizing the Third International: The African Blood Brotherhood, Asian Radicals, and Race, 1919-1922,” in The Journal of African American History, 159.}
Foner and Allen reference an interview Briggs gave to Carl Afford through the Federal Writers Project in the late 1930s, in which Briggs included a concept of “self-determination” when outlining the program of the ABB. Foner and Allen note, reversing Foner’s position expressed in his earlier work on the ABB in *American Socialism and Black Americans*,

Though Briggs mentioned self-determination in the above interview, given in the 1930s, when that concept was part of the Communist position, it is not mentioned in the full programmatic statement given below or in the scanty A.B.B. literature available today. However, Briggs himself, in early writings, suggested such an idea [and] urge[ed] also a ‘separate political existence’ for American Negroes.142

The ABB, however, regularly agitated for organizing both black and white workers, but was quick to add that race-consciousness was very important for newly organized black workers. In a publication from approximately 1923, the ABB campaigns “to establish a true rapprochement and fellowship within the darker races and with the truly class-conscious white workers.”143 The ABB was consistent in their organization around race and class as both important factors oppressing blacks in the US, a message with which the Workers Party, after some time, would come to agree.

Solomon argues that though they had many overlapping goals and a similar ideological outlook, the ABB did not immediately join with the Communist Party of America or the Communist Labor Party when they broke from the Socialists in 1919 because neither Party offered new thinking on issues facing black people.144 The clear goals of the ABB were to address these failings, organizing with race as a salient

142 Foner and Allen, *American Communism and Black Americans*, 17.
category of oppression and often organizing around race-consciousness as a way to achieve class-consciousness.\textsuperscript{145}

Foster, in his celebratory history of the CPUSA, recounts the history of the ABB and the CPUSA as:

The Communist Party from its foundation has increasingly interested itself in the fight for justice for the bitterly exploited and harassed Negro people. Among the earliest organized expressions of this Communist policy was the formation of the African Blood Brotherhood, with its paper, \textit{The Crusader}. This body, an offshoot of \textit{The Messenger} group in New York during the early 1920s, together with split-offs from the left wing of the Garvey movement, made a militant fight for Negro Rights. \textit{[sic]} The organization, however, did not achieve a mass basis; and in Chicago, in October 1925, the American Negro Labor Congress was launched. Its outstanding leader at this time was Lovett Fort-Whiteman, and its journal, \textit{The Negro Champion}.\textsuperscript{146}

By giving this quick history and claiming the ABB as a Communist group from the start, a fact that is contradicted by other accounts, Foster demonstrates how important the early black organizers were to the self-image of the CPUSA. Earlier in the book, Foster claims that by 1921 the Communist Party had begun to work with the editors of \textit{The Messenger}, a group of “Negro intellectuals and trade unionists including A. Phillip Randolph, Chandler Owen, Richard B. Moore, and Cyril Briggs.”\textsuperscript{147} Though in the 1920s the CPUSA did little to actually organize with black people, by the 1950s this history of the CPUSA’s work with black people was so important that Foster would exaggerate the involvement of the party in early black radical organizing.

To highlight this point, Foner and Allen argue that the ABB was a key inspiration of the Party. They contend that the ABB:

\textsuperscript{145} Aptheker, \textit{Documentary History of the Negro People of the United States}, Volume 3, 415-420.
\textsuperscript{146} Foster, \textit{History of the Communist Party}, 268.
\textsuperscript{147} Foster, \textit{History of the Communist Party}, 183.
May be considered among the principal sources of the Communist movement, not so much because of the number of Black recruits it provided – which were relatively few – but because of the vital contribution of its leading member in making white Communists sensitive to the meaning and dangers of racism, and to the pressing needs of the Negro.148

Cyril Briggs and the ABB’s influences gradually began to fade in 1922, and by 1925 the Party “suggested that its [the ABB’s] ‘local organizations’ merged with the forthcoming American Negro Labor Congress.” The Brotherhood did participate separately in the American Negro Labor Congress in 1925, but the merger of the ABB into the Workers Party marked the waning of support for Briggs’ “revolutionary nationalism.”149

Solomon is clear that in the early organizing of the Workers Party, class was a more salient prism of analysis than race. This was true in both of the early Communist Parties, and it was one of the main reasons that the ABB maintained some of its autonomy through the early 1920s. Even in the later 1920s and with the development of the American Negro Labor Congress, the Communists spoke of race only through their analysis of class. This made it difficult to communicate effectively with supporters of Garvey’s UNIA. As the Twenties drew to a close, the CPUSA’s analysis began to shift toward an acknowledgement of oppression based more concretely on race. This shift, which I will chronicle in more detail in the next chapter, opened the way for the Workers Party to enter black organizing communities and build ties across racial lines. First, however, a similar shift had to also take place in the Comintern and the International’s policies about race, colonialism, and class, and organizing had to shift to allow for the development of a new position on the Negro Question. Indeed, both shifts in the

148 Foner and Allen, American Communism and Black Americans, 17.
149 Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, 50.
CPUSA and in the Comintern were accomplished, in part, by the direct engagement with black organizers from the US who brought their experiences as organizers and activists to bear on the theoretical and practical discussions of the Resolution on the Negro Question.

The Comintern: The Development of the Negro Question in Moscow

Both of the US Communist Parties participated in the Third or Communist International, the Comintern, founded in Moscow in March of 1919. As mentioned earlier, it was under the direction of the Comintern that the two parties joined to form the Worker’s Labor Party (Workers Party) in 1922. The Black Nation Thesis, or the declaration of support for self-determination in the Black Belt, was developed and passed during the Comintern’s Sixth Congress in 1928. Prior to the Sixth Congress, however, the racial oppression of, and organizing opportunities with, black people in the United States were often a topic of debate in the Comintern, couched within larger discussions of colonialism and imperialism. I will quickly chart the development of the Negro Question in the Comintern leading up to the Sixth Congress and the limited reception of these developments in the US.

Even during the first meeting in March of 1919, Hutchinson notes, the Third International made support for “all movements of liberation in the colonies” a condition for joining the organization. More significant, perhaps, was a speech on the “Negro Question” at the Second World Congress of the Communist International in May of 1920 by John Reed, a respected white author and one of the founders of the Communist

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Labor Party. Foner and Allen claim that Reed’s speech “may be considered the first programmatic statement [of the Party] on the [Negro] question by one of its leaders,” arguing that he built off of Lenin’s “Draft Thesis on the National and Colonial Question” that was also presented and adopted at the conference. Reed’s speech, collected in Allen and Foner’s American Communism and Black Americans, is emblematic of the Party’s work the Negro Question at the time. Reed begins with an outline of the position of black people in the United States after the failure of Reconstruction, noting the widespread disenfranchisement of blacks, the horrors of Jim Crow, and the problems of unemployment and of segregated unions. He also notes that these factors oppressing black people often lead to outbreaks of violence. Reed discusses The Messenger, the leftist monthly publication for black radicals edited by A. Phillip Randolph. Similar to many other arguments presented by the Workers Party in its early years as noted above, Reed criticized Garvey’s “Back to Africa” movement. He argued that this movement found limited support in the US and thus the radicalism latent in the black population should be tapped by the Communist Party by “consider[ing] the Negro first of all as a laborer” analogous to the white laborer or farmer. Reed concluded with a plea for the Communists not to “stand aloof” from the black worker, but to seize the moment to organize and agitate “for social revolution not only to liberate all laborers from slavery, but also as being the only effective means of liberating the oppressed Negro people.” Reed’s influence in the party was great; academic clubs in the 1930s were called the John Reed Clubs, drawing on his popularity across many sectors of the

151 Foner and Allen, American Communism and Black Americans, 5.
152 Foner and Allen, American Communism and Black Americans, 7.
153 Foner and Allen, American Communism and Black Americans, 8.
154 Foner and Allen, American Communism and Black Americans, 8.
This speech, however, appears to have garnered scant attention in the Party press or other news accounts in the United States and had little long-term impact. In the early 1920s US Communists were embroiled in infighting, had few resources generally, and did not see organizing with black radicals as very important, though there was much lip service to the Negro Question.

At the Third Congress of the Third International in 1921 the South African delegation also noted their desire that the Executive Committee study the issue of the Negro Question, though nothing came of this request at first. At this meeting Lenin also developed a position that national liberation in colonial countries was of equal importance and an integral part of class struggle against imperialism, leading to the development of the national question within the colonial commission, all of which will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Two. The Fourth Congress opened in the winter of 1922 with many American delegates in attendance. The Congress included an extended discussion of the “American Negro Question,” with at least two black men speaking to the question: Otto Huiswoud (Billings), an active member of the ABB and the Communist Party, and the poet Claude McKay (Mackay), speaking as a “special delegate.”

Huiswoud successfully lobbied the Fourth Congress to set up a “Negro Commission” in the Comintern, which he headed, and which held the first special session on the “Negro Question.” Huiswoud’s statement to the Congress couches his analysis of the Negro Question in the history of colonialism, an acknowledgement that

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155 Solomon, The Cry was Unity, 40.
156 Draper, Roots of American Communism, 387. McKay was a ‘special delegate’ because he was not an official member of the CPUSA, though he was invited to participate in the Comintern and speak on issues facing black people in the Americas.
the Negro Commission existed as a subgroup within the Colonial Commission, and thus for Communists the Negro Question was part of the larger conversation on colonialism and imperialism. He concedes that the “Negro problem as such is fundamentally an economic problem, it is aggravated and intensified by the friction which exists between the white and Black races.”

He continues by outlining the main organizations working on the issues of black people in the US, highlighting: the NAACP, which he dismisses as led by bourgeois intellectuals; the Garvey Association, which he states is “ultra-nationalist, yet composed of a rank and file element;” and the ABB, working toward the “abolition of capitalism.”

As an instance of the influence of the CP in black communities, he mentions the Chicago Defender, a weekly radical newspaper with a distribution of 600,000 that “constantly use[s] radical propaganda material that we send out.” He concludes that the Communists should work toward organizing black people in labor unions and toward the recognition of black worker’s struggles.

Back in the US the movements on the Negro Question did not go by unmentioned this time in the Party press. Rose Pastor Stokes, a feminist, poet, and early activist with the Workers Party, wrote an enthusiastic account of the adoption of the Thesis on the Negro Question and the establishment of the Negro Commission, published in the “Daily Worker” in 1923. In this statement she argues that these two actions demonstrate “one of the most significant decisions of the Fourth Congress” for workers everywhere and comments that Americans will lead the fight for Negro rights around the world.

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revolution.’ The C.I. [Comintern], she announced, would launch ‘a special campaign’ to ‘compel admission’ of blacks into ‘the unions of the white man.’”¹⁶¹ No such campaign was started in 1922 or 1923, though conversations on the potential of union organizing with black people continued in Communist circles.

At the Fifth World Congress of the Comintern in 1924, Hutchinson notes, “John Pepper told delegates that the Party was ‘not in a position to separate the various nationalities or races.’ Pepper insisted the Comintern stick with the slogan ‘Equal rights for all nationalities and races.’”¹⁶² This comment occurred within a larger discussion as to whether to adopt the language of self-determination as was put forward by Comrade Manuilsky, a prominent Bolshevik leader from the Ukraine. Pepper, the strongest voice at the Congress, pushed aside the suggestion of self-determination and focused on the statement of equality.

A “Comrade Jackson” from the US, the alias of Lovett Fort Whiteman, also spoke at the Fifth Congress about the experience of black people in the US. Jackson/Fort-Whiteman argued for the “particular needs” of the black workers, noting the experience of the Sanhedrin earlier in 1924 as a place where the black petty bourgeois dominated the discussion because the Communists could not speak to the black workers about the issues facing them. He further argued that the Communist Party must recognize that “Negroes are not discriminated against as a class but as a race.”¹⁶³ He went on to claim: “Negroes are destined to be the most revolutionary class in America. But Communist propaganda among the Negroes is hampered by the lack of publicity

¹⁶² Hutchinson, *Blacks and Reds*, 43.
¹⁶³ Foner and Allen, *American Communism and Black Americans*, 70.
carrying a special appeal.”¹⁶⁴ These arguments, though not taken up more explicitly at
the convention, set the ground for the discussion on the Negro and Colonial Questions
at the Sixth Congress in 1928. These comments also indicate that there was some
dissent within the ranks of the delegates to the Congress. No critique of the congress
appears to have been levied by the Communist Workers Party press in the US; rather the
Comintern’s leadership was taken for granted and very influential in this period of a
small, and isolated, US Communist Workers Party.

The relationship between organizers and the central Party body began to change
between the Fifth and Sixth Congress of the Comintern as domestic organizing took
center stage for black Communists. These organizational efforts included the American
Negro Labor Congress mentioned above and the continuing work against (and
sometimes with) the UNIA and Marcus Garvey. The slogans used were often about
economic issues for black workers, but as Hutchinson notes: “In 1926, the Workers Party
finally came out for social equality in its congressional platform: “The workers and
farmers fight for repeal of all laws that discriminate against the Negro and for complete
political, industrial, and educational – in a word, social equality for the Negro.””¹⁶⁵
Hutchinson argues that 1926, after the successful founding of the American Negro
Labor Congress, is the turning point for the Workers Party to agitate for an idea of social
equality, alongside economic equality, for black people. Solomon challenges this version
of events and puts the founding of the American Negro Labor Congress squarely in the
“minds of African American Communists,” arguing that only after the Congress’
founding did they “turn to the Comintern for support in bringing it [the ANLC] to

¹⁶⁴ Foner and Allen, American Communism and Black Americans, 70.
¹⁶⁵ Hutchinson, Blacks and Reds, 47.
life.” Similarly, Gilmore, in her account of the role of Lovett Fort Whiteman, suggests the importance of the ANLC for both the Comintern and for the Workers Party, but acknowledges that the organizing success of the ANLC was limited. This did not deter Lovett Fort Whiteman, however, from delivering a speech claiming that: “The aim of the American Negro Labor Congress is to gather, to mobilize, and to co-ordinate into a fighting machine the most enlightened and militant and class conscious workers of the race.” The ANLC would not be as successful as Fort Whiteman might have anticipated with his fiery speech, but decidedly laid the groundwork for the huge organizing drives of the next decade, consolidating the Workers Party’s organizing with black radicals and bringing some of these issues to the consciousness of the rank and file Party members.

Before 1928, Foner and Allen argue that there were a few nodes of black organizing in the CUPSA. In the Party many black comrades worked to break Jim Crow rules in trade unions, addressed the often-complicated relations with the UNIA, and contributed their efforts to the presidential campaigns of William Z. Foster for the Communist Party. The campaign rhetoric for William Z. Foster for President and Benjamin Gitlow for Vice President in the 1928 campaign hints at the coming changes in the Workers Party rhetoric. Both utilize the dominant line of pre-1928 organizing with black people and on the Negro Question, while opening up a space for a new paradigm. In their platform they describe the “racial caste system” in the US as a fundamental

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166 Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*, 47.
167 Fort Whiteman in the *Daily Worker*, collected in Foner and Allen, *American Communism and Black Americans*, 112.
168 The few that existed they discuss in their documentary history, Foner and Allen, *American Communism and Black Americans*. 
feature of the racial, class, and cultural landscape of the US and identify and dismiss the capitalist rhetoric of a “lower race” and biological destiny. The campaign asserts that the Communist Party is the “Party of the liberation of the Negro race from all white oppression” but does not further articulate the reasons or causes of black people’s oppression in the US. To their credit, Foster and Gitlow did campaign heavily in the South and the Party platform had a detailed twelve point program of demands including the abolishment of Jim Crow and equal work place opportunity. Though the twelve points of the plan are well developed and the scope of the Party platform broad, the analysis of the plight of black people in the US does not delve into the sources of the special oppression of blacks in a white dominated capitalist system, taking the argument only a little further than the race vs. class model employed earlier in the 1920s. It will take the Third Period, marked by the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928, for the Communist Party to develop a full theoretical understanding of the oppression of black people in the United States.

CHAPTER 2

The Resolution on the Negro Question
The Sixth Congress of the Comintern and the Development of the Black Nation
Thesis, 1928-1930

“The Negro working class has reached a state of development which enables it, if properly organized and well led, to fulfill its double historical mission:
(a) To play a considerable role in the class struggle against American imperialism as an important part of the American working class; and
(b) To lead the movement of the oppressed masses of the Negro population.”
- Resolution on the Negro Question, 1928

“To the many thousands of Black, Brown and Yellow students, the effort of the USSR to give them a chance to become acquainted with the real world and with objective truth was a priceless gift.”
-William Patterson, The Man Who Cried Genocide

William Patterson, a lawyer from Harlem, recalls his time in the USSR fondly. He was in the USSR in the late 1920s, sponsored by the Workers Party to attend the University of the Toiling People of the Far East. In his autobiography The Man Who Cried Genocide, amid reminiscences of the people he met and the places he visited, he recalls the startling differences of Russia and Moscow. First he comments on the feel of the city, its quiet streets, the different foods, clothing, smells as a stark contrast from Oakland, San Francisco, and Harlem, the large cities where he had grown up and lived. The second difference he remarks upon, as “an American Negro,” is “the discovery that

171 Patterson, The Man Who Cried Genocide, 103.
there is no racial tension in the air.” Indeed, he argues “The Russians seemed to give a man’s skin coloration only a descriptive valued, looking immediately past this attribute to the significant human differences of character, mind and heart.”172 These comments frame his story of the meetings at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International, where he describes his discussions with other African Americans and interested Comintern leaders about the struggles facing black people in the United States.

Similarly to Patterson, in his political autobiography, *Black Bolshevik*, Harry Haywood describes his time in the Soviet Union as exciting, his tenure at the Lenin School as challenging and enlightening, and his role in developing the Resolution on the Negro Question at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International as some of the most important work of his life.173 He offers vivid details of the Congress, relating spirited debates over the role of black organizers in the Party, the needs of black workers in the US and across the world, and the internal politics of working in the Comintern. He discusses the development of the Resolution on the Negro Question as a long debate, synthesizing many viewpoints to arrive at a succinct analysis of the problems of black people around the world. In all of this he highlights the pivotal importance of the Resolution on the Negro Question. Of the 1928 Resolution, Haywood remarks: “The document was not a complete and definite statement, but a new departure, a revolutionary turning point, in the treatment of the Afro-American question.”174 Such a sentiment soundly summarizes the impacts of the Sixth Congress of the Communist

172 Patterson, *The Man Who Cried Genocide*, 112.
International: a new departure, a revolutionary turning point, but not a definite statement.

At the Sixth Congress, in the summer of 1928, the Comintern declared that capitalism was entering a period of terminal crisis worldwide, necessitating a change in organizing tactics, ominous revolutionary rhetoric, and a purge of activists not agreeing with the new line. The policy change was widely discussed as important because of a broader understanding of the changing nature of the economy: in 1928 the world was entering the “Third Period” of capitalism, rapid decline wedded with great revolutionary potential. The Communist Parties of the world, the Comintern argued, needed to prepare themselves to lead the way to a new revolutionary future, to organize the working class, and to bring forth the revolutionary class-consciousness latent in the hungry millions.\textsuperscript{175} This vanguardist approach was in sharp contrast to the US Workers Party’s existence as factionalist, underground organization for almost decade. Much of the factionalism remained in the Third Period; the Communist Party USA was highly sectarian and daily politics involved denouncing other left and left-leaning organizations.\textsuperscript{176} The “Third Period,” while it did not suggest the broad coalition politics that would be ushered in with the “Popular Front” a few years later, did suggest a more socially and politically engaged Party outlook and more clearly articulated organizing goals.

Alongside the move to the rhetoric of the “Third Period,” the Sixth Congress also marked a significant change in the particular political leadership of the Workers Party. As mentioned, the Party for most of the previous decade had suffered from

\textsuperscript{175} For more on the Third Period see: Solomon, \textit{The Cry Was Unity}, 96-109; Foster, \textit{History of the Communist Party of the United States}, 276-280.

\textsuperscript{176} Foster, \textit{History of the Communist Party of the United States}, 283.
infighting and factionalism, often turning to the Comintern to sort out leadership issues and governance structure. The Sixth Congress saw a sea change in the Workers Party, and one of the first real purges of former Party leadership. The Congress sparked the ousting of James P. Cannon, a member of the Central Committee in the Workers Party, and the internal politics of the Comintern foretold the expulsion of Jay Lovestone within a year of the convention. Both men were charged with opposition to the Party: Cannon for Left Opposition, or Trotskyism, and Lovestone for Right Opposition, or following Bukharin.177

Finally, with the passage of the Resolution on the Negro Question, the Sixth Congress marked the culmination of many years of discussion of, and organizing on, issues of race and class. Of specific importance was the role and purpose of black communist struggle, a process that began with Lenin’s comments at the Second Congress in 1920.178 The passage of the Resolution on the Negro Question involved internal struggles and compromise, eventually developing a draft resolution that, while groundbreaking, was not widely publicized and received little attention. This prompted the Negro Commission to revisit the Resolution in 1930 and reissue it with some clarifications and a new impetus towards concrete on-the-ground organization. The clarification of the Resolution on the Negro Question received much more attention in the US press and world-wide, prompting accelerated organizing in black communities, increasing support and acknowledgement of black activists in the Party, and a

177 For more on this see: Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, 75-76; Foster, History of the Communist Party of the United States, 272.
178 As discussed in Chapter 1, Lenin also developed a position that national liberation in colonial countries was of equal importance and an integral part of class struggle against imperialism leading to the development of the national question within the colonial commission. See: Draper, Roots of American Communism, 387
reorganization of the work with radical black communities and groups in both the South and across cities in the North, most notably Harlem and Chicago.

This chapter traces the development of the Resolution on the Negro Question through the Sixth Congress of the Comintern and its subsequent development in the Communist Party, USA. I pay particular attention to the development of the Resolution in Russia and the reception of the Resolution in the US, both in 1928 and again after its reissue in 1930. The chapter opens with an analysis of the Resolution on the Negro Question, a part of the Thesis on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies. To make sense of the Resolution and the impact it had on Party politics, I offer a discussion of the Third Period more broadly and describe throughout the other activist campaigns supported by the CPUSA during the Third Period. Since my later analysis of the pamphlets resulting from the Resolution on the Negro Question rely on an understanding of the Party politics of the late 1920s and early 1930s, I also detail some of the debates within the US delegation to the Sixth Congress of the Comintern and briefly discuss the changes in Party leadership and rhetoric.

Finally, this chapter lays the groundwork to understand the development of the Black Nation Thesis through pamphlet literature of the 1930s by examining the context of the Resolution, the various early interpretations of the text, and the Party’s larger political goals and policies. The unique space to think about race, class, and gender carved out by the Black Nation Thesis was by no means solely a product of the Comintern, but it was through the Comintern’s Resolution on the Negro Question that such a space was offered for the US Communist Party. Detailing the development of the Resolution of the Communist International on the Negro Question in the United States, from September 1928 and October 1930, will provide the necessary background
to build an analysis of the pamphlet material produced by the Communist Party, USA, around the Black Nation Thesis.

The 1928 Resolution on the Negro Question

The 1928 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question in the United States articulates: “The Negro working class has reached a state of development which enables it, if properly organized and well lead, to fulfill its double historical mission: (a) To play a considerable role in the class struggle against American imperialism as an important part of the American working class; and (b) To lead the movement of the oppressed masses of the Negro population.” This opening statement succinctly frames the rest of the resolution which outlines both the importance of work with black people in the United States as well as how this work will have a world-wide impact.

Developing through 25 specific points, the Resolution on the Negro Question in the United States outlines the Comintern’s ideas about organizing with black communities. The first point acknowledges that “the industrialization of the South, the concentration of a new Negro working class population in the big Cities of the East and the North and the entrance of the Negroes into the basic industries on a mass scale, create the possibility for the Negro Workers, under the leadership of the Communist Party, to assume hegemony of all Negro Liberation movements, and to increase their importance and role in the revolutionary struggle of the American proletariat.” While the second point suggests that because of the concentration of black people in the rural South, they are particularly exploited by Northern white capitalism.

The resolution proceeds to cite statistics of where the black population in the US lives, and uses this data to declare that in the “Black Belt” area black people constitute more than 50% of the population and are cruelly exploited and persecuted. These factors combined, the high population density and the continued exploitation and persecution, “provide the necessary conditions for a national revolutionary movement among the Negroes.”\textsuperscript{181} Black workers should, according to the Resolution, organize this national movement and the Communist Party must agitate amongst the white workers to support the struggles of black workers.

Points four and five outline how the oppression of black people in the Black belt is the “necessary condition for the national revolutionary movement.” Articles six and seven discuss that such a movement should organize for the “complete emancipation of the oppressed Negro race.”\textsuperscript{182} Part of the Party’s organization should be the “championing of the rights of the oppressed Negro race for full emancipation. While continuing and intensifying the struggle under the slogan of full social and political equality for the Negroes.”\textsuperscript{183}

Later the Resolution offers direct steps for how the Party should proceed, including organizing against white chauvinism, direct work with black people in the South including setting up more chapters of the Party, increased work on integration of unions and the creation of working class organizations and unions specifically for and by black people. Of particular interest, perhaps, is the declaration that the Party should push for work that organizes black women, who “by reason of their color and their sex”

\textsuperscript{181} “1928 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question,” 14.
\textsuperscript{182} “1928 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question,” 15.
\textsuperscript{183} “1928 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question,” 15.
receive doubly harsh treatment and are doubly ignored by most organizations.\footnote{184} This formulation of gender and race is particularly important for later CPSUA work, especially the 1940s work of Claudia Jones.\footnote{185} As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, there were some precedents in the US for such a formulation, specifically the work of black and white women in Harlem.\footnote{186} However, these important comments on race, class, and gender were not picked up in the publicity of the 1928 Resolution, and there was no mention of gender, or the exploitation of black women, in the 1930 revision of the Resolution.

The 25-point Resolution on the Negro Question was part of a larger Resolution on the Colonial Question, as the Negro Commission was a sub-commission of the Colonial Commission in the larger structure of the Comintern organization. The resolution also makes clear that the “Negro question in the United States must be treated in its relation to the Negro questions and struggles in other parts of the world.”\footnote{187} The resolution’s focus on black people as operating within an international context of race is important. For one, this framework enables the Comintern and the US party to connect struggles against colonialism and imperialism with the work for black liberation. Secondly, the international focus enables the Comintern, the Colonial Commission, and the various Parties to bring together different theoretical trajectories under the rubric of the Negro Question. Under the resolution, the Negro Question spoke to people organizing across the world and with many different histories with race, colonialism, and

\footnote{184}{“1928 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question,” 19.}
\footnote{185}{See: Jones, \textit{An End to the Neglect of the Problem of the Negro Woman}; Davies, \textit{Left of Karl Marx}, and McDuffie, \textit{Sojourning for Freedom}.}
\footnote{186}{McDuffie, \textit{Sojourning for Freedom}, 49-51.}
\footnote{187}{“1928 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question,” 16.}
nationalism. These different histories include the South African Communist Party and the Native Republic Thesis, which argued that black South Africans needed to be central to the work of the Communist Party, the CPUSA where class was the primary organizing model, and colonial Parties where race, class, and colonialism were inextricably linked. Indeed, the Negro Commission of the Comintern encouraged connection and dialogue between the US and South African delegates around issues of race, as well as with delegates from Latin America, the Caribbean, and other parts of Africa. Solomon notes that at the meetings on the Resolution on the Negro Question, Bennett, a Comintern official, admitted that there was already a Committee in place to “report on Negro issues in countries other than the United States and South Africa.” The Commission then decided that this commission would be expanded to include members from the US, members from South Africa, a member from Latin America, as well as Comintern officials.

The multiple points of view led to a sometimes complicated Resolution as all parties to the discussion attempted to have their say. Point number five, under the title “For Complete Emancipation of Oppressed Negro Race,” is a prime example of the complicated, and sometimes obscure, language that obfuscates the various important ideas in the Resolution:

To accomplish this task, the Communist Party must come out as the champion of the right of the oppressed Negro race for full emancipation. While continuing and intensifying the struggle under the slogan of full social and political equality for the Negroes, which must remain the central slogan of our Party for work among the masses, the

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189 Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, 79.
190 Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, 77-79.
Party must come out openly and unreservedly for the right of the Negroes to national self-determination in the southern states, where the Negroes form a majority of the population.\footnote{1928 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question,” 15.}

This section holds within it one of the central tenants of the resolution, the idea of a Negro Nation and the right of self-determination, yet it sparked a great flurry of questions when presented to the public. What was meant by “national self-determination” and how was this related to and different from the work of the American Negro Labor Congress? Indeed, the American Negro Labor Congress had been organizing around issues facing black people in the North, but had done little work in the South. How was a Southern policy to be developed? These questions plagued the small number of black activists in the Party.

The document is clear that mass action is needed and that the Party needs to grow in black communities. The Resolution continues to lay out specific “Tasks of the Party in Relation to Negro Work,” enumerating a fight against chauvinism, the training of black leaders in the Party, and the transformation of “The Negro Champion [the journal of the ANLC] into a weekly mass organ of the Negro proletariat and tenant farmers.”\footnote{“1928 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question,” 19.}

These tasks, along with the “fight – by propaganda and by deed” were clear suggestions for mass action, and in-line with Third Period Party rhetoric. However important these concepts were, there were still many questions left by the 1928 Resolution. These questions, centering on the concepts of “nation,” “colonies,” and “self-determination,” would be more thoroughly explored in the second resolution passed in 1930.

The Resolution on the Negro Question came out of a congress that was rocked by controversial shifts in Comintern Policy. To contextualize the Resolution, I will
The “Third Period”: Communist Organizing Principle from 1928-1934

For the Communists the Third Period of world capitalism marked a crisis in the capitalist system that would give rise to a surge in Communist organizing. Stalin unveiled the new organizing policy at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International in the summer of 1928, just over a year before the 1929 US stock market crash that brought on the Great Depression.

Harvey Klehr, a prominent historian of the CPUSA, in his book *The Heyday of American Communism*, asserts that the nomenclature of the “periods” of Communist organizing was cyclical and related to the perceived or predicted phases of capitalist development and stabilization. He argues: “If capitalism was on the upswing, that dictated a more cautious, reformist Communist stance. If capitalism was decaying, then militancy was the order of the day.”\(^{93}\) The periods noted both the relative stability and cyclicaling of capitalism but also the strength of revolutionary movements countering capitalist development. The first period, a down swing for capitalism, was just after World War I, marked by revolutionary struggles such as the Bolshevik Revolution. The

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second period was the strengthening of capitalism and the boom years of the 1920s, specifically after the 1923 German workers’ uprising had been quashed. Following this logic, the third period was to see a huge crisis in capitalism and the rising tide of communist organizing worldwide. Of the Third Period Michael Goldfields writes, “it prophetically predicted that the prosperity would soon end, that capitalism would suffer grave economic collapse. It also announced, less prophetically, that a new wave of revolutionary struggle was about to begin.”

The organizing principles of the Third Period were decidedly different than the previous Party politics and procedures. The new rhetoric emphasized militancy and limited compromise. Klehr noted that “the united front from below,” the rhetoric used by the Party, often also meant a turning away from social democratic goals and coalitions and building a working class united front, excluding socialists and reformers who were understood, by the Party, as “objectively bourgeois.” The Third Period was characterized by slogans such as “class against class,” most often associated with and used by the trade unions and especially the dual union movement of TUUL, the Trade Union Unity League, which replaced TUEL, the Trade Union Educational League. Another catch phrase of the Third Period was “social fascists,” used to designate social democrats and other groups that were perceived, by the communists, to be reformist and working with, or willing to work with, organizers to the right of the Communists.

As a theoretical move, the Third Period is an interesting change in tactics. In part political wrangling and in part economic policy, the Third Period, as developed by

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196 Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, 14.
Stalin, Nikolai Bukharin, and others, emerged out of a struggle for power in the CPUSSR. The Third Period marked a shift in the Comintern and CPUSSR rhetoric toward collectivization, such as the often forced collectivization of farmland in the Ukraine. The rhetoric of the Third Period emerged out of a claim that capitalism was entering a state of crisis and thus the organization of the Comintern and the national Communist Parties needed to shift to accommodate the potential changes in the world economy.

The Third Period’s prediction of capital’s impending doom, however, soon seemed prophetic and timely, if accidentally so, as the US stock market collapsed in October 1929. Economic markers aside, the downfall of capitalism seemed to be just around the corner, and thus the organization of the working class was of vital importance. The Communist Party, USA, threw their paltry weight behind organizing the unemployed, strengthening unions, and, in a new move also suggested by the Comintern, organizing blacks with new fervor. In part the organizing of black workers and farmers had been developed for many years in the Comintern, though not always as part of the National Question. However, the Third Period and the Resolution on the Negro Question from the Sixth Congress brought these traditions to a head in 1928.

197 Nicholas N. Kozlov and Eric D. Weitz suggest that although Stalin is usually credited with the development of the Third Period rhetoric, its actual architect was Nikolai Bukharin, the leader of the Comintern who was expelled from the Party shortly after the 1928 Congress. Kozlov and Weitz argue that Bukharin’s analysis was careful and theoretically well developed. However, because of political shifts, Bukharin lost favor in the Central Committee of the Soviet Party, and thus the rationale behind the Third Period became just another thing to be discarded with the disgraced Comintern leader. See: Kozlov and Weitz, “Reflections on the Origins of the ‘Third Period’: Bukharin, the Comintern, and the Political Economy of Weimar Germany,” Journal of Contemporary History.

198 This forced collectivization, as well as the policies of accumulation that led up to it, was, in part, responsible for the devastating famine in the early 1930s in the Ukraine and other areas called the Holodomor.
The Third Period in the US: Economic Crisis and Impacts on Black Organizing

In his *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, Foster focuses his discussion of the Third Period on the economic crisis and organizational efforts among the unemployed and work with unions. Foster barely mentions the Party’s work with black people; rather, his description of the Party work between 1928 and 1934 focuses on labor, wages, and unions highlighting the formation of TUUL, the Trade Union Unity League. Foster sums up the economic crisis of 1929 with figures from the *Labor Fact Book* from 1934:

> The golden era of ‘permanent prosperity’ in the United States was brought to a sudden end by the terrific stock-market crash of October 1929. This was accompanied by a headlong fall in all spheres of the national economy, a decline which continued without let up for the next four years. Over $160 billion in stock-market values were wiped out, basic industry production sank by 50 percent, 5,761 banks failed, and the value of farm products fell from $8.5 billion to $4 billion. Wage cuts for all industries ran to at least 45 percent. By 1933 some 17 million workers were walking the streets unemployed, and many millions more were on part time.

Of the impact of the economic and social crisis of the 1930s on black people in the US, Foster states: “The Negro masses – workers and sharecroppers – suffered most during the terrible crisis years. In the industrial centers unemployment among them ran about twice as high as among whites. Negro workers were laid off and whites given their jobs at lower wages. Wages for Negro workers averaged 30 percent less than for whites.”

The irony here is that in hindsight Foster highlights the wretched conditions for black

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people in the US after the stock market crash, but at the time the Party had almost no organizational projects addressing unemployment in black communities.202

The statistics don’t paint much of a picture of the destruction and pain the Great Depression caused for black people, who had already been suffering under Jim Crow laws and labor exploitation in the boom years of the 1920s. When the cotton price plunged from 18 to six cents per pound, sharecroppers often earned nothing from their work in the fields. Many of these sharecroppers had been in debt before harvest and fell farther behind on payments. Some starved on the plantations, while others moved to cities looking for jobs. However, in cities, jobs as a busboy, maid, cook, or elevator operator, that had often gone to urban blacks, were now gobbled up by unemployed white people. Black unemployment was at nearly 50% by 1932, and in Harlem blacks were unemployed at numbers one and a half to three times as great as whites.203 Violence also increased along with the rising racial tension. Groups like the KKK and the Black Shirts organized groups to drive black people out of cities, and terrorize black farm workers.204

Communists were among the groups who tried to address the growing inequity of black people during the Great Depression. Unemployed Councils and unemployment relief, tenants rights and debt relief, de-segregated unions and black specific unions, were just some of the campaigns Party organizers waged to address the suffering of both blacks and whites during the economic collapse. The work with black communities was at least rhetorically supported by the recent passage of the Resolution

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202 The only active Party organization addressing black communities at the time was the American Negro Labor Congress, which was too small to be very effectual.
203 Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*, 31.
204 Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 106-111.
on the Negro Question. Although the largest campaigns, in terms of numbers of people involved, were the Unemployed Councils and relief efforts, the Party’s work with black organizers was widely publicized and vitally important.

The popularity and spread of these programs, both unemployment relief and work in black communities, is one of the reasons CPUSA membership increased substantially in the Third Period. Michael Goldfield asserts there was a substantial growth in membership between 1929 and 1933 from 7,000 to 26,000, though he notes that most of this increase happened between 1932 and 1933. He attributes a large portion of this growth to the Party’s work with black people in this time, specifically the Scottsboro campaign, the work with black unemployed in urban centers, and the organizing with sharecroppers in the South. He argues that the US Communist Party grew more than other Communist Parties and other radical groups in the US partially because of its work with black people. As Goldfield asserts:

The real distinguishing positive feature of the Third Period, however, that made the party unique among U.S. radical groups, was its line on and commitment to the fight against black oppression. Largely because of this position, the Party’s work in the Third period in the U.S., in contrast to Communist work in many other countries, did reap many positive results.²⁰⁵

He follows this up asserting that the Negro question was revolutionary because it centered the problems black people faced in the US, framed the demands against black oppression as “a fundamental challenge to the whole capitalist system,” and won whites to the program of black liberation thus uniting the working class.²⁰⁶ Many of these claims about CPUSA rhetoric will be taken up specifically in the following chapters.

The ideas that a challenge to capitalism brought black people into the Party is reflected in Foster’s claim: “At the [US] Communist Party’s sixth convention, in March 1929, Jack Stachel reported that there were about 200 Negro members, but a year later, in the membership drive beginning March 6, 1930, which brought in a total of 6,167 recruits, no less than 1,300 of these were Negroes – so rapidly was Communist sentiment growing among the Negro masses.” Goldfield explains this growth by noting that “the Communist Party had powers of attraction based on its roots, its work, and its politics during the 1920s and early 1930s which far exceeded those of all other radical groups.” He comes to this conclusion by arguing that a dedicated scholar cannot just look at membership statistics to ascertain a social movement’s impact; rather one must look at times when the movement “gained sympathy, increased its respect, or made important breakthroughs” such as the few years after the articulation of the Black Nation Thesis for the Communist Party in the United States. Naison, Kelley, Gilmore, Solomon, and McDuffie’s histories of the period all echo this idea by highlighting the impressive and important gains made by black Communists and Communists in black communities. It is important to note that other areas of Communist organization also grew in the early 1930s, though not at such startling rates as among African Americans. Unemployment relief work was extremely important to the Party and to its new members, and the Unemployed Councils brought many activists into the Party.

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207 Foster, History of the Communist Party of the United States, 269.
210 Kelley, Hammer and Hoe; Naison, Communists in Harlem during the Depression; Solomon, The Cry Was Unity; Mc Duffie, Sojourning for Freedom.
The Third Period officially came to an end with the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, held in 1935 and the adoption of the rhetoric of the Popular Front against fascism. However, the transition to a rhetoric of a united front began in the US as early as the 13th Plenum of the CPUSA in late 1933. Though there was continued work with black people in the North and the South during the Popular Front, the character and candor of the organizations for black liberation changed. Goldfield argues that the cost of the broad and coalition-based focus of the Popular Front was the loss of the “League of Struggle for Negro Rights, the party auxiliary that agitated against lynching and gave the full party analysis of the roots of black oppression; its publication, the *Liberator*, was also discontinued. Perhaps most significant, however, was the quiet abandonment in 1936 of the militant Sharecroppers Union in the South.”

These changes, Goldfield notes, impacted the Party’s work in black communities in material and dramatic ways.

Writing before Goldfield, Naison’s analysis of Harlem and Kelley’s work on Alabama both support the idea that the Popular Front policies themselves did not necessarily strengthen the Party’s work with black people. Naison notes that the Harlem Party benefited from building coalitions with other leftist organizations, and also with liberal or reform minded groups. However, he argues that coalition politics in Harlem were not indebted to the Comintern’s Popular Front rhetoric, but grew out of the organizational developments of the Harlem Party. Writing about the Alabama Party

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211 Indeed, the change to the Popular Front was predominantly couched in the European politics and a campaign against fascism as is easily understood on Georgi Dimitrov’s speech at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935. The impacts of the Popular Front rhetoric in the US, however, were broader than its European roots, profoundly impacting the organizational structure of the Party.


213 Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*, chapters 6 and 7.
and building off Naison’s work, Kelley claims that while negotiating the new Party line of working with the middle class in a Popular Front, Comintern directives were less important. Rather, Kelley argues that changes in policy in Alabama to coalition with other black organizations grew out of the work happening in Harlem. As will be detailed in later chapters, there was a significant overlap between the centers of black organizing in the US; in any one given period, prominent black organizers regularly traveled and worked in Alabama, Chicago, and New York.

In the South particularly, Kelley suggests that the Party’s organizing goals changed very little over the next decade or so after the Third Period. Even the huge shifts in Party policy from pro-war to pro-peace had little impact on the organizing in the South. Rather, the stalwarts of the Party program, voting rights, civil liberties, employment, and housing, were maintained throughout the decade. Similarly, he says that the late 1940s reinvigorating of the slogan of self-determination under Foster was not taken up by Southern leaders, who continued with the same course of action that had been developed in the early 1940s, focusing on education and building broad coalitions to deal with racial tensions. At this same time, local black influences in the central Party declined as the leadership consolidated.

Indeed, the coalitional policies prefiguring the Popular Front were important to the development and continued success of both the Harlem and Alabama parties. To that end, many of the policies of broad coalition building while maintaining some revolutionary fervor were developed and promoted in Harlem and Alabama before the

Comintern and CPUSA adopted them. However, the Comintern and Central Committee’s rhetoric of self-determination, and, more so, the organizing efforts and especially small press literature developed under this rhetoric, were also important to the development and strength of the Party and its work among and with black organizers. As will be discussed in later chapters, of particular importance were the campaigns against white chauvinism in the Party, the discussion of black nationalism and self-determination, and the development of an understanding of race and class as linked. These practical and theoretical considerations were facilitated by the Comintern’s passing of the Resolution on the Negro Question and the CPUSA’s organizing around that Resolution.

**Sixth Congress and Changes in Party Leadership**

The Resolution on the Negro Question came out of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, which was noteworthy for the changes in policy and rhetoric for the Communist Parties worldwide, the Third Period, as discussed above. Even more particularly for the US, the Sixth Congress marked a significant change in Party leadership that would shape the development of both the internal organization of the Workers Party but also the kinds of campaigns and activities the Party could and would support. In order to understand the development of the Negro Question at the Sixth Congress, this section quickly outlines some of the factional struggles undergirding the conversations and the main organizers’ positions in the Negro Commission. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Negro Commission was started in the Workers Party by John Pepper (Joseph Pogany), as the Communists’ first attempt to formalize organization with and among black people. Lovett Fort Whiteman was named as the chief organizer, but
many prominent Workers Party leaders served on the committee or were involved in its conversations. At the Sixth Congress the leadership of these men was challenged alongside the Central Committee of the Workers Party, all of which has a stark impact on the development of the Resolution on the Negro Question.

Going into the Sixth Congress in 1928, the Workers Party was under the leadership of Jay Lovestone. Lovestone, who had been in the leadership group forming the Communist Party of America (CPA) in 1919, went on to become the editor of the CPA newspaper, *The Communist*, and then later was on the editorial board of *The Liberator*, the organ of the Workers Party. In 1927, after the previous leader Charles Ruthenberg’s death, Lovestone became the Party’s National Secretary. In the Party factionalism of the mid-920s, Lovestone was adherent to, and later a leader of, the Pepper-Ruthenberg faction. John Pepper (Joseph Pogany), a Hungarian-born Comintern activist in the US, and Charles Ruthenberg argued for a united-front labor policy and organized primarily out of New York. On the other side was the Foster-Cannon group, who organized from Chicago and was interested in radicalizing the American Federation of Labor and agitating for radical policies from within unions. The Workers Party was an uncomfortable and sometimes uneven balance of power between the two factions, each being represented on the Central Committee of the Party and therefore present at the fateful Sixth Congress.

These splits in the Workers Party were also tied to the battles for power in Moscow, and the power plays ricocheted across the Parties. The Communist Party leadership in Moscow in the late 1920s was still reeling from the death of Lenin and the reorganization of the Party under Joseph Stalin. In 1926-27, Leon Trotsky, Lev Kamenev, and Grigory Zinoviev joined forces to form the United Opposition to Stalin’s
leadership of the Party. This effort was unsuccessful and in October 1927 Trotsky and Zinoviev were expelled from the Central Committee; they were thrown out of the Party in November.\footnote{For more on the USSR Central Committee Politics see: Foster, *History of the Communist Party*, Draper, *The Roots of American Communism*, 380-385; Draper, *American Communist and Soviet Russia*, 425-435; Cannon, *The History of American Trotskyism*, 40-60. Zinoviev and Kamenev would later be tried in the first of the 1930s Moscow Show Trials, the Trial of the Sixteen, where they were both found guilty of forming a terrorist organization that planned to kill Stalin and shot on 25 August 1936.} At the Sixth Congress, Trotsky, though in exile, made a plea to the Congress to overturn his ousting by the Central Committee of the Soviet Union. The plea was unsuccessful, but was seen by many and bolstered support for Trotsky’s position. One of the people this plea brought to Trotsky’s position was James P. Cannon, of the Foster-Cannon group, who began to organize support in the US for Trotsky and Trotsky’s arguments. As Cannon’s support for Trotsky was uncovered, Lovestone lead the charge for Cannon’s expulsion from the Party in 1928, charging him with Left Opposition.

Lovestone would soon also be expelled from the Party, though because of his support for the Right Opposition, falling as yet another victim of the organizational purges starting the late 1920s. Lovestone was a vocal supporter of Nikolai Bukharin, a sharp economist involved with the discussions around the Third Period policy of Comintern. Foster, on the other hand, was aligned with Stalin and the Central Committee. As discussed briefly above, Bukharin had previously affiliated himself with Stalin in the USSR Central Committee. In 1928, however, Bukharin disagreed with Stalin over his economic plan and challenged the direction of the Party. He fell from power just after the Congress and Lovestone, who had vocally supported him and relied on his support for his position in the US Central Committee, was likewise shuttled from power.
Foster describes the ousting of the former Party General Secretary, Lovestone, as a result of his rightist stance and especially his articulation of “American Exceptionalism” whereby he argued that capitalism in the US was stronger than in other countries and thus the Party should adopt a different organizing model than the Comintern.218 Foster sums up the experience with Lovestone as: “The elimination of the unhealthy, non-Communist Trotskyite and Lovestone elements, who were basically responsible for the unprincipled aspects of the factional fight, had finally made it possible to unify the Party. Thus the six long years of sharp factionalism from 1923 to 1929 came to an end.”219 The unity was achieved under Foster and Earl Browder, who had just returned from work in China on behalf of the Comintern.220 Foster and Browder had worked together previously in various union-centered activities mainly based out of Chicago, where Foster had led one of the factions of the US Party in the 1920s. Foster and Browder united the Workers Party with a focus on Third Period politics of radical militant organizing and the leadership of the Comintern on all aspects of Party policy and theory.

This brief sketch of the internal politics of the Central Committees of both the Communist Party of the USSR and the Workers Party show the very convoluted and sometimes vicious power struggles that dominated much of the Party activism in the 1920s. By 1930 the infighting would decrease for a few years, but many would feel the impacts of the former struggles. One of the impacts was the central role of the Comintern in solving problems in the US. Since it was through and alongside the

218 Foster, History of the Communist Party of the United States, 272.
220 Foster, The History of the Communist Party of the United States, 276-286; Draper, American Communism and Soviet Russia, 430-432.
Comintern that many of the factionalist struggles were resolved, the position of the Comintern was cemented in the leadership of the Workers Party. Similarly, as Lovestone was thrown out of the party for his vocal support of the policy of “American Exceptionalism,” such an argument became taboo. Rather, under the leadership of Foster and Browder, the Workers Party struggled with the dictates of the Comintern and continued to increase Party membership with the strong leftist line of the Third period. In part because of Lovestone’s recent ouster, any claims of “American Exceptionalism,” or that policies developed in Moscow or by the Comintern wouldn’t work in the US, were disallowed or patently ignored.

**Development of the Resolution on the Negro Question in Russia**

The Resolution on the Negro Question paled in comparison to the policy changes of the Third Period and the shifts in Comintern and Workers Party leadership more generally. However, this Resolution was to become an important movement in the history of black radicalism in the US. As discussed at length in the previous chapter, the Negro Question had been brewing for the past decade, with multiple mentions of the Negro Question and the oppression of black people in the US at Comintern Conventions and the forming of the Negro Commission at the Fourth Congress in 1924. The Communists in the United States, however, had not adopted the idea of a separate nation for black people nor the program of self-determination until 1928, regardless of the various resonances this idea had with others presented by Briggs and the African Blood Brotherhood. Rather, the Party policy had always stressed the primacy of class, with race understood as a lesser aspect of class-oppression. The Resolution on the Negro Question changed this, suggesting the primary importance of race as an
organizing tool and foregrounding the idea of nationality as a key way the Party would organize around race and class. I trace here the development of the Resolution, looking at the various positions on the Negro Question that were offered prior to and at the Sixth Congress and offering an analysis of how the Resolution was developed.

The development of the Resolution in the Soviet Union is a hotly debated topic, as is the statement’s eventual impact in the US. Harry Haywood, in his autobiography *Black Bolshevik*, gives a detailed description of the proceedings that resulted in the resolution, of which he was a primary architect. Mark Solomon’s more recent work, *The Cry Was Unity*, and Glenda Gilmore’s *Defying Dixie*, are the most comprehensive and best-researched overviews of the development of the Black Nation Thesis of self-determination in Moscow at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern. Solomon, particularly, extensively researched the transcripts of the proceedings from the Negro and Colonial Commissions from the Congress, which became available in the 1990s with the opening up of the archives of the Communist Party and the Comintern in Moscow. Working with these archival records and the account of the Negro Commission proceedings given by Haywood in his autobiography, it is possible to begin to trace the fraught development of the thesis in the Comintern. Some of the texts of the arguments on the floor of the sub-committee tasked with preparing the statement, as well as in the Negro Commission, were published in the *Communist International* magazine and were available to the public after the Congress. The sub-committee that drew up the recommendation included Haywood, his brother Otto Hall, Clarence Hathaway, and N. (Charles) Nasanov, who worked with the Young Communist International and had spent time in the US. Others involved in the Negro Commission at various times included: Sen Katayama, originally from Japan but working in the US; Robert Minor, then
representative to the Comintern from the US; James Ford, William Patterson (William Wilson), and William F. Donne, all from the US; and Andre Shiek (Sik), a Hungarian and also an instructor in Moscow at the University of the Toilers of the East where Hall and Haywood had been in school.

As mentioned earlier, there are scholarly arguments about the development of the Black Nation Thesis, the usefulness of the content of the thesis, and the eventual impact the thesis had in the US. Theodore Draper, a prominent if often criticized historian of the CPUSA, is incorrect in his assertion that “there had never been a single word, written or spoken, in the American party, on the right of self-determination of the Negroes of the Black Belt, before the Sixth World Congress. The entire discussion was conducted and the decision was made in Moscow.” This argument is not borne out by other texts. Other works document that, especially amongst black radical organizations, ideas of nationalism, and even self-determination, though not always phrased as such, were common, well debated, and respected. A generous reading of Draper could suggest that ideas of nationalism and self-determination were percolating in the US and it was through their similarities to the National Question, already the subject of debate in the USSR for sometime, that the Resolution on the Negro Question developed in 1928. However, it is clear that in both the Comintern and the Workers Party there had been years of discussion on the Negro Question. Both of these events demonstrate that the Party, on an international and domestic level, grappled with the ideas of nationalism and

221 Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 350.
222 Not the least of which was the 1924 speech by John Reed in Moscow and the Negro Sanhedrin in the US, both discussed in Chapter one.
self-determination, though they did not come to the same conclusions that would be reached in 1928.

In the same text, Draper also argues that Lenin, through Sen Katayama, influenced the Second Congress’ debates on the Negro Commission. Similarly, he asserts Stalin’s voice in the development of the Black Nation Thesis, citing the comments of Otto Hall, William F. Kruse, and Joseph Zack, all students in Moscow, who attested to the fact that Stalin himself had suggested the “Negro national question” if not to them directly, then through their company. Draper uses this testimony to claim that Stalin had a strong hand in the development of the Black Nation Thesis, though other scholars, and Haywood’s text, refute this assertion. Goldfield, a generous and careful reader of Haywood’s autobiography, points out:

The common story that the position [on the Negro Question] was conjured up by Stalin, pulled out of a hat and foisted on an unsuspecting U.S. party when its leaders arrived in Moscow for the 6th Congress does not quite fit the facts. Haywood’s detailed account gives us a feeling for how many of his own experiences, combined with his deep understanding of Black life in the U.S., led him to be more susceptible than certain other U.S. students in Moscow to the position.”

Indeed, Haywood was one of the main activists from the US who were early supporters of the Resolution, as other key Party activists, both black and white, argued vehemently for other positions.

One of these other positions was that of Lovett Fort Whiteman who, prior to going to the Sixth Congress, co-wrote a paper with H.V. Phillips entitled “Thesis for a New Negro Policy” where he suggested it was “counterrevolutionary to organize black

223 Draper, American Communism and Soviet Russia, 343.
225 H.V. Phillips was a black Communist organizer who had been one of the “communist core” of the African Blood Brotherhood in the 1920s. For more on Phillips see: Haywood, Black Bolshevik.
southern farmers; since white southern farmers would never join them, class solidarity among poor rural Southerners was impossible.”

William Patterson and Jay Lovestone, the General Secretary of the Party, supported this argument.

Fort Whiteman’s argument was also in line with an earlier statement by Lovestone, which again relied on class-solidarity as the main organizing principles of radial workers. As Gilmore summarizes:

He [Lovestone] argued that only continued migration to the North would bring African Americans into the Communist Party because only then would they share the class perspective of white workers. Then, as the standard of living of African Americans improved in the North, lynchings would decrease, and the South facing an agricultural labor shortage, would industrialize.

Solomon goes farther, arguing that the group, fronted by Fort Whiteman and Phillips and supporting Lovestone’s position, was particularly critical of the ANLC [American Negro Labor Congress]:

The ANLC’s emerging stress on opposing lynching, Jim Crow, and political disenfranchisement was ill advised and misdirected. Lynching was an “occasional practice” that was confined to the South and affected “an exceedingly small number” of blacks. Jim Crow had engendered a distinct Negro commercial bourgeoisie and had formed the basis of Negro cultural, intellectual, and social life: “The Negro has come to regard [Jim Crow] as possessing unique advantages.”

In the months leading up the Congress these arguments found strong support, especially among the leadership of the Party. The support of Jay Lovestone for the thesis presented by Fort Whiteman and H.V. Phillips is important to underscore. Factionalism in the Workers Party and the slight fading of Lovestone’s influence by the end of the

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226 Gilmore, Defying Dixie, 39; Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, 64.
227 Gilmore, Defying Dixie, 39.
228 Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, 64.
Sixth Congress meant that the commission did not as strongly receive the proposal of his allies, Fort Whiteman and Phillips.

The debates on the Negro Question effectively shifted the organizing drive of the Party to work within the South, particularly around issues facing blacks including lynching, Jim Crow, sharecropping, and struggling to desegregate unions. In the end the Resolution was a heavily edited document that brought in ideas from many different positions. However, the ideas at the root of the final resolution were from the position put forward by Harry Haywood and Charles Nasanov.

Haywood and Solomon's texts agree that when Charles Nasanov, a Siberian-born representative of the Young Communist International who had spent some time in the United States and taken a deep interest in the issues facing black people both there and in South Africa, approached Haywood about the idea of black people in the US as an oppressed nation, Haywood was skeptical. However, through continued conversation and reconsideration of his own experience and his knowledge of the history of black people in the US, Haywood came to argue for the idea of a black nation and the right to self-determination. As he states, “I need[ed] to apply concretely my newly-acquired Marxist-Leninist knowledge in the national-colonial question to the condition of Blacks in the United States.”

Haywood argues that, because of slavery and the betrayal of Reconstruction, black people in the US were separated from the development of a liberal democracy. Because of this estrangement, he continues, amendments passed to guarantee freedom and equal rights in voting for black people were trampled and new codes and laws passed to subjugate black people, especially in the south. Haywood takes

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all of these conditions together to argue that black people in the US were not a part of the nation, but constituted a “nation within a nation.”

Haywood describes how he developed his portion of the draft resolution through careful study and reflection on the role of Garvey’s UNIA in the United States. He argues that although Garvey was, in his opinion, wrong in regard to much of the UNIA program, the UNIA movement highlighted the nascent nationalist sentiment within black communities. Cedric Robinson picks up on this idea and explains it more thoroughly. He argues: “It was the UNIA that had embodied the Black radical tradition and primed the Black masses with a sense of nationhood. It was the UNIA and the ABB [African Blood Brotherhood] through which many of the early Black activists in the party had passed. And it was the UNIA and the Brotherhood that had demonstrated the capacities of Blacks to organize politically and respond ideologically.”

It is well documented that most of the black students from the US who were in Moscow and who participated in the development of the resolution, had been part of the African Blood Brotherhood and engaged with UNIA, though they were often critical of the latter. In the debates leading up to the drafting of the resolution, Haywood notes that one of his main opponents was his brother Otto Hall who vehemently argued against nationalism citing the mistakes of the UNIA.

Solomon claims that Haywood and Nasanov’s “resolution was tentative and conditional, breaking less new ground than Haywood later claimed,” and that “nowhere in the document does the term self-determination appear.” However, the resolution,

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231 Haywood, Black Bolshevik, 222-234.
232 Robinson, Black Marxism, 227.
233 Haywood, Black Bolshevik, 229.
234 Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, 71.
when presented to the committee, caused a great stir and a long debate. I will not cover all of the debates about the resolution for self-determination here; suffice it to say that most of the other delegates from the United States, including the other black men on the commission, did not originally support Haywood and Nasanov’s position.235 Some of the other comments Solomon notes US students making at the meetings of the commissions include: Mahoney’s assessment that in the all-male debate “Negro women had been neglected in the Haywood thesis and the whole discussion” and William Patterson’s “blistering attack on the weakness and lack of sincerity of the Party’s approach to blacks over the nine years of its existence.”236 In the long process of adding amendments to the resolution, Solomon observes, a lot of progress was made toward consensus, but there were also many changes to the original resolution. Debates raged as to whether the right to self-determination meant segregation (it was argued it did not), how to best agitate and use the new slogans, and what would be the role of unions.237

The Political Secretariat of the Communist Party finally printed the Resolution in October 1928, months after the conclusion of the Congress. The extra time might indicate that even after the long debates at the Congress itself, more discussion was necessary before the Resolution was ready for public viewing. The debates archived are probably just the tip of the iceberg of the negotiations around such a controversial change in Comintern policy. Such argument also probably impacts how the resolution was communicated to outside audiences, such as the US Party, and its reception in the Central Committees and the Party presses around the world.

235 For a thorough discussion of the debates please see: Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, and Haywood, Black Bolshevik.
236 Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, 76.
237 Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, 78–79.
The 1928 and 1930 Resolutions and their Reception in the United States

The Resolution was fraught from the beginning, with great amounts of debate on all sides and throughout the long process of crafting the final language. Of the Resolution, Solomon notes:

It began with the traditional emphasis on the growth of a new urban black proletariat and the need for working-class leadership of the black liberation struggle; it castigated the Fort-Whiteman-Phillips notion that it was impossible to build a mass movement by fighting Jim Crow, lynching, and disenfranchisement; it attacked Lovestone’s characterization of southern Negroes as “a reserve of capitalist reaction”; and it chided Moore for allegedly stressing work in petty-bourgeois organizations and among the intelligencia.238

Indeed, the 1928 Resolution on the Negro Question spends a lot of space summarizing various problems both with the living and working conditions of black people in the US and the world, but also the previous organizing methods of the Party. Looking at the details of the reception of the Resolutions in the US, both the problems facing blacks and the problems facing the Comintern more broadly become clear.

The first publications from the Sixth Congress on the Negro Question were in the Communist International and contained the published debates from the floor at the 1928 Comintern Convention.239 The four pieces covered different opinions and angles on the Negro Question, and were presented as discussion pieces on the hotly debated topic. The pieces included: “The Comintern Program and the Racial Problem” by A. Sheik (Sik), “On the Question of the Work of the American Communist Party among Negroes” by James Ford and William Willison (William L. Patterson), “American Negro Problems” by John Pepper, and “The Negro Problem and the Task of the Communist

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238 Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, 71.
239 Foner and Allen, American Communism and Black Americans, 163.
Party of the United States” by Harry Haywood. The Resolution itself was issued in October 1928 from the Political Secretariat, but first published in the Daily Worker in February 1929, and in the Communist International, the theoretical organ of the Party, in January 1930.240 Other than a Daily Worker headline “The Communists Are For a Black Republic” there was scant press on the Negro Question. Solomon reports that as late as February of 1930 Otto Huiswoud was “still saying that blacks in the United States were an oppressed racial minority whose progress was bound up with migration and the building of race organizations under working-class leadership,”241 a line that strayed from the Resolution’s claims of self-determination.

Haywood suggests that the initial confusion about the Resolution stemmed from the different order in which the various discussion articles from the Commission’s deliberations appeared in the US. He notes that the first paper to reach the US public was John Pepper’s analysis entitled American Negro Problems. This piece was originally one of four from the Negro Commission deliberations, appearing in the Communist International in August of 1928. Pepper’s piece was a discussion article, labeled as such, and it appeared alongside the pieces by A. Sheik (Sik), James Ford and William Willison (William L. Patterson), and by Haywood. However, only Pepper’s piece was published in the US press (The Communist, October 1928) and also as a pamphlet put out by the Workers Library Publishers, also in 1928. Haywood suggests that this was in part because of Pepper’s own tenacity of sending the article to the pamphlet publisher, but also because of technical issues in The Communist journal at the time.242 Regardless,

240 Foner and Allen, American Communists and Black Americans, 189.
241 Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, 81.
242 Haywood, Black Bolsheviki, 267-268.
Haywood notes, the impact of the pamphlet was that Pepper’s piece enjoyed a much larger audience, much earlier than any of the other articles and before even the resolution itself was officially signed, released, or published. Pepper’s pamphlet also appeared without the tag line of “discussion article,” suggesting that it was the Party’s official line.

There were many issues complicating the dissemination of the information in the Resolution on the Negro Question including Haywood’s argument that Pepper’s pamphlet disrupted the proper articulation of the official line on the Resolution on the Negro Question, the compounding issues of changes in the leadership of the CPUSA Central Committee from 1928 to 1930, and the move to the rhetoric of the Third Period. Another problem was the confusing nature of the 1928 Resolution itself, both in language and in scope. To deal with the latter issue, the Political Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (Comintern) issued a further resolution on the Negro Question in the United States in October 1930.

The 1930 Comintern resolution on the Negro Question in the United States opens by announcing that the Party has always worked against Negro oppression, “but the party has not yet succeeded in overcoming in its own ranks all under-estimation of the struggle for the slogan for self-determination, and still less succeeded in doing away with all lack of clarity on the Negro question.” Thus the resolution attempts to provide greater clarity about the program for self-determination in the Black Belt, stating:

In the interest of the utmost clarity of ideas on this question the Negro Question in the United States must be viewed from the standpoint of

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245 “1930 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question,” 23, emphasis in the original.
this peculiarity, namely as the question of an oppressed nation, which is in a peculiar and extraordinarily distressing situation of national oppression not only in view of the prominent racial distinctions (marked difference in the colour of the skin, etc.), but above all because of considerable social antagonism (remnants of slavery).  

It is important that this formulation notes the historical grounding, slavery, and current circumstances, racial distinction, which enable the idea of nationhood and the new thinking about race. The statement continues, demanding that the slogan for the South be: “The right of self-determination of the Negroes in the Black Belt” while the North and South both would continue to work with the demands for equal rights for all black people. 

The 1930 resolution dedicates considerable space to the slogan of self-determination and many of the potential questions are raised and answered in the text.

One such issue is that of the Black Belt being a colony of the US. This idea is soundly dismissed, but the resolution works hard to indicate that this does not mean that the issues facing black people in the US are fundamentally different than those facing people in the colonies. “In rejecting this estimation [that of the Black Belt being a colony], however, it should not be overlooked that it would be nonetheless false to try and make a fundamental distinction between the character of national oppression to which the colonial peoples are subjected and the yoke of other oppressed nations.” 

Finally, the 1930 resolution notes that self-determination in the Black Belt carries with it three linked demands: “(1) Confiscation of the landed property of the white landowners and capitalists for the benefit of the Negro farmers,” “(2) Establishment of the State Unity of the Black Belt,” and “(3) Right of Self-Determination.” The latter is expounded upon to indicate that

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246 “1930 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question,” 24; italics in the original.
247 “1930 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question,” 24; italics in the original.
248 “1930 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question,” 29.
249 “1930 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question,” 30; italics in the original.
although black people have the right to separate from the US when the proletarian revolution happens, the Communist Party will, at that point, agitate for a continued governmental federation. As Solomon summarizes, “the 1930s resolution declared that political and social equality would be pressed in the North and South, but self-determination was to be the principal political slogan in the South.”

For all that the two Resolutions on the Negro Question broke new ground on the importance of organizing around race, Robin Kelley and Erik McDuffie point out that the more popular Resolution from 1930 was particularly masculinist, often precluding an analysis of the oppression of women of color or the opportunities of organizing with black women. Particularly, they argue that the Resolution precluded the organizing around both the Woman Question and the Negro Question, rendering the two as separate issues for years to come.

There was some precedence for organizing around the Woman Question and the Negro Question together. Indeed, the 1928 Resolution’s point number 19 states:

The Negro women in industry and on the farms constitute a powerful potential force in the struggle for Negro emancipation. By reason of being unorganized to an even greater extent than male Negro workers, they are the most exploited section. The A.F. of L. bureaucracy naturally exercises toward them a double hostility, by reason of both their color and sex. It therefore becomes an important task of the Party to bring the Negro Women into the Economic and Political Struggle.

However, although this statement lays out the framework for an understanding of the double oppression of black women, which will famously become the “super exploitation

250 “1930 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question,” 33-34.
251 Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, 84.
252 Kelly, Race Rebels, 114; McDuffie, Sojourning for Freedom, 43-44.
253 “1930 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question,” 33-34.
of black women” a few years later, little was done with this articulation and the 1930s Resolution did not mention women. The lack of a mention of black women’s role in organizing in the more widely distributed 1930 Resolution perhaps highlights and in part explains the lack of attention to black women’s issues in the early years of the organizing around the Black Nation Thesis. Black women had been organizing in the Party and in affiliated organizations since the beginning of the Party, often agitating for the importance of black women’s issues and a need for thinking about race and gender in Party policy. However, as the next chapter will detail, little was written specifically about the exploitation of black women, and black women’s organizing was often overlooked and undervalued.

Impacts of the Resolution on the Negro Question

Many prominent authors on the history of the CPUSA have taken up and analyzed the arguments of the Resolutions on the Negro Question. The bulk of this dissertation will deal with the immediate reworking of the resolution after 1930 for the US context and the various ways that ideas of the nation, race, and colonialism were parsed in those early texts and used to change the conversation on race, class, and gender in the US. However, to preface that later argument, I will provide here some of the most common and influential arguments about the 1928 and 1930 Comintern Resolutions on the Negro Question offered by later historians and theorists, specifically the concerns around the ideas of nation and race as they are presented in the resolution.

254 For more on the “super exploitation” of black women as theorized by both Maude White and Claudia Jones see: Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, 33; McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, 8.
255 For more see the work of Grace Campbell and Maude White, early radical organizers in the CPUSA, see: McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, 30-60.
256 For some of the best examples see Robinson, *Black Marxism*; Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*. 
In his *Negro People in American History* written in 1954, Foster is one of the people who build their analysis of “The Negro People as an Oppressed Nation” on the grounds of Stalin's definition of a nation. In his chapter with the above title, Foster works tirelessly to demonstrate how black people in the US conformed to Stalin's definition.\(^{257}\) He couches his analysis on both the development of a “Negro National Culture” but also on the “shattering, in both theory and practice, of the reactionary concept that Negroes are biologically inferior to whites.”\(^{258}\)

Stalin's definition of a nation, “A nation is a historically established, stable community of people, coming into existence on the basis of a community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological constitution, which manifest themselves in a community of culture,”\(^{259}\) is used by Draper, and many other scholars, as the foundation for nationalism for the thesis on self-determination. Draper argues: “Haywood and others made an intensive effort to apply this definition to American Negroes,”\(^{260}\) a claim borne out by the vast number of references to Stalin's definition of a nation in discussions of the Resolution, and the many attempts to articulate the Black Belt in the US as such a nation. One example is Foster's claim that Stalin's definition is the “scientific basis of nationhood.”\(^{261}\)

Cedric Robinson argues it was Lenin who was the actual “theoretical and ideological midwife” to the Black Nation Thesis, though people at the time, and some historians as demonstrated above, credited Stalin. Lenin's work on the National


\(^{258}\) Foster, *Negro People in American History*, 469.

\(^{259}\) Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 226. Here and throughout the paper, I use Robinson's more recent translation from the Russian; the wording is only slightly different.

\(^{260}\) Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 344.

Question laid the groundwork for much of the USSR’s development and the Comintern’s work on Colonialism. By looking to Lenin as a source for theoretical understanding of a nation, Robinson challenges many other critics of the Black Nation Thesis. Robinson claims that the common description of the Black Nation Thesis as developed straight from Stalin’s definition of a nation obscures the message of the thesis and changed some of the meaning of the text. Rather, he argues, Stalin’s definition’s impact on the Resolution should be reconsidered, in part because Stalin’s definition itself was lacking in specificity, clarity, and theoretical sophistication. Robinson dismisses Stalin’s work, saying of Stalin’s definition of a nation:

This extraordinary passage is perhaps characteristic of Stalin’s theoretical contributions to Marxist thought and to world knowledge. First, it is too ahistoric, since no contemporary nation has emerged in this way; second, it is abstract and vague, utilizing such phrases as “psychological constitution”; third, it is tautological: community manifests itself as community; and finally, it is not Marxian, tending as it does toward an evolutionary paradigm as opposed to that of historical materialism.²⁶²

Robinson goes even farther arguing that the theoretical basis for the Party’s identification of black people in the Black Belt as a nation was not Marxist. He argues: “Marx and Engels had both distinguished between ‘nations’ and ‘nationalities,’ recognizing in the former the capacity for independent economic existence and in the later an incapacity.” He continues: “The logical extension from Marx and Engels would have been to identify the Blacks of American as a national minority or as a nationality, but not as a nation. For Marx and Engels, the nation was a quite particular historical phenomenon.”²⁶³ The idea of a nation as tied to a racial group and racial oppression, however, was unique. And this combination of race, class, nation, and colonialism (in that the Negro

²⁶² Robinson, Black Marxism, 226.
²⁶³ Robinson, Black Marxism, 225.
Commission was a subgroup of the larger Colonial Commission) had a notable impact on the ideas of race and racism in the US.

The debates I have quickly outlined here, about the genealogy and exact meaning of the term “nation” in the resolution, were not topics that generated much debate in the early 1930s. Rather, the early questions about the resolution for self-determination revolved around the question of the role of the Party in the US and internationally and the kinds of work the Party should undertake. It is with this in mind that Robinson declares:

Notwithstanding its contradictions and ideological formulations, this Thesis on the Negro Question was a quite remarkable document. Certainly its New World-centric view limited it (for example, the proposition that the “center of Negro culture and … protest” was America). Certainly the presumption that a proletarianized Black people in America was the most advanced sector of the Black world was more of a vulgarization of Marx than a product of analysis. But just as certain, this statement was a more sophisticated presentation of the world system than had been developed in the earlier internationalism of UNIA. The Commission had successfully urged the Fourth Congress to recognize the relationship between the “Negro Question” and the “Colonial Question”.264

This quick summary of the global positioning of the Black Nation Thesis as a colonial question is very important, and only through this positioning within a larger analysis of colonialism can the Black Nation Thesis be fully understood. For though the statement suffered from an Euro/Western-centric viewpoint, it was also developed alongside and with an understanding of the oppression of black people in South Africa as well as the US and liberation struggles of colonial peoples around the world. Though again echoing McDuffie and Kelley’s analysis, in uniting the Colonial Question and the Negro Question, the Woman Question was often ignored completely, and in the US, all were

dominated by the ever present American Question of who would lead the Workers Party and what the focus of Party activism would be.

Conclusions

The Sixth Congress was an important turning point for the Third International. The Congress marked the turn toward the rhetoric of the Third Period, the resolution of the factionalist fights in the Workers Party (the CPUSA), and the first Resolution on the Negro Question. The shift toward the rhetoric of the Third Period and the changes in the leadership of the Workers Party are clearly linked; the ousting of Jay Lovestone and his followers was part of a larger shift in the priorities of the International and coincided with changes in leadership both in Russia and across Europe. The links between the changes in Party leadership, the Third Period, and the Resolution on the Negro Question are maybe less obvious. This chapter has demonstrated the connections between these seemingly disparate moves, indicating that the Resolution on the Negro Question, and its limited discussion in the US, are directly tied to the changing rhetoric and face of the Workers Party.

The Party’s focus on self-determination, in idea if not in name, both opened up a space for rank-and-file members to question and engage the larger Party theoretically and practically, but also enabled a critical rethinking of the problems facing black people in the United States within a larger framework of class, race, and colonialism. In what follows, I explore these spaces of contestation in my articulation of the Black Nation Thesis as a productive fiction, which enabled deep theoretical insight on questions of race and class, nationalism and colonialism.
Solomon’s assessment of the economic and political soundness of the Black Nation Thesis is bleak. He asserts: “A persuasive theoretical foundation for a ‘nation within a nation’ was never achieved. A nation was a transient community, not an eternal category. All statistics marshaled by Haywood and Nasanov did not cast light on the dynamics of social change in the Black Belt and in American society as a whole.” He supports his analysis saying: “Even the Comintern in the 1930s said that the Black Belt was ‘not in itself economically or politically such a united whole as to warrant being called a special colony of the United States.’” However, Solomon argues that the agitation for self-determination should not be dismissed entirely because it highlighted a “fundamental issue: democracy as independence, and independence as the right of choice.”

Solomon’s critique, in pivoting on these ideas of democracy and independence, begins to suggest the kind of work the Black Nation Thesis did as a productive fiction, as a speculation that drove and supported vast amounts of political work in the US to counter centuries of racism and dream of a better system. In what follows, I follow Solomon’s lead in looking at how the rhetoric of the Black Nation Thesis for self-determination was used to open up a space to think about colonialism, nationalism, and race. In Part II I look specifically at the way that CPUSA pamphlet literature defines and discusses race, education about race, and leftist black organizing more broadly. Drawing on pamphlets about the Black Belt, the Position of Negro Women, the campaigns against White Chauvinism, and declarations of the Party policy toward black people in

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266 Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*, 86.
the South, I suggest that the ways that the Party defined race in the context of capitalism impacted the kinds of social praxis the Party could undertake.
PART II

THE BLACK NATION THESIS
CHAPTER 3

Binding the Message:
Black Nation Thesis Pamphlets and Pamphleteers

“The real test of freedom for the Negro people in the Black Belt lies in their right to self-determination. Unless they can choose freely for themselves what the relationship of this new government will be to the United States as a whole, they will not be free.”


This is the first number of the Southern Worker, which is to be published regularly every week by the Communist Party of the U.S.A.

The Southern Worker is the Communist paper for the South.

It is being published because the Southern workers and farmers need it and want it. The Southern Worker is the voice of the Negro and white workers and farmers of the South crying in united protest against the state of starvation, suffering and persecution to which they have been subjected by the white ruling class.

-James S. Allen, “What Do We Stand For?”

James Allen set forth the credo of the Southern Worker on the front page of its first issue dated August 16, 1930. The paper, printed in Georgia, prepared in Chattanooga, Alabama, and bearing the postage address of Birmingham, Alabama, was the first Communist publication in the South. Allen boldly proclaimed “the Southern Worker stands unalterably for full social, economic and political equality for the Negro workers and farmers. This is one of its chief planks.”

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267 Allen, “What Do We Stand For?” Southern Worker.
268 Allen, Organizing in the Depression South, 36.
269 Allen, Southern Worker, 1.
platform, the *Southern Worker* was part of a national campaign on the Resolution on the Negro Question. From 1930 through 1936, the CPUSA published substantial rich and varied material on the Black Nation Thesis, touching on local issues, national election campaigns, and offering theoretical interventions. Many important current issues and debates were publicly aired in small booklets alongside the typical journalistic forms such as newspapers, journals, and weekly, biweekly, or quarterly magazines. The pamphlets, however, offered a more sustained critique, being usually longer than articles, with a more considered and complete analysis of contemporary issues and debates. CPUSA pamphlets varied from ten to upwards of 60 pages, were printed in black and white on standard bond paper, and were often a single signature, sheets of paper folded in half, and bound in paper with simple stapled, tied, or glued spines. The majority of the CPUSA pamphlets of the early half-century were around 40 pages. Pamphlets were useful for Party activists for a variety of causes and the pamphlet form and content shifted to suit different messages and audiences.

Many of the pamphlets produced around the Black Nation Thesis were direct reprints of speeches given at Party conventions or for election rallies publicizing important Party decisions. There were also more considered pieces, obviously meant for study or discussion guides, offering theoretical reflections on Party issues and debates.270 Indeed, many pamphlets were directly referred to and referenced in the discussion material and questions provided by the Party Agit-Prop and/or Education Departments.271 Though not archived together, the educational materials suggest that

270 For example see: Foster, *Foster and Ford*, a collection of the election acceptance speeches from the 1932 Presidential Convention.

specific Party chapters regularly used pamphlets not only to learn the Party line and new initiatives, but also to think about the larger impacts and ideology of Party rhetoric. These pamphlets were designed to engage Party members politically by presenting new information and insights, distilling party doctrine, and opening a space for imagining various politically informed futures.

In the chapters that follow, I offer an analysis of pamphlets produced around theoretical issues like white chauvinism, nationalism, and internationalism; the Scottsboro Nine trial, lynching, and chain gangs; and the *In A Soviet America* pamphlet series. In each chapter I analyze how pamphlets work as organizing tools for different kinds of campaigns, as well as the messages the pamphlets endorse. Finally, I examine these pamphlets as productive fictions, using the figure of the Black Nation Thesis to ruminate on ideas of race, nation, and class. To preface these more in-depth conversations, this chapter introduces CPUSA pamphleteering and pamphleteers, emphasizing particular pieces that demonstrate the wide breadth of pamphlets produced. Specifically, this chapter notes the important contributions to the development of the Black Nation Thesis offered in pamphlets produced around national election campaigns, specifically the Ford and Foster presidential campaigns in 1932 and 1936, and local CPUSA chapters, most notably Harlem and Alabama. The chapter ends with an analysis of the single pamphlet produced in the 1930s about black women’s special issues and oppression, *The Position of Negro Women*, attending to the values and goals of Communist organizing.

Finally, this chapter gives a more thorough outline of what CPUSA pamphlets were, how they were produced and distributed, and who was imagined as their intended audience. Alongside the discussion of specific pamphlet styles and forms, this chapter
introduces the major pamphleteers of the Black Nation Thesis and grounds the Thesis’s
development in the Third Period politics of the CPUSA.

Third Period Pamphlets: Suggested Fictions of the Black Nation Thesis

Selling for between 1 cent and 10 cents, paper-covered Communist Party
pamphlets were widely available to Party members and sympathizers in the 1920s and
1930s. Pamphlets were less ephemeral than the various daily and weekly newspapers the
Party produced and were recognized as a successful way to communicate with the
growing Communist and Communist-influenced public, often referred to in Party Agit-
Prop literature.

One of the only other studies of Communist Party pamphlet literature, Carl R.
Burgchardt’s “Two Faces of American Communism: Pamphlet Rhetoric of the Third
Period and the Popular Front,” is based on a limited study of 44 pamphlets chosen from
a sample of 143 Communist pamphlet published in the 1930s and does not appear to
reference any pamphlets on the Black Nation Thesis. 272 His main thesis is that the
CPUSA pamphlets were too sectarian to be meaningful to a wide audience. Specifically,
the article makes the claim that Communist rhetoric “was divided by a great fault line in
1935” with Third Period sectarianism on one side and Popular Front collaboration on

272 Burgchardt, “Two Faces of American Communism,” in Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest. This
piece, originally published in 1980 in the Quarterly Journal of Speech, is typical of most academic writing on
the Communist Party in the US during the Cold War, quite critical of Communist ideas, supposing an anti-
communist lens with little or no analytical support. Though there is not a definitive study, the Communist
Party and affiliated publishers printed upwards of a thousand titles in the 1930s. Burgchardt does not
include a listing of all of the pamphlets, though he references many of the International Publishers Series
pamphlets such as: The Third Period pamphlets: Moissaye J Olgin's The Socialist Party: Last Bulwark of
Capitalism (1932), The Communist Election Platform: Against Imperialistic War – For Jobs and Bread (1932),
and Foster's The Words and Deeds of Franklin D. Roosevelt (1932); and Popular Front titles such as: Amter's
The Truth About the Communists (1937), The Fight for Labor's Rights: Election Program of the Communist Party of New
York (1937), and Foster's Unionizing Steel (1936).
the other. Furthermore, Burgchardt argues that the CPUSA’s rhetoric failed to connect with US audiences, partially because of its flip-flopping between the rhetoric of the Third Period and that of the Popular Front, but also because “communist ideas and practices were repugnant to the American mind.”

Noting the charged language of the Third period pamphlets, where non-Communists were attacked as “social fascists” and the like, Burgchardt argues that the CPUSA was unable to repair these relationships even though the pamphlet’s tone and style changed. As evidence of his claims, he offers close readings of a limited sample of pamphlets, highlighting their rhetorical styling. He does not offer evidence for his claims about the reception of pamphlets either within the Party or for non-Party audiences.

In his analysis of the role of pamphlets for the Party and as an organizing tool, he argues that most of the CPUSA organizing work for internal Party members was through the daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly newspapers and magazines the Party produced such as the *Daily Worker* and the *Southern Worker*. He claims that: “Pamphlets, on the other hand, were often aimed at the non-communist public. Therefore the study of pamphlets most clearly reveals the special claims communist writers presented to the uninitiated general public of the United States.”

Though in what follows I argue that some pamphlets were clearly designed to address primarily Party members and used for pedagogical purposes, I agree that pamphlets were often also used to reach potential

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274 Burgchardt, “Two Faces of American Communism,” in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest*, 246. He builds his analysis of the pamphlets as “committing crucial rhetoric errors that tended to alienate the general public.” He highlights the pamphlets that attacked Socialists and other progressive and radical organizers, noting how divisive the sectarian rhetoric of the Third Period was for the CPUSA. He further notes that the history of sectarian backbiting also made it difficult for the Party to build alliances under the Popular Front, as many potential allies remembered the sectarian attacks and were reticent to build alliances.

allies and supporters. In line with my argument, later in the article, Burgchardt notes that the rhetoric of pamphlets is also of an alienated group, and thus “self-directed and served more to solidify the members of the group than to persuade the general public.” Because of their long form and their explicit address of the fears and desires of the pamphleteers and CPUSA organizers, “pamphlets served the important function of strengthening the resolve of those already committed to communism.”276 Moreover, pamphlets could do both, speak to Party members and potential allies, because they were longer and “allowed communist writers to present their premises, evidence, and conclusions in greater details.” As Burgchardt concludes: “pamphlets closely reflect the movement of ideas in communist rhetoric during the Depression.”277 Though he charts the movement of ideas within the Party from the Third Period to the Popular Front, my work expands this analysis, looking at the wide variety of pamphlets produced around the Black Nation Thesis.

As demonstrated through the Black Nation Thesis Pamphlets, these documents were produced for various audiences and in varying numbers.278 Some pamphlets, such as those printed around the Scottsboro Nine trials from 1931 through 1936, spoke to a general audience and enjoyed many repeat printings. Other pamphlets like James Allen’s The American Negro from 1932, were targeted to a Party audience but still widely distributed, with multiple reissues and a revision in 1938. Still other pamphlets had only a small distribution, such as local pamphlets in Harlem, or were not as widely publicized

278 No specific publication information is available for any of the 1930s CPUSA pamphlets. If records had once existed, they were most likely destroyed during the 1950s Cold War repression of the CPUSA.
or distributed, such as Cyril Briggs and Eugene Gordon’s 1935 pamphlet *The Position of Negro Women.*

In what follows, I use a close analysis of pamphlet literature to begin to ascertain how the CPUSA developed and used the Black Nation Thesis to foment radical change. I focus this analysis by looking specifically at the pamphlets directly relating to the Comintern’s 1928 Resolution on the Negro Question and the addendum to that resolution from 1930, which together are also known as the Black Nation Thesis. For a few years, between 1928 and 1936, the Third Period and the beginning of the Popular Front in CPUSA political terms, there was a unique space in which the Party examined and critiqued racial and class relations through the Black Nation Thesis.

Communication media in the US in the 1930s consisted mainly of radio and print; the latter, for the CPUSA, included daily, weekly, and monthly papers as well as a variety of books and pamphlets produced in the Party printing houses throughout the decade. Of these, International Publishers published many nationally distributed pamphlets especially in the International Pamphlets series, which began printing in 1930. Other active publishers in the decade include The Workers Library Publishers and a number of small presses run by various sections of the Party, such as the Harlem section, as well as organizations of the Party or affiliated with the Party, such as the International Trade Union Committee of the Negro Workers of the RILU (Red International of Labor Unions, aka Profintern), the National Council of Jewish Communists, the International Labor Defense, and the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, just to name a few.

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279 As discussed later in this chapter, *The Position of Negro Women* did not receive the publicity that other pamphlets did. For example, this pamphlet was not publicized on the back covers of other pamphlets and thus did not have as wide of a distribution.
The bulk of the pamphlets of the period were published in the International Pamphlets series. Based on the number of pamphlets indicating that they enjoyed second printings, and the fact that the publishers began to issue bound copies of 10 pamphlets each, the International Pamphlets series probably had the widest distribution. This numbered series touched on many topics, such as Youth in Industry (number twelve), Work or Wages (number 4), The Eyes of the Movie (number thirty-eight), The History of May Day (number fourteen), and Women who Work (number twenty-seven); and included many repeat authors, such as Grace Hutchins, Earl Browder, William Z. Foster, James S. Allen, and Alexander Trachtenberg, who was also the original editor at International Press and for the series of pamphlets. Both women and men published in the International Pamphlet series, with women writing on a variety of topics such as Anna Louise Strong’s work on Modern Farming – Soviet Style, from 1930, or Anna Rochester’s Profits and Wages, from 1932, as well as booklets on women’s issues.

A 1934 CPUSA publication, The Workers Leaflet Manual, sheds light on the development of CPUSA pamphlets. Although this booklet discusses how to make effective leaflets for communicating ideas to fellow workers, many of the ideas presented in the booklet would also equally apply to creating and writing pamphlets as the authors

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280 Though there is not any specific pamphlet publication information available, the International Pamphlets series is the most widely archived and collected in bound editions. International Pamphlets and International Publishers both published the flagship pamphlets and put out a series of important works by Marxist scholars such as the Little Lenin Library.

281 Tamiment Archives, Communist Party USA Printed Ephemera Collection, Box 1, folder: “CPUSA: AGIT PROP Commission (District 6)” undated. This manual was probably produced by the New York State Commission, District 6, but does not include other definitive publication information.
suggest. The manual discusses that “leaflets are one of the most important means of getting in touch with the masses” and notes that CPUSA leaflets, and by extension pamphlets, differ from other groups, such as the Auto Workers Union, in how they engage workers, ideas, and struggles. The example given is about striking auto workers: “The Union leaflet should express the position of the Union as an economic organization, while the Communist Party leaflet must make clear the full Communist position with regard to the strike, drawing political conclusions as well as calling for a militant united front conduct of the strike under rank and file leadership.” The manual goes on to declare that “in any case, the line of the leaflet should be carefully determined by the Unit Buro or Section Committee before the leaflet is issued.” The manual gives minute directions on creating useful and important leaflets. Poor leaflets are attributed to:

1. Abstractness, generalities, lack of concrete information on the particular shop situation or the territory where the leaflet is issued. 2. Failure to skillfully link up specific local grievances with the general campaigns of the Party. 3. Attempt to bring in too many ideas, with the consequent failure to adequately explain any of them. 4. Lack of coherence, that is failure to show the logical connection between the different ideas. 5. Poor appearance.

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282 Workers Leaflet Manual, np.
283 Workers Leaflet Manual, np.
284 Workers Leaflet Manual, np.
The last issue, poor appearance, is talked about in great detail, including best strategies for making titles, headlines and sub-text stand out, how to right justify with a typewriter, and the proper use of a mimeograph machine. Similarly, directions are given on how to write a snappy headline, how to effectively use illustrations, color, and size to make the leaflet more noticeable.

The manual discusses many kinds of leaflets, such as “purely agitational leaflets that aim to rouse the workers to some immediate action, or we may issue propaganda leaflets which aim first of all to explain, clarify and educate.” The importance of educational leaflets is stressed throughout the booklet; similarly, telling details about CPUSA Agit Prop policy are displayed in the sections discussing how leaflets educate. Leaflets, it is explained, are best used for short, to the point forms of address. “If it can’t be written briefly, a pamphlet or booklet should be made of it rather than a leaflet. [sic] a leaflet must not demand of the reader too much concentration or reasoning out of arguments.” Another educational suggestion is not “talking down to workers.” Specifically, the pamphlet notes that is it because of the “propaganda of the bourgeoisie that workers don’t know how to struggle against the system. It is our job to educate and lead them so that they will fight together against the capitalist class.”

There is no similar publication about pamphlet production, probably because pamphlets were often produced centrally and thus there was not a need for detailed instructions to be distributed to far-flung Communist Party sections. However, the production of the Leaflet Manual does indicate that the Party was thinking critically about both the form and the content of Party publications to best educate and influence

286 Workers Leaflet Manual, np.
potential allies and Party members, while highlighting the importance of education, propaganda, and stylistic form to Party publishers.

For many pamphlets, the intended audience was Party members. These pamphlets often used CPUSA specific terminology, made frequent, unelaborated upon references to minutia of Marxist thought, and expected an understanding of both the Soviet Union and Soviet political and economic policies. Judging by these indicators of scope and style, pamphleteers expected the audience to be familiar with the CPUSA and their polices and practices. The Party used these pamphlets to distribute and highlight policy changes, to refine thinking on certain subjects important to Party work, to offer opinions and arguments about strategy, and to provide “public interest” information. The pamphlets employ differing writing styles: some chronicle speeches given at large party events such as the semi-annual congresses of the National secretariat or public meetings; others directly relate to policy debates and party resolutions; while others still provide a more journalistic, sometimes even fictional, portrayal of the important issues of the day.

The pamphlets directly dealing with the issues pertaining to black people in the US also appear to be written for a general Party public; though some pamphlets, for example Haywood’s *The South Comes North in Detroit's Own Scottsboro Case*, are published speeches originally developed for a more specialized audience. Many of the pamphlets touching specifically on issues of race in the US and published after the Black Nation Thesis give context to larger black movements and struggles happening both domestically and globally. The pamphlets authored by James W. Ford and coming out of the Harlem office, where the Party appointed him as a special organizer, also take a national and even international scope.
An interesting side note: at least one pamphlet on the Black Nation Thesis in the United States was translated and distributed internationally. China Books published a volume containing James Allen’s *The Negro Question in the United States* (or *The Black Question in America*) and *Southern Economic Development*, in translation by Zhang Yousong.\(^{287}\) The book was published in Shanghai in August 1954 and enjoyed a printing of 2,500 copies.\(^{288}\)

In what follows, I move through the pamphlets not chronologically but in terms of their specific campaign, anticipated audience, intended impact, and rhetorical strategies. Within the thematic discussions, I account for the development of CPUSA thought and writing on the Black Nation Thesis, noting how the Thesis develops over time and space. Though some publishing dates are unknown, I attempt to make educated guesses of where they would fall in the chronology based on the material they cite, where they were published, and what other pamphlets their inside and back covers include as suggested additional reading materials. I try to introduce the main subject matter of the pamphlet, and use this as an opportunity to detail the CP history.

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\(^{287}\) Thanks to Jesse Saba Kirchner for his help with translation from the Chinese. The titles are probably *The Negroes in a Soviet American* and, perhaps, parts of *Reconstruction: The Battle for Democracy*. It appears that the translation is from a 1951 edition of a US text, but I can’t find any evidence of such a publication. Without a full translation of this text, it is hard to determine what specific texts are offered here in translation.

developing through the early 1930s, including the campaigns against white chauvinism, the anti-lynching work, union organizing, and broad mass movement building.

Pamphlets are useful for analyzing the development of the rhetoric of the Black Nation Thesis. They are not, however, indicators of concrete Party actions or policy outcomes. I look to the pamphlets to trace the rhetorical development of the Black Nation Thesis and how this rhetoric was used in the US by the CPUSA. Thus, this is a rhetorical analysis of the Black Nation Thesis, not a history of the CPUSA’s work with black organizers and activists or on issues of importance to black communities.

**CPUSA Pamphleteers**

A small handful of writers authored most of the CPUSA pamphlets on the Black Nation Thesis in the 1930s, though the pamphlets offered a wide scope both in content and format. With the notable exception of Elizabeth Lawson, who, in the 1930s, wrote pamphlets on unemployment and the Scottsboro Nine and Angelo Herndon trials, the 1930s Black Nation Thesis pamphlets were written by men, even those pamphlets directly addressing black women’s issues. The fact that the vast majority of the pamphlets were credited to men does not indicate that women did not organize in the Party on black issues, but it does reflect how power was divided in the Party on these issues.

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289 Lawson’s pamphlets include 1930s titles: *The Jobless Negro, 20 Years on the Chain Gang, and They Shall Not Die* and later pamphlets such as: *Thaddeus Stevens* (1940), *The Gentlemen from Mississippi: Our First Negro Senator* (1960) and *The Reign of Witches: The Struggle Against the Alien and Sedition Laws* (1952). Lawson was an important figure in the early CPUSA work with black organizers, especially in the Education Department. She published many “Study Guides,” most notably the 1939 “Study Outline: History of the American Negro People, 1619-1918.”
Women were slightly more likely to be published on issues pertaining to black organizing at the level of daily and weekly party newspapers. For example, in the collection published by Foner and Shapiro, *American Communism and Black Americans: A Documentary History 1930-1934*, five contributions appear to be from women writers. These include Ethel Stevens writing for the *Daily Worker* about white chauvinism in Buffalo, NY, Helen Marcy’s two articles in the *Southern Worker* on the Scottsboro trial, the “Appeal of Scottsboro Mothers” appearing in the *Daily Worker*, and Myra Page’s account of the trial of Angelo Herndon also for the *Daily Worker*.\(^{290}\) The importance of gender in the Scottsboro Trials, and the representation of gender in pamphlets publications, will be discussed further in Chapter six. Women were more active in writing pamphlets and journal articles later in the CP history, indicating some improvement in the Party’s treatment of women.\(^{291}\) In the 1940s Claudia Jones published a series of pamphlets, some dealing specifically with black women’s unique position and multiple oppressions.\(^{292}\)

In the 1930s, however, while women were not empowered or encouraged by the party to write pamphlets or participate widely in the Party press or leadership, some women did write for daily, weekly, and monthly papers. Women were more readily seen as organizers, secretaries, and support for Party activities while men were promoted as theoreticians and thinkers for the Party. Erik McDuffie, writing on the role of black women in the CPUSA in the 1920s and early 1930s, argues: “While often excluded from the leadership of Communist-affiliated movements, they [black women] found a voice through writing.” He continues, “black Communist women journalists proffered early

\(^{290}\) Foner and Shapiro, *American Communism and Black Americans*.

\(^{291}\) See McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom* and books by and about Claudia Jones including Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*. For material about women working in the Party in the 1930s see the texts by Solomon, Naison and Kelley for specific women organizers.

\(^{292}\) For more on Claudia Jones, and black women in the CPUSA, see Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*.
articulations of the ‘triple oppression’ framework and the thesis on black women’s superexploitation that was popularized in the Communist Left two decades later by Claudia Jones.\(^{293}\) McDuffie notes that the first article appearing in the Communist Party press about black women’s issues was white Communist Jeanette Pearl’s 1924 article for the \textit{Daily Worker}. Black women who worked with the Party published elsewhere; for instance, Grace Campbell, an important CPUSA activist, published a series in the \textit{New York Age} on women’s issues, including issues of race and class, in 1925.

After the adoption of the Resolution on the Negro Question, black women published more articles in the Party presses. McDuffie notes articles by black women about issues facing black women in journals such as \textit{The Negro Champion}, \textit{the Labor Defender}, and \textit{The Daily Worker}.\(^{294}\) In Haywood’s autobiography and the accounts of Naison, Kelley, and Solomon of the various organizing projects around the Black Nation Thesis, many women are featured prominently. Women such as Maude White, who attended the school in Moscow with Haywood and worked in various cities across the mid-west for the Party,\(^{295}\) Helen McClain, an organizer from Philadelphia who attended the Fifth Congress of the Red International Labour Union in Hamburg in 1930,\(^{296}\) and Louise Thompson, from New York but active with the Communist struggles in Alabama,\(^{297}\) to name just a few, were prominent organizers and key to many Communist struggles. However, none of these women were widely published before the 1940s,

\(^{294}\) McDuffie, \textit{Sojourning for Freedom}, 51.
\(^{295}\) Haywood, \textit{Black Bolshevik}, 215, 217, 313, 300, 358 and others.
\(^{296}\) Haywood, \textit{Black Bolshevik}, 328.
\(^{297}\) Kelley, \textit{Hammer and Hoe}, 71, 79.
when Claudia Jones began to regularly contribute pamphlets and articles for the Communist presses.

The three most prominent authors in the 1930s on the Black Nation Thesis were Harry Haywood, James S. Allen and James W. Ford, though William Z. Foster and Earl Browder, the upper echelons of leadership in the CPUSA, also issued statements referencing the Black Nation Thesis. Other authors who published pieces on the Black Nation Thesis included leaders of the various Party organizations based on race, such as the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, the Negro Commissions, and the American Negro Congress. B.D. Amis, a militant black activist from Chicago, headed the League of Struggle for Negro Rights and co-authored or wrote the introduction for several pamphlets in the 1930s.298 Theodore Bassett and Abner Berry, both in the leadership of the Harlem Party working with James Ford, also co-authored pamphlets and wrote introductions and, according to Mark Naison, helped write speeches that, if published, would not have included attribution.299 Finally, many of the authors who published on the Black Nation Thesis were Jewish men: James Allen, Israel Amter, Milton Howard, Joseph North, Sasha Small, and Isador Schneider;300 many, though not all, of whom where working closely with various Party organizations focusing on black issues.

298 For more on B.D. Amis see: Howard, Walter T. (Ed.) B.D. Amis, African American Radical: A Short Anthology of Writings and Speeches. His pamphlets include an introduction for They Shall Not Die and he is probably a co-author on many of the LSNR pamphlets including Equality, Land and Freedom: A Program for Negro Rights.

299 Naison, Communists in Harlem During the Depression, 136. All pamphlets from speeches included only the speaker as the pamphlet’s author, though, understandably, many organizers probably participated in speech writing.

300 Thanks to Bettina Aptheker who pointed this fact out to me and filled in the archival records on some of these men. Although it was more common for Communist Jewish men to write on issues facing African Americans, in 1939 James Ford published Anti-Semitism and the Struggle for Democracy with Theodore R. Bassett through The National Council of Jewish Communists.
As introduced earlier, Harry Haywood, a prominent party activist from the mid-1920s through the late 1950s and active in leftist organizing through the mid-1980s, participated in the development of the Resolution on the Negro Question in Moscow. Haywood, born in Nebraska in 1898, attended two schools in Moscow, first the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in 1925, and then the International Lenin School in 1927. He stayed in Moscow until 1930 as a delegate to the Communist International (Comintern). He was one of the main architects of the Resolutions on the Negro Question and spoke often in favor of Black Nationalism. In the early and mid-1930s, upon returning to the US, he served on the Central Committee and on the Politburo, was head of the CPUSA Negro Department and General Secretary of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights. He gave many speeches for the party and published prolifically in the 1930s. He also wrote one of the main early full-length books on the Black Nation Thesis, *Negro Liberation*, published in 1948. Richard Wright’s autobiography *Black Boy* represents Haywood though the character Buddy Nelson, though Haywood was not pleased with the characterization and fought with Wright over it.

James S. Allen was born Sol Auerbach in Philadelphia in 1906 to Russian Jewish radicals recently immigrated to the US. He was a doctoral candidate in philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania, when he traveled with the first American student delegation to the Soviet Union. He joined the party after his travels in 1928 and was expelled from college for his radical activities. He served as a writer for the *Daily Worker* and edited the *Labor Defender*. He took on the nom-de-plum James S. Allen in 1930, and in the same

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301 For more on Harry Haywood see his autobiography, *Black Bolshevik*.
302 Allen, “Marxist Publisher” ed. Peter Filardo, in *American Communist History*, 293.
year founded the underground newspaper the *Southern Worker*.303 He argues he changed his name often at that time, using Jim Bigelow among others, but was listed as “Managing Editor” and wrote a weekly column, “The Reds Say” under the name Jim Allen. He notes:

> When I submitted my first pamphlet, *The American Negro*, for publication under my natal name of Sol Auerbach, the head of International Publishers, Alexander Trachtenberg, demurred. He insisted on “Jim Allen,” for, he held, as a name associated with the Southern Worker it would give the pamphlet greater authority. We finally agreed on “James S. Allen” to establish an identity of a sort. And so it remained.304

He was very active in the Party’s campaigns in the South and a prolific writer for the Party. In the late 1930s he went to the Philippines at the behest of the CPUSA and was drafted into the army in 1944. Later, Allen returned to New York and became the director of International Publishers. Throughout all of this he worked and wrote for many journals and newspapers of the Communist press and published upwards of 25 pamphlets and booklets.305

James W. Ford was born in Alabama in 1893 but grew up in Chicago and attended Fisk University. After finishing college in Tennessee he served in France during WWI. Sensitive to racial discrimination from an early age, Ford was radicalized, in part, after the war when he had a hard time finding work that used his college degree. He found work in the Chicago Post Office, joined the Postal Workers Union, the Communist Party, and was a member of the American Negro Labor Congress in 1926. Ford went to the Soviet Union in the late 1920s; in 1929 he headed the International

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303 Allen, *Organizing in the Depression South*, 40.
304 Allen, *Organizing in the Depression South*, 40.
305 For more on James S. Allen see his multiple autobiographical works including: *Organizing in the Depression South*, and *The Radical Left on the Eve of War: A Political Memoir* and “Marxist Publisher,” ed. Peter Filardo, in *American Communist History.*
Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers and a year later became head of the Negro Department of the Trade Union Unity League. In 1932 he was the first black man to be nominated for Vice President, running with William Z. Foster on the Communist Party’s ticket. He also ran with Earl Browder in both 1936 and 1940. While not campaigning, he worked as a Special Organizer of the Communist Party’s Harlem section and published most of his pamphlets from that organization.  

The biographies of these men indicate their close ties to the Party apparatus, serving as leaders of Party affiliate organizations, local chapters, and national campaigns. Such a close relationship to the leadership of the Party enabled them to write and publish these pamphlets, but also shaped the pamphlets themselves. Pamphlets were often a product of the accepted Party line on particular issues, extended political and policy conversations, and a thorough vetting system in publication. To account for this, I propose to look at the pamphlets as both monographs and as collective works. Most, though not all, pamphlets are credited as direct author’s statements, especially those published by International Publishers and enjoying the largest distribution. Other pamphlets, for example those produced by the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, have multiple authors, or include a substantial introduction by another Party leader contextualizing the pamphlet.  

Of course no published work is ever a simple monograph; every piece benefits from the discussing, reworking, and editing that publishing usually entails. In the context of the CPUSA, however, these pamphlets are products of a social movement. Haywood and other authors have discussed the vetting process of writing in the CPUSA, the strict,  

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306 For more on James W. Ford see: Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* and Solomon, *The Cry was Unity*. 

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almost censorial, way that writings had to follow the Party line to be published by the CP press. This vetting process was criticized by some Party authors who challenge they were unable to make their own arguments and statements about an issue. The control of the CPUSA over the published record is also evident in the similarities of the pamphlets produced: many pamphlets use almost the same language to talk about the Black Nation Thesis, draw upon the same research to verify claims, and even structure their argument in similar ways to elicit the reader’s emotional response.

More to the point, the CPUSA publishing process, working with edicts, resolutions, and talking points from the Comintern and writing within the various formulas promoted by the Party, enabled the entire movement leadership to be involved in the work of creating these pamphlets. Part of this process was ideological, as would-be Party authors had to work within the somewhat strict ideological trappings of the CPUSA to get published. However, as discussed in Chapter two, many of these authors had been instrumental to the process of developing the Black Nation Thesis at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern. This publishing process was also, in part, productive groupthink, a brainstorming, vetting, and working process that enabled the development

307 Bettina Aptheker, though writing of the CPUSA many years later, also notes the difficulty of getting work published through the CPUSA, especially work that was not considered to be “in-line” with the CP (see: Aptheker, Intimate Politics). In conversation, Bettina Aptheker also suggests that the Party body that oversaw such vetting was called the “Control Commission” and that more information might be available in the CPUSA collections at the Tamiment Library. As of the time of writing, these files are unavailable to the general public.

308 Cruse, Harold. Rebellion or Revolution?, 172; Haywood, Black Bolshevik, 348.

309 For example, many of the CPUSA pamphlets from the 1930s open with a newspaper story or other current event, link this occurrence with CPUSA policies or debates, such as the Right to Self-Determination, and then show how the CPUSA’s policy or program is addressing the issue. Pamphlets also often end with a few short paragraphs on how said issue or debate is handled in the Soviet Union, suggesting the Soviet policy on the issues is well advanced and should be a model for US organizing. In Chapter six, I will demonstrate how the appeals to the Soviet Union, so common in many of these pamphlets, work to ground the material in a productive fiction to enable social movement development and cohesion. However, the uncritical, and admiring, attitude toward the USSR was also one of the biggest weaknesses of the Party, blinding the Party to the autocratic horrors occurring under Stalin’s regime and sowing doubt and skepticism in many radicals who might otherwise have been supporters.
of these pamphlets. Thus I approach the pamphlets both as monographs, single author's documents that are in conversation with other single authored pamphlets, but also as the product of the CPUSA as a whole and working toward a larger conversation on the meanings of nationalism, self-determination, internationalism, and race as impacted by class and gender.

**Politics and 3rd Period Pamphlets: “Race Leaders” and Revolution**

CPUSA pamphlets are products of their time and the political atmosphere of the Party, both in their authorship models but also in their treatment of other activists and organizations. One example of pamphlets closely following CPUSA edicts is the early 1930s blanket dismissal of other black organizations, as part of the Third Period sectarian politics of the Party. These sectarian politics would change by the mid-1930s with the growth of the Popular Front Period, but the early 1930s were marked with frequent repudiation of other organizations, especially other left-leaning black groups such as the NAACP and the Urban League.

James Ford’s pamphlet *The Right to Revolution for the Negro People*, published in Harlem around 1934, demonstrates the Party’s Third Period politics, specifically critiquing the role of religion in black community organizing. A small pamphlet militantly agitating the revolutionary spirit of black communities to rise against the capitalists, this pamphlet uses many of the standard CPUSA arguments to support a revolutionary plan of action, including a sectarian critique of other black organizations and a thorough denunciation of capitalism. This pamphlet diverges from some of the

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310 For examples of this look to Haywood’s biography, *Black Bolshevik* chapter 16, where he discusses all of the work as being done by committee and group, citing the pamphlet *The Road to Negro Liberation* as being developed by a group of activists ready to take up the task of building the LSNR.
norms established in earlier works in two significant ways: the first being an analysis of the role of religion in revolutionary movements, and the second a much more explicit theoretical exposition of Marxism and examination of the revolutionary traditions of black people. CPUSA Black Nation Thesis pamphlets rarely discuss religion and often only vaguely alluded to Marx, scarcely engaging his writings directly.

The pamphlet is structured around Ford’s litany of arguments for and against revolution for black people. The first part of this discussion is his analysis of Christianity, which he argues is always used by the ruling class to suppress the masses. Using the familiar quote from Marx, Ford works implicitly to undermine the Christian church. Such an argument was in line with the sectarian Third Period politics and interesting in light of the CPUSA struggles with different black organizations, many of them church based. Though the Party would flip-flop on their attitude toward church organizations, this is clearly a long-winded attempt on Ford’s part to discredit the church as anti-revolutionary.

In another interesting deviation from typical pamphlet form this pamphlet offers is the most thorough exploration of the “Essence of the Revolutionary Method” and the “Revolutionary Traditions of Negroes.” These two sections expand on ideas that are hinted at in other pamphlets but not fully analyzed. The first section looks at the debates between revolution and reform, which undergird many of the criticisms of other black organizations, especially the NAACP. Of this difference Ford argues:

The real essence of the revolutionary method consists in the fact that every action is inspired by a fundamental aim not merely to make the slavery of the masses a little more bearable under capitalism (this is what we call the reformist method) but to destroy the entire system of slavery

which breeds and exists only at the expense of the life blood of the toilers.\textsuperscript{312}

Ford then suggests that the revolutionary method is most suited for rousing the masses and gaining the support necessary to challenge and change capitalism. This argument is closely linked with Ford’s analysis of the history of revolutionary tradition amongst black people. He calls up the familiar Nat Turner, Gabriel Prosser, and Denmark Vessey that many other pamphlets name, but goes further to link these protests with the movements in Haiti and the Caribbean. All of these struggles, Ford argues, are reworked by the petty bourgeois leaders to suggest that working with the ruling class will be of benefit for black liberation projects. Ford criticizes the “petty bourgeois misleaders” for using the revolutionary traditions of the black masses for their reformist goals, and calls on militant black workers to fight against this misrepresentation of history.\textsuperscript{313}

The use of the term “misleader” is common in the pamphlets, as is the derisive use of the term “Race Leader” to refer particularly to the NAACP. Such terminology is particularly prevalent in the early pamphlets produced around the Scottsboro Nine trial, when the relationship between the NAACP and the CPUSA was strained over the representation of the Nine defendants. Other pamphlets directly critique Du Bois or Walter White, two leaders in the NAACP, citing them as petty bourgeois nationalists.\textsuperscript{314} The criticism levied against the NAACP, the Urban League, black churches, and other local black organization, in hindsight, is harsh and opportunistic. In fact both the CPUSA and the NAACP were vying for the support of black people and the sharp tones reflected this competition. In truth, both programs were focused on the reformist goal

\textsuperscript{312} Ford, \textit{The Right to Revolution for the Negro People}, 12.

\textsuperscript{313} Ford, \textit{The Right to Revolution for the Negro People}, 12.

of ending racial discrimination, though, for the CPUSA, this goal was tempered by the sometimes revolutionary aims of the Black Nation Thesis. All of these groups were making difficult and important inroads in the fight against racial oppression. The CPUSA’s comments and criticisms make sense in light of their dogmatic Third Period rhetoric and policies of separation and militancy. The rhetoric employed to discuss other black organizations softens by the late 1930s when coalitions between groups were fostered and joint actions supported, though concerns over reform and revolution continue for decades.

**Elections: Where do the Communists Stand?**

One outcome of the sectarian politics of the early 1930s was the CPUSA’s decision to run a Presidential ticket. The mid-term elections of 1930 are the first example of the impact of the Black Nation Thesis on the Communist Election Platforms, specifically the pamphlet *Working Class against Capitalist Class: Main Election Issues of the Communist Party*. This little pamphlet, only quarter sheet size, opens with an illustration of a black working man, stereotypically depicted with bulging muscles and workman’s overalls. This man holds a rolled up paper entitled “Communist Platform” with the under title: “Only with this program will I Win.”

The work with black people is not discussed at the beginning of the pamphlet,

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even though this image is on the back of the cover, before even the first page of the pamphlet. Rather, near the end of the pamphlet two sections, ”Anti-Negro Laws are most Vicious Anti-Labor Laws” and “To stop Lynching, the Rule of the White Bourgeoisie Must Be Ended,” begin to layout some of the platform on black issues.

Reflective of its early date, this pamphlet foregrounds class and only begins to suggest the special oppression of black workers, stating:

Of all the Anti-labor legislation throughout the Country, the one directed against the Negro masses is the most vicious. The anti-Negro laws throughout are an attempt, on the one hand, to make possible an even more merciless exploitation of the Negro section of the working class than the exploitation of the working class as a whole; on the other hand, these laws aim to maintain in the minds of the workers themselves the anti-working class ideology of a color line.316

This line of argument, though not fully taking up calls presented in the Black Nation Thesis for a full understanding and theoretical engagement with the double exploitation of race and class, does begin to move from the earlier line where race was just another part of class exploitation. The recognizing of “more merciless exploitation” is important here, though the argument is still focusing on the impacts on white workers,

316 CPUSA, Working Class against Capitalist Class: Main Election Issues of the Communist Party, 22-23.
and their falling for the “anti-working class ideology of the color-line.” Similar to the work against White Chauvinism popularized by the Yokinen trial, this pamphlet suggests a race-specific form of exploitation, but this exploitation is still subservient to the theoretical understanding of white supremacy (chauvinism) of the white worker.\footnote{The Yokinen trial is discussed at length in Chapter four.}

The second platform point regards lynching and again white supremacy. This section is clearer in the articulation of what white supremacy does to further exploit and suppress black workers, offering an analysis of lynching as maintaining white power structures. This pamphlet also uses the demands of the Black Nation Thesis, stating:

> The Communist Party declares that the beastly rule of lynching and the withholding of all legal rights from the Negro Masses of the South cannot be remedied under the political rule of the white bourgeoisie. The Communist party therefore demands the right of self determination for the Negro Masses in the Southern states.\footnote{CPUSA, \textit{Working Class against Capitalist Class: Main Election Issues of the Communist Party}, 25.}

The platform goes on to suggest that lynching, using an example of an unnamed black man lynched in Texas, needs to be a point of struggle for all workers, but does not offer much more analysis or any points of concrete action. As an early example, this pamphlet highlights many of the ways elections materials engaged the Negro Question and white chauvinism.

In later years, the Party would endorse other national or domestic campaigns and build coalitional support for progressive candidates;\footnote{For example, the CPUSA endorsed the Progressive Party’s campaigns for Henry Wallace in 1948 and Vincent Hallinan in 1952.} in 1932, however, the CPUSA ran William Z. Foster, a veteran labor leader and former general secretary of the Party, for
President and James W. Ford for Vice-President. Their campaign materials are some of the clearest statements of the Black Nation Thesis produced by the CPUSA in the 1930s and one of the unique bound pamphlet sets in the holdings of the Tamiment Library.

As mentioned, pamphlets were sometimes bound into collections and then resold as a larger reference set; publishers often bound pamphlets for consumers, although particular librarians or cataloguers also bound other pamphlets well after they were published. The best example of publisher-bound pamphlets is the International Publishers’ bound pamphlet sets, which often collected pamphlets on the major works of Lenin or Marx, but also gathered and sold the early International Publishers pamphlets. It appears that these sets were developed and distributed by the press itself, though the printing dates are unclear. The bound collection of 1932 elections materials, Where do the Communists Stand, is another probable publisher-bound set.

Where do the Communists Stand collects pamphlets on the election platforms of the CPUSA in 1932, including: Communist Election Platform, as adopted by the National Nomination Convention, Chicago, May 28-29, 1932; The Fight for Bread, Earl Browder’s keynote speech at the National Nomination Convention; Who Are the Friends of the Negro People, C.A. Hathaway’s speech delivered at the National Nominating Convention of the Communist Party proposing James W. Ford of Alabama for Vice-President of the United States; Foster and Ford for Food and Freedom, cataloguing the acceptance speeches of

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320 For an interesting recent publication that put the campaign of Foster/Ford in the context of African Americans and the US Presidency, see: Glasrud and Wintz, African Americans and the Presidency. Specifically, Cullen and Wilkison’s chapter: “The Communist Party of the United State and African American Political Candidates” which outlines the Party’s long history of running black organizers as Vice Presidential candidates alongside white Party leaders as President. The article begins to discuss the unfortunate racial dynamics of this decades long pattern begun with the 1932 Ford campaign.
William Z. Foster and James W. Ford; The Socialist Party – Last Bulwark of Capitalism, by Moissaye J. Olgin; and Foster-Ford – The Candidates of the Working Youth. The bound collection demonstrates the important election issues on the CPUSA platform, including a critique of capitalism, scorn for the Socialist Party, and support for the Black Nation Thesis, women, youth, and farmers. The CPUSA's challenge to the Socialist Party and their candidates for President and Vice-President, Norman Thomas and James H. Maurer, was in line with Third Period politics.

Even if not directed at issues pertaining to the Black Nation Thesis, most of the elections materials prominently feature the Resolution on the Negro Question and the CPUSA's campaigning to end racial oppression. By 1932 the Scottsboro Nine trials were regularly covered in the news and these pamphlets served as another opportunity for the Party to highlight their work on black issues, especially in the South. Foster and Ford for Food and Freedom is a clear example of the prominence of the Black Nation Thesis. The pamphlet contains the acceptance speeches of both William Z. Foster and James W. Ford, candidates for President and Vice-President for the Communist Party. The speeches, made in Chicago at the

Figure 5: Foster and Ford, Foster and Ford for Food and Freedom, cover.

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321 Other pamphlets included in the collection: Capitalism Defends Itself Though the Socialist Labor Party, an “Expose of What Stands Behind the S.L.P. Attack on Comrade William Z. Foster”, also by Moissaye J. Olgin; The Democratic Town of the Hoover Hunger Government; Hoover – That Great Engineer – After Four Years; The Word and Deeds of Franklin D. Roosevelt, a speech delivered by William Z. Foster, in Columbus Ohio, August 20, 1932; The Farmers' Way Out, noting the CPUSAs position on the problems facing farmers; Will Beer Bring Back Prosperity? The Communist Position on the Repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment; Working Women and Elections; New York State Communist Election Platform; Is the Socialist Party the Party of the Workers? by I. Amter.
Communist National Nominating Convention on May 28-29, 1932, lay out the six immediate demands that compose the platform of the Communist Party. The demands are:

1. Unemployment and social insurance at the expense of the state and the employers.
2. Against Hoover's wage-cutting policy.
3. Emergency relief for the impoverished farmers without restrictions by the government and banks; exemption of impoverished farmers from taxes, and no forced collection of rents or debts.
5. Against capitalist terror; against all forms of suppression of the political rights of the workers.
6. Against imperialist war; for the defense of the Chinese people and of the Soviet Union.

The foregrounding of “Equal Rights for Negroes” is also highlighted in C.A. Hathaway’s pamphlet *Who Are the Friends of the Negro People*, also published by the Campaign Committee in 1932. Hathaway, a white organizer from Minnesota, targets both black and white organizers with the pamphlet: speaking of the importance for black workers to join together and also commending the CPUSA for supporting blacks to make “their” own decisions in the Black Belt.

Hathaway’s pamphlet is clear in that the CPUSA’s choice of Ford, “a Negro worker – a leader of the oppressed Negro people” is no accident. Rather, Hathaway frames Ford’s nomination as an important political choice, specifically noting that Ford’s nomination is not a “cheap vote-catching move.” He continues: “In fact, a great number – probably a majority of the Negro people, who might be won for the Communist platform and candidates, are viciously and illegally denied the right to vote.”

Contrasting this “cheap vote-catching,” Hathaway notes the Party’s choice of Ford as

Vice-President is motivated, but motivated by the desire to demonstrate the CPUSA’s position for “complete and unconditional equality for the Negro people.” Using this as a staging ground, Hathaway continues to lay out, in very simple and direct terms, the policies of the CPUSA and the politics of the Black Nation Thesis, highlighting the fight against lynching, chain-gangs, and Jim Crow, the need for unemployment relief, and the right to self-determination for the Black Belt. Many of these goals are reformist, though the rhetoric of the Black Nation Thesis held on to a revolutionary edge that the Party played off the Socialists and others who also argued for reforms. Of the radical demand of self-determination for the Black Belt, Hathaway is very specific, noting the importance of land in the South for black workers, state unity for the Black Belt, and the right to secede from the Federation based on the oppression faced under Jim Crow and Lynch Law.

Hathaway’s pamphlet also argues that the other parties, Republican, Democratic, and Socialist, “persecute Negroes” and, though they might make campaign promises, will fall back on their historical record of oppressing black workers after the elections. Hathaway details past crimes of both the Democratic and Republican parties but condemns the Socialist Party most vehemently. This is sectarian politics at its worst, as the Socialist Party, though using a slightly different rhetoric, did not differ from the CPUSA in most of their platform. However, in line with Third Period party rhetoric, Hathaway claims: “No party lies more brazenly on the Negro question than the Socialist

325 Hathaway, *Who Are the Friends of the Negro People*, 4, italics in text.
326 Hathaway, *Who Are the Friends of the Negro People*, 14-16.
Party,” noting specifically the Socialist Party’s framing of Negro Equality in terms of legal rights and claiming that they are purposefully ignoring demands for social, political, or cultural equality.\textsuperscript{329}

Other 1932 elections pamphlets also foreground the Black Nation Thesis. \textit{Working Women and the Elections} highlights the larger fight for “full social and political equality for the Negro masses!” but also details the oppression specifically faced by black women.\textsuperscript{330} This pamphlet, targeted specifically to women in the Party and often calling out to women in the pages, asks readers to think of their experience as black and white women to understand the need for organizing women for the election. Black women’s “special oppression” is not mentioned in name, thought the pamphlet does discuss the double burden faced by black women by being targeted for both their race and their gender. The pamphlet contends that “Negro women proved to be the best fighters, and above all the best organizers” in recent campaigns for the unemployed, farmers, and tenants.\textsuperscript{331} The pamphlet continues to discuss both black and white women in their roles as farmers, members of the working class, mothers, and political actors noting imperialist wars, the treatment of the Soviet Union, and the debates around prohibition.

In Harlem, the 1932 elections material offered an even more nuanced understanding of race and class relations, such as in \textit{New York State Communist Election Platform: For Immediate Relief of the Unemployed, Against Discrimination of Negro Workers}. The New York State ticket ran Israel Amter, a Jewish organizer who also wrote pamphlets on the Negro Question, for Governor, and Henry Shepard, a black organizer, for

\textsuperscript{329} Hathaway, \textit{Who Are the Friends of the Negro People}, 8.


\textsuperscript{331} National Elections Committee of the Communist Party, \textit{Working Women and the Elections}, 7.
Lieutenant-Governor. The pamphlet also includes the declaration for the standard platform, including: “4. Equal rights for the Negroes and self-determination for the Black Belt.”332 Importantly, in the pamphlet, the second title is “Negro and Latin-American Workers Suffer Most” where the pamphlet lays out the statistics of unemployment and desperation among black and Latin American workers, agitating for relief for these unemployed workers.333 This focus on Harlem elections continued to local elections and state contests. For example, James Ford, William Patterson, Herman MacKawain, and William Fitzgerald published *An Open Letter to the Negro People of Harlem: The Election Issues and The Negro People* in 1933 highlighting the importance of local elections to the Harlem councils and to state representative positions.

The CPUSA also ran Foster and Ford in the 1936 election; the Black Nation Thesis was again mentioned in campaign material, though not as prominently as during the 1932 campaign. This shift in priorities was partially due to the Party’s changing focus toward the conflicts in Europe, while at the same time the Party was centering its work with black communists in the National Negro Congress.334 Ford’s *The Negro People and the

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Farmer-Labor Party was one of the main contributions, a pamphlet detailing the speech that Ford gave at the Plenum of the Central Committee in November 1935. Following Browder’s speech, where he lays out the platform of the Farmer-Labor Party, this pamphlet highlights the platform’s response to black issues and organizing, noting the familiar fights against Jim Crow, lynching, and anti-voting laws and practices. In the official 10-point program of the Party, black issues are number eight: “Full civil rights for the Negroes where they are being denied, especially in the South; against discrimination in every form; death penalty for lynchers; full support to the National Negro Congress.”

The rest of the campaign material, as in the rest of this speech, uses much of the same rhetoric, often a little toned down, that was developed for the 1932 campaign.

Local Struggles

In addition to elections and topical pamphlets on the Black Nation Thesis, there were also pamphlets produced locally and for local audiences that used the rhetoric of the Thesis to impact local organizing struggles. Though there might have been leaflets printed in many of the smaller Party offices, local pamphlets on the Black Nation Thesis were mostly produced in Harlem. Few, if any, pamphlets or leaflets were produced in the South in the 1930s; however, James Allen and others published the Southern Worker, a weekly CPUSA journal, in Alabama intermittently from 1930-1937.

The Harlem section of the Communist Party, under the leadership of James W. Ford, put out a series of pamphlets starting in the early 1930s. These pamphlets further

elaborate on many of the arguments developed in the Black Nation Thesis, often focusing these arguments on problems occurring in Harlem and for Harlem residents. Few, if any, of the Harlem pamphlets are dated, so the order of the pamphlets and relationship between them is difficult to ascertain. Most of the pamphlets were authored or co-authored by James Ford and, relying on subject matter and internal references, were probably published between 1931 and 1937. One such piece is Ford’s *Hunger and Terror in Harlem* that describes in two parts “The causes and remedies for the March 19th outbreak in Harlem.” This is a reference to the Harlem Riot of 1935, which was sparked by a rumor of police brutality and grew quickly with many Harlem residents in fury over their harsh and unfair treatment at the hands of the police and the state. In the pamphlet, Ford chronicles the police brutality, evictions, and unfair treatment targeted at black people in Harlem. He argues:

the Negro people are treated like dogs in New York City, shot down and beaten by police for the least provocation. Such persecution is a part of the Jim Crow lynch system in this country and flows out of the economic and social conditions of the Negro people in the South, the most outrageous national oppression.

Ford continues outlining many of the daily tortures endured by black people, including letters to substantiate his arguments and claims.

The first part of the pamphlet highlights police brutality and the attacks on inter-racial couples in New York. The pamphlet proceeds to list demands under the title “The People of Harlem Demand Bread and Security:”

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336 For more on CPUSA organizing in Harlem see Mark Naison’s *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*, which details the many organizing campaigns undertaken by the Harlem Party.  
337 Ford, *Hunger and Terror in Harlem*, 3.  
1. We demand that a stop be put to police attacks on the unemployed of Harlem,
2. We demand that immediately every unemployed person be put on relief in Harlem and that there be no discrimination against single people and young workers.
3. We demand a halt to jim-crow practices in relief and jobs. [sic]
10. We demand the punishment of all police that have beaten up unemployed workers and the arrest and conviction of police who have killed Negroes in Harlem without provocation, particularly the killers of Lloyd Hobbs and Edward Laurie.339

The tone and detail of this pamphlet is significantly different from centrally published pieces, because this pamphlet, unlike many of the others, is focused predominantly on the community of Harlem. The centrally published pamphlets, designed to travel nationally and speak to a wide range of people, are less invested in particular local struggles. The localization of the argument marks one of the early shifting points from the sectarian rhetoric of the Third Period to politics of coalition and direct engagement of the United or Popular Front. This shift in rhetoric is in line with Mark Naison’s observation in Communists in Harlem During the Depression, that Harlem organizers prefigured the coalitional politics of the Popular Front, building alliances to target specific issues of Harlem residents.340 This shift is obvious in the second part of Ford’s pamphlet, in which he engages with the question of the health care and services provided to black people in Harlem.

Other Harlem pamphlets were focused on local elections, such as James Ford, William L. Patterson, Herman MacKawain, and William Fitzgerald’s 1933 pamphlet An Open Letter to the Negro People of Harlem: The Election Issues and The Negro People or Ford’s single authored, Win Progress for Harlem. Yet other Harlem published pamphlets were

339 Ford, Hunger and Terror in Harlem, 22-23.
340 Naison, Communists in Harlem During the Depression, xviii.
broader in scope, such as James Ford’s *The Communists and the Struggle for Negro Liberation* and *The Right to Revolution for the Negro People*. Ford also published a series of pamphlets on international issues under the auspices of the Harlem Section of the Party including *World Problems of the Negro People (a Refutation of George Padmore)* and *Imperialism Destroys the People of Africa*. Similarly, the Harlem Section of the Party also published the pamphlet *War on Ethiopia: An Interview with Teke Haawariate, Ethiopian Ambassador* around 1936.

Chapter four centers on these internationally focused pamphlets and places them in context with the larger ideas behind the Black Nation Thesis. The predominance of international pamphlets coming out of the Harlem offices is probably due to James Ford’s leadership of the Party section, as Ford’s role within the Comintern supported his focus on international issues. Increased African American attention to foreign affairs, especially issues in Africa and the colonial world, was in part spurred by an emergent anti-colonialism, a growing global awareness between the World Wars, and, especially in Harlem, a particular interest in the Ethiopian struggle for independence. As will be discussed in Chapter four, critiques of imperialism, struggles for independence, and African nationalism were all important topics to many black radicals and the subject of many pamphlets, especially out of the Harlem section of the CPUSA.

The Chicago section of the CPUSA published fewer pamphlets, though often with similar themes as the Harlem section. Martha Thomas’ *High Cost Living: Program of Struggle Against the High Cost of Living*, from 1935, and *Buddy, Can You Spare the Time*, published around 1932, cover similar themes to *Hunger and Terror in Harlem*. Though there were many black organizers in Chicago, and many important campaigns on issues

\[\text{341} \] See: Plummer, *Rising Wind*, and van Eschen, *Race Against Empire.*
facing black workers, the pamphlet material did not reflect this focus. Randi Storch’s *Red Chicago: American Communism at its Grassroots, 1928-1935* chronicles many of the struggles of black Communists in Chicago. Though a center of activism spurred by the Black Nation Thesis, as Storch demonstrates, the Chicago chapter did not produce pamphlet literature with a focus on black communists and their concerns like Harlem. One notable exception is Harold Preece’s 1940 pamphlet entitled *Peonage* published by the Abolish Peonage Committee of the International Labor Defense in Chicago. This pamphlet talks about “1940s style slavery” and the plight of black workers across the country but especially in the South. The pamphlet is not focused on Chicago-specific concerns, but tackles the larger issues of the Black Nation Thesis broadly. Thus, though published in Chicago, the pamphlet does not exhibit many of the traits of other CPUSA local issue pamphlets.

The other major organizing location around the Black Nation Thesis was the South. The 1929 textile strike in Gastonia, North Carolina, was the Party’s first campaign in the South and directly engaged issues of race, class, and interracial union organizing. The Gastonia strike was unsuccessful in winning many of the striker’s demands, but sparked a renewal of labor organizing across the country. Gastonia was mostly an industrial campaign and developed and used organizing strategies directly tied to unionization struggles for both black and white workers. As such, Gastonia could not serve as an organizing model for the Deep South, characterized by being rural, agrarian,

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342 Storch, *Red Chicago*.
343 Preece, *Peonage*, introduction.
344 Three works chronicle the Communist struggles in the South: James Allen’s political auto-biography *Organizing in the Depression South*, Glenda Gilmore’s comparative work *Defying Dixie*, and Robin D.G. Kelley detailed and thorough account of Southern Communist organizing *Hammer and Hoe*.
and segregated, with a history of radical traditions not steeped in industrial unions. Gastonia, though an important campaign, would not be a model for the Party in the South. As Allen explains: “Gastonia was on the coastal plain, in the recently industrialized area, away from the principal plantation sharecropping regions of the central plains and the Mississippi Delta.” However, the Party, in line with the Black Nation Thesis, wanted to organize in the South. As Allen notes:

The Party’s first serious effort to organize in the Deep South, with its great concentration of Black population, came in early 1930. It was a direct consequence of the internal change in the Party and the new position on the struggle for Black freedom. The decision to proceed with the establishment of Party organization and of an openly Communist periodical in that part of the South confirmed the change in course.  

After Gastonia, as the party moved to develop programs in the Deep South, the CPUSA’s main Southern base of operations was first Birmingham under the direction of Tom Johnson, and then Chattanooga, Alabama, where James Allen ran the offices of the weekly paper the *Southern Worker*.  

Allen published the *Southern Worker* with his wife Isabelle starting in 1930. The paper had a weekly distribution and sold for two cents a copy. Yearly subscriptions were a dollar. Since the paper operated underground, there was no advertising, and funding the paper and its distribution, according to Allen, was often difficult. James and Isabelle Allen published the *Southern Worker* until September 1931 when it was taken over by Harry Wicks. Wicks was not successful with the paper and eventually Elizabeth Lawson, a regular contributor to the paper, took over editorship. The paper folded in 1932, but was reestablished by Lawson, under the pseudonym Jim Mallory, in 1933.  

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345 Allen *Organizing in the Depression South*, 17-18.  
347 Allen *Organizing in the Depression South*, 33-36, 41-42.
Now published out of Birmingham, the paper came out somewhat irregularly until 1936. Publishing the *Southern Worker* was a significant task and the weekly paper fulfilled all of the print media functions typical in other areas. The paper also ran larger “special issues” where it provided more in-depth coverage of issues such as the Scottsboro trials, the miner’s campaigns in Harlan, Kentucky, and the activities of the Sharecroppers Union.

In light of the struggles to publish the *Southern Worker*, it is understandable that the CPSUA did not publish anything else in the South. However, there were some booklets published by Southern activists and organizers through the larger publishing centers in New York. These pamphlets are not as directly related to local struggles as the Harlem pamphlets but anticipate a Southern readership and speak to specifically Southern issues and debates. *The Disinherited Speak*, a 1937 pamphlet collecting letters from sharecroppers, is a prime example. This pamphlet, published in New York by the Workers Defense League, which organized the defense of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, shares stories of the sharecroppers with readers both in the North and the South. Similarly, George Anstrom’s *The Government Takes a Hand in*

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348 Allen *Organizing in the Depression South*, 128.
the Cotton Patch speaks to issues facing cotton farmers across the South, although the Workers Library Publishers in New York published the 1933 pamphlet.

The best example is Tom Johnson’s 1935 pamphlet The Reds In Dixie: Who Are The Communists and What Do They Fight for in the South, published by the Workers Library Publishers but aimed at a Southern audience. This pamphlet organizes its message around common misconceptions of Communists, attacking stereotypes of “foreign” Red organizers in the South wanting “to tear down churches, incite race riots, force whites to marry Negroes and eventually turn America over to some foreign country – probably Russia.”\textsuperscript{349} To counter this, Johnson demonstrates that Communists are like other Southerners, often immigrants, working for positive change, and believing in “America’s work.” These claims are perhaps a bit disingenuous, as the majority of Party members were Northerners, urbanites, and more often Jewish than black. Still, Johnson highlights similarities that are important. He argues: “Now we can see who the Communists really are: \textit{They are workers, black and white, native and foreign-born, who work in American industries or starve in American soup lines.}”\textsuperscript{350} Johnson continues to outline that Communists, like other Southerners, want good jobs for working people, giving examples of Communists leading strikes for better pay and unemployment relief across

\textsuperscript{349} Johnson, The Reds in Dixie, 3.
\textsuperscript{350} Johnson, The Reds in Dixie, 5, italics in text.
the South.\textsuperscript{351} He further notes that Communists have been organizing for unemployment insurance, for higher wages, and for better and more successful strikes. In line with the common CPUSA politic, Johnson gives poignant examples of other unions and labor organizations that have failed Southern workers, especially Southern black workers. He gives examples of the lower wages paid by the N.R.A. (National Recovery Act) for work in the South, as well as the A.F. of L. (American Federation of Labor) voting for lower wages in the South and “losing the Alabama mine strikes.”\textsuperscript{352} To counter these examples of labor and governmental organizations selling out the South, Johnson highlights the Communists’ work with the Sharecroppers Union, unemployment relief, and higher wage strikes.

Johnson continues analyzing why wages are lower in the South for workers on the same jobs. He notes that there are two reasons that “Southern workers must suffer more than those in the North or the West.”\textsuperscript{353} Specifically:

\begin{quote}
First the fact that before the Civil War the slave system prevented the South from developing industry and kept it poorer than the North, where big shops and factories were springing up all over the land. [Secondly,] the fact that slavery in the South has never been completely abolished.\textsuperscript{354}
\end{quote}

Looking to the history of slavery, Johnson argues that Southerners need to join together across racial lines to organize for better wages and unemployment relief and against racial prejudice. He makes the argument that working against racial prejudice will benefit white workers not only because they will be a stronger labor force, but because it will raise real wages by challenging the prevailing practice of using white workers to break

\textsuperscript{351} Johnson, \textit{The Reds in Dixie}, 7.
\textsuperscript{352} Johnson, \textit{The Reds in Dixie}, 10-13.
\textsuperscript{353} Johnson, \textit{The Reds in Dixie}, 24.
\textsuperscript{354} Johnson, \textit{The Reds in Dixie}, 24-25, italics in text.
black workers’ strikes and vice versa. He argues that the “very division between black and white in the South is largely responsible for forcing lower wages and worse conditions on every Southern worker – be he white or black.”

Near the end of the pamphlet, Johnson looks concretely at the myth of white superiority. Under the heading “Is It True That Whites are ‘Superior’ to Negroes?,” Johnson challenges the attitude among some whites that whiteness is racially superior. Citing the bravery of black soldiers, science that proves the equality of all humans, and the history of inter-racial union successes, Johnson argues that these ideas of white superiority will not help white workers. He claims:

This fairy tale of “white superiority” is false from top to bottom – a lie carefully cultivated and drilled into the minds of the white workers for just one purpose – to split the ranks of the working class and weaken the fighting power of the workers. Does it fill the stomach of the white worker when he is starving that he is superior to the Negro? Does it get him higher wages and better conditions? Of course not! It serves the interest of but one class and one alone – the bosses, the capitalist class.

Johnson follows this with a discussion of the Resolution on the Negro Question. He argues that if racial superiority is a lie, and workers are stronger when they work together across racial lines, white workers should support black workers also in their fight for self-determination in the Black Belt. He argues: “The Communist Party believes that the Negro people in the Black Belt, if they are to be really free, should have the right to control and govern this territory and to develop their life and culture in their own way.” He is quick to point out:

This does not mean that we want to establish some sort of Jim Crow State. On the contrary, the white croppers and workers in the Black Belt

355 Johnson, The Reds in Dixie, 26, italics in text.
356 Johnson, The Reds in Dixie, 29-30, italics in text.
357 Johnson, The Reds in Dixie, 33.
would be welcome to stay. They would have equal rights, would have a voice in government, and their rights would be fully protected. It simply means that the Negro people, as the majority in this territory, would have the right to self-government, the right to determine what kind of government it is to have, and what connection, if any, this nation is to have with the U.S. Government.

Linking a critique of capitalism and the demand for self-determination for black people in the Black Belt, Johnson ends his pamphlet noting how the Communist Party is good for Southerners, speaks to the concerns of Southern workers, and works for Southern issues. Though not published in the South, this pamphlet, much like the material in the weekly newspaper The Southern Worker, addresses local Southern issues and debates.

Local pamphlets highlight how the CPUSA worked with the Black Nation Thesis to try to make an impact on members’ everyday lives and communities. Looking at the different issues facing people in Harlem and in the South, the CPUSA was able to tailor the message of the Black Nation Thesis to particular communities and debates. Similarly, the Party offered pamphlets on specific issues and concerns and aimed toward different constituents. Some pamphlets were pointedly about certain trades, longshoremen and miners, for instance, or focused on particular constituents such as youth or women. Only one pamphlet, however dealt with the issues facing black women in US, though many pamphlets mentioned black women as important organizers and targeted their leadership in local campaigns.

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358 Johnson, The Reds in Dixie, 33, italics in text.
359 This is especially true for the In the Soviet American series with titles such as: Seamen and Longshoremen Under the Red Flag, The Miner’s Road to Freedom, and Happy Days for American Youth, all published in 1935 by the Workers Library Publishers.
Race, Gender, and Class: The Position of Negro Women

The one pamphlet published in the 1930s on the oppression of black women is *The Position of Negro Women* by Cyril Briggs, a veteran Party organizer, and Eugene Gordon, a radical black newspaper reporter. This 1935 pamphlet, unique in its subject matter, is not unique in its structure or the economic frame of its argument. Under the cover image of a young black woman, with a slightly off-centered beret and a sad downward gaze, the pamphlet details the economic difficulties facing working black women.

The most groundbreaking statement in the pamphlet is the opening paragraph in which Gordon and Briggs proclaim:

In a Society based on production for profit, to be both a woman worker and a Negro is to suffer a double handicap. The Negro woman worker is doubly victimized. She suffers from the general discrimination against women workers and from her identity as a member of a nationality singled out by the ruling class for special plundering, persecution and oppression.\(^{360}\)

Gordon and Briggs are not the first to use the framework of a double burden to describe the oppression of black women. Indeed, earlier Party journalists writing in weekly and daily papers had developed some of this rhetoric used in Gordon and Briggs’s

pamphlet. As Erik McDuffie notes, black women in the party had been writing about “triple oppression” of black women at the nexus of race, class, and gender for over a decade by 1935, though not always using that terminology. McDuffie credits a white Communist organizer, the aforementioned Jeanette Pearl, with the first article about black women in the *Daily Worker* in 1924. In her article, entitled “Negro Women Workers,” Pearl

condemned the brutal exploitations of black women industrial workers and their exclusion from organized labor. However, she did not issue a call for the Workers Party to unionize black women or to recruit them into its ranks. Nor did she discuss how the interplay between race, gender, and class positioned African American women at the bottom of the U.S. labor force.

Gordon and Briggs’s pamphlet does just that, however, foregrounding the economic exploitation of black women and calling for multi-race and multi-gendered unions to build a strong working class movement.

Gordon and Briggs do not discuss some of the other impacts of a “triple oppression” framework, ideas which had been broached by black women in the CPUSA in the daily and weekly press. For example, McDuffie notes that Grace Campbell, writing for the *New York Age* in 1925, discussed how “race, gender, class, and cultural biases shaped black women’s relation to the criminal justice system.” Other black women organizers wrote articles naming women as the most exploited of the labor force, paying special attention to black women who worked as domestics and in menial labor jobs.

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Gordon and Briggs build off of this tradition of black women organizers’ contributions to daily and weekly papers in their longer, narrative pamphlet. They mostly focus on economic exploitation of black women workers, but they do note that “on her lower wages, she must meet the discriminative higher rentals extracted from Negro workers by piratical landlords, both Negro and white, in the segregated ghettoes in which she and her family are forced to live by Jim-Crow laws or practices.”\textsuperscript{365} Noting both Northern migration and the increase in industrial employment opportunities for black women, Gordon and Briggs criticize that these changes have not improved the lot of black women workers. Indeed, wages for black women are far below white men, but even below white women workers. Partially, Gordon and Briggs maintain, this is because unions are segregated and white chauvinism is used by labor bosses and white laborers alike to continue to oppress black workers.\textsuperscript{366} They counter, however, that the government is also supporting and even legalizing wage discrimination. Their poignant example is black women workers at the Southland Manufacturing Company.

The Southland Manufacturing Company, for instance, a cotton shirt making concern of Alabama, employs mostly Negro women (95 per cent). The N.R.A. code for cotton making industries calls for a weekly wage of $12 in the South. The Company appealed for, and obtained, exemption on the pretext that its Negro women workers were “incompetent”, and “deserved” only $9 a week at the most.\textsuperscript{367} The authors continue noting how these black women are exploited first because they are in the South, Northern cotton manufacturers pay a base wage of $14 per NRA

\textsuperscript{365} Gordon and Briggs, \textit{The Position of Negro Women}, 2.
\textsuperscript{366} Gordon and Briggs, \textit{The Position of Negro Women}, 4.
\textsuperscript{367} Gordon and Briggs, \textit{The Position of Negro Women}, 5.
standards, and secondly because of their gender and their race, thereby earning only $9 a week.\(^{368}\)

Black women working in the professions are not much better off, Gordon and Briggs claim. Citing the US Department of Labor, Women's Bureau Bulletin No. 70, they argue that few black women are employed in professional jobs and the few that are earn significantly less than their male counterparts.\(^{369}\) Black women most often find professional employment as teachers, and the economic disparity among teaching is stark. Gordon and Briggs note:

School teaches comprise the largest professional group among Negroes, and here women predominate. Confined almost wholly to segregated sections of big cities, or to rural Southern Schools, Negroes teachers are forced into a position of economic and social inferiority to white teachers. In the North, the pay of white and Negro teachers is usually identical, but in the South a teacher is paid according to her color. If she is black she gets much less. For example, in Louisiana Negro elementary school teachers receive an average of $292 a year, as against $1,107 for white elementary school teachers. Negro high school teachers receive $661, while white higher school teachers are paid $1,419.”\(^{370}\)

Such discrepancy, the authors explain, is a “deliberate attempt to limit the education of Negro children, with shorter school terms, etc. In Alabama and other Southern states, most of the Negro schools have been shut down during the past two years on the pretext of shortage of funds.”\(^{371}\)

Gordon and Briggs end their pamphlet with a summary of some of the victories the CPUSA has won for working black women, focusing on the unemployment relief measures and alluding to the activism and organizing work of black women in winning

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these important fights. They continue arguing that the struggles for the benefit of working black women “must be intensified and broadened.” Gordon and Briggs, *The Position of Negro Women*, 15. They suggest, of course, the CPUSA’s program of inter-racial cooperation and support for the Black Nation Thesis. Specifically, they argue: “Larger masses of white workers must be drawn into the fight against Negro oppression, against racial and sex discrimination, for full economic, political, and social equality for the Negro people, and for the right of self-determination for the Black Belt.” Gordon and Briggs, *The Position of Negro Women*, 15-16. Citing Scottsboro and unemployment victories, Gordon and Briggs are confident that more successes are on the way for black women workers. They end their pamphlet in what becomes a common trope of CPUSA pamphlets of 1935, evoking the “shining example” of the Soviet Union, where “women have been emancipated.” Ending on a triumphant note: “The victorious workers and peasants of the Soviet union point the revolutionary way out of the morass of capitalist race hatred and national oppression, chronic mass unemployment and suffering, fascist reaction and imperialist war.” Gordon and Briggs, *The Position of Negro Women*, 16.

Gordon and Briggs’s pamphlet is interesting as it is the only pamphlet that foregrounds the oppression of black women until Claudia Jones’ published materials in the 1940s. Even then, Jones’ work draws from Gordon and Briggs’s pamphlet and relies on many of the same analytical moves, analytical moves developed through a long history of black women organizing in the Party. The pamphlet is also interesting for what it does not enjoy, namely reference in other Party works or pamphlets.

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375 Jones, *An End to the Neglect of the Problem of the Negro Woman*!  

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Most of the Black Nation Thesis pamphlets published by the larger Party presses such as International Publishers, the Workers Library Publishers, or the ILD, are regularly listed on the back of other pamphlets. In this way, pamphlets are used together to form a library on particular topics, and are even listed as such. For example, in *The Communist Position on the Negro Question* pamphlet included here, and the “Pamphlet You Should Read on the Negro Question” form an important primer to think about the Resolution on the Negro Question in the CPUSA. Pamphlet back and inside covers, therefore, become an important tracking mechanism for pamphlet distribution and importance. Pamphlets that are regularly listed, for example James Allen's *The American Negro* or Harry Haywood and M. Howard's *Lynching*, are more likely to have a larger

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Figure 10: Johnson, *The Reds in Dixie*, back cover.

Figure 11: Spivak, *On the Chain Gang*, back cover.
distribution and greater support from the CPUSA leadership. Gordon and Briggs's pamphlet, however, is almost never included as “further reading.” This suggests, perhaps, that this pamphlet, and the material it covers, the oppression of black women, was not considered a high priority of the CPUSA in 1935. Indeed, the only reading list to mention The Position of Negro Women is from the pamphlet Women and Equality, which includes a short paragraph on Negro women. Here The Position of Negro Women pamphlets is also included in the “Pamphlets on Women” collection along with other titles such as: What Every Working Woman Wants, The Road to Women’s Freedom, Women in the Soviet Union, and Mother Bloor.
The exclusion of Briggs and Gordon’s pamphlet is important for many reasons, not the least of which is how it allows for the Black Nation Thesis to be gendered exclusively male. The paradigm of the Black Nation Thesis, and the dreams of black liberation that the Black Nation Thesis pamphlets help to foster, are severely limited by a lack of gender analysis. The Party publishing apparatus obscured the one pamphlet that could begin to address these issues and bring into the conversation some of the important interventions black women organizers in the Party had been making for decades.

Conclusion

The CPUSA used pamphlets to communicate with its members on many issues and debates of national importance. From 1930-1936, few issues had the national spotlight as much as the debates around race, nationality, and class, framed around the Comintern’s Resolution on the Negro Question and the resulting Black Nation Thesis. Many kinds of pamphlets were used to think about the Black Nation Thesis, from the election campaign material of Foster and Ford, to the local Harlem pamphlets about...
tenants’ rights as self-determination. These pamphlets frame the Black Nation Thesis as specifically American, and make the Thesis an important issue for American Communists. Reaching out to different audiences and employing very different methods of analysis and rhetorical strategies, the Black Nation Thesis pamphlets worked to demonstrate the importance of thinking about the connections of race and class, and deepened the CPUSA’s analysis of historical materialism to think concretely about race.

At the same time, the pamphlets are important sites to look at the development of the social movement’s rhetoric on the Black Nation Thesis. Taking pamphlets not only as individual authors’ statements, but also as products of a larger social movement process to create and debate policy, the Black Nation Thesis pamphlets shed light on the various ways the Party discussed and thought about the Resolution on the Negro Question. Importantly, however, the social movement’s voice on issues around race and class is strikingly male. Although, in 1935, Eugene Gordon and Cyril Briggs published The Position of Negro Women, most of the pamphlet literature focused on men and elided black women’s issues. Similarly, men, both black and white, wrote most of the Black Nation Thesis pamphlets, although Elizabeth Lawson, a white Party organizer in the South, published both in the Southern Worker and her own pamphlets. It would not be until Claudia Jones published a series of pamphlets in the early 1940s that black women’s issues would be given prominence in Party publications.

In the lack of coverage of black women’s issues it is obvious how pamphlets are both dependant on and reflective of the issues the Party holds as most significant and power relationships within the Party. In the 1930s pamphlets this is also obvious in the preponderance of critique of other black organizations and their dismissal as “misleaders” of black people. The rhetorical framing of the NAACP, the Urban League,
and other large black organizations as bourgeois and incapable of helping black workers is characteristic of the sectarian Third Period politics of the CPUSA. By the mid-1930s these positions shifted and collaboration and coalition with other left-leaning and black community groups became a priority for Party organizations.

Another example of the shifting priorities of the CPUSA is the tension between local and national pamphlets. Local pamphlets highlighted local struggles and, to a limited extent, reached out to other local organizations. National pamphlets, for example the campaign literature from the 1932 and 1936 Presidential and Vice-Presidential campaigns of Foster and Ford, foregrounded sectarian struggles, criticizing the Socialist Party and other black organizations. CPUSA pamphleteers also wrote pamphlets for different audiences, targeting local pamphlets to local issues and speaking more broadly with national and campaign material.

CPUSA pamphlets on the Black Nation Thesis worked on many different levels of engagement, speaking to local and national issues. Social movement pamphlets reached out to new members, while also debating policy and developing CPUSA rhetoric. In the chapters that follow, I analyze pamphlets produced around the Black Nation Thesis from 1930 through 1936. I look specifically at pamphlets dealing with chauvinism, nationality, and internationalism to ground the Black Nation Thesis in a theoretical tradition spanning the US and the Soviet Union. I also analyze pamphlets written around the Scottsboro Nine trial, noting the style of propaganda used to educate people outside of the Party and spread the message of the CPUSA. Highlighting these different pamphlet traditions within the CPUSA demonstrates the various kinds of pamphlets produced, the intended audience for these pamphlets, and their impact on the development of the Black Nation Thesis.
Chapter two argued that although the Black Nation Thesis was, arguably, “made in Moscow,” it was forged in the US through the direct organizing of black and white Party leaders, rank-and-file members, and allied organizers. As shown in chapter three, through this direct, on the ground organizing work, the Black Nation Thesis became very “American” and was used to think through concrete local ideas, problems, and issues. This transformation can also be mapped through the theoretical pamphlet literature of the Party, which both locates the Black Nation Thesis concretely in the US domestic context while simultaneously engaging a global argument about race.

This chapter traces the development of the Black Nation Thesis through a reworking of the rhetoric of nationalism and internationalism for a US American audience. The “Americanization” of the Thesis can be seen specifically in the early deployment of the Thesis alongside conversations about white chauvinism and the
geographic specificity of the Black Belt. By grounding the thesis in discussions about whiteness and power the CPUSA was able to begin conversations on systematic racism that engaged a wide variety of members and implicated everyone in the struggle against racist oppression.

To make the Black Nation Thesis understandable and useful for the US context, the CPUSA had to bridge various nationalist traditions. The second part of this chapter traces three different conceptions of nationalism, Soviet, Western, and Black Nationalist, that were at play in the discussions around the Black Nation Thesis and shows how the Thesis knit together these different traditions to impact domestic discourse on race. Along with a critique of imperialism, the nationalism deployed by the Black Nation Thesis both grounded the Thesis in the US context while linking it to a larger conversation about race globally. The chapter concludes by looking at the outcome of the Americanization of the Black Nation Thesis, which, in the Popular Front period of the late 1930s, was a distinct discourse of internationalism.

Overall, the Black Nation Thesis broadly impacted the rhetoric about race in the United States by suggesting a different kind of Black Nationalism that was grounded in the US as well as a critique of colonialism. The pamphlets directly engaged with the Thesis show the development of the language around race, nation, and imperialism in the US. This discussion links a reckoning of race and class, and, in later cases race, class, and gender. These pamphlets are key to the development of the rhetoric of race, nationalism, and imperialism, which lay the groundwork for later civil rights movements growing out of the South. Building on decades of scholarship, the CPUSA’s Black Nation Thesis pamphlets were particularly useful because of their foregrounding of the Black Belt to imagine different possibilities of race and class.
While the previous chapter laid out the foundations of pamphlet literature and explored the various pamphlets that were used to communicate about race, class, and gender in the US, this chapter traces the development of the Black Nation Thesis specifically. Concretely, this chapter looks at how The Black Nation Thesis helped organizers in the US to educate about and work through conceptions of imperialism, anti-colonialism, and nationalism based on analyses of situations elsewhere. Organizers brought these conversations closer to home through an engagement of internationalism and the Black Nation Thesis.

This chapter analyzes some of the most important theoretical pamphlets of the 1930s. Though there is scant information available about the pamphlets’ publication, but judging by their wide distribution in archives and the ample reference to these pamphlets in other CPUSA printed material, these pieces enjoyed a fairly wide dissemination. Unlike the Scottsboro and anti-lynching pamphlets discussed in the next chapter, these pamphlets were directed to readers familiar with the Party and Party politics; the pamphlets use insider terminology, refer to other authors, concepts, and events with little preamble, and are often acidic in their critique of non-Party activism.

Some of the pamphlets discussed are reprints of Party speeches or public events. Most notably, the 1934 Eighth Convention speeches of both Earl Browder and Harry Haywood were key theoretical statements concerning the Black Nation Thesis. Similarly, the earliest pamphlet to mention many of the tenets of the Black Nation Thesis consisted of the transcript of the show trial of August Yokinen. Yet other pamphlets have a more developed argument, such as James Allen’s well-researched and oft-cited booklet *The American Negro*. In all, the pamphlets considered here are emblematic of a wide variety of printed literature used to reach out to Party members and ruminate on
the ideas advanced in the Black Nation Thesis. These ruminations centered around a critique of chauvinism, nationalism, and imperialism leading to a unique and important internationalist framing of the Black Nation Thesis and offering a new take on ideas about race, class, nation, and international struggle.

**Race Hatred on Trial: White Chauvinism in the US**

Early CPUSA conversations about black oppression in the US centered on discussions about white chauvinism. Predating whiteness studies or a concerted attention to white ethnic identities and white cultural production, the CPUSA’s attention to white chauvinism as part of the critique developed around the Black Nation Thesis demonstrated the multi-faceted approach to thinking about race.\(^{376}\) White chauvinism was a term used to discuss the mistaken beliefs of white people that they were superior to blacks. Like white supremacy, the ideas of white chauvinism suggested that white people were historically, politically, and morally superior. The use of the term chauvinism also implied a national character to whiteness and an exaggerated patriotic belief in white people, and, in the domestic context, in the whiteness of the US as a

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\(^{376}\) The CPUSA was not unique in theorizing about whiteness in the 1930s. Indeed, Du Bois had published “The Souls of White Folk” in the collection *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* in 1920. David R. Roediger has also edited a collection of black authors writing on whiteness entitled *Black on White: Black Writers on What It Means to Be White*, which includes over ten pieces written before 1930. Also see Mia Bay’s work on the changes in black people’s perceptions of whites between 1830-1925 in *The White Image in the Black Mind*. 

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nation. Many pamphlets refer to ongoing struggles against white chauvinism in the Party in the early 1930s, usually through reference to the trial of August Yokinen.\footnote{One such pamphlet is James Allen’s \textit{The American Negro}, where, near the end of the pamphlet, after thoroughly discussing the economic oppression of black industrial workers and farmers, Allen offers a quick overview of Communist activism around issues of race. He frames this analysis around an understanding of white supremacy, which he argues is used by the white ruling class to “justify the severe economic exploitation of the millions of Negro workers and tenant farmers, and at the same time secure the support of the white workers in attacking the Negroes.” (23) On the basis of a history of white chauvinism that begins with slavery and is reinforced with the betrayal of Reconstruction, Allen reinterprets segregation and Jim Crow alongside other legal, economic, and social forms of oppression of black people in the US. He looks specifically at segregation in the army and lynching law. He highlights the actions of the Party and the Trade Union Unity League in fighting white chauvinism, struggling for the rights of black laborers, and working to make sure the Communist Party is committed to black liberation, citing the anti-chauvinism trial of August Yokinen case as an example of the Communists’ dedication (28-29).}

August Yokinen, a Communist with ties to the Finnish Language Group and a worker at the Finnish Club in Harlem, was tried in a show trial in Harlem for the “crime” of white chauvinism. The charges stemmed from the exclusion of black workers from a dance at the Finnish Cultural Center and Yokinen’s comments that black workers should not share a bathhouse with white workers. The 1931 CPUSA pamphlet, \textit{Race Hatred on Trial}, offers an edited transcription of the proceedings of the public trial that was held on March 1, 1931. Many authors cite this trial as one of the first public airings of the new Resolution on the Negro Question, the second version of which was finalized in

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{CPUSA, \textit{Race Hatred on Trial}, cover.}
\end{figure}
the Comintern in the end of 1930. The trial accomplished important work publicizing the CPUSA's ardent belief in integration and stance against racism, but the costs were high: the deportation of August Yokinen and through that the sacrifice of one member for the public display of anti-racist fervor. Importantly, though Yokinen was eventually deported, this was neither the purpose of the trial nor the desire of the Party; he was reinstated to Party membership before he was deported for visa violations.

Yokinen's role as a defendant in the trial must be unpacked. By all accounts, Yokinen did not speak much English, his statement included in the pamphlet is translated from Finnish, and his allegiance to the Communist Party, even after being put on trial, is not elaborated upon. Though deportation was not the goal of the trial, the authorities likely learned of his visa violations because of the publicity of the trial, and thus the CPUSA is not without blame. In light of this it is hard to square the CPUSA's use of Yokinen to make a statement about race and racism. Yokinen's treatment begins to hint at the various ways that the Party employed accusations of chauvinism. As Robin Kelley notes, “Occasionally the fear of being accused of ‘white chauvinism’ actually dulled the impact of criticism directed at blacks, and in a few rare moments black Communists deftly milked these fears in order to avoid censure.”

The trial of August Yokinen shares some characteristics with the later Moscow show trials: the predetermined admission of guilt, the spectacular nature of the trial used as an “education” tool, and the punitive sentencing. This trial in the US, however, differed in many ways. Also, the first of the public show trials in Moscow happened at least 5 years after the Yokinen trial. The pamphlet links Yokinen's trial to other discrimination trials in the USSR where white workers from the US were put on trial and found guilty of discrimination against a black worker also from the US. Naming this history, and the careful staging of a black man for the defense and a white man for the prosecution, indicate that this trial was designed more to call attention to race prejudice than to put the fate of Yokinen in the public view. For more on the trial and its importance, see Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*, 139-142 and Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression*, 47-51.

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In his Introduction to the pamphlet, white party author Jim Allen (James S. Allen) summarizes the importance and effects of the trial for the CPUSA:

The trial of August Yokinen before 1,500 white and Negro workers in Harlem for acts clearly based on race prejudice was an event without example in the history of the American Labor Movement. He was not tried before any court of American ruling-class “justice.” He was tried by a court of workers. He was brought to trial by the Communist Party for conduct detrimental to the interests of the working class as a whole and for violation of the fundamental program of the Party.380

The workers’ court convicted Yokinen of white chauvinism, stripped him of his membership in the Party, and outlined concrete steps and actions that Yokinen had to accomplish before his Party membership could be restored. According to the pamphlet and other Party reports, Yokinen accepted the verdict and worked diligently to earn back his membership to the Party.

This pamphlet is one of the first places that the ideas of the Black Nation Thesis were put into practice and applied to a situation in the United States. Allen asserts: “Yokinen was guilty of upholding by his sentiments and his acts the ideology of ‘white-superiority’ which serves as a ruling-class excuse for the acts of suppression and persecution of the Negro workers and farmers.”381 Allen thus opens the pamphlet, setting the stage for the later analysis and, simultaneously, demonstrating how racial differences are used to further ideological differences and how these “sentiments” play out in other arenas and oppress black people. Likewise, Allen suggests linkages between

381 CPUSA, *Race Hatred on Trial*, 3.
imperialism and black oppression by linking Yokinen’s status in the US as a foreigner with the plight of black workers.\textsuperscript{382}

The pamphlet details the trial, presenting a blow-by-blow account of the proceedings. The CPUSA made clear choices around racial representation in the trial, demonstrating the importance the trial had as a forum for ideas about race and racism. For example, the jury for the Yokinen trial consisted of half black workers and half white workers; the prosecutor was a well-known white communist, Clarence A. Hathaway, and the defense attorney was a prominent black communist, Richard B. Moore.\textsuperscript{383} The spectacle of the trial was obvious, as was the importance of the trial for thinking about race in Harlem. As Mark Naison notes, “The party had distributed thousands of leaflets in Harlem inviting people to attend and its efforts produced a large turn-out. ‘The hall was crowded to the doors long before the proceedings began,’ the \textit{Times} reported, ‘Everyone of the 1,000 chairs was occupied and 1,000 more persons stood about.’”\textsuperscript{384}

Perhaps most interesting in the transcription of the trial was the case of the prosecution, where the program of the Black Nation Thesis was, for the first time,

\textsuperscript{382} Allen argues: “Yokinen acknowledged his errors and pledged himself to carry on untiring activity against all forms of race prejudice. As a foreign-born worker, he realized that he too was being divided off by the ruling class from the other white workers, in the same way as the workers were being divided on race lines.” (3) Allen acknowledges some of the tensions between nativism and racism in this statement. These issues are further explored in later CPUSA pamphlets where the Party tries to demonstrates the ties between anti-racism and anti-imperialism through arguments about nativism. Conversations that link the foreign born and people of color are common in later CPUSA pamphlets, especially around deportation trials. Many of these conversations center on the underlying arguments that link imperialism, nativism, and patriotism, the very same concepts the CPUSA tries, in the early 1930s, to counter with the development of the Black Nation Thesis. For more on these campaigns see Naison, \textit{Communists in Harlem During the Depression}. For more on the CPUSA attacks against this campaign see later pamphlets by Haywood and Ford.

\textsuperscript{383} For details about the Yokinen jury see: CPUSA, \textit{Race Hatred on Trial}, 4. Clarence Hathaway is referred to in the pamphlet only as C.A. Hathaway.

\textsuperscript{384} Naison, \textit{Communists in Harlem during the Depression}, 47.
elaborated upon in a pamphlet. Hathaway, in his speech for the prosecution, began by outlining the facts of the case. Yokinen had pleaded guilty, and the trial was mostly to ascertain if he should be allowed to remain in the Party or what other means of redress might be appropriate. The charges against the Party member were not debated. Yokinen had, along with other workers at the Finnish Club, not been hospitable to fellow black workers when they had come to the Club for a dance, and had maliciously ejected them from the Hall. Yokinen was on trial because, when questioned by the Communist Party about his hostility to the three black workers, he justified his behavior the night of the dance “because he was afraid if Negro workers were permitted to come to a dance, they would also come to play pool; they would also come to bathe in the excellent bathroom of which the Finnish comrades were justly proud.” It was this attitude, named white chauvinism by the CPUSA, and running contrary to the resolutions for equality between black and white workers and to the CPUSA’s strong stance against the oppression of black people, which led to Yokinen’s trial.

The prosecution continued by demonstrating why Yokinen’s attitude was dangerous to the Communist Party. Hathaway emphasized that the CPUSA was actively fighting against racism, and outlined the position of the CPUSA, which linked racism to capitalist class hatred. Importantly, it is the white Party activist, Hathaway, who first introduces the Black Nation Thesis in a pamphlet with an introduction also by a white author. Hathaway showed how the supposedly “scientific theories” of race were false, and how these ideas fed into an equally false idea of white superiority and enabled “Jim-Crowism” and segregation. He argued that workers must struggle against this.

385 CPUSA, Race Hatred on Trial, 8.
propaganda, which also functions to split the working class. The Communist Party does this work, Hathaway argued, and proceeded to outline the program of the Black Nation Thesis, declaring that: “the Communist Party fights for equality for the Negroes.”

As the earliest pamphlet that deals concretely with the new Resolution on the Negro Question, Hathaway’s framing of the program in his speech for the persecution demonstrates how Yokinen’s trial was used as a forum to discuss the Black Nation Thesis. He first outlines the demand for land for black workers in the South, indicating that the betrayal of Reconstruction and the continued oppression of black workers were in large part due to the continued inequality of the sharecropping system. Secondly, Hathaway calls for “State Unity of the Black Belt,” declaring: “The Negroes in the Black Belt of the South can never get equality under the rule, domination and State power of the southern landowners. We say immediately fight to establish the State unity of the Black Belt in the South.”

Hathaway’s argument was strongest, and if a reader can believe the small inserts of (Applause.) in the text, best received, when he emphasized the role of workers, both white and black, struggling together to make active changes in the treatment of black people in the US. Such an example came when he declared, in response to Garvey’s argument of “Back to Africa”: “We [CPUSA] propose that in the first place, the white

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386 CPUSA, Race Hatred on Trial, 18.
387 CPUSA, Race Hatred on Trial, 19. Hathaway’s conceptions are not completely in line with later articulations of the Black Nation Thesis and the Black Belt. He notes: “The Black Belt now runs across several States. We say unite the territory into one State and then hold new elections there and give the Negro masses there the freedom, not to be dominated by the rule and the persecution of the white ruling classes, but to rule themselves in their own State, under such a form of government as they desire in the South. (19) Furthermore, Hathaway argues that self-determination means: “the Negro masses in the Black Belt must have the complete and unrestricted right to determine for themselves the kind of government that they will have, and their relationship to the government of the United States, or to the other States and the foreign governments.”(19) In the early rendering of the Black Nation Thesis, Hathaway’s arguments are somewhat vague and his rhetoric unlike later pieces, which develop a more nuanced account of both the Black Belt Nation and the concept of self-determination.
working class take up the fight to establish the right of the Negroes to remain in the United States. (Applause.)" Likewise, when Hathaway contends that the Communists are a party of action, “not mere promises,” he quotes from the 1930s Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question to outline the joint struggle for Negro Liberation. 389

Action is highlighted more in this pamphlet than in other works, and the calls for action on the part of the CPUSA serve another purpose in the trial to underscore the need for action on the part of the Jury to find Yokinen guilty and strip him of his Party membership. However, the reliance on the idea of action in this pamphlet and the speeches it chronicles also indicate the importance of fighting for change in the system. Perhaps most easily seen in the meta-story of the Yokinen Trial, the CPUSA in 1931 was trying to find new ways of organizing, thinking, working, and representing the Communist cause. The trial was, as many authors of the time and later critics point out, unprecedented in the CPUSA or other left-leaning social groups in the US. 390 Also, as hinted at earlier, the trial, though relying on common and understood modes of justice, a court, jury, prosecution and defense, also challenged many of the systems of governance and control by having equal representation to black and white jurors, changing and challenging modes of punishment and redress, and using the trial as a public spectacle more blatantly than traditional courts. Many of these ideas tested in both the trial and in the pamphlet representing the trial would be used extensively in the public campaigns to free the Scottsboro Nine and Angelo Herndon later in the 1930s. Indeed, the form of the trial became very important to the CPUSA’s continued work around racial justice.

388 CPUSA, Race Hatred on Trial, 20.
389 CPUSA, Race Hatred on Trial, 21.
390 Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, 139-140; also Allen’s introduction to the pamphlet.
The defense case for Yokinen was less grandiose in many ways than that of the prosecution (and is given much less space in the pamphlet). It is also obvious that Yokinen was not the real focus of the trial, his fate and livelihood taking a back seat to the performative displays of anti-racism. Richard B. Moore’s case for the defense also relied on the creation of a political spectacle. His case rested on the fact that Yokinen admitted his guilt and on the assertion that the context of his actions, capitalism and the dominant ideology of white superiority, must be taken into account. Moore places the blame primarily on the capitalist system and calls on all attendees of the trial to “Examine yourselves!” for these same tendencies.\textsuperscript{301} He argues for condemning Yokinen, but not disgracing him by expelling him from the Party because that will not help to build bridges between black and white workers, but will merely promote distrust. He does not, however, question the Party’s role of singling Yokinen out for such a trial. His final call for more self-criticism invites the assembled group to collectively shoulder guilt and blame for the crimes for which Yokinen is charged. This move is an effort to also revive and support an idea of the positive transformative potential of social movements, where members and observers can be educated and change their opinions, actions, and beliefs.

The pamphlet concludes with a short statement from Yokinen, translated from the Finnish, in which he again admits guilt, discusses how he is trying to unlearn white supremacy and wants to do this to further the struggle of the united working class. After summaries from the defense and prosecution, the jury found Yokinen guilty and expelled him from the Party. Yokinen worked diligently with the League for the Struggle

\textsuperscript{391} CPUSA, \textit{Race Hatred on Trial}, 29.
of Negro Rights and earned his Party membership back in short time while continuing to fight for the rights of black comrades. The pamphlet, however, does not discuss the impact of the trial on August Yokinen’s life other than a brief mention that the Party did not support his deportation. Harlem activists, on the other hand, demonstrated against Yokinen’s deportation, linking his deportation with continued anti-racist struggle, through an analysis of lynching and deportation as two parts of an oppressive capitalist system.392

        Of the larger anti-chauvinism campaign of the 1930s, Solomon writes, “like most of [the Party’s] ideological crusades [it] was a mix of idealism and manipulation, realism and fantasy. The ‘mass trials,’ expulsions, and heresy hunts often served […] as fevered substitutes for the harder educational work in the face of deeply rooted prejudices.”393 Though arguably the Yokinen trial galvanized the anti-racist work of the CPUSA and helped to root the Black Nation Thesis in US discourse, the Party’s willingness to use one member's racism as the stage to publicize their campaign for integration is contemptible. The willingness to sacrifice one member for a public display foreshadows later trials where Party members would be unfairly accused of various infractions in order to change political tactics, remove potential critics, or demonstrate the force of the central Party apparatus.394 Though seemingly progressive, with the half

392 Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*, 144.
394 Example include: the Soviet Show Trials of the late 1930s, the “Jewish Doctor” trials, but also the stripping of various people’s Party membership because they did not agree with changing Comintern policy. In an example close to home, the end of both Richard B Moore and George Padmore’s Party membership was clouded in disagreements over the National Question and finer points of the Black Nation Thesis. See: Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*, chapter ten.
white and half black jury and the black “defense” lawyer and the white “prosecutor,” the trial was also an exercise of power and a show of force by the Party.\textsuperscript{395}

Though the outcomes of the trial, and the precedence it set, were fraught, there were some important lessons learned and conversations begun. The importance of the Yokinen trial was twofold: first, it highlighted white chauvinism as an important part of a discussion on racism and secondly, it was an early vehicle for the development of the Black Nation Thesis. As a discussion of whiteness this pamphlet is quite unique; no other pamphlet until the early 1950s deals concretely with white chauvinism, though many mention it obliquely. White chauvinism was important for the development of racial consciousness, however, and was used to first broach the Black Nation Thesis in the US. Yokinen’s trail continued to be emphasized in many pamphlets of the 1930s, demonstrating the importance of a critique of whiteness, as both a structure of white supremacy and as an ideology that divides the working class, in the development of the CUPSA thinking on race in the US.

In the early 1930s the Black Nation Thesis was still being tried on for size in the US and the particulars of the resolution were being debated and argued. As will become clear by looking closely at other pamphlets, the early definitions of the Black Belt and black nationalism were in flux and the purpose of the Black Nation Thesis, as well as its revolutionary potential and the organizing principles it could encompass, were still being debated. This helps to put into context the shifting definitions of the state, nation, and self-determination offered in \textit{Race Hatred on Trial}, while still leaving room for acknowledging the important development of ideas of imperialism, race, and white

\textsuperscript{395} This relationship is similar to those developed in Merleau-Ponty’s analysis \textit{Humanism and Terror}. 

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supremacy that this pamphlet contributes to the larger discussion of the Black Nation Thesis.

_The American Negro: Tracing The Black Belt_

Many of the shifting ideas of black nationalism and the Black Belt were further developed in James Allen’s 1932 pamphlet _The American Negro_, number 18 in the International Pamphlet series. The first pamphlet fully devoted to looking at the situation of black people in the United States, _The American Negro_ provides an overview of the topics that the CPUSA identified as most salient to the struggle for black people’s liberation, detailing the problems around lynching, voting, chain gangs, the economy, and tenant farming, and putting these domestic questions in the context of global anti-imperialist struggles and international black liberation debates.\(^{396}\) The pamphlet is also typical in that it merely mentions the particular experiences of oppression faced by black women, noting that black women are also exploited. Allen notes that black women, many of whom were

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\(^{396}\) This pamphlet was later revised by the author to reflect “important changes in the United States and the world situation” and republished in 1938 under the title _Negro Liberation_. Though building on similar material, the pamphlets are different enough that I consider them separately.
employed as domestic workers and a few in the trades, had an even more difficult time earning decent wages or supporting a family but offers little analysis of their plight.\textsuperscript{397}

Specifically, \textit{The American Negro} is important because it builds a case for the geographic unity of the Black Belt through an analysis of the economic situation black people faced in the US. In addition, Allen touches on the Third Period politics that characterize these early pamphlets, the importance of an understanding of imperialism and global struggles in the discussion of black oppression, and the CPUSA’s work on white supremacy, discussed as white chauvinism, as a key part of race discrimination.

Allen centers his critique on the economic oppression of black people in the South. He details “the slavery of the tenant system,”\textsuperscript{398} listing the different kinds of tenant relationships, variations on systems where the farmer works land owned by the landlord with tools, animals, seeds and supplies sometimes also provided by the landlord. He notes that often landlords increased their profits by crediting farmers’ food and provisions in the winter, spring, and summer awaiting fall harvest; thus, creating a system of debt that kept croppers and tenants tied to the land and dependent on the landlord.

The inability to move to find better work, or better working conditions, the stark dependency on the landlord, and the lack of redress for work grievances indicates to Allen the similarities between the cropping systems and chattel slavery. In addition, Allen notes: “When a landlord sells his land, he sells it together with his tenants and croppers, much as slaveholders sold their plantations in the days of chattel slavery.”\textsuperscript{399} To further highlight the similarities between sharecropping and chattel slavery and the power of

\textsuperscript{397} Allen, \textit{The American Negro}, 14.
\textsuperscript{398} Allen, \textit{The American Negro}, 6.
\textsuperscript{399} Allen, \textit{The American Negro}, 7.
white landowners, Allen relates the story of the Red Cross refugee camps set up after the Mississippi flood of 1927. When, in order to have access to and provide relief to trapped, starving, and ill farmers, the Red Cross agreed with landlords that “their” tenants would be returned, and croppers had to have written permission from their landlords to leave the camp or they could be “shot by the National Guard like a runaway slave.”

Allen acknowledges that both white and black farmers were oppressed by the tenant system, but notes that only 42% of white farmers are tenants compared to 76.5% of black farmers. Of this latter number, he notes that almost half of them are “croppers, the lowest category of the tenantry and the most oppressed.” Allen pays special attention to the sufferings of farmers under the tenant system in light of the economic crisis of the 1930s. He argues that while in good times farmers might have been able to get a job in the off-season to augment their income, such jobs are scarce now and credit and debts keep piling up for tenant farmers. He analyzes the credit and debt cropping system and links it to peonage, arguing: “Both farm laborers and share-croppers are little better off than slaves. The tenant system, especially on the large plantations, with absolute control by the landlord, means peonage.” Allen highlights the peonage system by noting that if an indebted cropper runs away he is often arrested and “given the alternative of going to work on the chain gang or going back to his landlord, with the cost of the chase and the fine added to his debt.”

400 Allen, The American Negro, 11.
403 Allen, The American Negro, 10.
Though he focuses on the South and the oppressive conditions faced by black farmers, Allen also discusses the opportunities and hardships faced by black workers in industrial work, some in Southern cities but mostly in the Northern industrial centers. He gives the numbers of black workers in industry and notes that black people were most often “last to be hired, first to be fired.” Overall unemployment was very high in 1931 and Allen gives statistics for the vastly higher rate of unemployment for black workers in various cities across the country. Unions were one of the means of redress to the bad economic conditions. However, as Allen notes, some unions, such as the American Federation of Labor, discriminated against black people and thus “made it possible for the employers to use Negroes as strike-breakers.” Poor representation in unions also meant that many times black workers could be hired at a lower rate, limiting the earning potential of black people but also sowing the seeds of mistrust broadly amongst workers.

Overall, Allen uses the pamphlet as an opportunity to discuss the various systems of economic oppression used against black people the early 1930s, with a focus on farming and tenant systems in the South. Having established an understanding of the oppression of black working class people and farmers, Allen uses the pamphlet to outline the CPUSA’s work on the Negro Question. In this, Allen’s greatest impact is the detailed information about the Black Belt in the US compiled in The American Negro. Allen collects statistical and 1930s census data to highlight the position of black people in the United States, describing the concentration of black people living in the South, tracing the Black Belt and the border territory and carefully noting the percentage of

black people living in each county. Allen also describes the mass migration to Northern cities, in part because of the war and changing production needs, but also as an escape from the terrible conditions for black laborers in the South.

By highlighting both the economic and social aspects of racial oppression in his discussion of the Black Belt, Allen sets the groundwork for later pamphlets that build on this idea of a contiguous area of black population. For example, the later pamphlet *Equality, Land, and Freedom* published by the League of Struggle for Negro Rights (LSNR), describes the Black Belt as:

The homeland of the American Negro people, comprising some 350 counties, cutting across existing state borders. This is the soil upon which the historical battles for freedom took place seventy years ago, where these battles have been re-joined by the heroic Negro sharecroppers of Elaine, Arkansas, in 1919, and of Tallapoosa County, Alabama, in 1931 and 1933.  

In this the LSNR moves from Allen’s economic and statistical model to develop an argument about national unity. Importantly, Allen’s pamphlet developed a landed area for black people and used this territory to call attention to and organize black struggles. Allen’s rhetoric resonates with the idea of a Motherland but also with the importance of the land as the means of production in the South. Since farming is the main type of production in the Black Belt, the land, and specifically often the soil, takes on multiple valences as national space, means of livelihood, cultural home, and historical ground, all of which become important in conversations of a Black Belt Nation.

Allen’s earlier pamphlet only sketches the full program of self-determination. He glancingly notes an idea of nationalism, stating: “Negroes, who suffer super-exploitation and persecution as an oppressed people or nationality, can only attain full equality with

other people of the world by a struggle against the white ruling class, against which the white workers are also struggling.”

Allen does note that self-determination is the only way for black people in the South to achieve full equality but he only begins to suggest what this might mean. He states that black people in the Black Belt should be able “to exercise governmental authority over this entire territory and determine their relationship to other governments, especially the United States government, including the right of separation if so desired. This necessarily includes the demand for the withdrawal of the armed forces of American imperialism from this territory.” Thus Allen links the struggles of black people in the US to other anti-imperial struggles, suggesting a deep critique of imperialist capitalism and a conception of occupation to illustrate the oppression of black people.

Similarly, Allen notes that the economic exploitation of black people is rooted in a chauvinist capitalistic system, but he does not trace the connections between white chauvinism and racial oppression.

Allen argues that the problems of the tenant and share-cropping farming system in the South can only be solved through an agrarian revolution in the course of which “Negro farm tenants and poor farmers will dislodge the white landowning class and take possession of the land and farm stock and tools. With these basic weapons in their hands, they will be able to set up their own government and obtain full liberation.” However, the only suggestion for a government of liberation is offered through the example of the “rapidly developing struggles of colonial people throughout the world –

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409 Allen does not expand on these ideas, but the Black Power Movement develops many similar critiques thirty years later. See specifically Charmichael (Ture) and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 42-43.
in China, India, Africa and in the semi-colonies and colonies of Wall Street imperialism – that are hastening the decline of world capitalism already undermined by the deep economic crisis.

As will be discussed later, the possibility of liberation is also held out by the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle, again linking the capitalist system to the world system of nation-states.

Along with *Race Hatred On Trial*, Allen’s pamphlet is one of the first airings of the Black Nation Thesis in the US. It is also the most widely referenced pamphlet of the early 1930s, appearing on every book list about the Negro Question and in many of the

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The pamphlet is important for how it helps to shape the Black Nation Thesis in a US context. Working along with the critiques of white chauvinism, Allen’s careful Marxist analysis, relying on political, economic, scientific, and historical analysis, brings the Black Nation Thesis into the US context through the concrete delineation of a landed area for a Black Nation, the economic analysis of why this area should be controlled by the black majority, and a thorough discussion of the economic oppression of tenant farmers. Again here the land, the very soil, is important to the development of the Black Belt as a national space. These ideas are used by later pamphlets to develop a more sophisticated analysis of nationalism and, along with a critique of imperialism, an internationalist ethic for the Black Nation Thesis. Concrete ideas of nationalism and a more developed relationship between the struggles of black people in the US with world-wide colonial struggles will enable Allen, in his 1938 revision of this pamphlet entitled *Negro Liberation*, and other authors writing at a similar time, to suggest alternative programs for black Communists interested in working toward said liberation.

**Nation within a Nation: Equality, Land, and Freedom: A Program for Negro Liberation**

The idea of a “nation” for black people in the US was one of the key contributions of the Resolution on the Negro Question in the 1930s. Nationalism in this instance drew upon the Soviet idea of a nation, the dominant Western idea of a nation-state, and the Garvey influenced program of Black Nationalism. It was through their unique combination in the Black Nation Thesis that the Thesis became useful in a

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412 See the records of the CPUSA at the Tamiment Library, Education and Agit-Prop folders. At the time of writing, the collection was not fully catalogued and folder numbers are not available.
domestic US context. When combined with a critique of imperialism to link the oppression of black people in the US to global conflicts around race and class, the Black Nation Thesis provided the CPUSA with a vehicle to reflect on an idea of internationalism and race.

To begin to unpack the idea of a nation in the Black Nation Thesis it is important to underscore the political history of the idea of “nation” and “nationality” in the USSR. Stalin is often credited as the theoretical midwife of the Soviet ideas of nationalism. Specifically, many pamphlets and authors writing about the Black Nation Thesis note Stalin's argument that: “A nation is a historically evolved, stable community based on a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture.” As discussed previously, Cedric Robinson and many others have argued that Stalin's definition is not useful or historically accurate, especially in the US context; however, the statement's popularity cannot be denied. These authors contend that, taken at face value, Stalin's definition is vague and tautological, arguing that a community begets a community and suggesting few concrete markers of a nation. Stalin's definition offers scant material for the CPUSA to develop a concrete conception of the nation for the Black Nation Thesis.

The first definition of nationalism that influenced the development of the Black Nation Thesis was the Soviet nationalities policy that, in the 1920s, stressed the importance of national/ethnic cultures and supported the proliferation of national identity within a socialist economic framework. Yuri Slezkine, chronicling the

413 Arguably, Lenin’s writing and theories were more at the root of the Soviet nationalities policies, but popular literature at the time credited Stalin.
415 Robinson, Black Marxism, 226.
development of the nationality policy in his article “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” argues that the nationality policy was convoluted and unclear even in the USSR. He argues that in the 1930s the Soviet regime supported an idea of “nationalist in form and socialist in content,” meaning that though many nations might be represented within the Union they were united in their relation to socialism. Indeed, the nationalist form, according to Slezkine, was popular especially because it did not interfere with the socialist content. There could be schools and newspapers in every language but the curriculum and news stories would be the same; having material in “native tongues” facilitated the transmission of socialist ideas and arguments.416

Following the Soviet concept of “nation,” nationality might be partially understood as ethnicity or race; the Soviet nationalities policy indicated people were of Jewish nationality or Ukrainian nationality but had Soviet citizenship. As sociologist Rogers Brubaker argues, there are two different “modes in which nationhood and nationality were institutionalized in the Soviet Union – territorial and political on the one hand, ethnocultural and political on the other hand.”417 Brubaker continues noting that the particular historical formation of the USSR and Eastern Europe meant that there was not an easy confluence of territory, language, political formations (states), and cultural norms. In crude terms, many cultural and ethnic groups with different languages, religions, and political expectations inhabited any given landed area. The USSR in the 1920s supported the proliferation of nationalities and national identities

(so-called ‘korenisatsia’ = nativization), including setting up separate institutions, language programs, and educational systems that helped develop and maintain cultural plurality. By the mid-1930s the scale of the nationalism program in the USSR was diminished, but the importance of national autonomy was officially maintained, though perhaps practically hampered.\textsuperscript{418}

Another important aspect of Soviet nationality policy was the separation of the nationalism of “oppressor nations” and of “oppressed nations.” Oppressor nation nationalism, which Slezkine notes was also called “great-power chauvinism”\textsuperscript{419} was gratuitously malevolent” and “the result of unfair size advantage.” The nationalist sentiments of the oppressed nations, however, were a legitimate “reaction to discrimination and persecution” and should be supported to enable the people of the oppressed nation to come into their own. Indeed, the separation of different forms of nationalism in this manner enabled both the campaigns against chauvinism and the slogans of self-determination for oppressed nations.\textsuperscript{419} The relevance of these differences was perhaps clear in the USSR (though most argue it was not) but the different concepts of nationalism were not easily mapped on to the US context. The CPUSA tried to argue that black people were an oppressed nation and the US was an oppressor nation, thus facilitating the argument of self-determination for the Black Belt. However, to make the Black Nation Thesis work in the US, other ideas of nationalism, especially the nation-state and histories of Black Nationalist movements, were combined with Soviet nationalist arguments.


\textsuperscript{419} Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” \textit{Slavic Review}, 419.
While the Soviet Union focused on a more flexible notion of nation and nationality, the US held to the Western system of nation-states. Thus, understandably, as the Black Nation Thesis was written about in the US, ideas of the nation-state were to be combined with concepts of the nation normalized in the USSR. Nationalism, as the principal idea behind the nation-state, to reference the seminal work of Ernest Gellner, was the political principle that “holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.”

E.J. Hobsbawm furthers this idea by looking at the national consciousness and noting that by the early 20th century linguistic and ethnic nationalism, an older understanding of nationalism based around language and the more recent developments grouping people based on “races,” were working to reinforce one another and the concept of the nation-state.

Western ideas of nation-states also rely on a common sense understanding of national territory and are built on conceptions of national land. Nation-states have explicit territory, borders, and claim rights based on historical connections to soil. Thus the Black Nation Thesis worked to combine these two ideas of the nation: the Soviet concept of a national form with a resolutely socialist content, and the Western nation-state with the proscribed rigid association between the territorial, the cultural, the economic, and the political.

A third factor in the development of the Black Nation Thesis was the influence of the histories of Black Nationalism, most specifically the work of Marcus Garvey and

420 Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, 1.
422 This is often referred to as Westphalian Sovereignty highlighting the role of the Westphalian Peace Treaty in 1648 which had European powers recognize territorial integrity. For more on this see: Caporaso “Changes in the Westphalian Order: Territory, Public Authority, and Sovereignty” in International Studies Review.
the UNIA. Garvey and the UNIA proposed an idea of Black Nationalism that centered on the establishment of a:

- Universal Confraternity among the race; to promote the spirit of race pride and love; to reclaim the fallen of the race; to administer to and assist the needy; to assist in civilizing the backward tribes of Africa; to strengthen the imperialism of independent African states; to establish Commissionaires or Agencies in the principal counties of the world for the protection of all Negroes, irrespective of nationality; to promise a conscientious Christian worship among the native tribes of Africa; to establish Universities, Colleges and Secondary Schools for the further education and culture of the boys and girls of the race; to conduct world-wide commercial and industrial intercourse.  

Clearly focused on race as the basis of nationalist sentiment, Garvey worked toward the creation of a nation-state for African Americans. In this instance, nationhood, and Black Nationalism, stressed economic advancement and the development of a black middle class but also the importance of thinking about race in the development of nationalist sentiment. Though the UNIA and the CPUSA were often in conflict over direct organizational issues, the influence of Garvey’s ideas of Black Nationalism on black and white leftists and particularly the Party cannot be over-stated, as the importance of race to the development of nationalist sentiment draws directly from Garvey and especially the UNIA’s organizations and activism in the US. Again, Garvey used a conception of land, but the land was often far away, mythically important but not worked with or lived on.

Attempting to unite these three, somewhat disparate, ideas of nation and nationality was one of the main theoretical accomplishments of the Black Nation Thesis. Thus the idea of a nation that was established through the Black Nation Thesis was a unique and important intervention by the CPUSA. Specifically, the national unity

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imagined in the Black Belt was organized around shared territorial, cultural, political, and
economic realities, but also explicitly recognized race and class as factors that created and
enabled national unity in the Black Belt. When deployed alongside critiques of white
chauvinism and imperialism, these conceptions of nationalism, especially grounded in
Allen’s economically driven analysis of the Black Belt, enabled a powerful internationalist
critique.

The development of a new concept of “nation” through the Black Nation
Thesis is most readily apparent in the League of Struggle for Negro Rights’ pamphlet
Equality, Land, and Freedom.424 Though many pamphlets touch on ideas of the Black Belt
as a nation, the LSNR offers the most detailed description and analysis of the nation.
The LSNR published Equality, Land, and Freedom in 1933, not as part of the International
Pamphlets series, but as a draft of the resolutions for the League. A specific author is
not credited, though at the time Langston Hughes was the President of the League and

424 The League of Struggle for Negro Rights was one in a line of Communist Party supported or backed
organizations agitating for the rights and struggles of black people in the US. Starting with the Sanhedrin
and the American Negro Labor Congress, the CPUSA had been involved in varying degrees with black
political struggles. The League of Struggle for Negro Rights worked alongside the Negro Divisions of
other national Party organizations, such as the Trade Union Unity League (later the Trade Union
Education League), and the International Legal Defense, as well as international organizations, such as the
International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers. The League was unique, however, in that it was
the primary civil rights organization of the CPUSA. The LSNR had many national chapters but enjoyed
the strongest influence in Harlem and Chicago. In his autobiography, Haywood notes that the LSNR was
hampered by the rigid dictates of the CPSUA: “LSNR branches of individual members were small,
sectarian groups made up almost entirely of CP members and close sympathizers” (439). However small
and ineffectual the actual LSNR groups were, the national program elaborated in the pamphlet Equality,
Land and Freedom was a key document in the development of the Black Nation Thesis, clearly outlining
important theoretical and practical considerations, especially around the idea of national unity.

The League of Struggle for Negro Rights worked ostensibly for the realization of the 1928 and
1930 Resolutions on the Negro Question, focusing on self-determination and national sovereignty for the
Black Belt. However, as Mark Solomon demonstrates, in practice the LSNR was less theoretically driven
and rather focused on militant agitation through the newspaper it published, The Liberator. Similar to other
publications, and reflecting the sectarian nature of the CPUSA in the early 1930s, the LSNR widely
criticized other black political and social organizations like the NAACP and the Urban League, branding
them “Negro misleaders” who supported capitalists and furthered the oppression of black workers. In this
The Liberator, and the LSNR more broadly, suffered from the very sectarian Communist Party politics of
the early 1930s, while simultaneously working to develop new racial theories and practices in the US.
(Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, chapter 9-11).
Harry Haywood the General Secretary. Most likely a group of key members of the LSNR worked together to draft the tentative resolutions presented in the pamphlet. An advantage to not being part of the International Pamphlet series, this booklet has a graphic cover depicting a black man breaking the chains of bondage over the globe, especially depicting the United States, Cuba, Haiti and Africa. The cover image is evocative of many of the themes in the pamphlet, both explicit and implicit. The man on the cover, a worker by his clothing, build, and suggested social position, breaks the chains that limit the US, the Caribbean, and Africa, and alludes to the history of the Atlantic slave trade. The pamphlet cover indicates that the liberation of black people in the four named localities is directly linked, and the masculine chain-breaker’s position over the US suggests that black men from the United States will lead this struggle. The title of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, emblazoned on the bottom of the cover to claim publishing credit, suggests that this group too, might help lead the way to Equality, Land and Freedom.

The pamphlet includes drafts of “The Program of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights,” “The Bill for Negro Rights, to be again presented to Congress and the
President,” and “The Constitution and By-Laws of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights.” The preface indicates that these drafts anticipate a large readership, stating: “These documents are herewith being presented for consideration and discussion to all organizations, groups and persons, whether they be white or Negro, interested in the liberation of the Negro people.” By directly engaging an intended audience already interested in Negro Liberation, this pamphlet fulfills a very different function than Allen’s *The American Negro*, offering concrete suggestions and a direct engagement with national domestic issues. Specifically, the pamphlet drafts a program for a CPUSA directed national organization, proposing legislation and offering constitutional by-laws for the group and within this frame discussing the importance of Black Nationalism.

Of the three parts of the pamphlet, the first, “Draft Program of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights,” is the most illustrative of the development of the Black Nation Thesis, highlighting both the discourse on nationalism and further developing the rhetoric of self-determination and Black Nationalism. The “Preamble” begins by situating the LSNR within a historical context of slavery and oppression. Referencing the cover of the pamphlet, and suggesting historical continuity in oppression, the preamble opens with:

> For three hundred years the American Negroes have been enslaved. The same blow which struck the shackles of chattel slavery from them hammered on the chains of a new slavery. After three quarters of a century of supposed freedom the Negro people must still fight for that liberty which should rightly have been theirs after the Civil War.  

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Echoing Allen’s pamphlet, this opening both illustrates the connections between chattel slavery and wage slavery, highlighting the fact that the system of industrial capitalism supported by the victorious North in the Civil War was also the means of black people’s current oppression. The relationship of Southerners, especially Southern blacks, to capitalists and Northerners was contradictory; Northern capitalism was seen as both a liberatory force and an enslaving menace. The final line of the opening displays this tension by declaring that liberty “should rightly have been theirs after the Civil War” but suggesting that capitalism (and less explicitly Northern whites) kept such freedom from blacks in the South. The pamphlet reminds the reader that the promise of the North and capitalism, the promise of the United States remaining united, was liberty for black people. However, the LSRN argues this promise was not kept, as capitalism furthered the enslavement of black people through tenant farming and wage slavery.

The pamphlet emphasizes the injustice black people face, pointing to Jim Crow laws, Black Codes, share-cropping, and the persecution of black people by the larger legal system and “lynch law.” *Equality, Land and Freedom* counters all of this tyranny against black people, and responds to the opening call for the liberty that “should have been theirs after the Civil War” by proclaiming “before the whole world that the American Negroes are a nation – a nation striving to manhood but whose growth is violently retarded and which is viciously oppressed by American imperialism.”

Thus the LSNR presents its draft program as the only “course of action which guarantees the development of the American Negroes to full nationhood, which will elevate them to that rightful place of equality before all and subservience before none.”

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between man-hood and nation-hood are important here, as justice is conceptualized in the possessing and controlling of land and gendered constructions of nationhood.

The concept of the nation in this pamphlet echoes Western discourse of the nation-state in that it is tied to land, specifically the Black Belt. Here land is both the location of the nation but also the means of production for the nation. Black people, who had worked the land for centuries, laid claim to the very land of the Black Belt through blood, sweat, and tears. Relying on the history of the Civil War, the promises of land, freedom and equality, denied by the betrayal of Reconstruction and the maintenance of white land ownership, are brought forth as the means of achieving freedom. Thus the LSNR argues: “The so-called emancipation of the slaves did not bring freedom, because without the means of livelihood, without land, there could be no freedom.” Rather, there was a continuation of the plantation system “with all its horrors – share-cropping, peonage, chain gangs, convict labor.”

The League claims that the only way to change these problems is the “destruction of the plantation system in the South, the division of land among the Negro farmers, among the croppers and tenants, [which] would destroy the most important material basis, the basis for the oppression of the Negro people in the United States.” In this quote the connection developed between land and freedom from oppression is outlined within the historical context of the US. This idea is taken a step further as the League echoes James Allen’s earlier work calling for the creation of one state out of the fragments of the various states comprising the Black Belt:

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430 LSNR, Equality, Land and Freedom, 8.
The League of Struggle for Negro Rights declares that the territorial unity of this continuous stretch of land must be proclaimed and established. It declares that upon this territory must arise that political state over which the Negro majority will have the governmental authority. The Negro Nation cannot be free as a people until they have complete rights to set up their own government.\textsuperscript{432}

The declaration of nationhood, and the subsequent articulation of which rights the “Negro majority” would have in the new nation space, begin the project of imagining a new nation-state for black people. Importantly, this call is framed in terms of the betrayed promises of Reconstruction and names many of the same kinds of programs and rights that were implemented under Reconstruction governments, indicating the very American roots of this pamphlet’s programmatic suggestions.\textsuperscript{433}

These imaginings of the rights of black people in the new nation-state also indicate what exercises of state power the LSNR finds most oppressive. Mirroring Reconstruction, the League argues that national-unity (or nation-state unity) of the Black Belt would mean: “the Negro majority [would] have governmental and administrative control and authority over this entire territory, with the right to set up its own governments and judicial institutions, to elect its own officials, to make laws, to set taxes, to dispose of public property, to organize its own armed forces for the protection of these rights.”\textsuperscript{434} Thus, a careful reading of the rights afforded to black people in the Black Belt after nation-state unity is achieved, demonstrates what rights black people did not have, or did not have the ability to exercise, in the 1930s, especially in the South. It also shows that the kind of power imagined for a new state closely mirrors the current

\textsuperscript{432} LSNR, \textit{Equality, Land and Freedom}.

\textsuperscript{433} For more on the specific Reconstruction programs see: Rosen, \textit{Terror in the Heart of Freedom}.

\textsuperscript{434} LSNR, \textit{Equality, Land and Freedom}, 11.
configuration of federal and state power in the US, and little challenge was actually being levied against the system in this description of the Black Belt. Rather, the ruling class, white and capitalist, was identified as the problem. This is indicated most clearly when the League says that the right to self-determination means “the disbanding and removal of the armed forces, civil and military, of the white ruling class exploiters in the Black Belt territory. It means a decisive struggle against the whole ruling class machinery, in and out of the Black Belt, which has held the Negro people in a vice of iron.” 435 The LSNR’s statement also clears up the ambiguity of the relationship a Black Belt nation-state would have to the US, saying: “the right to self-determination means that the Negro people in the Black Belt have the right to choose freely for or against complete separation from the federal government, no matter what its form in existence at the time in the United States.” 436 Again this is the transposing of a nationalist rhetoric of sovereignty to an argument, in part, about class; it is self-determination as both worker-determination and black-determination.

The LSNR pamphlet demonstrates how the CPUSA combines the various concepts of nationality in the Black Nation Thesis. Taking from the Soviet conception, nationalism is about national form with a subtle argument for socialist content. Though all of the CPUSA pamphlets state that with the creation of the Black Belt Nation the new inhabitants, a majority of whom would be black, could choose their new form of government, the presumption is, of course, that the new state would be socialist. 437 Importantly, under this Soviet conception, nationalism means self-determination, it

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means equal access to inter-state bodies, and it means cultural support for a specific Black Belt national culture. The conceptions of the Black Belt Nation also reference Western traditions: the form of the nation-state through the claims to land, the working of the land to create a nation, and, similarly to above, the ability to participate with other nation-states like the United States. Finally, in content the Black Belt Nation addresses many of the same kinds of claims as the UNIA around race solidarity. Though the CPUSA’s Black Nation Thesis also stresses class solidarity, and disagrees with the UNIA plan on issues of imperialism, Africa, and Christianity, the specifics of racial equality and class solidarity as the basis of the nation is strikingly similar to the UNIA. The UNIA’s plan of racial uplift through national unity and black economic growth is taken up in the Black Nation Thesis, and much of the rhetoric directly borrows from Garvey’s organization in the US.

The LSNR’s framing of their call for national (nation-state) unity for the Black Belt echoes a critique of capitalism as a basis for national liberation. These echoes include both the history of revolutionary struggle for black people in the US, citing Nat Turner, Denmark Vessey and Gabriel (Prosser), but also connect to a larger anti-imperialist campaign with black revolutionaries in Haiti and Jamaica, and the “insurrectionists of Dutch Guinea.” It is this larger argument about imperialism that hints at the League’s later claim that “the Negro problem in the United States is closely linked to the problems of the Negro people and other people oppressed by imperialism throughout the world.” Though this statement might, in part, be the LSNR’s attempt

439 LSNR, *Equality, Land and Freedom*, 17. Again, the CPUSA was not the first or the only group to make this kind of a claim. The claim was still foundational to their organizational work and challenging to the status quo.
to include all aspects of the 1928 and 1930 Resolution on the Negro Question, they use this frame to highlight many issues and take a firm stand on international issues. The LSNR argues for “uncompromising and continuous support to the liberation movement of the Negro masses throughout the world; for complete independence of Africa and the West Indies; for equal rights and the right to self-determination for the oppressed Negro national minorities in South and Central American and in Cuba.” These calls are taken up more concretely in pamphlets written by James W. Ford in the subsequent years where he focuses on the global struggle for the rights for black people and the role of the US, and black people in the US, in that global struggle. In this pamphlet, however, a US centrism and exceptionalism pervades, and the LSNR proclaims that black people in the US, because of their social and economic advantage, have a “great responsibility in giving assistance to the Negro people in other countries” and leading the way in the struggle for self-determination and equal rights. An anti-imperialist ethic, however, permeates the work, frames the call for state unity of the Black Belt and decisively shapes the ways the state is imagined by challenging the capitalist understanding of colonial relationships with a spirit of internationalism.

**Nationalism, Americanism, and Imperialism: The Road to Negro Liberation**

The original drafting of the Negro Question in Moscow framed the issues of black oppression internationally. As part of the Colonial Commission, the Negro Commission, which drafted the original Resolution on the Negro Question in 1928 and the 1930 revision, was concretely concerned with the liberation of black people around

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the globe and directly engaged imperialism and colonialism. Specifically, the Resolution was clear in its aims: to “struggle against American imperialism” and to “lead the movement of the oppressed masses of the Negro population” worldwide.442

This international framing was kept and sometimes highlighted in the US pamphlet literature on the Black Nation Thesis. The problems facing black people in Haiti, Cuba, and Ethiopia were emphasized to think about the global impacts of race through a clear connections of capitalism, imperialism, and white chauvinism. More specifically, however, US pamphlets relied on a rhetoric and analysis of imperialism to connect the struggles of black workers across the globe with the struggles in the Black Belt. This connection manifested in calls for support for anti-imperialist struggles on the basis of race-solidarity as well as class-solidarity, but also in the rhetoric about the imperialism of the US in the treatment of black people in the Black Belt. In what follows, I look at both of these associations of imperialism for how they impacted the development of the Black Nation Thesis.

Many pamphlets mention the international scope of the Negro Question both to make sense of the oppression of black people but also to give hope to struggles for liberation, connecting black liberation to struggles against imperialism and colonialism. As mentioned, Allen's *The American Negro* ends with the analysis of the fall of capitalism hastened by the struggles of colonial peoples, naming “China, India, Africa and in the semi-colonies of Wall Street Imperialism”.443 Similarly, the League of Struggle for Negro Rights’ pamphlet *Equality, Land, and Freedom*, highlights the importance of a global vision

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of the oppression of black people to understand the specifics of the Negro Liberation.

It argues:

The Negro problem in the United States is closely related to the problems of the Negro people and other peoples oppressed by imperialism throughout the world. The Negro people everywhere, whether as a minority in the U.S.A., South and Central America, or as a majority in Africa and in many of the islands of the West Indies, or where they exist in the so-called independent states of Liberia and Haiti, are oppressed by imperialism. This common bond of interest is established for the Negro people all over the world in the fight against their oppressors.444

This echoes ideas developed throughout the pamphlet literature linking anti-imperialist struggle of the 1930s with the development of the Black Nation Thesis. The LSNR pamphlet also communicates the global scope of the black liberation struggle in the cover image of the pamphlet, the black worker breaking chains over the globe with Cuba, Haiti, the United States, and the African continent highlighted.

Another pamphlet explicitly making the link between imperialism and black liberation struggles in the US is Earl Browder’s *The Communist Party and the Emancipation of the Negro People*, a transcript of his 1934 speech at the eighth convention of the CPUSA. In his speech Browder outlines how the “Rights of 1776 and 1865 [are] not carried thru” for black people in the US. He continues that the “completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution for the Negroes, as for other oppressed nations, thus becomes today objectively a revolutionary struggle to overthrow imperialism.”445 In this statement Browder builds two important arguments and again links anti-imperialist agitation with the struggles of black people in the US. The first, that the US has not fulfilled even its bourgeois-democratic ideals in regards to black people and should thus be questioned by

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its own standards, and second that black people, in their struggle for freedom and emancipation, are linked with other anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist struggles. This later idea develops from the position of the Resolution of the Negro Question within the larger argument about the ideas of National Liberation struggles and the Colonial Question. In all, Browder, in line with the CPUSA arguments built in the Black Nation Thesis, argues that black people in the US are oppressed in similar ways to colonial and imperial subjects; they are exploited economically and culturally with no access to government or legal redress.

The idea of a similar kind of oppression between black people in the US and colonial subjects is followed through in pamphlets not directly pertaining to the Black Nation Thesis but which also highlight the connections between anti-imperialist struggles and the liberation of black people in the Black Belt. Samuel Weinman’s pamphlet, *Hawaii*, published around 1932, primarily discusses the exploitation of Hawaii at the hands of the United States government and capitalists. Importantly, it uses the plight of black workers in the South to explicate the horrors befalling the Hawaiian people. One specific example is near the end of the pamphlet where the author parallels the practice of lynching in the South to the killing of prize fighter Joseph Kahahawai by New York

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446 Importantly, Browder is not supporting the bourgeois-democratic ideals here, but correctly noting that if these ideals were carried through for black people in the US, this in itself would be a revolutionary act.
socialite Grace Hubbard Fortescue, Thomas Massie, and a couple of Navy men. Kahahawai was accused of the rape of Thalia Massie, daughter of Fortescue and wife of Thomas Massie, but was out on bail due to a lack of evidence of rape and therefore a postponed trail date.\textsuperscript{447} The pamphlet is not clear on the details of the case, but is clear in its interpretation:

\begin{quote}
The capitalist press colored the facts and distorted the meaning of the Massie case in 1932 to such an extent that its significance as an expression of imperialist policy was concealed. The bare facts are as hackneyed as a triangular melodrama. Several officers and men in the U.S. Navy killed a native Hawaiian. When they were apprehended while trying to dispose of the body, they accused the dead man of having raped a white woman.

It is an old ruling class trick. In the South it has been long used against the Negroes. The Scottsboro case is but one of hundreds of examples. Both the Massie and the Scottsboro cases are rooted in the same soil.
\end{quote}

Linking the Massie case with Scottsboro, which in 1932 was receiving a great deal of national attention, the pamphlet makes clear the importance of the Black Nation Thesis in thinking about race and imperialism in the Hawaiian case. Weinman goes further, arguing:

\begin{quote}
Wherever the ruling class oppresses a mixed racial and national population, it fosters prejudices, putting one race against another and it inculcates the “theory” of Nordic superiority – ruling class superiority [chauvinism]. The imperialists spread the notion that dark skinned men are unfit to cohabitate with white women. The reverse – white men seducing native girls – however, is permissible.

The punishment for the “sin” of inter-racial cohabitation is death – lynching.\textsuperscript{448}
\end{quote}

The connections drawn between the murder of Kahahawai and lynchings in the US South enable two cross-associations. First, that the murder of the native Hawaiian man

\textsuperscript{447} For more on the Massie killing see: Stannard, \textit{Honor Killing: Race, Rape, and Clarence Darrow's Spectacular Last Case.}

\textsuperscript{448} Weinman, \textit{Hawaii}, 25.
on potentially trumped up charges of the rape of a white woman, would sound like a Southern lynching and be easily referenced to the Scottsboro Nine case, especially in late 1932 as the Scottsboro case was garnering many national and international headlines. This would enable a quick identification of media control, the abuses of white power, and the use of a rhetoric of white women's purity to condemn a non-white man – a critical understanding of the Massie affair in Hawaii. Secondly, the pamphlet links anti-imperialist struggle with the fight for black liberation. As much as the reference to Scottsboro enables a critical understanding of the events in Hawaii, the reference to Alabama demonstrates how the CPUSA wants to show a connection between the treatment of black people in the US and the treatment of colonial and imperial subject sin other lands. Importantly, the connections around race that these pamphlets make are epiphenomenal to more fundamental class relationships. As is the case with many of the pamphlets, and, indeed, much of the CPUSA's theoretical work, race is discussed but not always brought in to fundamentally change the underlying class analysis.

The visual material presented in the pamphlets, images and maps mostly, also connect the black liberation struggle with anti-imperialist global battles. The clearest example is the League of Struggle for Negro Right's pamphlet cover discussed above. A map showing the imperialist trade routes is included in both Hawaii by Samuel Weinman and Yankee Colonies by Harry Gains, which demonstrates the connections between the
US's colonial holdings and the imperialist expansion through war bases, which the pamphlet's text ties to the exploitation of black workers domestically. Even more direct in its connections is the map included in Luis Montes’ pamphlet *Bananas*, which visually links lynching in the South with exploitation in the banana plantations in South and Central America. The map suggests the importance of an anti-imperialist critique that includes the exploitation of Southern black workers. The illustrations by William Siegel included in Montes’ pamphlet are striking. This pamphlet focuses on imperialist trade in Central and South America, honing in on the banana trade to highlight the unfair and unequal trade relations in the Americas. Importantly, this pamphlet focuses on the working conditions of the mostly black banana harvesting labor force, linking their plight through visual and textual means to black workers in the United States, especially rural farmers in the South. Under headings such as

![Figure 20: Montes, Bananas, 2.](image)

![Figure 21: Montes, Bananas, 18-19.](image)
“Slaves of the Company,” “On the Plantations,” and “Dividing the Workers,” the pamphlet offers a picture of black workers struggling against white imperialism, chauvinism, and greed. The drawings echo many other CPUSA pamphlets in style and function, particularly pamphlets produced around the Scottsboro Nine trial discussed in the following chapter.

These pamphlets also demonstrate how an idea of internal US imperialism was used to connect the struggles for self-determination of black people in the Black Belt with anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist debates in other countries. James Ford and Harry Gain’s 1935 pamphlet War In Africa: Italian Fascism Prepares to Enslave Ethiopia demonstrates some of the connections the CPUSA was making between various imperial and colonial threats abroad and domestic struggles. In a section entitled “Harlem Masses Back Ethiopia” the authors explain the connections between Harlem and the Ethiopian struggle: “Repercussions from the struggles of the Cuban and Ethiopian peoples, who are brilliantly resisting the attacks of the imperialists, should inspire the masses in Harlem, raise their class consciousness and arouse them to revolutionary action against American imperialists.”

Ford’s earlier pamphlet, the 1933 Imperialism Destroys the People of Africa, is even clearer on the connections of imperialism in Africa and the plight of black people in the US, offering a list of demands for both groups, which include:

abolition of hard and laborious work for women and children, free hospitals and dispensaries at the expense of the State, and the introduction of compulsory unemployment insurance for all unemployed workers to be paid at the expense of the State, [...] for self-determination, complete independence of all Negro colonies from

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449 Montes, Bananas, 6-10.
450 Ford and Gains, War In Africa: Italian Fascism Prepares to Enslave Ethiopia, 26.
imperialist rule, [...] the right to self-determination for National Minorities.\textsuperscript{451}

This program is in keeping with the domestic program for Negro Liberation as put forward by the CPUSA and the League of Struggle of Negro Rights, and shows the larger connections of black liberation struggle.\textsuperscript{452}

Both of these pamphlets draw from James Ford’s earlier piece on the \textit{Economic Struggle of Negro Workers}, from 1930, which deals with the economic issues and suggests plans for organizing trade unions that help black workers. The pamphlet is international in scope, discussing the issues facing black workers in South Africa, West and East Africa and the United States. It gives a history of trade unions that work with black people, looking as far back as the turn of the century and specifically following the development of the Comintern’s Red International of Labor Unions, the organization Ford worked for at the time. The pamphlet concludes with a proposal for a “Trade Union Program of Action” that would unite black worker’s struggle worldwide. The pamphlet explicitly discusses both race and class oppression:

The Negro toiling masses suffer, both as member of the working class and as members of an oppressed race. In the United States, they are mercilessly exploited on the cotton plantations, in the mines, factories and shops of the North and South. They are deprived of full civil rights and are segregated and forced to live in over-crowded houses and restricted sections of the city. They are victims of lynch-law and mob violence.\textsuperscript{453}

This pamphlet is published before the CPUSA’s concentrated work in the South, and the 18 demands presented in the pamphlet are mostly union and labor based. The

\textsuperscript{451} Ford, \textit{Imperialism Destroys the People of Africa}, 14-15.

\textsuperscript{452} James Ford published a great number of pamphlets in the early 1930s out of the Harlem Section of the CPUSA that build similar arguments. For instance see: \textit{World Problems of the Negro People: (A refutation of George Padmore)}, \textit{Imperialism Destroys the People of Africa}, and \textit{The Communists and the Struggle for Negro Liberation: Their Position on Problems of Africa, of the West Indies, of War, of Ethiopian Independence, of the Struggle for Peace.}

\textsuperscript{453} Ford, \textit{Economic Struggle of Negro Workers}, 13.
pamphlet is interesting, however, as an early example of the development of the international Negro Question. The final page of demands includes:

15. CIVIL RIGHTS: We must fight to achieve the abolition of all racial discrimination, the abolition of “Pass” laws, and all other laws and regulations against the rights of Negro workers. We must struggle to achieve the right to vote, for freedom of speech and freedom of workers’ press, where this right is denied. All “color bars” and caste systems which exist in South Africa and the West Indies, and which tend to split the ranks of the workers must be abolished wherever they exist. 16. SELF-DETERMINATION AND INDEPENDENCE OF THE NEGRO TOILER: In South Africa, in the West Indies and in the Southern part of the United States, the trade union organizations must help thru the economic struggle, the Negro toilers in their struggle for self-determination.454

Written between the two articulations of the Negro Question in the Comintern and while Ford was working for the International Trade Union Organization, this pamphlet outlines the important precedents to Ford’s work in Harlem.

Though many pamphlets draw connections between a critique of imperialism and the Black Nation Thesis, few offer direct or concrete examples of what an anti-imperialist Black Belt Nation would look like. Some of these nuances are more clearly outlined in Harry Haywood’s report to the Eighth Convention of the Communist Party USA in April 1934, published as the pamphlet The Road to Negro Liberation. This pamphlet argues: “the tasks of the Communist Party are winning working class

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leadership of the Negro liberation struggles, and the fight against reactionary Nationalist-Reformist movements among the Negro people.”

This pamphlet, a speech Haywood gave at the convention following Browder’s lecture, focuses on the struggles facing the CPUSA in doing work with and for black people in the later 1930s, similarly targeting the problem of reform minded “race leaders” and the successes of the Party, specifically Scottsboro and the anti-lynching campaign. Haywood’s pamphlet is unique in his careful dissection of a litany of other organizations and movements of black people at the time, including the “Jobs for Negroes Movement,” the Liberian Plan, and Neo-Garveyism. Haywood works to ground the Communist’s Black Nation Thesis as countering these other movements, both discrediting the others as reformist or imperialist in nature and demonstrating what he calls the “real revolutionism” of the Communist plan and struggle.

He concludes his pamphlet by discussing the two fronts of the Communist Party’s fight for a revolutionary doctrine that Browder had outlined: the first front being white chauvinism and the second front petty bourgeois nationalism. Haywood goes a step further than Browder, however, articulating that the unity of the two fronts is their detraction from “Internationalism.” Thus, Haywood pushes a line of strict internationalism, which he credits to a correct Stalinist view. It is within this discussion of internationalism, of the different nationalist tendencies, and of the continued fight against white chauvinism that Haywood’s theoretical underpinnings of the Communist program of self-determination come into full view. All of these ideas are crystallized around Haywood’s discussion of the “left reformist Negro movements,”

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455 Haywood, *The Road to Negro Liberation*, 1.

which he identifies as growing out of “the sharpening class struggle and growing radicalism of the Negro toilers.”

Haywood begins his speech with a section on “The Object of Negro Reform” in which he lays out arguments against “Negro bourgeois reformists [and] petty bourgeois nationalist organizations” such as the NAACP, the Tuskegee Institute, and various black leaders. He argues that these groups propose, incorrectly, that the “Negro question can be solved within the confines of the present capitalist imperialist social order without revolutionary struggle. That the fate of the Negro masses is bound with the maintenance of capitalism, or as Kelly Miller, the outspoken Negro conservative expressed it: ‘Capitalism is the Negro’s friend; white labor is his enemy.” Haywood argues that this form of bourgeois reformism is rampant in black communities and amongst black leaders. He states, “from this flows its tactical line of reliance on bourgeois courts, legislative bodies, its treacherous compromises with the white ruling class, its reactionary sabotage of the revolutionary struggles for Negro rights.”

Including what he calls the “‘Black Cabinet’ of the Roosevelt administration,” Haywood contends that the reform minded black social movements are hurting the cause of the black masses.

In his discussions of the problems with social democratic, liberal, and nationalist black organizations (the NAACP, the Garvey Movement, and others), Haywood argues that these groups mollify the white leadership of the US by organizing their programs

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457 Haywood, The Road to Negro Liberation, 3.
458 Haywood, The Road to Negro Liberation, 5.
459 Haywood, The Road to Negro Liberation, 5-6.
not to challenge the US government or ideology; in fact these movements work within
the framework of US imperialism. Haywood contends:

This Liberian-American movement, which parades under the slogan for
‘freedom for Liberia’, is in actuality but a scheme for fastening the yoke
of American imperialism and its reactionary bourgeois puppets still
tighter upon the backs of the Liberian masses. It is an attempt to deceive
the Negro toilers in the U.S.A. into a scheme directed to maintain the
subjugation of the Liberian people by American imperialism. ⁴⁶⁰

The charge of aiding US imperialism is at the core of the second prong of critique
against the “Back to Africa” movements. He argues that “the strivings of the Negro
bourgeois and petty-bourgeois intellectuals for economic expansion are not directed
against American imperialism; on the contrary, every one of these schemes fully
coincides with the interests of American imperialism.” ⁴⁶¹ Haywood counters these
groups with the Communist Party program, which, he argues, challenges US imperialism
and works toward an internationalism with black and white workers across the globe.

Haywood argues that the CPUSA is the only group to offer a plan for “real self-
determination,” or “the correct program by which oppression can be abolished and
these aspirations fulfilled.” ⁴⁶² He offers few details about this program, however, other
than calling on the nationalities policy in the Soviet Union as a model. As before, his
argument is strongest in critiquing other programs, and a careful reader is left with only a
sketch of his program by reading through the criticisms he levies against other groups.
Haywood does not so much outline the Communist plan, but focuses on a
condemnation of other groups. In this last instance he discusses the Pacific Movement
of the Eastern World and its slogan of “United Front of Darker Races Under

⁴⁶⁰ Haywood, *The Road to Negro Liberation*, 37.
⁴⁶¹ Haywood, *The Road to Negro Liberation*, 37.
⁴⁶² Haywood, *The Road to Negro Liberation*, 45.
Leadership of Japan.”463 Haywood criticizes this group for its program of “race unity as against working class unity,” which, he argues, works to the benefit of imperialism, especially Japanese imperialist organization.464

The 1938 pamphlet *Is Japan the Champion of the Colored Races*, published by the Negro Commission, follows up on this argument. This pamphlet, authored by Theodore Bassett, A.W. Berry, Cyril Briggs, James Ford, and Harry Haywood, builds a strong critique of imperialism, and especially the race arguments put forward by proponents of Japanese Imperialism. The pamphlet ends with a section entitled “The Negro’s Stake in Democracy” where many of the ideas expressed in this chapter are demonstrated. The authors argue: “At the root of the Negro problem lies the unsolved land question in the South. Land peonage, the very foundation of Negro oppression in the South, spreads its dismal shadow over the Negro people wherever they are, reflecting

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463 Haywood, *The Road to Negro Liberation*, 46.
464 Haywood, *The Road to Negro Liberation*, 47.
itself in all the forms of discrimination throughout the country.” Drawing on the history of a failed Reconstruction at the hands of greedy Northern capitalists, the pamphlet claims the one true ally of the black organizers is the Communist Party and, citing the Herndon and Scottsboro cases and other CPUSA victories, suggests the continuation of CPUSA and black organizational unity. This pamphlet characterizes the CPUSA’s Popular Front rhetoric of the late 1930s with its focus on the rejection of fascism and its support for an idea of “American democracy.” Though this pamphlet differs from the others discussed in this chapter because it builds on Popular Front rhetoric, the claims of nation-hood, land, freedom, and anti-imperialism still hold. The authors go on to suggest that although the Japanese government says they support the cause of the Scottsboro Nine, that this and other claims of racial unity are false and that the real champion of the “darker races” is the Soviet Union.

Conclusion: Negro Liberation

Referred to on the back cover of the Negro Commission’s pamphlet Is Japan the Champion of the Negro Races, James Allen’s 1938 pamphlet Negro Liberation was another prime example of Popular Front changes to the Black Nation Thesis. Allen published Negro Liberation in 1938 as a revision of his earlier pamphlet for the International Pamphlets series, The American Negro. In the latter pamphlet, Allen continues with the basic arguments of the preceding work but significantly expands his arguments about the

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465 Bassett, Berry, Briggs, Ford, Haywood, Is Japan the Champion of the Colored Races, 42.
466 Bassett, Berry, Briggs, Ford, Haywood, Is Japan the Champion of the Colored Races, 46-47.
467 Negro Liberation was perhaps one of the most published CPUSA Black Nation Thesis pamphlets. Though no publication numbers are available, there are archived copies of Negro Liberation with at least four different cover designs indicating regular re-issues of this popular pamphlet. See: Reference Center for Marxist Studies Collection, Box 3, Folder 4.
uneven and unequal development of the black people in the South and North of the US. Noting how both the bourgeois and the workers are negatively affected by the racism of US capitalism, Allen shifts his focus in this pamphlet towards building coalitions amongst progressive forces. This change is in line with the rhetoric of the Popular Front period of the Communist Party that was well developed by the pamphlet’s printing in 1938. The pamphlet presents a strong argument about the need for self-determination in the Black Belt, drawing even more explicitly on Stalin’s definition of a nation and the Soviet model of revolutionary change. What is characteristically different about this pamphlet, other than the abandonment of the sectarian Third Period politics, is the shift in tone away from the use of the Black Nation Thesis as a productive fiction to exploring ideas of social and political change and towards a rhetoric of reform and collaboration. This shift, rhetorically abandoning the imagined possibilities of the black nation in the Black Belt for the more pedestrian goals of working for incremental change, echoes the larger shifts of the CPUSA toward the Popular Front and the impact of continued black migration from the South to the North. This is not to say that later coalitional work was not important, ground-breaking, and fundamentally challenging to white supremacy and capitalism, but that the imaginative underpinnings of the organization shifted away from the goals of the Black Nation Thesis.

The earlier pamphlets on the Black Nation Thesis combined the legacy of Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association, the ideas of nationalism propagated in the Soviet Union under Stalin’s influence, and a long history of Marxist analysis to suggest structural changes to ideas of race and class. Indeed, the CPUSA deployed an idea of race that was grounded in the history of slavery in the US while also cognizant of the larger global patterns of capitalism, colonialism, nationalism, and imperialism.
This concept of race and racism was also indebted to the continuing fight against white chauvinism, and as such demanded that Negro Liberation be the goal of all CPUSA members, at least in theory, and in the sectarian rhetoric of the Third Period. In practice, as discussed in the previous chapter, the struggles for Negro Liberation were focused in the urban centers in the North, particularly Harlem and Chicago, and in a few pockets of rural organizing in the South, mostly in Alabama.

The theoretical work offered by the Resolution on the Negro question was taken up in the US though a variety of pamphlets. These pamphlets both highlighted the history of black liberation and relied on Reconstruction as an important period of positive struggle, but also offered new insights for black struggle. Most of these insights were centered on the naming of the Black Belt and the argument that black people should be considered a national group. Though the meanings of the idea of nationalism were sometimes cloudy, the Black Nation Thesis offered an important vision for change and a model for national liberation that built on both the Soviet example and the work and rhetoric of Marcus Garvey and the UNIA.

Finally, the CPUSA linked conversations about black liberation with the growing concern about imperialism and need for international solidarity. This internationalist frame, thinking about the problems facing black people in the South as connected to global issues and struggles, brought the domestic arguments about the Black Nation Thesis back into the Resolution on the Negro Question's original framing within the Colonial Commission. It also helped build support for the Black Nation Thesis in international circles, as seen directly in the Scottsboro Nine trials and the public campaign to free the defendants, detailed in the following chapter.
PART III

THE SCOTTSBORO CASE
CHAPTER 5

The International Labor Defense: Propaganda and the Radical Imagination, 1931-1933

March, protest! Demand that Negroes be guaranteed their right
to sit on juries, to vote, to hold office, to enjoy equal rights!

Struggle against Jim-Crowism, lynching, persecution!

Demand the release of the Scottsboro boys!
– James Allen, Smash the Scottsboro Lynch Verdict

“Well On A Monday”
Well on a Monday, Monday I was arrested;
Well on a Tuesday, Tuesday I was tried;
Well on a Wednesday, Wednesday I was sentenced;
Well on a Thursday, Thursday chain-gang bound.

Hard luck in family, good God it all fell on me;
I stay in prison, Can’t you people see;
Chain gang is my home, Jailhouse my stopping place;
Don’t care about it, ‘Cause it’s low down place.
– Me and My Captain: Chain Gang Songs of Negro Protest

On March 25, 1931, nine young black men, ages 13-20, were pulled from a train
and arrested for fighting with white men (and winning). The young white men, having
jumped the train after the fight and walked to the nearest town, told the authorities an  

468 Gellert, Me and My Captain: Chain Gang Songs of Negro Protest, n.p. Lawrence Gellert published two
collections of Protest Songs in the 1930s, the first, Negro Songs of Protest, in 1936, and the second, Me and
My Captain, in 1939. In the collection on Chain Gang songs Geller indicates the importance of song that
showcase the perverted “justice” of the South, using the collection as an opportunity to comment on
Lynch-law, chain-gangs, and other vestiges of the Southern justice system for black people. In Gellert’s
words: “It is important to remember that content is what matters above all else. The Negro sings these
songs not for amusement; or to show off; or merely to pass time of day. He sings from the necessity of
expressing himself, because ‘there’s something troubling my mind.’” (preface) See: Music File T158, Folder
exaggerated story of black men armed with guns and knives. This account quickly led to a crowd gathering at the next train stop, Paint Rock, Alabama, where the authorities and the crowd pulled many young people off the train, youths who were “hoboing” along the rails looking for work. Two young white women, dressed in overalls, were also taken from the train and tried to run, but were caught and brought back to the commotion at the platform. Either at the behest of their arrestors or on their own volition, the young women, Victoria Price and Ruby Bates, accused the young black men pulled from the train of gang rape.469

Facing the Southern Justice system for a crime against white women’s purity, these young men, Charlie Weems, Ozie Powell, Clarence Norris, Olen Montgomery, Willie Roberson, Haywood Patterson, Andy and Roy Wright, made famous around the world as the Scottsboro “Boys,”470 were rushed to trial on April 6, 1931 in the small town of Scottsboro in Jackson County, Alabama. The trial was set for Fair Day or Horse Trading Day, when thousands of people from the surrounding area were in town for market and entertainment.471 The court called for support from the Alabama bar to defend the Scottsboro Nine. Milo Moody, a 69 year-old white man who had been in partial retirement, was the only volunteer. Under the Judge’s encouragement Stephen Roddy, a real estate lawyer, was brought in to assist him. The trials were swift, each lasting on average only a few hours. By April 9, 1931, Judge E. A. Hawkins sentenced

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469 For more on the Scottsboro arrest and trial, including detailed accounts of the different versions of the arrest drama, see: Allen, Organizing in the Depression South; Carter, Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South; Gilmore, Defying Dixie; Goodman, Stories of Scottsboro; Howard, Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro; and Kelley, Hammer and Hoe.

470 Following Gilmore, I use this formulation to both acknowledge the popular way the trial was referred to while also recognizing the very racialized logics at work in the naming of the young black defendants as “boys,” so often a term used pejoratively for black men of any age. I do not use this formulation in the dissertation, other than when quoting, for similar reasons.

eight of the nine to death in the electric chair. Roy Wright’s case ended in a mistrial, as
the jury could not agree upon death or life imprisonment for the thirteen year-old
defendant. The International Labor Defense, the legal arm of the CPUSA, handled the
appeals of the Scottsboro rulings and organized the early campaigns for their freedom.
A large part of this campaign was small press literature, newspapers, journals, leaflets,
and pamphlets. The campaign lasted over six years, from 1931 to 1937, and many of the
young men faced a jury multiple times and were sentenced to death repeatedly. The trial
went to the Supreme Court twice, once because of the poor defense representation
afforded the young defendants in Scottsboro, and again on account of African-
Americans being systematically excluded from juries. Over the six years of trials, the
CPUSA published dozens of pamphlets about the Scottsboro Nine.\footnote{472}

The pamphlet coverage was not unique to this trial; many important and current
issues were discussed in small booklets as well as the more common journalistic forms
such as newspapers, journals, and weekly, biweekly, or quarterly magazines. However,
pamphlets were able to offer a more sustained critique, since they were usually longer
than articles, with a more considered and complete analysis of contemporary issues and
debates. There is a long history of pamphleteering for trials or issues of interest to
radicals in the US, examples including the trial of Big Bill Haywood, 1907, Triangle Fire
Trial, 1911, and the trials of Sacco and Venzetti, 1921. Longer and more vividly
illustrated than newspaper or journal articles, pamphlets were useful to Party activists for
a trial such as Scottsboro since they enabled the authors to present the conditions of the
trial, the political backdrop of the situation, and an analysis of the proceedings.

\footnote{472 I have found fifteen pamphlets published by the CPUSA on the Scottsboro trial, but I believe there is
evidence that many smaller sections also published Scottsboro related pamphlets.}
Similarly, pamphlets could reach people of varying literacy levels, as they sometimes told stories through pictures with limited text.

Part III looks at pamphlets produced around the trials from 1931 to 1937 to think about the kind of ephemera developed for the expansive international and domestic campaign to free the Scottsboro defendants. To analyze the literature around the Scottsboro cases I suggest a model of pamphleteering that is more propagandistic in style and form, with the aim to educate people outside of the Party about the case while subtly introducing the CPUSA platform. The Party used these pamphlets to raise awareness, increase membership, and publicize the trial, but not to discuss Party policy or the theoretical understandings of race, class, and gender. This differed from other CPUSA pamphlets of the time, as discussed in Parts II and IV, which foreground theoretical issues. These pamphlets, however, still engage with the ideas of the Black Nation Thesis, if not the rhetoric specifically. The Scottsboro pamphlets suggest the importance of self-determination for black people and highlight how race and class work together to make the young Scottsboro defendants targets of the legal system.

Indeed, the pamphlets around Scottsboro should not be dismissed as simple or common; they suggest radical ideas and dreams for black activists who had been struggling for years against lynching, Jim Crow, and stark racial oppression. The Scottsboro pamphlets, therefore, toe an interesting line of challenging the status quo while appealing to a mass audience. They negotiate this delicate balance by being less explicit in terms of the revolutionary program than other pamphlets produced around the same time but geared toward Party members. The pamphlets still offer productive fictions however, as imagining a world where black men would not be subject to lynchings, chain gangs, and false legal proceedings was a clear leap of the imagination in
the US South in the 1930s. This chapter will look at the early years of the Scottsboro Nine trials and the CPUSA pamphlets and the precedents of working on lynching and chain gangs. The following chapter will examine later coalitional work with the Scottsboro Defense Committee, analyze the gendered implications of the trial, and look at the Scottsboro trial as a model for other defense campaigns.

A concerted study of the pamphlets produced around the Scottsboro trials demonstrates three key ideas. First, that the Scottsboro pamphlets, building on a tradition of radical pamphleteering, honed a successful model of propaganda to address legal issues and specifically trials of political, or class-war, prisoners. Secondly, the Scottsboro trial pamphlets show that this model of pamphlet propaganda worked, both by raising awareness about the trial and helping to overturn the multiple sentences of death, but also by increasing the visibility of the CPUSA’s larger campaign around race, especially in urban black communities in the North. Finally, the Scottsboro pamphlets help to explicate the difference between pamphlets that build on a radical vision, a concrete aim for political and social improvements in the lives of black workers, and pamphlets that suggest a productive fiction, a discussed, but not realizable, goal of social transformation.

The Scottsboro pamphlets directly engage a long history of propaganda, but do so by navigating a complicated space between the propaganda traditions of the US and those of the USSR. In the USSR, the All-Union Communist Party (the CP of the USSR) and the Comintern both had large and sophisticated Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) departments that were charged with political education, moral building, and the simple dissemination of information. Therefore, the term propaganda did not have the negative connotations that it did in many parts of Europe and the US. An analysis
of propaganda will help situate the Scottsboro pamphlets within traditions of pamphleteering on the Black Nation Thesis and suggest other uses and forms of productive fictions in pamphlet literature.

This chapter begins with an analysis of the early Scottsboro Nine trials pamphlets produced in 1931 to 1933 by the CPUSA. In these early years the CPUSA was locked in a struggle with the NAACP over control of the trial and many of the pamphlets produced had multiple goals: to raise awareness of the trial, to educate on ideas of the Black Nation Thesis, and to win the hearts and minds of black activists away from the NAACP and to the CPUSA.

The Scottsboro Trials

The CPUSA was well positioned to get involved in the Scottsboro case because of the offices of the *Southern Worker* in Chattanooga, Tennessee. James Allen describes first hearing about the case in his *Organizing in the Depression South: A Communist’s Memoir*:

> On the evening of March 25, 1931, an alarming report came over the radio. Nine Black youths had been taken off a freight train by a deputy posse at the small town of Paint Rock, Alabama. [Sic] We wired the International Labor Defense in New York, alerting them to the danger of a mass lynching. The local ILD telegraphed Governor B. M. Miller of Alabama and Judge Alfred E. Hawkins at Scottsboro, charging them with responsibility for the safety of the prisoners.473

Allen continues that he, his wife, Isabel, and Lowell Wakefield, Southern representative of the ILD, went to the hearing in Scottsboro. He watched as the young men were tried in rapid succession and sentenced to death. He reports telegraphing the Governor of Alabama, Benjamin Miller, to denounce the trial as “legal lynching” and demand a stay of

473 Allen, *Organizing in the Depression South*, 79.
Indeed, after the April 9th sentencing in Scottsboro, the International Labor Defense (ILD), a legal defense organization associated with the Communist Party (CPUSA) and the US section of International Red Aid, approached the families of the defendants offering free legal representation for appeals to the Scottsboro rulings. As discussed in more detail in the following chapter, the NAACP and the Methodist Church also offered to provide legal support, though some in the organization were unwilling to get the organization involved in the case. Other more mainstream black organizations were likewise unwilling to get involved in a possible rape trial, and were suspicious of the ILD and the CPUSA’s work with the trial. As Walter Howard reports in his book *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro*, black Communist Eugene Gordon, in an issue of the ILD paper *Labor Defender*, “ridiculed the hesitant middle-class black reform organization as ‘Nice Association for the Advancement of Colored People.’” Eventually, as the case grew in the courts, the NAACP also offered support for the defendants and battled the CPUSA for the right to provide legal services. From April through December of 1931, the NAACP and the CPUSA struggled over who was to lead the defense, until, by the beginning of 1932, the NAACP withdrew from the case.

The ILD, under the leadership of J. Louis Engdahl, a white journalist, and the League of Struggle for Negro Rights (LSNR), headed by the black Communist leader B.D. Amis, led a two-pronged defense for the Scottsboro Nine, focusing both on a large-scale public campaign as well as a legal battle. The families of the Scottsboro defendants

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474 Allen, *Organizing in the Depression South*, 81-82.
475 Much has been written about the defense of the Scottsboro trials, see: Carter, *Scottsboro*; Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*; Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*; Howard, *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro*; and Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*.
476 See: Howard, *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro*. On the other side, many of the early ILD pamphlets are also vindictive in their condemnation of the NAACP, the Urban League and other black organizations.
477 Howard, *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro*, 12.
were courted by the CPUSA and involved in the defense organization, speaking at rallies and being portrayed in heart-wringing newspaper articles. There were regular articles, rallies, speeches, petitions, and pamphlets appearing alongside the depositions, trials, and appeals.\textsuperscript{478} The protests in support of the Scottsboro defendants were international in scope. George Padmore and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW), a Comintern organization organized in Germany, helped to organize rallies of support in many European cities including Riga, Latvia, Berlin, Hamburg, and other cities in Germany, and cities throughout the Soviet Union.

The ILD retained George W. Chamlee to appeal Judge Hawkins' ruling. Chamlee's appeal focused on new evidence that Ruby Bates and Victoria Price had worked as prostitutes in Tennessee, which, to the defense, meant they were probably lying to the court. Chamlee also cited the atmosphere of Scottsboro and put in a request for a change of venue. The appeal was denied but Chamlee was, eventually, granted a stay of execution. The Communist Party attorney Joseph Brodsky and ILD attorney Irving Schwab joined the case as it moved to the Alabama Supreme Court on grounds of inadequate representation, no time for council to prepare their cases, an intimidating crowd in the courtroom, and the unconstitutionality of excluding blacks from the jury.

In March, 1932, the Alabama State Supreme Court ruled against seven of the eight remaining Scottsboro defendants, supporting the lower courts death sentences for everyone except 13 year-old Eugene Williams, who was granted a new trial since he had been tried as an adult in Scottsboro. The Court maintained the denial of a change of

venue, upheld the testimony of the two white women, and declared there was no need for a new trial.

The case was then appealed to the United States Supreme Court on October 10, 1932, and argued by Walter Pollak for the ILD and Alabama Attorney General Thomas Knight, Jr. Pollak argued that the mob atmosphere and the inadequate council demanded an overturning of the Scottsboro verdicts. In a landmark decision, the Supreme Court found that the state of Alabama’s failure to provide the defendants with adequate, competent council violated their Fourteenth Amendment rights. The Court pointedly did not fault Moody and Roddy for lack of an effective defense, noting that both had told Judge Hawkins that they had not had time to prepare their cases. The problem, the justices argued, was instead with the way the judge hurried the trial.

After this victory the case went back to Judge Hawkins who granted a change of venue. Then the case moved to the small, rural community of Decatur, Alabama, known as a bastion of the KKK and close to the homes of Ruby Bates and Victoria Price. The ILD brought the famed New York criminal defense attorney Samuel Leibowitz to present the case, with Joseph R. Brodsky to assist. Leibowitz won a separation of the case of Haywood Patterson, who was tried in Decatur before the Judge James E. Horton. Surprising everyone, Ruby Bates came to the stand for the defense and reversed her previous testimony. Victoria Price, however, maintained her original testimony and spoke on the behalf of the prosecution. An all-white jury sentenced Haywood Patterson to death for a second time on April 9, 1933.

Immediately after the conviction, the ILD’s attorney Brodsky filed a motion with Judge Horton for a new trial for Patterson on the grounds that the conviction was contrary to the evidence given, citing specifically the recanting of Ruby Bates’ story. At
the same time the Scottsboro defendants went on hunger strike in the jail citing unfair treatment, and the ILD, LSNR, and the CPUSA launched huge campaigns across the country. William Patterson had taken the helm of the ILD in 1932 as J. Louis Engdahl traveled domestically and internationally with Ada Wright, the mother of Andy and Roy Wright, to secure the Nine’s freedom. As part of this campaign, on May 5, 1933, thousands of people marched in Washington DC, delivering a petition to the President signed by 200,000 demanding the “freedom of the Scottsboro Boys.” Ruby Bates, the families of the Scottsboro Nine, and prominent Communist leaders met with the Vice President, John N. Garner, and pled for their freedom.

In June, Judge Horton set aside the conviction from April and ordered a new trial for Haywood Patterson. In a bold move, Judge Horton wrote a lengthy opinion where he noted that he believed that Victoria Price lied under oath and that there was not enough evidence to convict the Scottsboro defendants. In November 1933, a third trial for Patterson began in Decatur before Judge William Washington Callahan. Leibowitz worked diligently to prove that blacks were not on the jury roles, going so far as to show that the former Jury Commissioner had added false names; Judge Callahan overruled the challenge. Callahan kept the trials to a strict three-day period, which meant that Ruby Bates’ testimony could not be heard as she was in New York for a medical procedure. Patterson was again found guilty and sentenced to death ten days later. The next week, Clarence Norris was likewise found guilty and sentenced to death for a second time. Leibowitz appealed both rulings and stayed the execution dates for Norris and Patterson. The case went a second time to the United States Supreme Court as

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Howard, *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro*, 16.
Norris v. Alabama, where the Court reversed the Decatur convictions on the basis that blacks had been excluded from the jury pool because of their race. The Supreme Court demanded retrials for Norris and Patterson with blacks allowed on jury roles.

A local Alabama attorney, Charles Watts, argued the final round of trials of the Scottsboro Nine, with the assistance of Leibowitz. Judge Callahan arraigned the adult defendants in Decatur. A black man, Creed Conyer, was selected as the first black person since Reconstruction to sit on an Alabama grand jury. However, as indictment could be made with a two-thirds vote, the grand jury voted to indict the defendants.

Haywood Patterson was convicted of rape and sentenced to 75 years in prison. He escaped in 1948, wrote the book Scottsboro Boy, and was then caught by the FBI. He was sent back to prison for manslaughter for killing a man in a bar-fight and died of cancer in prison in 1952. Clarence Norris was convicted of rape and sentenced to death; Governor Graves reduced his sentence to life in prison and he was eventually paroled. He skipped parole, went into hiding, and, when found in 1976, was pardoned by Alabama Governor George Wallace. He died in 1989. Andrew Wright and Charlie Weems were convicted of rape and sentenced to 99 and 105 years in prison, respectively. Eventually, both were paroled, Weems in 1943 and Wright in 1950.

While being moved from Kilby prison to Birmingham, Ozie Powell got in a brawl with prison officers and cut an officer with a pocketknife. He was shot in the face by another officer and suffered permanent brain damage. After the shooting, Powell pled guilty to assaulting the Deputy and was sentenced to twenty years. As part of his plea the rape charges were dropped. Powell was released in 1946. After spending over six years in prison, in July, 1937, the State of Alabama dropped all charges against Willie Roberson, Olen Montgomery, Eugene Williams, and Roy Wright.
Through the Scottsboro case, especially the trial itself, the CPUSA waged a huge public campaign to raise awareness in the North of black issues in the South; to publicize the Party’s position in regards to black people; and to challenge the legal system, both of Alabama and the US Supreme Court. Many have argued that Scottsboro was a major turning point in the CPUSA’s work with black people, bringing in members and publicizing the Party and its organizational platform. Walter Howard, in his book on black Communists’ work on the Scottsboro Case, notes that black membership in the CPUSA “mushroomed from two hundred members in 1930, less than 3 percent of the total, to seven thousand in 1938, over 9 percent.”

In what follows I will discuss the pamphlets produced around the Scottsboro Nine trials and look specifically at how these pamphlets differed from others of the time period in order to be more effective propaganda for the Party. I also note how pamphlets were geared toward not only raising awareness of the issues in the Scottsboro case, but also bridged into other CPUSA ideas, including the Black Nation Thesis, though often in subtle language.

Propaganda

The history of propaganda is complex, but most discussions trace contemporary US understandings of the term to the First World War and President Woodrow Wilson’s

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480 For a thorough discussion of the CPUSA’s role in black radical organizing see: Allen, Organizing; Gilmore, Defying Dixie; Howard, Black Communists; and Kelley, Hammer.
481 Howard, Black Communists, 9.
propaganda campaigns.\textsuperscript{482} Definitions of propaganda from the 1930s, for example in the works of Lasswell and Blumenstock, differentiate propaganda from education and highlight systems of control.\textsuperscript{483} In contrast, the CPUSA pamphlets highlight the similarity of the aims of education and propaganda, especially around the Scottsboro Trials. In these pamphlets the simple text and message, accessible language and metaphor, and the evocative images work together to both inform the public about the case and to subtly suggest the correctness and value of the Communist line.

Many argue that the definition of propaganda shifts over time and across political terrain.\textsuperscript{484} Garth S. Jowell and Victoria O'Donnell agree, noting: “Propaganda is a form of communication that is different from persuasion because it attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist. Persuasion is interactive and attempts to satisfy the needs of both the presenter and persuadee.”\textsuperscript{485} They continue that, though propaganda has often been made synonymous with lying, deception, and manipulation, this characterization rather displays the political bias of the reader. A more meaningful analysis might center on propaganda as control. Jowell and O'Donnell suggest that propaganda tries to control the message and the ideology to

\textsuperscript{482} Chomsky, \textit{Media Control}, 11. For more on the history of propaganda see: Doob, \textit{Propaganda}; Lasswell and Blumenstock, \textit{World Revolutionary Propaganda}; Jowett and O'Donnell, \textit{Propaganda and Persuasion}; and Seidman, \textit{Posters, Propaganda, and Persuasion}. It is also important to note that many of the academic works on propaganda are ardently anti-Communist and use Communism and the USSR to discuss the negative understandings of propaganda, focusing on deception and manipulation. The prime example of this trend is Clews, \textit{Communist Propaganda Techniques}.

\textsuperscript{483} As Lasswell and Blumenstock note, in a discussion of revolutionary propaganda, “propaganda is the manipulation of symbols to control controversial attitudes; education is the manipulation of symbols (of and other means) to transmit accepted attitudes (and skills),” 10. See also, Doob, \textit{Propaganda}, 89. For a more contemporary definition, see Jowett and O'Donnell, \textit{Propaganda and Persuasion}.

\textsuperscript{484} Psychology Professors Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson explain that the term propaganda has shifted over time, from meaning education to meaning deceit. They note that the term came to mean something more like suggestion, declaring: “Propaganda is the communication of a point of view with the ultimate goal of having the recipient of the appeal come to ‘voluntarily’ accept this position as if it were his or her own.” Pratkanis and Aronson, \textit{Our Age of Propaganda}, 9.

fulfill an objective. “The objective that is sought requires the audience to reinforce or modify attitudes and/or behavior.” Following this analysis of propaganda, the CPUSA was clearly trying to change the attitudes and behavior of many people with their reporting on the Scottsboro Nine trials. They were up against another huge propaganda machine, the US government and media, which dismissed Scottsboro as just another rape of white women by black men. To be successful with the case, and more so to encourage the masses to think differently about race and class, the CPUSA pulled out all of the stops in the Scottsboro pamphlets.

To suggest a different reality of race relations, especially in regards to the legal norms of lynching, was fantastical in the early 1930s. The lynching system was well established, and implicitly supported by the courts. To imagine a change to lynch law was a leap of the radical imagination, though different than the fictions offered by the internal Party pamphlets. This chapter looks at the CPUSA pamphlets as productive fictions, ones which suggest a new order and organization of legal realities of the South where black men would be offered justice, even when accused of the rape of a white woman. Later pamphlets, discussed in Chapter six, will go further, also suggesting a white womanhood that was not based only on purity but also on justice.

The CPUSA and other groups’ organizing against lynching relied on a vision of a different, more just world. These pamphlets suggest a radical, if sometimes impossible, vision of the future, and, through this suggestion, allow for broader social movement imagination around issues of race, class, and justice. In such, these pamphlets are productive fictions, offering a speculative vision of a new reality to propel a program of

487 As discussed briefly in the introduction, the Black Radial Imagination is an idea put forth by Robin D.G. Kelley in his book Freedom Dreams. See my further elaboration in the final chapter of this dissertation.
social change. The pamphlets directly concerned with lynching, and anti-lynching organizing, had to assume and argue for what was almost the impossible: a different legal and social reality for black people in the US, especially the South.

The radical vision offered by the Scottsboro pamphlets is perhaps more powerful because it is subtle and rests on a reworking of dominant social expectations. To suggest, as these pamphlets did, that black men should not be falsely accused of crimes, should be given fair trials, should be allowed to serve on juries and have adequate representation was, until Scottsboro, just a dream. To further suggest that black families should not be pulled apart by the legal system, that black and white people should not be given radically different sentencing for similar crimes, or that a black person’s testimony was as valid as a white person’s, was also counter to years of history in the US. Furthermore, to claim that black people were systematically oppressed through the legal system, while not unique to the CPUSA, was still a radical idea and to fight against this oppression was often a difficult fight. This is not to suggest that there were not long and important histories of fighting lynching, legal or otherwise, or of black communities organizing to challenge their legal oppression. Indeed, pioneers such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Fredrick Douglass, and countless others made many of these same connections in their work. The NAACP, though the target of the CPUSA’s early ire, had a long history of working against lynching and had mounted a sustained anti-lynching crusade across the South. Scottsboro was, however, still groundbreaking and the belief in such a case relied on a dream of freedom that can only be called, in 1931, part of a radical imagination.
Propaganda and Death Penalty!

The Scottsboro pamphlets refine a few different pamphleteering traditions already being used and developed in the CPUSA. First, the pamphlets build on a long history of organizing around political prisoners, including a tradition of pamphlets publicizing legal cases and calling for the release of prisoners. Pamphlets published by the Socialist Party around the Sacco and Venzetti case are the obvious parallel to the Scottsboro pamphlets, but the Party also put out pamphlets over the Mooney and Billings case, as well as less publicized labor trials.488

The International Labor Defense, or ILD, published many of these pamphlets about political and class prisoners. The ILD was begun as part of the Red International Aid to offer legal support to the CPUSA. Labor Defense: Manifesto Resolutions Constitution, a pamphlet chronicling the first national conference of the ILD held in Chicago in June 1925, notes that the conferences hosted “hundreds of delegates, sent by workers’ organizations in all parts of the country.” Though predominantly focused on workers organizations and lawyers, also “a number of former class war prisoners and men now under indictment, took active part in the conference. Class war prisoners wrote letters expressing their happiness that unity in defense had become the order of the day.”489 The pamphlet includes a manifesto of the ILD, the Resolutions from the opening Convention, and the Constitution agreed upon by the delegates. The Manifesto opens with the note that at the time of printing, in 1925:

488 Tom Mooney and Warren Billings were two socialist labor leaders who were tried and convicted of the San Francisco Preparedness Day bombing in 1916 and sentenced to death by hanging. Many believed they were wrongly convicted and there was a large international campaign for their freedom, which was successful in changing the sentence to life in prison in 1918. Mooney was pardoned in 1937 and Billings pardoned in 1939.

there are not less than 128 workers confined in American prisons because of their political opinions and because of their activities in behalf of the workers’ cause. A half hundred more await trial. No crime has been proved against any of these workers. They are in prison because they organized, inspired and led workers in the struggle for class betterment. They are class war prisoners.\footnote{\textit{ILD, Labor Defense}, 3.} 

As the ILD was founded before the Resolution on the Negro Question, none of the rhetoric of the resolution is included in the founding pamphlet. Black workers’ need of legal defense, however, is noted:

The growing movement for organization of Negro workers and farmers had increased the special persecutions from which they have always suffered. Many Negro workers, farmers and soldiers are in prisons for no other reason than they have either tried to organize themselves in labor and farmer unions or otherwise sought protection against exploitation and torture and murder of members of their race.\footnote{\textit{ILD, Labor Defense}, 4.} 

Thus, though a thorough understanding of race as another fulcrum of oppression is not present, the need to organize especially around issues of race is highlighted as a main purpose of the ILD.

Of particular interest in the opening platform of the organization is the Resolution on Information and Publicity. The pamphlet notes: “The labor movement is not generally informed of the facts of labor persecution and perversions of justice in labor cases. Conspiracies against labor are frequently carried out in secret.”\footnote{\textit{ILD, Labor Defense}, 11.} And later:

It is the aim of International Labor Defense to develop publicity toward this end in all its forms. Regular press service, public meetings, motion pictures, books, pamphlets, leaflets, stickers and posters shall be utilized for extending to every corner of the labor movement the exact news and data about all cases of working class persecution. In addition to these, the National Conference is of the opinion that an illustrated monthly magazine devoted to the cause of Labor Defense should be published as
soon as sufficient organizational base is established to assure its success.  

A similar pamphlet from 1934, *What is the ILD?*, and the 1935, *Ten Years of Labor*, tell of the successes of the ILD in the first 10 years. In the latter pamphlet, a section is dedicated to the successes “in Defense of Negro Rights,” arguing:

In the ten years from 1925 to 1935 the rulers of the rope and faggot learned that lynching law, mob violence, divide and rule,– wholesale terror against the Negro people, would have to reckon with a powerful foe. Simultaneously with its defense work on the economic front the I.L.D. became the champion and defender of countless victims of national oppression.

Followed by a quick chronicle of the Scottsboro Case the pamphlet links this victory to other ILD-led campaigns for laborers’ freedom. It goes on to connect the Scottsboro victory to others in Oregon, Minneapolis, New York and Detroit, where the ILD suggests it was successful in securing freedom for framed-up workers from mobs and lynch law.

The ILD pamphlet that is the most obvious precursors to the Scottsboro Nine pamphlets, is the 1930 piece *Death Penalty! The Case of Georgia Against Negro and White Workers*. This pamphlet, issued by the International Labor Defense in 1930, uses many of the same written tropes as the later Scottsboro pamphlets. Published before the ILD shot to the national spotlight with the Scottsboro trials a year later, it concerns the case against white organizers M.H. Powers and J.O. Carr for “inciting to insurrection.” The pamphlet serves both as publicity for the trial as well as a call for funds for the ILD, complete with a contribution form on the back cover. The pamphlet agitates for the

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494 ILD, *What is the ILD?* and Small, *Ten Years of Labor*.
freedom of multiple prisoners: “Newton, Burlak, Story, Dalton, Powers, Carr” are all listed on the back. It follows many of the same patterns of argument employed in later trial publicity pamphlets, including: a summary and refutation of the alleged crimes, an overview of the case and trial, and, finally, an analysis of this case as part of a system-wide problem with roots in capitalism. The pamphlet specifically takes on the death penalty, and rings with the refrain of the prosecuting attorney: “Your Honor, we ask for the death penalty in these capital cases,” but also centrally concerns the oppression of black people in the South, including an indictment of the working conditions for black people, lynch law, and the chain gang.

The cover of the pamphlet communicates many of these ideas. The skull on the Statue of Liberty holding the electric chair instead of a torch suggests the death of the

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496 ILD, *Death Penalty!*, 4.

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ideals of liberty as linked to the death sentences for Communist organizers. This pamphlet does not specifically take up arguments about race and the rhetoric of the Black Nation Thesis. This is understandable, in part, since the Resolution was still being vetted in the larger Party structure at the time of the pamphlet’s production in mid-1930. Rather, and similar to They Shall Not Die! discussed below, the pamphlet targets a readership outside of Party circles and works to educate the masses about the issues facing oppressed workers, pushing for concrete actions and increased political awareness. The pamphlet does offer important insights into the organizing models of the CPUSA and is a prime example of the more broadly positioned pamphlets often produced by the International Labor Defense to raise awareness for campaigns, win support for legal causes, and popularize the CPUSA.

As mentioned above, the pamphlet starts with the call for the death penalty by the Prosecuting attorney, Assistant Solicitor General John Hudson. The ILD argues that this punishment does not even fit the crime the defendants are accused of: incitement to insurrection. The authors note that the same indictment was levied against four other workers: Mary Dalton, working for the Textile Workers Union; Ann Burlak, with the ILD; Henry Story, an Atlanta worker; and Herbert Newton, a field organizer with the American Negro Labor Congress. This pamphlet only follows the case of Powers and Carr, however, limiting the analysis of the other workers to: “These workers were arrested for attempting to hold a meeting in Atlanta, Ga., as a protest against lynching. The capitalist masters have decided that a worker’s meeting in Georgia is a crime punishable with death.”

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497 ILD, Death Penalty!, 6.
Using metaphors of King Arthur’s Round Table and referring to the murder of Sacco and Vanzetti, the ILD paints a picture of the perversity of “capitalist justice,” citing many frame-ups and trumped up charges against Communists and the brutal repression leftist organizers face in their regular activities. The charges against Powers and Carr, the ILD maintains, stem from the distribution of a leaflet for a meeting of workers in Atlanta. Under the heading of “An Appeal to Southern Young Workers” the leaflet shows a black worker and a white worker shaking hands. The ILD argues that this call for solidarity challenges the long-standing color line that upholds black workers’ oppression. Thus the leaflet, and the challenge to white supremacy that the leaflet suggests, was the real threat to the white capitalist bosses and the reason for the invocation of “capitalist justice” in the form of the death penalty.

In both scope and content the Death Penalty! pamphlet is easily situated in the history of propaganda, highlighting the early, and Soviet, definition of the term to mean education and persuasion, rather than the later turn of the term to indicate deceit and manipulation. The pamphlet works with the tradition of propaganda for education, suggesting new ways of thinking about problems, criticizing the mainstream’s representation of justice, and pushing for freedom for the political prisoners. Similarly,
the Scottsboro pamphlets draw on this history of propaganda and use these tools to agitate for the freedom of the young defendants.

**Early ILD Pamphlets: They Shall Not Die!**

The widely distributed *They Shall Not Die! The Story of Scottsboro in Pictures* is a perfect example of a more broadly positioned booklet developed and published by the CPUSA to raise awareness and to highlight the Black Nation Thesis. This pamphlet, printed multiple times in 1932, tells the story of the Scottsboro “Boys”, with a simple and engaging story by Elizabeth Lawson and poignant drawings by A. (Anton) Refregier. 498 Like other ILD pamphlets such as *On the Chain Gang* by the journalist John Spivak, discussed in what follows, this pamphlet is less a policy debate or a clarification of Party principles than it is a story meant to publicize the case and win support for the International Labor Defense. Unlike later pamphlets, this pamphlet does not include a plea for funds or letters to the mayor or other elected officials; the only advertisement is the ubiquitous call to read other CPUSA publications on the back page of this pamphlet, sporting *The Liberator* and a list of CP pamphlets on the “Negro Question”.

The “Story in Pictures” also demonstrates the much broader range of literacies addressed by this and other Scottsboro Pamphlets. Lawson’s pamphlet, published in New York City, uses simple speech to accompany Refregier’s allegorical drawings, such as the cover illustration to *They Shall Not Die!* Refregier’s sketch of two workingmen cutting

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498 Amis, “Introduction,” Lawson, *They Shall Not Die*. In his introduction to the pamphlet B.D. Amis identified both Lawson, a white woman and Managing Editor of *The Liberator* journal published by the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, and Refregier, an “artist-worker” and member of the John-Reed Club. Refregier, a Russian immigrant, would go on to make a name for himself as a prominent muralist, working up from the Worker’s Progress Administration roles to paint the famous Rincon Post Office mural in San Francisco. See: Refregier, *An Artist’s Journey*. 

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down a lynching tree in Scottsboro illustrates the tagline. Without any text, the image—the court-house in the background, the ropes dangling ominously from the unseen branches, the wood-chips flying from the axes—enables easy identification with the pamphlet and the larger political aims of questioning the legal systems that, the CPUSA argues, is going to “legally lynch” the young Scottsboro defendants. Images on every page of the pamphlet further elucidate the story and allow for stark illustration of the political aims. Ruby Bates and Victoria Price, the white women accusers, as they first emerge in the text, are pictured as just like the “Boys” in torn overalls, being egged on by a well-dressed authority figure.499 Later in the story, the Judge looms large between the defendants and the electric chair, visually eliminating the need for a jury or a trial to condemn the young defendants to death.500

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499 Lawson, They Shall Not Die!, np.
500 Lawson, They Shall Not Die!, np.
The story chronicles the fates of nine young black men on trial in Scottsboro, all from poor working families suffering from both the economic crisis and the continual segregation in the South. The text does not try to be impartial; Lawson develops a touching story of survival against all odds. She details how the nine ended up on the train, heading to Memphis trying to find work, along with other men, both black and white, and two women who were dressed in men’s clothes. She writes that a fight broke out on the train between white and black workers and the white workers jumped off and called the authorities. The young men on trial, who had not been involved with the fight, were found on the train at the next stop, Paint Rock, Alabama, and charged with fighting with the white men. Only later, upon finding the two women on the train, was the charge changed to rape. Lawson notes that the women in question were pressured into their statements, and that through this process “the two white women now ceased to be arrested vagrants and became ‘pure’ and holy examples of ‘outraged white womanhood.’” Uncovering the racialized and gendered norms and values on display at the trial, Lawson criticizes the pageantry of the trial and the “mob atmosphere” developing around the defendants, which is also depicted in Refregier’s sketches. Apart
from the story of how the nine ended up on trial, Lawson condemns the judicial farce in the Scottsboro courtroom, calling the trial “a legal substitute for lynching.” She notes that the young defendants were not given adequate counsel, were not able to call their families, and that there were no witnesses called for the defense. In successive group and solo trials eight of the nine young men were sentenced to death in the electric chair. The ninth boy, Roy Wright, only 14 at the time, received a mistrial and was “thrown back in jail.” She concludes by noting the positive work the International Legal Defense and the League of Struggle for Negro Rights were undertaking on behalf of the defendants, highlighting the mass protests held across the US organized by the Communists, and the new, competent lawyers secured for the nine by the ILD. With a parting dismissal of the NAACP for supporting the lynch-law system, Lawson calls for increased solidarity between black and white workers in protests to “break open the doors of Kilby Prison and free the nine framed Scottsboro boys.” Other Scottsboro pamphlets follow this model of evocative images and simple persuasive text free of many direct references to Party politics. In this the Scottsboro pamphlets follow a line of CPUSA pamphlets.

502 Lawson, *They Shall Not Die*, np.
503 Lawson, *They Shall Not Die*, np.
504 Lawson, *They Shall Not Die*, np.
geared to a broader audience, with provocative images and an accessible, direct message such as *Death Penalty! The Case of Georgia Against Negro and White Workers*, discussed above.

Another early ILD pamphlet was *Lynching Negro Children in Southern Courts*. This pamphlet, written by Joseph North, is the fourth International Labor Defense Pamphlet, and follows many of the tropes established in *They Shall Not Die!* This pamphlet does not have quite as many vivid images to illustrate the story, and takes up the case later in the process, focusing on the trials more than the frame up. The images of the young defendants in the courtroom are stark. The stylized depiction of the starving, lonely young men hunched in the jail cell has clear religious overtones; the light from the high window illuminates their heads, throwing their features into relief. The men bend their shoulders under the burden of awaiting death. The call could not be clearer, even if...
it was not spelled out in a caption: “AWAITING DEATH. Will you save these boys?”

By focusing on the trial this pamphlet is also able to discuss what is going on “behind the state at Scottsboro” or why the young men are on trial for a crime they did not commit. The analysis of racism and classism here is sharp and heavily influenced by the rhetoric of the Black Nation Thesis. The pamphlet outlines the “lie of race superiority” that is used “to make the white worker or poor tenant farmer believe he is better than the Negro.”

It is also emblematic of earlier pamphlets, ending with a thorough condemnation of the NAACP and their supposed unwillingness to engage in mass struggle. Rather, the pamphlet suggests that only mass struggle, the organization of white and black workers across the country crying to stop the lynching of the Scottsboro Nine will win their freedom. The end of the pamphlet erupts in exclamations:

Negro People! Workers and Farmers! White and Black! All who oppose brutal lynch murder! Answer the appeal of the nine innocent workers. A new trial with a jury of white and Negro workers!

Stop the legal lynching of these 9 working-class Negro boys! Rush telegrams and resolutions of protest to Governor of Alabama. These boys are innocent! Demand their immediate rights! Equal rights for Negros in all courts! Shame the savage Jim Crow lynch system. Death to all lynchers!

Build the International Labor Defense into a mighty shield of the working class!

These calls also indicate that the ILD was working on multiple fronts for the campaign. Though the earlier thrust of the pamphlet was for open protest and grand marches, calls for telegrams, petitions, and funds were also included, suggesting that the ILD’s program

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505 North, Lynching Negro Children, np.
506 North, Lynching Negro Children, np.
was not, perhaps, as different as that developed by the NAACP and the Scottsboro Defense Committee, discussed in more details in the following chapter.

*Smash the Scottsboro Lynch Verdict*, another early pamphlet published by the Workers Library Publishers, is a moving description of the Scottsboro case including updates on the trial two years after the first guilty verdict and death sentence was handed down. In this short piece, Allen concludes that white supremacy is still strong in the South but notes that the CPUSA and the ILD are gaining ground and working for the rights of black people against the legal lynch system. The cover of this pamphlet is quite evocative, with two black men taking down and carrying away a gallows with “Lynch Justice” emblazoned on the side.

Though no discussion of the Black Nation Thesis’s call for self-determination is present in this pamphlet, the analysis of white supremacy is sharp and Allen’s summary of the trial stirring. Two years into the trial Ruby Bates, one of the white women also on the train who originally charged the nine young men with rape, had changed her testimony and spoke for the defense. Many critiqued Bates’ testimony in the
court including the prosecutor and the mainstream press, which painted her as a turncoat and remarked upon her “New York cloths.”

Allen, however, explicitly supports Bates and discredits the testimony given by Victoria Price.

Allen focuses the end of the pamphlet on the larger social question posed by the trial, especially what it means to have black people excluded from juries. He uses this as a crescendo to call for continued unity and agitation for freedom for the Scottsboro Nine and loosely ties this to the fight against capitalism. He argues, “Underneath these social issues lie profound and basic challenges to capitalism. The struggle of the Negroes in the Southern Black Belt against social oppression and for equal rights must at the same time be a struggle for the land which they have always been deprived.”

This argument is not further developed, just hinted at, perhaps acknowledging that readers would have been so familiar with the CPUSA program that further elaboration was not needed. Regardless, this pamphlet fits within the pattern developed by others, to build off of the ideas of the Black Nation Thesis, to hold these ideals in the background, but not to directly work with these concepts. Rather, the purpose of the pamphlet, to communicate support for the Scottsboro Nine and maintain support after the disappointing trial, remains central to the pamphlet’s design and style.

The Scottsboro Nine pamphlets were in conversation with other pamphlets produced specifically about lynching and chain gangs. Drawing on comparisons with this material, I show how the Scottsboro pamphlets illustrate the different audiences and functions of CPUSA small press literature. Specifically, the pamphlets functioned as

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507 Allen, Organizing in the Depression South, 114.
508 Allen, Smash the Scottsboro Lynch Verdict, 14.
external pedagogical tools, and were used to increase membership, educate the masses, sway political opinion, and motivate concrete action.

**Lynching**

The simmering racial tensions, which emerged in a new form after Reconstruction, pitted working-class white people against working-class black people. Wealthy and powerful white people used white supremacy to enlist the support of poor whites, often through appeals to white purity and manufactured stories of black men as predators of white women. Stories like Scottsboro, where black men were accused of raping white women, were not uncommon and often led to a local white mob, with the tacit or explicit support of local (white) law enforcement, hanging or burning the accused man without a trial. Indeed, as Robin D.G. Kelley notes, such events were “public spectacles intended to punish and terrorize the entire black community.”\(^{509}\) The CPUSA pamphlets produced to challenge lynching relied on a radical imagination of a more just and equitable life in order to imagine such a radical change to the social, political, and legal order.

Though there is trouble in the definition, lynching is often defined as extrajudicial execution carried out by a mob with the purpose of exerting power over or controlling a community.\(^ {510}\) Indeed, many authors have noted that lynching often played

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\(^{510}\) For more on the trouble of defining lynching see: Waldrep, *African Americans Confront Lynching* and Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*. 

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off of tensions around race, class, and sexuality. More specifically, lynching in the US was a common way for Southern whites to control black people, and rose dramatically after the Civil War and the betrayal of Reconstruction as whites worked to reestablish white supremacy throughout the South. Lynching itself was usually extralegal, but, as in the Scottsboro case, the term “legal lynching” was also used to describe the atmosphere of the Southern courts that targeted black communities, and particularly black men, and tried them on trumped up charges. Though the vast majority of lynching targeted black men, especially after Reconstruction, white men and black and white women were also lynched. However, the normal narrative justification of lynching often revolved around the protection of white women from black men who were charged with rape. As Crystal Feimster argues: “Not only did the justification of lynching as a protection for white womanhood allow for unprecedented violence against African Americans, it also served to terrorize women and place limitations on their sexual freedom and political rights.” She continues:

Lynching and the threat of rape served as warnings that the New South was a dangerous place for women who transgressed the narrow boundaries of race and gender. At the same time, the stories that southern white men told and used in their white supremacy campaigns served to draw attention away from their own sexual crimes against black and white women.

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511 For more on class, sexuality, and lynching see: Wells-Barnett, On Lynching; Aptheker, Lynching and Rape; Davis, Women, Race & Class; Hall, Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and The Women’s Campaign Against Lynching; Carby, “On the Threshold of the Women’s Era” in McClintock, Mufti and Shohat (eds.), Dangerous Liaisons; Wiegman, “The Anatomy of Lynching” Journal of the History of Sexuality; McGuire, At the Dark End of the Street; Feimster, Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching; Hale, Making Whiteness; Rosen, Terror in the Heart of Freedom.

512 For more on how lynching worked to shore up whiteness see: Hale, Making Whiteness, 201-239.

513 Feimster, Southern Horrors.

514 Feimster, Southern Horrors, 5.
Black women were also the target of gross sexual violence, especially in the South. As Danielle L. McGuire chronicles in *At the Dark End of the Street*, sexual violence was often used as a tool of white men to control and terrorize black women and communities.\(^{515}\) Indeed, the all-too-common lynching of black men was part of a larger pattern of mob violence, largely unchallenged by the authorities, which terrorized black communities across the US but particularly in the South and the West.

Anti-lynching crusaders, most famously Ida B. Wells-Barnett, worked tirelessly to address the growing problems of lynching in black communities across the South. Wells-Barnett was an active pamphleteer, publishing *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* in 1892 and *A Red Record, 1892–1894*, documenting the lynching of the intervening years and commenting on their justifications. She was adamant, having examined many accounts of lynching based on alleged rape of white women, that rape was just an excuse used to hide the real reason for lynching: white people’s desire to maintain white supremacy in economic, cultural, and political spheres. Anti-lynching activists pushed for the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, introduced to the United States Congress in 1918, but were unsuccessful in passing the legislation due to the control of the Southern States of the Congress.

By 1932 many CPUSA and affiliated organizations were publishing pamphlets dealing with the call for self-determination and lynching, including Harry Haywood and M. Howard’s *Lynching*, a general study, and Scottsboro specific pamphlets such as: Joseph North’s *Lynching Negro Children in Southern Courts*, the ILD’s *Story of Scottsboro*, and, *They Shall Not Die! The Story of Scottsboro in Pictures*.

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Number 25 in the International Pamphlet series, Harry Haywood and M. Howard’s *Lynching* is a concise work outlining how the Party views lynching, its history and purpose, as well as ways to challenge the lynch-law system of the Southern states. Haywood and Howard open the pamphlet with a quote from a Southern newspaper, the *Memphis Press*, describing the lynching of Henry Lowry. The authors draw on a tradition of opening pamphlets with local or national newspaper clippings, pointing to framing mechanisms that place the pamphlets in a larger social dialogue and offering readers a critical perspective on events of the day. In this pamphlet, Haywood and Howard use the news clipping to highlight that Lowry was lynched because he fought back against abuse at the hands of his landlord. They quickly add that other Southern plantation owners supported the lynching because they wanted to squelch any idea that Lowry’s behavior, talking back to white landowners, was acceptable. Haywood and Howard also note that Lowry was at the landlord’s door because his family was starving as a direct result of the poor wages he earned cropping and the meager supplies advanced from the landowner before the crop came in. As the authors argue:

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516 M. Howard was a nom-de-plum for Milton Halpern, a white Jewish organizer in the Party. Thanks to Bettina Aptheker for this clarification.
To refuse to starve, to refuse to be robbed. These were the terrible “crimes” for which Lowry, Negro farm worker, was burned at the stake – lynched by the landlords and their henchmen. This is how the white ruling class attempts to subdue any opposition to its merciless exploitation of the Negro people.517

Beginning with an account of Lowry’s lynching, a lynching reportedly motivated by greed, revenge, and the white ruling class’ need to control black populations, sets the tone for this pamphlet. This tone is important as it helps the authors argue that lynching is a race and class motivated crime, not a crime motivated by gender or sexuality, the common call of “rape.” Though the authors claim that between 1882 and 1932, when the pamphlet was published, “over 4,000 Negroes have been either hanged, burned, or both. Of these over 75 were women; some of the victims were young girls less than 15 years of age,” they focus on the more common lynching of men and the cultural narratives that allow such crimes to almost always go unpunished.518

The struggle against lynching had a long history in black communities before the 1930s. In its literature about lynching, both in pamphlets and in longer works that broach the subject, the Party does not give credit to the earlier anti-lynching campaigns or campaigners such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett. As mentioned, Wells-Barnett’s work was vast and extremely sophisticated, including a thorough debunking of the myth of the rape of white women, which was often held up as a justification for the lynching of black men.519 Haywood and Howard’s pamphlet comments on many of the same issues Wells-Barnett highlights, including how lynching was used to intimidate and oppress black people and

517 Haywood and Howard, Lynching, 4.
518 Haywood and Howard, Lynching, 4. These statistics, though not referenced here, probably build off of the NAACP’s work compiling Lynching statistics from 1882 to 1919 in their publication Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918. The pamphlet’s numbers do not match up completely, probably because the authors added recent known lynchings to the numbers published in other places.
519 For more on Wells-Barnett and anti-lynching campaigns, see two new books about her life and times: Schechter, Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, and Giddings, Ida: A Sword Among Lions.
does not liberate or protect white women. Echoing, though not recognizing, the critique developed by Wells-Barnett, Haywood and Howard challenge the idea that rape is the cause of lynching, and show that it is used as an excuse to obscure the real reason for lynching black men: economics. Following Wells-Barnett’s argument that it is the economic threat of black businessmen, Haywood and Howard contend that it is the need to keep black people in a position of inferiority, both economically and socially, which is the root cause for most lynching. The authors, in their discussion of “The ‘Rape’ Lie,” do note the unequal treatment of people accused of rape: lynching for black men accused of raping white women, but a slap on the hand, if anything, for white men accused of attacking black women.\textsuperscript{520} As they argue: “Many Negroes have died of objecting to the rape of Negro girls and women by whites.”\textsuperscript{521} It is important, however, to further unpack the “rape lie” to understand not only that rape was prosecuted differently for black people and white people in the US, but also to look at how the rhetoric of rape was often used to falsely convict black men. Likewise problematic was the authors’ complete dismissal of rape in this pamphlet as only, and always, a lie. This rhetoric, though important for debunking the myths around lynching, could also be interpreted as denying women’s agency over their own bodies by dismissing all rape as part of a legal frame-up.

Rather than focusing on issues of trumped up charges of sexual violence, the Communist authors argue that lynching functions to maintain the control of the ruling class, a fact they claim that other black leaders of the time ignore. In line with the

\textsuperscript{520} Kelley discusses this point at length, criticizing both the ILD and the NAACP for not taking on the cases of black women raped by white men. An example he gives is Murdis Dixon, a young black girl raped by her white employer. See Kelley, \textit{Hammer and Hoe}, 84.

\textsuperscript{521} Haywood and Howard, \textit{Lynching}, 8.
rhetoric of the Third period, Haywood and Howard critique “race leaders,” such as Walter White, a secretary for the NAACP, for misrepresenting the reasons behind lynching in order to gain the support of the white ruling classes. They say that the large black organizations denounce lynching as the actions of mobs of “poor whites who have no radios and do not go to the movies.” Though these claims are overblown, as the NAACP and other black organizations were working tirelessly against lynching, the point of the critique is important as Haywood and Howard use this to propose the Communist analysis of lynching as part of a larger system, “the system of national oppression, super-exploitation and social persecution.” They continue: “Lynchings defend profits! Lynchings are a warning to the Negro toilers. Lynching is one of the weapons with which the white ruling class enforces its national oppression of the Negro people, and tries to maintain the division between the white workers and the Negro toilers.”

Haywood and Howard’s pamphlet does mention the Scottsboro case, but does not center on it. The trial is mentioned almost off hand, as if the authors expect the readers to be familiar with the case and its developments. This framing, as well as the language choices, the sharp critique of the NAACP and other more mainstream black organizations, and the rhetoric of the Party suggest that this pamphlet, unlike others around Scottsboro, was not written for a wider, generalist audience. Rather, this pamphlet is squarely positioned toward Party activists and concerned with developing

Party policy. In this positioning, the pamphlet suggests, as mentioned earlier, a radical vision of a world without lynching and using this as a means to organize the Party base. This pamphlet’s focus on the CPUSA’s critique of the NAACP also suggests that this pamphlet might have been targeted to a black progressive audience and/or those interested in interracial work. Indeed, the pamphlet could have been used to pull activists away from the NAACP by denouncing their anti-lynching campaign strategies. As discussed in the next chapter, the CPSUA and the NAACP worked together for the later part of the Scottsboro Nine trials and the sectarian attacks on other groups were no longer included in the pamphlet literature.

Chain Gangs and Lynching: The work of John L. Spivak

As the CPUSA pamphlets about lynching draw on a long history of anti-lynching organizing, especially in black communities, they also draw on work that challenges the penal system’s treatment of black people. Though not always referenced in the pamphlet literature as directly applicable to the Scottsboro Nine trial, the CPUSA was also engaged in a

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525 This positing is also evident in Haywood and Howard's analysis of how “race hatred” and “race inferiority” have been squashed in the Soviet Union. Though their analysis is not developed enough to actually demonstrate how the Soviet Union, because it is anti-capitalist, would protect against lynching, the authors suggest that a different government would not allow for the same kind of legal lynching (15).
national conversation about the horrors of other aspects of the Southern justice system’s treatment of black people, including politically motivated indictments, debt slavery, and chain gangs. On the latter, the CPUSA published John L. Spivak’s *On the Chain Gang*, number 32 in the International Pamphlet series, in 1932. The pamphlet drew from Spivak’s research for the novel *Georgia Nigger*, a fictional account of a black man’s ensnarement in the systems of legal re-enslavement through the penal system in the South.526 As Douglass A. Blackmon argues in *Slavery By Another Name*, the book was a brutal and blunt portrayal of the “system designed to enslave or intimidate black men into obedience.”527

In the shorter, non-fiction pamphlet published by the CPUSA, Spivak uses a simple journalistic style to discuss the wretched treatment of black men on chain gangs.528 This pamphlet tackles the issue of chain gangs, or groups of prisoners made to do forced labor, often building roads or rails, generally tied together by chains around the ankles. Chain gangs have a long history in the United States, but took on new meaning in the post-Civil War South where black men and, less often, black women and white men and women were put on chain gangs and forced to work.

The Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution made slavery illegal except as punishment for a crime. What this translated to in the South were a

526 Alex Lichtenstein, in his article “Georgia History in Fiction,” argues that the novel was only barely fictional, that most of the accounts were directly drawn from research Spivak undertook in the Georgia prisons and observing chain-gangs. For more see: Lichtenstein, “Georgia History in Fiction: Chain Gangs, Communism, and the ‘Negro Question’: John L. Spivak’s *Georgia Nigger*” in *Georgia Historical Quarterly*.

527 Blackmon, *Slavery By Another Name*, 372.

528 The editors of the pamphlet claim in their brief Preface, that Spivak is a “well-known New York newspaper reporter,” though, in reality, he worked in a variety of media and with a host of papers. He does, however, employ a journalistic style and tone for this pamphlet, which starkly contrasts with the more propaganda style of other pieces of the time. Spivak, *On the Chain Gang*, 1. Blackmon, *Slavery By Another Name*, 371.
series of Black Codes, and other legal or semi-legal means to convict black people for crimes and force them to work for the state or, more often than not, for the white planters and former slave owners.\textsuperscript{529} The “crimes” black people were often charged with were vagrancy, idleness, unemployment, and drunkenness, though sometimes “talking back” and insolence were also considered cause for conviction.\textsuperscript{530} As the pamphlet’s preface states:

By the use of vagrancy laws ‘unattached’ or unemployed workers are picked up by the police, thrust into chains and forced to work either for the county or for the planters. There is no distinct line between the two in the Black Belt. In the large plantation areas of the South the sheriff acts as the planter’s foreman recruiting and driving labor for him wherever it is required.\textsuperscript{531}

As Spivak clearly outlines the relationship between the ruling class, the government, and the black workers, he builds on accounts that echo the arguments around the Scottsboro Nine trial. This pamphlet, therefore, can be viewed in relationship to these others, suggesting a broader analysis being offered to CPUSA members, connecting lynch law and chain gangs. Indeed, framing the problem of chain gangs alongside the ideas of lynch law that drives the Southern (and also Northern) legal system in regards to black people allows Spivak to draw connections between his pamphlet and the Scottsboro trials, deepening the Party’s critique of the legal system. This critique is vividly displayed in the dire depictions of the US justice system. Spivak carefully outlines the cruel and pointed way in which the legal system targets black people with unfair treatment, citing torture techniques such as “stretching” and “trussing” whereby prisoners, mostly black

\textsuperscript{529} Foner, \textit{Give Me Liberty!}, 562-3.
\textsuperscript{530} For more on this history of Chain Gangs, slavery and forced labor in the South please see: Blackmon, \textit{Slavery By Another Name}; Davis, \textit{Are Prisons Obsolete}; Wilson, \textit{Forced Labor in the United States}.
\textsuperscript{531} Spivak, \textit{On the Chain Gang}, 1.
men, are tied up or pulled to inflict bodily pain. In both the CPUSA pamphlet and in the fictional *Georgia Nigger*, Spivak provides pictures and other documentation of the atrocities of the Georgia penal system. He notes that prisoners who have medical complaints are denied a doctor’s care and that the many letters decrying lack of medical care and cruel treatment to the point of death are ignored by the state system. Developing on these ideas, he documents the myriad ways that the treatment of black prisoners by the police and jailers breaks US laws against torture.

Spivak’s pamphlet also demonstrates the various audiences CPUSA pamphlets attempted to engage. The CPUSA published this non-fiction account the same year as Spivak’s fictionalized book *Georgia Nigger* was being widely distributed and received positive attention from the New York *Times*. Historian Alex Lichtenstein notes that the publication of the more popular piece *I am a Fugitive From A Georgia Chain Gang* by Robert Elliot Burns, and its subsequent treatment by Hollywood, eclipsed the impact of the more radical, and ultimately more critical, *Georgia Nigger*. Importantly, *Georgia Nigger* also took up the racial aspect of the chain gang, a fact covered over in the white protagonist in *I am a Fugitive From a Georgia Chain Gang*, which is an autobiographical account of a white World War I medic who was

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arrested and sentenced to 6-10 years on a chain gang for stealing food from a grocery store.

Though the whitewashed version of chain gang cruelty received more popular attention, the CPUSA publicized Spivak’s more historically accurate account. The *Daily Worker*, the CPUSA’s main newspaper with a large distribution, serialized the book, and provided commentary linking the book to the Black Nation Thesis and the Resolution on the Negro Question. The potential for a wider audience for CPUSA pamphlet material is exploited with Spivak’s pamphlet, however this is not new ground for the CPUSA. Indeed, there was a long history of pamphlets geared toward a more popular audience, a tradition the Scottsboro pamphlets built on in the early 1930s.

In the early pamphlets the CPUSA produced around the Scottsboro Nine trials, many, if not most of them, produced under the auspices of the International Labor Defense, the Party draws on a long history of political trial pamphleteering. These pamphlets are geared toward a larger audience, both to publicize the trial at hand, but also to introduce CPUSA platforms, and to draw potential supporters to the CPUSA. For example, in the early Scottsboro pamphlets, when the CPUSA was butting heads with the NAACP over control of the trial, many pamphlets were keen in their critiques of the NAACP, often to sectarian extremes. The Scottsboro pamphlets also honed arguments about lynching and chain gangs, which were being made in the more Party-specific press. The longer treatments of the politics behind lynching and chain gangs,

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534 Indeed, though both white and black people were sentenced to the chain gang, it was a much more common punishment for blacks.

Haywood and Halpern’s *Lynching* and Spivak’s *On the Chain Gang*, were important Party documents outlining both the horrors of these systems but also demonstrating how the CPUSA platform and the Black Nation Thesis would address these issues. Both of these pamphlets drew upon propagandistic publishing traditions and differed from many of the pamphlets discussed in previous chapters. In developing other formal pamphleteering styles, the Party still relied on productive fictions to communicate important ideas. In this instance the fictions were subtler, lacking the explosive demands that some pamphlets engaged in. However, these productive fictions, the dreams of a world where black people were afforded equality under the law, were all the more powerful for their clarity. Appealing to both white and black readers, these pamphlets helped to build the Party’s base in the South and the North and strengthen recruitment in black communities.

This chapter has looked at the early ILD and CPUSA pamphlet literature produced around the Scottsboro Nine trials and the linked conversations on lynching and chain gangs. The next chapter looks to the pamphlets produced under the coalition that took over the Scottsboro defense in 1933-1934, the Scottsboro Defense Committee. These pamphlets differ in both scope and format, telling a related history of the trial and demonstrating the changing ideas about the trials and the defense campaign. The next chapter also details the roles that gender played in both sets of pamphlets, those produced by the CPUSA and those by the Scottsboro Defense Committee, taking up questions of lynching and gender and analyzing how gender was used in the pamphlets to communicate ideas about race and class.

In order to mount a successful activist campaign for the Scottsboro Nine trial, the CPUSA argued that they needed to challenge the conventional discourses on race,
sexuality, and class upheld through lynching and terror style “justice” in the South. To do this, the CPUSA and ILD focused on offering a new way of thinking about race as wedded to a class analysis. Indeed, the ILD and the CPUSA pamphlets demonstrate that the tensions around race, class, and sexuality were high, and in 1931 the political stage for such conversations became the courtroom in Scottsboro.

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536 Du Bois’ *Black Reconstruction*, published in 1935, does similar work but has a different audience and scope.
CHAPTER 6
The Scottsboro Defense Committee
Gender and the Development of a Form, 1934-1937

“As Scottsboro”
Paper come out, done strewd de news,
Seven po’ chillun moan deat’ house blues,
Seven po’ chillun moan in’ deat’ house blues.
Seven nappy heads wit’ big shining eye
All boun’ in jail an’ framed to die
All boun’ in jail an’ framed to die

Messin’ whit women snake lyin’ tale,
Dat hang and burn, and jail wit’ no bail,
Dat hang and burn, and jail wit’ no bail.
Worse ol’ crime in white folks lan’
Black skin coverin’ po’ workin’ man,
Black skin coverin’ po’ workin’ man.
- Negro Songs of Protest537

“And I know also that after the fight began for the Scottsboro boys,
every Negro worker in mill or mine,
every Negro cropper on the Black Belt plantations,
breathed a little easier and held his head a little higher.”
– Angelo Herndon, You Cannot Kill the Working Class

As detailed in Chapter five, after the April 9th sentencing in Scottsboro, the
International Labor Defense (ILD) approached the families of the defendants offering
free legal representation for appeals to the Scottsboro rulings.538 The NAACP and other

537 Gellert, Negro Songs of Protest, n.p.
538 For more on the Scottsboro arrest and trial, including detailed accounts of the different versions of the
drama around who would offer legal representation, see: Allen, Organizing in the Depression South; Carter, Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South; Gilmore, Defying Dixie; Goodman, Stories of Scottsboro; Howard, Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro; and Kelley, Hammer and Hoe.
black organizations in the South or the North also offered support for the young defendants and a public opinion battle ensued. Eventually, the defendants and their parents retained the support of the ILD, somewhat quelling the debates. By the middle of the campaign, however, the NAACP and other groups were working alongside the CPUSA and the ILD to secure the young defendants’ freedom. This chapter takes up where the last left off, looking at the pamphlet literature of the later campaign, especially the work produced by the coalition, the Scottsboro Defense Committee.

Indeed, the ILD coordinated the defense through the first change of venue, the splitting of the trials of Haywood Patterson, and the change in Ruby Bates’ testimony. Though there were some successes, an all white jury sentenced Haywood Patterson to death for a second time on April 9, 1933. Judge Horton overturned this conviction amid worldwide protests, including the European travel of Ada Wright, mother of Andy and Roy Wright, with J. Louis Enghahl of the ILD, and Ruby Bates’ pleas for the Nine’s freedom on the steps of the capitol. By the end of 1935, the Scottsboro Defense Committee (SDC), including members from the ILD, the NAACP, the ACLU, the League of Industrial Democracy, the Church League of Industrial Democracy, and the Methodist Federation for Social Service, were representing the Scottsboro Nine. This shift in the defendant’s representation was in line with the change in the CPUSA’s organizing model with the advent of the Popular Front and the coalitional politics it embraced. This committee oversaw the final round of trials of the Scottsboro Nine, argued by Alabama attorney Charles Watts in Decatur.

The prison time served by the Scottsboro Nine was horrid. As black Communist lawyer Ben Davis Jr., who visited the Nine frequently, notes, their treatment was brutal, bordering on torture. Walter Howard, drawing on the testimony of Ben Davis, argues that their treatment in jail was particularly bad because their case received so much national attention.\(^\text{540}\) However, the CPUSA argued, had the case not been brought to the national stage the Scottsboro Nine might well have been killed in 1931.\(^\text{541}\)

The tension between publicizing the trial and raising awareness and focusing on the young defendants and trying to protect them from the state and the hands of their captors was a central fulcrum of the various defense strategies. The CPUSA was adamant that the public spectacle of the world-wide campaign was essential to keeping the Nine from the electric chair. Indeed, the CPUSA was clear in their belief that “ONLY MIGHTY MASS PROTEST OF THE INTERNATIONAL PROLETARIAT CAN STOP THE EXECUTION OF THE 8 BLACK PROLETARIANS.”\(^\text{542}\) The NAACP countered that building support across class and race lines would be more effective in supporting the young defendants. As Walter White, the head of the NAACP at the time, wrote in *Harper's Magazine* in December 1931, the “bungling and dangerous tactics in the Scottsboro cases have even led to sharp criticism from within [the Communist] Party.”\(^\text{543}\) He continues, quoting Du Bois, “the tactics of the American Communists were ‘neither wise nor intelligent… If the communists want these lads murdered, then their tactics of threatening judges and yelling for mass action on the part

\(^{540}\) Howard, *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro*, 17.


of the white Southern workers is calculated to insure this.”

The verbal and written sparring continued through the first years of the trials including letters from the defendants, their mothers, and prominent progressive leaders flooding the left press.

The scholarly and critical analyses of the Scottsboro trials also often take sides on this debates of tactics and parties. Hugh T. Murray, writing in the journal *Phylon* in 1967, argues vehemently that the NAACP was misrepresented by the CPUSA and that the limited successes of the early Scottsboro trials were flukes, luck rather than skill in working with the explosive trial. William Patterson, head of the ILD for much of the Scottsboro Nine trials, offers the opposite story, arguing that the NAACP tried to wrest control from the ILD and “demanded exclusive right to handle the case.”

Throughout the six long years of the defense trials, both the NAACP and the CPUSA’s tactics would be put to use and prove to be important strategies. The early trials were marked, as noted above, with large-scale protests and bombastic language in CPUSA pamphlets. The later trials campaign, detailed in what follows, was somewhat more subdued and relied on alliances and coalitions built across racial and class lines.

Pamphlets were used as political tools for both the ILD and for the later coalitions, and included pleas to contact politicians, to join meetings and rallies, and to send money to the defendants and the defense committees. The ILD and the Scottsboro Defense Committee (SDC) employed many of the same methods in political pamphlets, though at other times their methods sharply diverged. Similarly, the shifting

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545 For more on the debates around who would represent the Nine see: Patterson, *The Man Who Cried Genocide*, 126-130.


547 Patterson, *The Man Who Cried Genocide*, 130.
political landscape of the CPUSA, from the Third Period to the Popular Front, changed the rhetoric they were willing to employ in Scottsboro pamphlets. This chapter charts these changes and discusses the political implications for each.

Part of the rhetoric shifts also highlight the important role that gender plays in the pamphlets produced around Scottsboro. As Robin Kelley and Erik McDuffie have noted, the CPUSA's organizing around the Resolution for Self-Determination for black people in the Black Belt was particularly masculinist, often impeding the organizing around both the Woman Question and the Negro Question, rendering the two as separate issues for years to come.\footnote{Kelly, Race Rebels, 114; McDuffie, Sojourning For Freedom, 43-44.} I will note the characteristics of this masculinist approach by looking at roles afforded to white and black women and men in the Scottsboro pamphlets, the opportunities of women organizing around the Scottsboro campaign to join the conversation in print, and the rewarding of masculinity in the campaign’s literature. Thus, this chapter pays special attention to both the representations of the white women accusers throughout the trial pamphlets as well as the representation of the mothers of the Nine who were instrumental to the campaign for their release.

Finally, this chapter concludes by looking at the legacies and echoes of Scottsboro, particularly noting the connections and differences from the Angelo Herndon case of 1932-1937 and how Scottsboro became a model for later CPUSA organizing. Similarities across trial pamphlets suggest how these pamphlets work as productive fictions, challenging the accepted racial and class dynamics in the US. Finally, through the conversation on gendered representation in the Scottsboro pamphlets, I
argue that the challenge to norms of race and class was often accomplished through an appeal to conventional tropes of gender.

**Later ILD and Scottsboro Defense Committee Pamphlets**

As the Scottsboro Nine trial progressed, the ILD continued to put out pamphlets calling for the support of the young prisoners, reporting on the progress of the case, and generally trying to keep the trial in the forefront of people’s minds as it dragged through multiple courtrooms in Alabama and the Supreme Court. Examples of this include three important pamphlets that were published in 1934: *The Story of Scottsboro, Scottsboro: Act Three*, and *Mr. President Free the Scottsboro Boys. Scottsboro: Act Three*, a pamphlet by Sasha Small in 1934, tells the story of the trial as a theater drama, thick with evil and heroic characters, such as the conniving Victoria Price, the brave Ruby Bates, the stoic Lester Carter, a witness for the defense, the manipulative Thomas Knight, the prosecutor, and the valiant Attorney Leibowitz. *Mr. President Free the Scottsboro Boys*, discussed in more detail later in the chapter, is also dramatic in its rendering of the case as a plea of the mothers of the Scottsboro defendants to free their sons. This pamphlet goes on to link the trial in Alabama to the crimes committed by the Nazis, includes pleas from international figures for the defendants’ freedom, and demands that the reader, also, send their protest to the President. The pamphlet is written for a broad audience, showing the Party’s anticipation of support from a wide swath of people for the ILD’s campaigns to free the young men.

These pamphlets, all published by the ILD, take various forms to communicate their message, but are consistent in their style with simple, accessible language, a lack of CPUSA jargon, and poignant depictions of the defendants. These later pamphlets
refrain from lambasting the NAACP or other groups; understandable as, by 1934, a coalition was forming to take over the defense and the NAACP were no longer considered “race misleaders” by the CPUSA. The pamphlets also all include calls for action, forms to submit funds, and information about other pamphlets, newspapers, journals, and protests to get people involved.

Around 1934, though it is not dated, the ILD published the *Story of Scottsboro*, prepared by Isidor Schneider. The pamphlet takes the form of a timeline, giving specific dates for key events in the progression of the trial and concise descriptions of developments. The pamphlet leaves off with the promise of the ILD to take the Patterson case to the Supreme Court of Alabama if the lower court’s decision is not overturned. The tone is somber, there are no pictures, and even the cover is simply text with thick black bars, reminiscent of a jailhouse, flanking the title. This pamphlet ends with a sober analysis of cooperation:

The Scottsboro case is a symbol of the oppression of Negro people by the capitalist masters. The imprisonment of Tom Mooney is a symbol of the persecution of militant labor leaders by the capitalist masters. Both are expressions of the domination of the exploiting class over the white workers, the Negro peoples and their sympathizers. Both must be fought as part of the struggle of the revolutionary workers and the oppressed Negro people against class oppression. The working masses and their supporters cannot hope to win their struggle as a divided force. White workers must fight with the Negro people to free the Scottsboro boys.
The oppressed Negro people must fight with white workers to free Tom Mooney.549

This statement is indicative of the tonal shifts in the ILD literature of the time, but also of the changing ideas about race and class. Importantly, the white people who are asked to join in solidarity are workers; white people are organized around their class interest. Black people, however, are referred to as a people, not just as workers (though black workers are also discussed in the pamphlet.) This rhetorical shift is important as the Party is trying to understand the different ways that race and class work in society; they call for solidarity between white workers with black people, all black people, who are oppressed by virtue of racial distinctions and racism. This shift does not just happen around the Scottsboro case, but the case is important to it especially because though the defendants were, supposedly, workers, they were not arrested for a work-related crime. Rather, as the ILD continues to present the Scottsboro case, the young men’s targeting because of their race specifically becomes more prominent. Never does the ILD or the Party suggest that the young men are not also targeted for being poor workers in a capitalist system, but they begin to suggest some of the nuances of racial oppression noting the oppression of black people, not just black workers.

These later ILD pamphlets are much more in line with the pamphlets put out by the Scottsboro Defense Committee and other allied groups around the trial of the Nine. These pamphlets include: the Scottsboro Defense Committee’s 1936 pamphlet, *The Scottsboro Case: Opinion of Judge James E. Horton*, which gives a quick four-page timeline of the case and then presents the opinion of the Judge to overturn the verdict of his court

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549 Schneider, *The Story of Scottsboro*, np.
in the trial based on the evidence provided; and *Scottsboro: Record of Broken Promises*, also published by the Scottsboro Defense Committee in 1938, which details the many times that the system has failed the young defendants. Though published by the same committee (neither pamphlet credits a particular author), these pamphlets are different in both their tone and how they present the case. Moving away from the vivid style of the ILD and CPUSA pamphlets, they offer a much more sober analysis, relying heavily on the legal framework for a thorough understanding of the case but losing much of the organizing and popular sentiment in their legal reference. Though ILD pamphlets published around 1934 were much more restrained than the early, explosive pieces, these later coalitional pieces again take a turn toward respectability.

As discussed above, the early Party pamphlets built off of the model the ILD had established to publicize trials and sway public opinion. The later pamphlets produced by the coalition continued to work in this mode, though with a much more measured style. The goals of these later pamphlets are easy to ascertain: they are again trying to win popular support for the trials, to keep the plight of the Scottsboro defendants in the forefront of the political consciousness, and to criticize the Southern judicial system for its treatment of black people. Importantly, the pamphlets are no longer trying to wrest support from the NAACP, though discussions about the coalition are often relegated to the front or back cover of the pamphlet where the publishing group is outlined. The wider scope of the pamphlets indicates that the authors were aiming for a broader constituency, looking to reach members in all of the coalitional groups and other sympathetic to the message. The change in tone, however, is significant and telling and clearly shapes the message. While CPUSA used the pamphlets for the
purpose of propaganda, to increase membership and educate readers, the Scottsboro Defense Committee pamphlets were often more limited in their scope and attention.

The pamphlet *Scottsboro: The Shame of America*, published in 1936, followed many of the structures deployed in the earlier ILD pamphlets including using narrative conventions to reach the reader, using an emotional appeal to sway the pamphlet’s audience, and developing the story through a time-line of events. However, the pamphlet does not end with the bombastic calls for support of the “Boys” defense trial, or with calls to question the legitimacy of the legal system or its treatment of black people. The Scottsboro Defense Committee pamphlets plainly conclude with legislative action suggestions and pleas to write your mayor, rather than the CPUSA’s lambasting of systems of segregation based on race and class. For example, James Allen’s 1933 *Smash the Scottsboro Lynch Verdict!* ends with:

> March, Protest! Demand that Negroes be guaranteed their right to sit on juries, to vote, to hold office, to enjoy equal rights! Struggle against Jim-Crowism, lynching, persecution! White workers, disassociate yourself from the lynch law policy of the ruling class, by being the first to strike out for Negro rights! Demand the release of the Scottsboro Boys!  

In contrast the Defense Committee’s pamphlet *4 Free, 5 in Prison – On the Same Evidence* ends with a call to “1. Sign the petition addressed to Gov. Bibb Graves [...] 2. Get your organization to pass a resolution and send a protest telegram to Gov. Graves. [...] 3. FUNDS are needed to continue the successful conquest of the defense.” The more measured tone, the engagement of the legal system and large organizations over mass protest and smaller political groups both indicate the different directions the two defense

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teams took as well as the political uses of pamphlets from both groups. Importantly, later CPUSA pamphlets, such as the 1937 *The Scottsboro Boys – Four Freed! Five to Go!* by Angelo Herndon, maintained the animated tone and critique of racialized logics alongside the description of the trial.

The shift in tone for the later SDC and ILD pamphlets also indexes the change in how the pamphlets were used as productive fictions. These later pamphlets were still suggesting the radical goals of justice for black people, especially in the South, and a legal system that did not discriminate based on race. The pamphlets did not, however, push the CPUSA’s Black Nation Thesis rhetoric, though the underlining ideas were still present. Rather than focusing on the links between race and class, these pamphlets pursued important arguments about legal access and justice for black communities. This shift is also apparent in the roles gender played in Scottsboro pamphlets. Unlike the CPUSA pamphlets that acknowledge the impact of race, class, and gender on black women’s oppression, though often inadequately, the Scottsboro pamphlets do not

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552 Herndon, *The Scottsboro Boys – Four Free! Five to Go!*. 
engage in a analysis of gender, often relying on understood and accepted tropes of gender to further arguments about race and a critique of the justice system.

Gender and the Representation of the Scottsboro Trials

The representations of gender are significant to the Scottsboro pamphlets, specifically the rhetoric around and the portrayal of women. Though central to the case, women rarely show up in the printed material and when they do they are often type cast, falling into accepted tropes of womanhood: victim, villain, prostitute, mother. White women oscillate between being victims in the popular portrayals or prostitutes in the early ILD pamphlets. Black women are stereotyped through the Scottsboro Mother, a figure that appears in the pamphlets crying for her son's release. None of the pamphlets give much if any of a voice to the women involved in the story, rather accepted characters of women are used to communicate ideas and propel the drama around the male defendants. The easy slippage into tropes of womanhood, portraying women as stock characters but never fleshing out their experiences or the impact the trial would have had on their lives, is commonplace for CPUSA pamphlets of the time.

Although there are many active stereotypical portrayals of women in CPUSA rhetoric, at the same time other activists were keenly aware of the important aspects of gender oppression. For example, the pamphlet *The Position of Negro Women*, by Eugene Gordon and Cyril Briggs, published in 1935, highlights the exploitation of black women. Specifically, the pamphlet opens with a statement explaining the “double handicap” that black women experience in society, stating baldly: “The Negro woman is doubly

553 Lawson, *They Shall Not Die*, np.
554 ILD, *The Story of Scottsboro*.
Chronicling the struggles of black women to improve their working conditions, noting the importance of labor unity in the face of racial and class discrimination, and holding up the USSR as a “shining example of the correctness of the Communist example,” the pamphlet uses a common formula of CPUSA material. However, the pamphlet offers a strong foundation for thinking about the issues facing black women in the US, including black women in factories, in domestic service, as well as white-collar workers and professionals. This work builds off of the work of other prominent communist women, both black and white, who were struggling to bring women's issues to the forefront of the Party platform. Women such as Maude White, Claudia Jones, Audley “Queen Mother” Moore, and Louise Thompson (later Louis Thompson Patterson) were involved in high-levels of Communist work, and there were large numbers of black women in the rank-and-file membership of the Southern CPUSA.

For example, in his chapter “Scottsboro Delimited,” literary scholar William Maxwell attends to what he calls varieties of “triangular-homosocial rhetoric” to make sense of the multiple arguments about the Scottsboro trial and its place in CPUSA history. Though I will not detail his carefully argued and thoughtful analysis here, he points to important stock conclusions often buttressed by Scottsboro, specifically noting: “Communist interracialism was impaired by its mostly unexamined masculinist foundation” and that though the Party was able to win support from African American

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555 Gordon and Briggs. The Position of Negro Women, 2.
556 Gordon and Briggs. The Position of Negro Women, 16.
557 Gordon and Briggs. The Position of Negro Women, 12.
558 For more on black women in the CPUSA, see: McDuffie, Sojourning for Freedom.
women, the rhetoric around Scottsboro continued to slight these same supporters.\textsuperscript{559} Indeed, Maxwell notes specifically the work of Louise Thompson in renegotiating the Scottsboro trial rhetoric to think about the oppression and attacks on black women. In her piece about her own time in jail “Southern Terror,” collected in the International Publishers 1935 anthology \textit{Proletarian Literature in the United States}, she links her case with Scottsboro, even mentioning she and the defendants are in the same jail in Jefferson County Alabama.\textsuperscript{560} Maxwell argues that Thompson’s article’s case for its right to Scottsboro referents is tenaciously faithful to Black Belt-era party racial analysis. “And it is the Communist Party,” Thompson devotedly declares near the conclusion, “which has analyzed the Negro question as that of an oppressed nation of people, defined the alignment of class forces for and against the Negro people’s struggle for liberation, and begins the organization of white and Negro working masses together.”\textsuperscript{561}

Maxwell continues that Thompson is successful in her aim to call attention to the struggles of black women in the Party, but these changes are small steps in a much longer debate. Indeed, the CPUSA and SDC pamphlet literature mimic many of the traditional tropes of gender. Though Thompson’s article is published in the \textit{Proletarian Literature in the United States} anthology by International Publishers, no pamphlets are published by black women dealing with Scottsboro, and only few news articles.\textsuperscript{562}

The propaganda style pamphlets of the Scottsboro trial, however, did not take on these critiques by black women, but rather built their analysis on quick, stereotypical portrayals of women. Perhaps some of the pamphlets’ authors did not think gender

\begin{footnotes}
\item[559] Maxwell, \textit{New Negro, Old Left}, 149.
\item[562] The \textit{Daily Worker}, the \textit{Southern Worker}, the \textit{Harlem Liberator}, and various other daily, weekly, or monthly journals do publish articles by black women about Scottsboro. See: McDuffie, \textit{Sojourning for Freedom}, 79-81, and Foner and Shapiro, \textit{American Communism and Black Americans, 1930-1934}, 249-319.
\end{footnotes}
issues were important to the Scottsboro case. In other work, however, Elizabeth Lawson
discusses women’s issues and supported women publishing and participating in public
discourse. Though there are no records of such a discussion, it is likely the Scottsboro
pamphlet authors were trying to appeal to the largest possible audience, and sacrificing
women’s issues to reach a broader base, appealing to familiar tropes of gender to
communicate new ideas about race and class.

To think about the representations of gender in the Scottsboro pamphlet
literature I will primarily look at the representations of women in the text, both the
white women accusers and the black women as mothers of the defendants. Another
important aspect of the gendered representation of the pamphlets is the masculinist
framings so common in the CPUSA. Specifically, masculinity was rewarded in forms of
organizing and activism, sometimes when femininity was elided, but more often when
women were ignored and men supported and celebrated.

Martin Summers, in his book *Manliness and its Discontents*, delineates different
masculinities suggested and supported for black men in the years 1900-1930. Though he
focuses on middle-class black masculinities, and limits his study to the years just
preceding the Scottsboro trial, his categorization of black masculine options are
instructive here. He notes that the masculinity favored by black men of the often
slightly older generation, noting specifically the Prince Hall Free Masons and the UNIA,
was organized around being a producer. The centrality of the marketplace, the
importance of character and respectability, and the indispensability of producer values

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563 For example see Lawson’s work as editor of the *Southern Worker* in the mid-1930.
564 The Prince Hall Free Masons were a predominantly African-American organization started in 1784 and
lay at the heart of an idealized Victorian manhood to which these men aspire.” Summers contrasts this with the men who came of age during the First World War, participated in the Harlem Renaissance, and filled the ranks of historically black colleges and fraternities. These men expressed a manliness, in Summer’s words, that rejected “earlier generations’ emphasis on respectable bourgeois manliness,” and instead “revolved around consumption and the body.” The masculinity expressed and rewarded in the pamphlets’ portrayal of Scottsboro is more closely aligned with the former of Summer’s two categories. The young defendants are discussed in terms of their roles as workers, their good character, and their respectability. Part of this portrayal was, of course, countering the state and mainstream press’ portrayal of them as out-of-control monsters that had sexually ravaged the young white women. Mainstream headlines ran with depictions of the young defendants as “brutes,” “fiends,” and worse. On the day the Nine were thrown in jail, the Jackson Country Sentinel ran the headline “Nine Negro Men Rape Two White Girls Threw White Boys From Freight Train And Held White Girls Prisoner Until Captured By Posse.” The headline also shows that the depictions of masculinity also often turned on representations of age; here the defendants are black “men” who have attacked the white “boys.” However, in both the Communist and the sympathetic mainstream press the Scottsboro Nine were regularly called “boys” to suggest their innocence and virtue. Importantly, calling a black man a “boy” also played on derogative Southern cultural norms where all black people were referred to as “boys” and “girls” irrespective of age. Herein, the CPUSA and

565 Summer, Manliness and its Discontents, 8.
566 Summer, Manliness and its Discontents, 8-9.
567 Sorensen, The Scottsboro Boys Trial: A Primary Source Account, 16.
sympathetic mainstream press are playing a difficult game, supporting racist cultural norms to try and build support for the young defendants. Looking at the rhetoric around masculinity, especially in terms of race and age, is instructive to further explicate the gendered expectations at play in the pamphlet literature.

To think about the representations of gender in the CPUSA's work of the early 1930s, I track two phenomena in the Party's printed ephemera: first, I look at the roles afforded to black and white men and women in the Party, accounting for how both race and gender work in Party participation; secondly, I analyze the roles afforded to black men, and white and black women, in the text, to suggest the masculinist frame of organizing and rhetoric. Importantly, though black women’s participation in the CPUSA was curtailed and limited in the 1930s, this pattern begins to change in the 1940s and brought forth a new flood of brilliant black radical organizing that Erik McDuffie has so thoroughly chronicled under the rubric of black left feminism.

White women in the CPUSA enjoyed some leadership positions, had some success in organizing around women’s issues, and were frequent contributors to Party publishing. There were a decent number of pamphlets from the early 1930s by white women and on the woman question. Pamphleteers such as Anna Louise Strong, Anna Rochester, and Grace Hutchens, the latter two a known lesbian couple who published frequently in the CPUSA press,\textsuperscript{568} wrote on issues such as farming technologies and conditions, the tyranny of Wall Street and monopoly capitalism, and women's role in the

\textsuperscript{568} For more on Hutchens and Rochester see: Lee, \textit{Comrades and Partners: The Shared Lives of Grace Hutchens and Anna Rochester}. 
work force. However, other pamphlets, written by white women, were not obviously credited to them, for instance the pamphlet *They Shall Not Die! The Story of Scottsboro in Pictures* credited the illustrator, Anton Refregier but not the author, Elizabeth Lawson, a white woman deeply involved in the Party’s organizing in the South and especially around black issues.

As discussed in pervious chapters, black men and women were involved in the leadership of the Party to limited degrees before the 1930s. Black men were also published authors, including the examples already discussed: James Ford, Harry Haywood, Ben Davis, Pettis Perry, B.D. Amis, and Angelo Herndon, among others. The pamphlets around the Scottsboro trials demonstrate the roles afforded to black women, white women, and black men in the CPUSA and I will limit my conversation here to these pamphlets. A concerted study of these pamphlets will demonstrate the masculinism of the Party’s rhetoric. Earlier ILD pamphlets did not have much to say about gender, or little more than simplistic portrayals of Ruby Bates and Victoria Price, the white women accusers. Bates and Price, as they first emerge in the text, are pictured as just like the “Boys” in torn overalls, being egged on by a well-dressed authority figure. These white women pulled from the train were, obviously, central to the case against the Scottsboro defendants though they show up rarely in the pamphlets.


571 Lawson, *They Shall Not Die!,* 8.
concerning the trial. Early pamphlets by the ILD often barely mention the young women on the train, sometimes noting they had been “forced into prostitution by low wages and lack of work” but not suggesting much about their motivations and lives or livelihoods. Indeed, in their article about Mother Ada Wright, Miller, Pennybacker and Rosenhaft note the charges that the white women worked as prostitutes were often levied in order to challenge their claims of rape and throw suspicion on their character. For example, in *8 Who Lie in the Death House*, written by Paul Peters and published by the ILD in the early 1930s, the white women's character is directly called into question. Under the title “Symbol of Pure White Womanhood,” the pamphlet continues:

> Who are these girls in overalls on whose word alone – there is no other ‘evidence’ of rape – eight young boys must be burned in an electric chair?

> Irving Schwab, second attorney for the International Labor Defense, now analyzes their story. Lies perjuries, contradictions, faked testimonies, one by one he rips them open. Both girls are known prostitutes. Both have been seen time and again drunk in Chattanooga brothels. One has a long police record in Huntsville, Ala.

Indeed, the claims that the women are prostitutes, regularly drunk, and that they are lying to the court paints an image of unsavory characters that should not be trusted. Furthermore, the violent language of the pamphlet, where the defense attorney “rips open” the women sitting on the witness stand, communicates that the defense believes these young women deserve abuse and aggression. This pamphlet, like others, uses stereotypical understandings of gender, white women as victims or women as villains, to communicate the important story of the pamphlet, the young black male defendants. In

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572 Lawson, *They Shall Not Die!*, 2.


this the pamphlet plays to simmering racial tensions around the use of white women as literal lynch pins of the young defendants.

In later pamphlets such as *Scottsboro: The Shame of America*, published by the Scottsboro Defense Committee, the white women’s roles expand, as when in 1933 Ruby Bates rescinds her testimony and begins to appear for the defense in the on-going trials against the Nine. In these pamphlets, Ruby is now described as scared, young, manipulated, and, finally, brave in her speaking for the defense. The pamphlet gives some of her back-story: that she worked in the mills and supported her mother, that she was suffering from 11 hour work days and still not enough to eat, that she had wanted an adventure, and had followed Victoria Price for a night on the trains. The pamphlet ends with Ruby walking out of the courtroom after giving the testimony: “Those boys never touched me,” hand-in-hand with Mrs. Patterson, one of the defendants’ mother. She is still a victim, but now of the larger racial and class system, to be celebrated for her strength to turn against the capitalist bosses. Holding

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Figure 38: Kahn and Perez, *Scottsboro Alabama: A Story in Linoleum Cuts*, 123.
hands with Mrs. Patterson, Ruby Bates is also a symbol of interracialism and the promise of racial justice in the South. The 1935 book of linoleum cuts by Lin Shi Khan and Tony Perez show the importance of Ruby Bates for the later campaign, the strong image of a girl doing her best to protect the huddled forms of the Scottsboro defendants.

Victoria Price, in these later portrayals, is a villain of the first degree. Since, as readers and thus assumed supporters of the CPUSA, we can celebrate the class solidarity of Ruby Bates’ change of heart, Victoria Price’s continued acquiescence to the prosecution means she is selling out her class and manipulating the younger woman who looked up to her. She is described as “proud of the notoriety she gained. She was a lady now. Her picture in the papers. The lay and the other gentlemen in the courtroom called her Mrs. Price – spoke to her as the sacred white womanhood of Alabama which had to be protected!” The pamphlet portrays Victoria Price as a harlot, playing the system of racial and gender hierarchy to save herself from potential charges of vagrancy, and enjoying the spotlight and the notoriety. In the drama played out in the Scottsboro Trial pamphlets, neither of the white women are anything but a stock character, the villain or the victim, neither woman is afforded any humanity, but they do have a clear narrative function.

The Scottsboro pamphlets also show plainly the easily accepted role for black women in the Party through the trope of the Scottsboro Mother. An early pamphlet, Joseph North’s *Lynching Negro Children in Southern Courts*, includes a short call from Mrs. Janie Patterson, one of the only mentions of her by her first name and also including her own voice in the pamphlet. He notes “Mrs. Janie Patterson, mother of Haywood, one of the condemned boys has said, ‘I have told my boy he should know the I.L.D. is out fighting to save him and the others. It’s the I.L.D. and the workers’ organizations, white
and black, that can save our boys.”

Though this is an isolated reference to a mother of one of the defendants in the early pamphlets, later pamphlets utilize the mothers often to elicit support for the cause.

These later pamphlets, such as *Scottsboro: The Shame of America*, *Mr. President Free the Scottsboro Boys*, and *Lynching Negro Children in Southern Courts*, often use the gendered trope in the portrayal of the mothers of the Scottsboro defendants. *Scottsboro: The Shame of America*, published by the Scottsboro Defense Committee in 1936, is a clear example where black women show on the pages often to elicit support and sympathy from the readers. The pamphlet’s drama opens with an image of an over-worked mother, Mrs. Williams, bending over a wash tub to make a mere 90¢, not enough to feed her eight hungry children. A vignette of Mrs. Montgomery, struggling to feed her young daughter and watching her older son slowly go blind, follows this. Like Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Montgomery, the mothers of the Scottsboro Nine are portrayed as tired but resilient, dedicated to their sons’ defense and victims of a racist capitalist system. A latter scene in the courtroom finds three mothers crying as their sons are sentenced to death, and then their strength as they agree to help fight the charges with the ILD’s defense team. Ada Wright, mother to Andy and Roy Wright, is celebrated for her travel all over the world to publicize the case and get her and the other mothers’ sons out of

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576 It is also interesting that little of the scholarly material on the Scottsboro trials include the mother’s names. Lashawn Harris’ article “Running with the Reds” bucks this trend noting the names of all of the mothers active in the freedom campaign: Janie Patterson, Ada Wright, Mamie Williams Wilcox, and Viola Montgomery. Harris, “Running with the Reds,” in *The Journal of African American History*, 30.
Indeed, Miller, Pennybacker, and Rosenhaft’s article turns on how Mother Wright’s presence, noting her role as a mother and as a black woman, enabled the Scottsboro campaign and the Party to elicit support from people across Europe and the United States and brought a great deal of notoriety to the case.\footnote{ILD, \textit{The Story of Scottsboro}.}

\textit{Mr. President Free the Scottsboro Boys}, published by the ILD in 1934, opens with a plea framed though the Scottsboro Mothers: “Mr. President, I join the mothers of the Scottsboro Boys in requesting you: ‘Free them.'”\footnote{Miller, Pennybacker, Rosenhaft, “Mother Ada Wright and the International Campaign to Free the Scottsboro Boys, 1931-1934”, in \textit{The American Historical Review}.} Using the occasion of Mother's Day, the pamphlet explains, five of the mothers and a group of “prominent people” went to Washington to request a meeting with the President. Though originally turned away, eventually the Mothers and Richard B. Moore, working with the ILD, were able to deliver a plea to the President’s secretary. The plea is printed in the pamphlet, as well as the statements from Ruby Bates, and a statement from Mrs. Mary Craik Speed, a white woman from Alabama, speaking on behalf of the Nine. The prominent place of the Mothers’ letter and the printing of letters from both Ruby Bates and Mrs. Mary Craik Speed, sets this pamphlet apart as offering a much more sustained engagement with women’s voices, experiences, and views on the trial. However, the pamphlet in total is over 30 pages, and a short five include the women’s words.

Here black women function as ciphers for the troubles of the working class, characters but not actors in the drama. This treatment in press echoes McDuffie’s arguments that though black women were central to all of the CPUSA campaigns and crucial for the party’s success, especially in black communities, they were usually

\footnote{ILD, \textit{Mr. President Free the Scottsboro Boys}, 3.}
marginalized and looked over for leadership positions, for example of the American Negro Labor Congress or the later League of Struggle for Negro Rights.\textsuperscript{583} Perhaps neither the Scottsboro Defense Committee nor the ILD were willing to clearly take on the complex ways that the women were instrumentalized in the trial, as both groups glorified Ruby Bates as young, beautiful, and pure-of-heart contrasting her with the old, ugly, conniving, and manipulative Victoria Price. Or the ever-suffering mother, without a voice but regularly pulled forward, crying for her son’s release. It is common for the CPUSA to portray women though quick figurations of womanhood, portraying them as stock characters but giving little credence to their experiences or the impact the trial would have had on their lives.

Black men, on the other hand, are fleshed out in these pamphlets. Both pamphlets introduce each of the defendants and talk of their troubles at home: not enough food, younger siblings starving, no work, no future. One of the young men, Olen Montgomery, is going blind, others need medical attention. The nine are portrayed as brothers, friends, sons, with sorrows, motivations, and dreams. They all

\textsuperscript{583} McDuffie, \textit{Sojourning for Freedom}, 74.
leave home, in the story, to ease the burden for their family, to find work or medicine, and meet up on a freight train heading to Alabama.

In the latter Scottsboro Defense Committee Pamphlet, chronicling the further trials of the nine defendants, the young men’s testimonies are carefully covered.

Judge Callahan calls Haywood Patterson. Tall and erect, Haywood stands before him. Asked whether he has anything to say before he is sentenced, Haywood Patterson speaks up: “I’m not guilty. Justice has not been done in my case.” Five years of bitter imprisonment, days in solitary, sleepless nights on the concrete floors of the Kilby death house, beatings – have not broken the spirit of this boy.584

The defendants are given a voice in the pamphlets, their case covered with care, their opinions noted, and their troubles documented.

Black men are similarly recognized and celebrated as organizers and activists in the Party. The Scottsboro trials raise the profile of many prominent black radical organizers and bring yet others into the Party. Black men such as Angelo Herndon, Ben Davis Jr., and William Patterson worked on the Scottsboro trial, defense, and international campaign and were well regarded. Herndon wrote many pamphlets for the CPUSA about the Scottsboro Nine, including: both The Scottsboro Boys: Four Freed! Five to Go! and You cannot kill the working class in 1937. He was made more famous for being arrested and tried on “inciting

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584 Scottsboro Defense Committee, Scottsboro: The Shame of America.
to insurrection” charges for possessing and distributing Communist Party literature. He chronicles his life and trial in *Let Me Live*, also published in 1937.

**Scottsboro as a Model for Organizing**

The Scottsboro trials bridged two eras of Comintern organizing strategies, the Third Period (1928-1934) and the Popular Front (1934-1939). The rhetorical shifts this transition required can not be dismissed, as the Party moved from a mostly separatist organization that shunned potential allies and engaged in enthusiastic name-calling, to a group dedicated to working with others to see the larger goals of an end to fascism and solidarity on the Left. Many scholars of CPUSA organizing around the Black Nation Thesis argue that the staunch Party lines did not apply to the Party’s work with black people.\(^{585}\) Rather, black organizers working in the Party continued traditions of working with community groups of often opposite political alliances, especially in Harlem and Alabama.

Other groups in the CPUSA also built on the tradition of the Popular Front prior to its official adoption, as some critics have noted that the ILD was the first popular front organization because of its goals to work with other groups to impact legal discourse and support class-war prisoners.\(^{586}\) Indeed, the transition between CPUSA organizational rhetoric was difficult at times for the Scottsboro trial, evidenced by the early lambasting of the NAACP and then the coalition with them a few years later. Arguably, however, Scottsboro could traverse these Party rhetoric better than many other causes. As noted above, Scottsboro, and the huge national and international

\(^{585}\) Specifically this is Naison’s argument in *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*, an argument supported by much of Kelley and Solomon’s work in *Hammer and Hoe* and *The Cry was Unity*, respectively.

\(^{586}\) For the clearest articulation see Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 13.
campaign waged by the ILD, brought many people into the CPSUA, as official members but also as potential allies and sideline supporters. The campaign’s ability to bring in these new allies, introduce them to CPUSA ideas and rhetoric, and hold their attention while the Party moved to a more coalition-oriented stance, is impressive.

The Scottsboro pamphlets were very successful in spreading the word about the trial, in winning the hearts and minds of a larger number of supporters, both internationally and domestically, and in publicizing the ILD’s defensive strategy, including, in some pamphlets, new ways to think about race and class. In this the Scottsboro campaign both raised awareness and kept the trial in the forefront of the nation’s conscious for the seven long years of courtroom drama. In large part because of the success of the Scottsboro campaign strategy, the kinds of publicity the campaign developed around the trial became a model for other defendants and defense campaigns. The publicity model built on historical cases such as Sacco and Venzetti and Mooney and Billings, but was honed with the Scottsboro case, becoming a common strategy for other campaigns for political prisoners for decades to come. Indeed, all of these campaigns had a history of bringing people into the Party. William Patterson, in his autobiography, is clear in his assessment that working on the Sacco and Venzetti trial was what brought him into the orbit of the CPUSA.587

The pamphlets were models in both their form and the stories they told. The echoes in the story are obvious: many pamphlets clearly reference Scottsboro. Often these references are explicit such as Harry Haywood’s *The South Comes North: in Detroit’s Own Scottsboro Case*, but others are implicit, such as Elwood Dean’s *The Story of the Trenton*

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Six, New Century Publishers, 1949; Harry Raymond’s *Save Willie McGee*, New Century Publishers, 1951; Edward Strong’s Political Affairs pamphlet *The Till Case and the Negro Liberation Movement*, or Louis Burnham’s *Behind the Lynching of Emmett Louis Till*, both published in 1955. Later campaigns, such as the campaign to Free Angela Davis, also draw on many of these methods and tropes and use pamphlets to communicate, raise awareness, and agitate for both abolition and reform. These pamphlets draw connections between racial oppression, class injustice, and the legal treatment of black people in the US, showing, like Scottsboro, that the legal system uses class and race to discriminate against black people, especially in the South, but also in the North and the West. Later campaigns would also engage issues of gender in productive ways, though, as noted, the Scottsboro campaign relied on common gender tropes to communicate its message.

To communicate these important ideas, the pamphlets use the model of Scottsboro, sometimes referring to the case, other times alluding to it in rhetoric and style, to elicit support and raise awareness, particularly in black communities. The use of Scottsboro as a model is clearest in Haywood’s pamphlet about Detroit’s racially motivated incarceration practices in 1934. In this pamphlet, *The South Comes North in Detroit’s Own Scottsboro Case* published by the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, Harry Haywood both outlines the program of the League and demonstrates why such organizing is important in the atmosphere of legal lynching and increasing intimidation.

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588 In Trenton, New Jersey, 1948 an all white jury convicted six black men for the murder of an elderly white shopkeeper against all evidence. The young men had been arrested without warrants and forced into signing confessions. Both the NAACP and the CPUSA worked on the appeal resulting in acquittal for four defendants. Willie McGee, a black man, was convicted of raping a white housewife and electrocuted by the state of Mississippi in 1951. The CPUSA worked on the trial and appeal, and many celebrities gave McGee their support. Later evidence suggests that McGee and the white woman might have consensual lovers, a defense that was not used in court because of the prejudice of the white jury. Emmett Till was a 14-year old black man who was murdered in Mississippi after reportedly flirting with a white woman, Carolyn Bryant. A jury acquitted Roy Bryant, the white woman’s husband, and his half-brother J. W. Milam, of the murder, though the men admitted to the killing later in a magazine interview.
of black people in Detroit. The direct reference to Scottsboro in the title, but also regular references throughout the pamphlet to “vicious frame-ups,” “Southern police,” and “Southern methods come north,” allow for the easy identification of Northern black workers’ oppression with the system of injustice perpetuated in the South and publicized through the Scottsboro trial.\textsuperscript{589} Similarly, the 1950s pamphlets include phrases popularized with the Scottsboro trials and reminiscent of the campaign to free them. Phrases such as “legal lynching” and direct references to the Scottsboro case demonstrate how the model of Scottsboro was built and then used by the CPUSA press. The Scottsboro model was not limited to the Party press; other black activist groups used the model to publicize cases, for example the NAACP’s 1943 pamphlet \textit{A United States Army “Scottsboro Case”}. The Scottsboro campaign had such a huge international and domestic impact that it was used almost immediately as a model for other campaigns. The Angelo Herndon trial and the resulting campaign are a prime example of Scottsboro’s impact. The Herndon case is also interesting because Herndon was a member of the CPUSA and on trial for this political membership and not for trumped up rape charges. Therefore, though the campaign materials were often similar, and often both campaigns referenced the other, there were concrete differences in the CPUSA and ILD’s publicity of the trials. To conclude this chapter I will look at the Herndon and Scottsboro pamphlets for their similarities and differences.

\textsuperscript{589} Haywood, \textit{The South Comes North in Detroit’s Own Scottsboro Case}, 5-9.
Angelo Herndon

Angelo Herndon was another cause célèbre for the CPUSA and the ILD in the early 1930s. Born in 1913 and raised in a poor family in Ohio, Herndon moved South at age 13, first working in the mines in Kentucky and Alabama. Herndon joined the CPUSA while in Birmingham, and eventually moved to Atlanta, Georgia, becoming involved in the CPUSA-supported organizing in the Unemployed Councils. In June, 1932, Herndon was one of the lead organizers of a protest march of the unemployed in Atlanta and came to the attention of the authorities. Herndon was not shy about his membership in the CPUSA; as an active leader in the unemployed movement, he was known for his leaflets, speeches, and organizing activity. On July 11, as Herndon checked his mail at the post office, he was arrested. A few days later, Police searched his hotel room and found Communist Party publications. Subsequently, Herndon was charged for inciting insurrection in the state of Georgia, using the evidence of the CPUSA literature Herndon received in the mail including George Padmore’s The Life and Struggle of Negro Toilers and copies of the Southern Worker.

Herndon’s case was quickly picked up the ILD and his bail was paid. William Patterson, head of the ILD, engaged two young black attorneys, Ben Davis Jr. and John Geer, to defend the case. An all white jury found Herndon guilty, however, and the judge sentenced him to 18-20 years in prison on a “mercy” ruling by the jury. He served two years of his sentence before he was released on bond awaiting appeal. The

590 Kelley, Hammer and Hoe, 15.
591 Gilmore, Defying Dixie, 161.
592 Gilmore, Defying Dixie, 164.
593 The jury found Herndon guilty but recommended “mercy,” the Judge sentenced him to 18-20 years. Martin, “Communists and Black: The ILD and the Angelo Herndon Case,” in The Journal of Negro History, 132.
Supreme Court of Georgia denied the appeal and Herndon was sent back to jail. In 1935 the case went to the US Supreme Court where it was tried by a group of high ranking and well lettered attorneys including Whitney North Seymour, who would later serve as head of the American Bar Association, and young Columbia law professors Walter Nellhorn and Herbert Wechsler. Despite such accredited lawyers, the Supreme Court dismissed the case. In October 1935, with the support of the NAACP, the American Bar Association, the ACLU, and other prominent groups, the case went back to Atlanta. In Atlanta, Judge Hugh Dorsey ruled in Herndon’s favor, freeing Herndon for a short while. The Georgia Supreme Court overturned this ruling, however, and the case was again appealed to the US Supreme Court. The Court heard the case this time and overturned the lower courts ruling, freeing Herndon in 1937.

Throughout the long years of the trial, while in and out of jail, Herndon tirelessly campaigned for his, and the Scottsboro Nine’s, freedom. For example, upon his release from prison in 1934 Herndon was greeted as a hero by a huge crowd of well wishers, including CPUSA luminaries, at Pennsylvania Station in New York City. His case was well publicized, especially in leftist circles. Though his case does not have the current cache of the Scottsboro Nine, at the time both cases received a lot of public attention and were the fodder for many pamphlets.

Elizabeth Lawson published 20 Years on the Chain Gang? Angelo Herndon Must Go Free! in 1935. The pamphlet is an urgent call for support and assistance in the Angelo Herndon trial, written after the Georgia State Supreme Court upheld the lower court’s

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guilty verdict and the US Supreme Court refused to hear the case. The International Labor Defense, the defense work for the Herndon trial, published this pamphlet, which enjoyed a first printing of 50,000 copies.\textsuperscript{596} The cover depicts a black man being pulled by a white judge or justice and the ILD attempting to cut the rope. Lawson follows the formula laid out in many of the other pamphlets about the ILD trials in the South. She tirelessly campaigns for Herndon’s freedom and carefully outlines how the US court system is unfair and unequal, specifically noting the treatment of blacks in the South. Most damning, perhaps, is her linkage of this case to the Dred Scott ruling. She notes how the ruling of Dred Scott, claiming: “a Negro has no rights that a white man is bound to respect” calmed the fears of slave owners. “Just so, today,” Lawson argues, “the Southern Landlords, the Southern slave-drivers in mine and mill, the Klansmen, the lynchers, feel themselves more secure in their power, because of the verdict of the Supreme Court in the case of Angelo Herndon.”\textsuperscript{597} She follows this up by demonstrating that the ILD, in their defense of Herndon, showed

\textsuperscript{596} Lawson, 20 Years on the Chain Gang? Angelo Herndon Must Go Free!, inside cover.

\textsuperscript{597} Lawson, 20 Years on the Chain Gang? Angelo Herndon Must Go Free!, 3.
the dubious “legality of the statute under which Herndon was convicted – a statute based on a law of pre-Civil War days designed to crush the revolts of slaves against their masters.”

Thus further condemning both the rule of law that arrested Herndon, but also the multiple courts that upheld the law, Lawson also reminds her readers of the work of John Spivak who illuminated the general public to the conditions of chain gangs and argues that the conviction is unfair and inhumane and will surely bring death to Angelo Herndon.

In the remainder of the pamphlet, Lawson gives a moving biography of Herndon, the descendant of slaves from Virginia, who went to work in the mines at age thirteen. She tells of his coming into organizing, his work with the Unemployed Councils, and his dedication to the Scottsboro case. Discussing his arrest and trial she notes that he was arrested for distributing literature and charged with an old Georgia statute of inciting to insurrection. The statute reads:

> If any person be in any manner instrumental in bringing, introducing or circulating within the state any printed or written paper for the purpose of exciting to insurrection or resistance on the part of slaves, Negroes or free persons of color, he shall be guilty of high misdemeanor, which is punishable by death.

Herndon was sentenced to the chain gang for 18-20 years under the above statue.

Lawson’s pamphlet was one of a number of campaigns the ILD undertook on Herndon’s behalf. She notes the large, and successful, drive to raise Herndon’s bail money, his popular national tour, and the other pamphlets and literature being produced about the trial. The pamphlet also served as a call for contributions to the ILD, had a

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598 Lawson, 20 Years on the Chain Gang? Angelo Herndon Must Go Free!, 3.
599 See the earlier discussion of this pamphlet, Spivak, On the Chain Gang.
600 Lawson, 20 Years on the Chain Gang? Angelo Herndon Must Go Free!, 6.
membership card application, and included a script for a letter to send to the Supreme Court demanding that they hear the Herndon trial. Perhaps most interesting in comparison to other pamphlets produced at the time was the inclusion of a half page with the directions “Tear This Off and Keep at All Times.”601 This small section of the back cover of the pamphlet included directions on what to do if one were arrested, with advice such as: “1. Give no information to officers. Only a name. 2. Plead NOT GUILTY and demand a jury trial. 3. Demand that the INTERNATIONAL LABOR DEFENSE defend you. 4. Insist that you be let out on your own recognizance; if they refuse this, demand bail be set low.”602 This echoes other programs started by the ILD at that time encouraging readers to be prepared if arrested and to know their legal rights such as the ILD pamphlet Under Arrest! Workers Self-Defense in the Courts published in 1933.

Lawson’s pamphlet, like many others dealing with the well-publicized trials of black men in the South, offers a hope of legal fairness, representation, and equality that was unheard of for black people in 1930. Herndon’s own pamphlet, “You Can Not Kill the Working Class” published jointly by the ILD and the LSNR is a prime example. Herndon opens his pamphlet talking about his great-grandmother and his grandmother, both women terrorized during slavery, targeted for their gender and their race. He quickly leaves these women, however, as the pamphlet unfolds to tell of his upbringing in a mining town, his struggle trying to resist unfair labor laws and practices, and his radicalization. He discusses how he was impressed with the LSNR campaigns against lynching and then focuses on Scottsboro. For Herndon the position of Scottsboro in

601 Lawson, 20 Years on the Chain Gang? Angelo Herndon Must Go Free!, back cover.
602 Lawson, 20 Years on the Chain Gang? Angelo Herndon Must Go Free!, back cover.
the social lexicon is clear: “the Scottsboro case marked a new stage in the life of the Negro people – and white workers too – in the United States.”\textsuperscript{603} Under a heading “What Scottsboro Means” Herndon waxes poetic about the importance of the case and that because of the case “every Negro worker in mill or mine, every Negro cropper on the Black Belt plantations, breathed a little easier and held his head a little higher.”\textsuperscript{604} Using Scottsboro to frame and understand his own experiences of police brutality, of trumped up charges, and of the power of working class solidarity in achieving his freedom, Angelo Herndon’s pamphlet is exemplary of how crucial the Scottsboro trials were and particularly the importance of the publicity and pamphlet literature about the case. In Herdon’s vivid descriptions we can see the power of Scottsboro as a productive fiction. It was through Scottsboro, the dream that black people could be treated fairly, that the black community held its head a little higher. The cultural imagination that these statements suggest speak to the importance of speculation and productive fictions on the part of the defense committee, whether the ILD or the SDC.

Though there are many similarities, the differences in the Herndon and Scottsboro trials are stark. Herndon was a CPUSA member and organizer. As Glenda Gilmore argues in \textit{Defying Dixie}, he was articulate, writing brilliant pamphlets and giving moving speeches to publicize his case and his trial.\textsuperscript{605} The Scottsboro defendants, on the other hand, had minimal education, were never released from jail during their trial and

\textsuperscript{603} Herndon, \textit{You Cannot Kill the Working Class}, 18. \\
\textsuperscript{604} Herndon, \textit{You Cannot Kill the Working Class}, 19. \\
\textsuperscript{605} Gilmore, \textit{Defying Dixie}, 161.
thus could not publicize their trial. Rather, the Scottsboro Nine were most often spoken for, by their mothers, by the ILD, and by the many pamphleteers writing on their behalf.

Another difference were the charges Herndon and the Scottsboro Nine were facing. Though both cases were political, and arguably politically motivated, the charge of rape shaped the Scottsboro trial and the campaign for the young defendants’ freedom in very specific ways: the pamphlets about the case spent time discussing the frame up, the young defendants were portrayed as innocent and almost child-like, their back story providing much of the fodder for the pamphleteers. The Herndon case on the other hand turned around a constitutional issue and the focus of many of the campaign pamphlets was on the chain gang.

Sasha Small’s 1935 pamphlet, *Hell in Georgia*, while ostensibly about the Herndon trial, reads more like John Spivak’s *On the Chain Gang*, giving as much space to discussion of the problems of Georgia’s punishment system as to Herndon’s trial. Perhaps because Herndon was so eloquent on his own behalf, or perhaps because he was a CPUSA member, the CPUSA and ILD pamphlets about his case often stray away from the legal issues and focus more broadly on the legal

Figure 42: Small, *Hell in Georgia*, cover.
system, the problems facing poor black workers, and the need to organize.

Finally, the readership anticipated by the Herndon and Scottsboro pamphlets is significant. The Scottsboro pamphlets, as discussed, are written for a broad international and domestic audience. The tone is often calm and the style clear. Though some ILD pamphlets employ the energetic style of political protest, the pamphlets about the Scottsboro trial generally lack the jargon, internal references, and hard-hitting factionalism that are characteristic of other CPUSA pamphlets of the time. In this the Scottsboro campaign pamphlets are inline with the propaganda style popular in the USSR, where pamphlets were used as political education, to raise awareness of issues and causes, and to recruit potential members. The Herndon pamphlets are similar in many ways; these pamphlets are also, generally, poised for a broad audience, though not as international in scope. The pamphlets rely on more CPUSA language and jargon, perhaps anticipating that people who were interested in Herndon’s case would be more familiar with the CPUSA than those who were reading about Scottsboro.

Other clear differences are the back cover information in both pamphlets. Though printed in the same general time frame (overlapping in the years 1932-1936), and often published by the same organizations (the ILD and the CPUSA) the Herndon pamphlets often have information for activists printed on the back cover. Small’s *Hell in Georgia*, for instance, has the ubiquitous card informing readers how to protect themselves from the law. The back pages and covers of the Scottsboro pamphlets, however, often include pleas for money, to join a march or a local organization dedicated to the Scottsboro cause, or instructions on how to call local or national politicians to petition for the Nine’s freedom. These different back covers suggest most clearly the
different kinds of audiences anticipated by the Scottsboro and the Herndon pamphlets.

Potentially emblematic of the larger differences in the two cases, these different audiences, the different back covers, and the different scope of the pamphlets also speak to the various ways the CPUSA was reaching out to its constituents and to other leftists and potential allies in the mid-1930s. These two types of campaign pamphlets, though different, are similar in their generally more outward focus, their propagandistic style, and their clear political messages. The pamphlets are part of a successful campaign model that was developed and honed in these two trials and then deployed for decades to come. Though not always successful, the campaign style developed in the Scottsboro and Herndon trials can not be underestimated as the two cases were eventually overturned and the US Supreme Court rulings they achieved opened the way for years of progressive struggle.

Though the legal impact of the series of trials connected to the Scottsboro Nine was impressive, the cultural impact of the Scottsboro campaign was even larger. Almost 80 years later, the Scottsboro Trials still hold a prominent place in the history of black communities in the US. Part of this legacy is the legal changes hard-won through the six years of trials. However, these movements towards better justice would not have been
possible but, arguably, for the campaign for their freedom and the dreams of fairness supported by the pamphlets produced for that campaign. Though these pamphlets often turned on traditional stereotypes of gender and were therefore limited, the challenges to ideas of race, class, and what counted for justice, especially in the South, were impressive. This challenge grew out of and was bolstered by the dreams of many organizers, and coalesced in the pamphlets as productive fictions used to spur activists and organizations. Building on a tradition of pamphleteering to raise awareness and the profile of the CPUSA, the Scottsboro Nine trials cemented this form as an important tool for progressive social movements in the US for years to come.
PART IV

CONCLUSIONS
CHAPTER 7

In a Soviet America
Productive Fictions about Race and Class

“Racism is as much about accustoming people to becoming used to certain racial configurations so that they are specifically not used to others, as it is about anything else. Indeed, we have to remember that what we are combating is called prejudice: prejudice is prejudgment.”
-Samuel R. Delany, “Racism and Science Fiction,” Dark Matter

“When the slavers were liberated in the South as a result of the Civil War the slave blocks and the auction houses were burned to the ground by former chattels. One can well imagine with what elation the liberated people of the South will not burn the jim-crow signs, symbols of the capitalist slavery of white and Negro alike. The bonfire of jim-crown signs will light the way to real freedom.
-James Ford and James Allen, The Negroes in a Soviet America

Tom Johnson’s 1935 pamphlet The Reds in Dixie ends with a call for “A Soviet America.” He argues:

This, then is the final goal of the Communist activist – a working class revolution and the establishment of Soviet Power (that is, the power of the organized working class in alliance with the poor farmers and the Negro people) in America. It is not an easy road, but there is no other that will lead to the final solution of the problems facing the workers and poor farmers today. Every strike, every struggle of the unemployed for more relief, every struggle of the sharecroppers for the right to sell their crops themselves, is a step forward along this road to freedom. In the course of these struggles we will learn how to fight, we will test our leaders in the heat of the battle and we will hasten the day when we, the workers of America, will win our country for our class.

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606 Delany, “Racism and Science Fiction,” in Dark Matter, 396.
607 Ford and Allen, The Negroes in a Soviet America, 46.
608 Johnson, The Reds in Dixie, 46.
Such proclamations of the promise of Soviet solidarity are commonplace in the 1930s CPUSA pamphlet material produced around the Black Nation Thesis. The foregrounding of solidarity among workers and farmers, and the singling out of sharecroppers and the unemployed, are characteristic of Party rhetoric building alliances amongst the working class. Also common are the specific calls to black people as revolutionary actors and, by the mid 1930s, the singling out of black people as an entire group. The CPUSA, by 1935, had determined that black people were a revolutionary class in and of themselves and focused much of their printed literature at building support among black people, especially in Harlem and in the South. Part of this literature supported the Scottsboro and Herndon political trials, while other pieces agitated more specifically for the creation of a Negro Nation in the Black Belt of the Southern United States.

While in the beginning parts of the pamphlet Johnson tirelessly argues against claims of white superiority and explains in great detail the benefits of self-determination for the Black Belt for all Southerners, he does not name the Black Nation Thesis, or the Resolution on the Negro Question calling for self-determination for black people in the Black Belt, specifically in this section. His calls for a Soviet America and the struggles necessary to win a Soviet America, however, are echoed in these discussions.

The call for a “Soviet America,” I argue, is an essential organizing tool for the CPUSA, especially in regards to the Resolution on the Negro Question. The ability to imagine a new social order in America, and specifically to imagine a place of black rule in the Black Belt, was fundamental to the development of the CPUSA’s thinking on race

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and class, and had lasting impacts on the rhetoric of race in the US. Specifically, the CPUSA’s reworking of nationalism was important to later critiques, as was the linking of race, class, and imperialism. Perhaps most important was the CPUSA’s articulation of self-determination. V.P. Franklin’s *Black Self-Determination: A Cultural History of African American Resistance* traces the ideas of self-determination to the Enlightenment in Europe.⁶¹⁰ He uses political theorist Dov Rosen’s work, *The Quest For Self-Determination*, to think about the development of the term. Rosen notes specifically that the conception of self-determination for minority peoples comes out of both the World War I edicts of President Woodrow Wilson’s program for “minority self-determination,” especially focused on the subject people’s of Europe as well as the decolonization movements.⁶¹¹ James R. Forman, who is cited heavily by Franklin, argues in his book *Self-Determination and the African-American People* that self-determination for African Americans can be clearly traced to the Black Nation Thesis of the CPUSA.⁶¹² All three authors note, however, that the concept of self-determination was developed slowly, and often through conversation within many groups. For example, Marcus Garvey’s UNIA as well as the African Blood Brotherhood offered important early ideas about self-determination.⁶¹³ Franklin’s book collects more evidence of the importance of self-determination by looking at the “testimony and narratives of slaves and former slaves and the statements and opinions expressed by black tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and average black agricultural and industrial workers of the nineteenth century.”⁶¹⁴ He notes

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⁶¹³ For a more thorough discussion of this see Chapter two.
that these narratives discuss “freedom, resistance, education, as well as self-determination” as good and important and valuable.\footnote{Franklin, \textit{Black Self-Determination}, 9.}

As Forman asserts, and Franklin’s book testifies to, the idea of self-determination was extremely important to the development of black radical traditions. Forman discusses the importance of the idea of self-determination in conversations in the United Nations about former colonies and imperial powers.\footnote{Forman, \textit{Self-Determination and the African-American People}, 69-70.} Harry Haywood, working at times within the CPUSA and later in other left organizations, continued to develop and explain the Black Nation Thesis and the importance of self-determination for African Americans and other oppressed people. Indeed, many of the ideas explored in the Black Nation Thesis would be taken up in later CPUSA pamphlets by prominent authors, CPUSA pamphlets from the 1930s would be reprinted in their entirety in the 1970s, and other left social movements, especially the Black Panthers, would adopt similar rhetoric about race, the state, and internalized colonialism.\footnote{See Coda for more detailed information.} Importantly, calls for self-determination by the CPUSA were used almost exclusively for black people. Though worldwide the idea of self-determination was extended to colonial and imperial subjects and black people in almost any country, the CPUSA did not extend self-determination to other racial minorities. Most egregiously, perhaps, the sovereignty and rights of Native Americans were never considered under the rubric of self-determination.

These calls for self-determination and the pamphlets dedicated to the exploration of the Black Nation Thesis were acts of the radical imagination. This is not to imply
that the work was any less important; on the contrary, as works of the imagination, these pamphlets were key to the development of a new discourse on race. To think through how the Black Nation Thesis pamphlets were used by the Party to ruminate and educate about race, I consider the pamphlets as productive fictions: concepts that were used to foment new ideas and impact radical change.

The previous chapters discuss the Scottsboro pamphlets, which, similar to many other pamphlets produced by the ILD, were written for propaganda purposes, meaning with the aim of increasing membership, educating the public, and motivating concrete political action. In these goals, however, the pamphlets challenged long held beliefs about the justice system, the place of black people in US civil life, and the possibilities of overturning lynch-justice. This challenge was very much an example of productive fiction; it was a leap of faith to think that the race relations that had structured US sociality for over a century would change immediately, that the Scottsboro Nine could escape a legal lynching.

Other CPUSA pamphlets of the time, however, targeted Party members and allies and employed different, more considered, rhetorical strategies, and relied less on images, to create a space for collective imagining and to serve as internal pedagogical tools. But these, too, can be understood as promoting productive fictions. The idea of a “Negro Nation,” or more explicitly of self-determination for black people who would, in the CPUSA imaginary, form a separate nation in solidarity with the revolutionary United States, is fertile ground for re-conceptualizing the ideas of race, class, and, eventually, gender.

This chapter works to contextualize these productive fictions in the history of CPUSA pamphlet literature. I will first offer an analysis of the most exemplary CPUSA
pamphlet on the Black Nation Thesis as a productive fiction: James Ford and James S. Allen’s *The Negroes in a Soviet America*. Expanding this analysis beyond the Ford and Allen pamphlet, I look at tropes of the “Soviet America” across CPUSA pamphlet literature and use this as a basis to begin to unpack the importance of speculative fiction in the CPUSA pamphlets, and how such fiction is used productively. I suggest reading CPUSA pamphlets as speculative fiction, a literary term that broadly encompasses many fantastical genres, to foreground the hypothetical and hoped-for aspects of the CPUSA Black Nation Thesis pamphlets. This conversation unfolds by looking at both the history of social science fiction and of utopian literatures, drawing on these two bodies to unpack the importance of speculating about the future for social movements. I conclude the chapter and the dissertation offering thoughts on the usefulness of productive fictions for social movements as evidenced by the CPUSA's Black Nation Thesis pamphlets.

*The Negroes in a Soviet America: Suggestions of a Possible Future*

*The Negroes in a Soviet America*, James Allen and James Ford’s collaborative work published in 1935 by the Workers Library Publishers, most concretely lays out the imagined promise of the Black Nation Thesis. This promise is blatantly Soviet in both content and form, as easily evidenced by the title of the pamphlet as well as its cover art. The smiling face of a young black man looks out from the cover, offering the promise of a new hope. Flanking him are small vignettes of industrialization on the left and a small rural farm on the right, visual images of what the pamphlet promises the South would look like after a Soviet Revolution. The young black man, wanting for nothing and enjoying life, suggests prosperity under socialism - a sharp contrast to images of
wretched workers struggling under capitalism that graced so many other pamphlet covers. This pamphlet offers the clearest articulation of the Black Nation Thesis, and opens a space to imagine different race relations through an explicitly fictional picture of a “Soviet America” that will alleviate the ills of racism and class exploitation.

Originally printed by the Workers Library Publishers in 1935, the pamphlet has subsequently been reprinted many times. It is not clear that the Workers Library Publishers did a second printing; however, many conservative presses have offered offsets of Ford and Allen’s text. It would be possible to read this pamphlet as advocating for a Communist revolution in the US that would create a society duplicating the USSR. Readings like this are especially prominent in right-wing publications over the past five decades or so. For instance, the National Economic Council reprinted the pamphlet in 1945, and the conservative John Birch Society did the same in 1956. More recently David Allan Rivera’s *Final Warning: A History of the New World Order* (Oakland,
offers a similar reading of the pamphlet, using it as a backdrop to his fourth chapter looking at what he describes as the communist conspiracy from the 1920s through the civil rights movement.

The first of the conservative reprints, in 1945 by the National Economic Council, adds a postscript, agitating against proposed anti-discrimination laws. The postscript states: “This special offset edition of ‘The Negroes in a Soviet America’ has been brought out in order that the people may form a true understanding of what is at back of the present hullabaloo about ‘Race Equality.’”\textsuperscript{618} The printing shown here is by \textit{American Opinion}, the Journal of the conservative John Birch Society, and is from sometime after 1956 when the Journal began publishing. The printing perfectly matches the Workers Library Publishers’ edition; the conservative presses believed that the pamphlet would speak for itself to a conservative audience and does not add a rebuttal or introduction other than a short rejoinder in the inside cover. Conservative suggestions that

\textsuperscript{618} National Economic Council, \textit{The Negroes in a Soviet America}, back cover.
the pamphlet be read simply as a blueprint for revolution, of course, run into problems. The pamphlet is clear that the social and economic situation in the US was not comparable to the USSR in many ways, quite a few of which are outlined in the pamphlet’s discussion of the development of capitalism in the US. Reading the pamphlet as a fiction, rather than a blueprint for the revolution, opens up a space for activism that works toward a different imagining of life for black workers. As part of the In a Soviet America series, alongside texts on the potential benefits of sovietization for minors, youth, seamen, and professionals, the pamphlet offers an imaginative, speculative space.

The speculative nature of the Negroes in a Soviet America pamphlet is echoed in other In a Soviet America pamphlets, though these pamphlets use this tool less prominently than Ford and Allen. For example in Max Weiss’s In a Soviet America: Happy Days for American Youth the author notes that in a new society

the youth of America would have the opportunity to take part in government. The right to vote would be extended to every young worker and young farmer. [sic] The Soviet Youth, however, would not only be given the right to vote. They would have the desire to vote.619

In Seamen and Longshoremen in a Soviet America, Hayes Jones argues that “The Soviet American seamen, as the workers in all industries of Soviet America, will have no fear of unemployment. To begin with his wages would be guaranteed by the social insurance fund provided by industry.”620 These pamphlets all enable a speculative look at the US,

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619 Weiss, In a Soviet America: Happy Days for American Youth, 36.
620 Jones, Seamen and Longshoremen in a Soviet America, 8.

Arguably the most spectacular in its vision, the \textit{Negroes in a Soviet America} pamphlet is an enticement to think about the possibilities of revolution and a call to arms against the rampant oppression of black people. Indeed, most of the pamphlet, as is common with CPUSA booklets, details the economic and social oppression faced in the US, offering a refrain of “in a Soviet America” to highlight the ills of the US by proposing an alternative.

Ford and Allen organize the pamphlet in three sections: first, “The Negro in Capitalist America”; second, “The Negro and Revolution”; and the third, “The Negro in Soviet America.” The first section opens with a criticism of Booker T. Washington’s argument that “capitalism would permit the Negro to develop business and manufacturing, and increases his ownership of land.”\footnote{Ford and Allen, \textit{The Negroes in a Soviet America}, 3.} The authors conclude, “In this way, he [Washington] believed, the Negro could achieve an important economic place in the capitalist world. His whole philosophy was built on this belief.”\footnote{Ford and Allen, \textit{The Negroes in a Soviet America}, 3.} Ford and Allen, perhaps obviously, disagree and spend most of the first section of the pamphlet laying out the conditions that black people in the United States face, reiterating many of the arguments made in the pamphlets discussed previously. To quickly summarize, they discuss the vast inequality of land ownership in the South, the horrors of tenant farming and sharecropping, and the terror of the chain gang and Lynch law. They then look to
the recent history of migration, noting that black people looked for a better life in the
cities only to find that they were systematically excluded from unions and industries and
forced to live in the poorest ghettos in squalor. Ford and Allen also discuss what they
call “the ‘stigma of race,’” outlining how capitalism creates the conditions for the
persecution of black people. Specifically they offer two arguments:

First: The ruling class must use severe measures of oppression and
persecution in order to keep the Negro peon on the plantation, in order
to maintain that special slavery of the South. The capitalists also make
use of the same measures to force the Negro to take the lowest place in
industry.
Second: The whole idea of the ‘superiority of the white race’ and the
practices of Jim-Crow are used to effect a severe separation of the white
masses from the Negroes. Race prejudice grew out of the old chattel
slave system.624

They substantiate both of these arguments by referring to the treatment of Filipinos in
the United States and draw direct connections between colonialism and the treatment of
black people, especially in the South, while also showing how race prejudice plays out
differently in both arenas.625 They argue that though the Filipinos are also an oppressed
people, they do not face the same kind of prejudice in the US because there is not the
pressure from Filipino masses in potential solidarity with white working class masses.
Rather, they argue that persecution of black people uses “extreme and severe methods”
to keep black and white workers apart because of the fear of class solidarity across racial
divisions.626 This argument is somewhat counter to many of the pamphlets explored in
more detail in Chapter four which argue that colonialism and imperialism is one of the
ways to understand the oppression of black people in the South. Ford and Allen’s point,

625 Ford and Allen, The Negroes in a Soviet America, 10.
626 Ford and Allen, The Negroes in a Soviet America, 10.
that racial prejudice is used to further separate black and white workers, is important. However, they are, at this time, unwilling to think across racial categories to think about how similar Filipino workers are treated, especially in California.627 Other pamphlets at the time had begun to bridge these gaps and build an analysis about race more broadly, especially in Harlem between Latin American and black communities.628

Ford and Allen identify two problems impeding dreams of “Negro liberation.” The first problem addresses black people specifically, discussing social and political equality for black people with special reference to lynching, segregation, social ostracism, and extra-exploitation in farming and industry. The second problem Ford and Allen identify is common to all workers: the exploitation of capitalism, named as including wage-slavery, unemployment, poverty, crisis, and war.629 Recalling the history of chattel slavery in the US, Ford and Allen lay out the history of oppression of black people and this history’s connection to the development of capitalism. They recall the promise of Reconstruction, and its betrayal, arguing: “The North went to war in order to destroy the power of the slaveowners. That, too, was a revolution. But it was not finished. Our task is to finish it.”630 They propose self-determination as the way to support the continued freedom of black people. Following the CPUSA’s plan, they suggest making the Black Belt a new designated territory, which will have the right of self-determination to choose a government structure and negotiate the relationship to the other parts of the US.

627 For more on Filipino workers struggles in California see: Ngai, Impossible Subjects, chapter 3.
628 For example see: New York Communist Party, New York State Communist Election Platform: For Immediate Relief of the Unemployed Against Discrimination of Negro Workers.
The call for self-determination is part of what makes the speculation offered in *Negroes in a Soviet America* different from the rest of the *In A Soviet America* series. Though other pamphlets offer dreams of full union representation, fair pay, and increased vacation time, the calls for self-determination offer a cultural shift of a different magnitude. The calls for self-determination foreground cultural change, rather than looking to achieve specifically economic changes for the Soviet America, and highlight the social changes that would be linked to economic betterment: for instance more purchasing power, more leisure time, and better education. Other changes highlighted are equal treatment in cities, especially equal access to housing and a change in residential segregation practices.\(^631\) Furthermore, the pamphlet emphasizes the importance of free public education in the South with equal access for all children and remarks over the incredible change such education will mean for black people.\(^632\) For Ford and Allen, subsumed under the “question of equality” are issues such as the “social heritage of the chattel-slave system” and the linked “idea of ‘white superiority’ and race prejudice.”\(^633\) Little detail is given to the calls for self-determination beyond the critique of white supremacy; however, its role is fundamental even in vague form. As the authors argue: “the real test of freedom for the Negro people in the Black Belt lies in their right to self-determination. Unless they can chose freely for themselves what the relationship of this new government will be to the United States as a whole, they will not be free.”\(^634\)

Ford and Allen argue that the two revolutions, one of black people for self-determination in the Black Belt and the other a more general proletarian revolution, will

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support one another though they might not happen simultaneously. If the Black Belt has a revolution first, which, they argue, is likely because capitalism is not as developed in the South and black people are the greatest revolutionary force in the US, then the Communists would support the Black Belt revolution and agitate against the North. If the wider proletarian revolution were to occur first, then the new revolutionary government would immediately grant self-determination to the Black Belt.635 The image held up as a shining example for both of these revolutions is the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Soviet policy on nationalities, and Ford and Allen go to great pains to connect the histories of protest in the US, including slave rebellions, to anti-colonialist movements of black people in Africa to the Russian Revolution and the subsequent founding of the USSR. Finally calling up again the betrayal of Reconstruction as a started but failed revolution, they conclude this section with a call to continued revolutionary fervor.

This fervor is focused in the final section of the pamphlet “The Negro in a Soviet America,” where Ford and Allen are the most explicit about the dreams crystallizing around the Black Nation Thesis. They are also unambiguous about the inspiration for these dreams, noting: “We do not need to be prophets. On the basis of our present possibilities and of the new paths already laid bare in the Soviet Union, it is possible to at least outline the main features of the new society.”636 Thus it is clear from the outset that the Black Nation Thesis is presented as following in the footsteps of the Russian Revolution and building on the model of the Soviet Union. The way that this dream or imaginary is depicted, however, is still important. Though both of the authors

636 Ford and Allen, The Negroes in a Soviet America, 36.
had, by the mid 1930s, traveled to the Soviet Union, most Communists, especially most black Communists, had not. Thus the storytelling about the USSR was crucial to stoke the imaginations of organizers and agitators in the US, but also to suggest new possibilities to work toward. The common trend in the pamphlet literature was to criticize and critique the status quo as demonstrated here through advancing the Black Nation Thesis, but this approach is also characteristic of other pamphlets, and especially the International Pamphlet series. The last section of this pamphlet bucks that trend, developing other options for life in a “Soviet America” and suggesting what this might look like for the black worker.

In subsections labeled the “Soviet United States” and the “Soviet Negro Republic” dreams of a new world include redresses to current problems. The claims are as simple as: “The horrors of segregated, over-crowed ghettos will disappear. All residential sections of the city will be opened to the Negro.”\textsuperscript{637} Or as grandiose as proposing that black “farm families would now have the possibilities of leisure and peace, plenty and abundance, education and culture.”\textsuperscript{638} Still further, black people, after a revolutionary overthrow of the current system, could set up any kind of government, nation or state that they might want to best meet their needs and desires.\textsuperscript{639} Ford and Allen, obviously, imagine a Soviet state for the “New Negro Republic” but carefully demonstrate that the reorganization of wealth and power that this transition entails would echo the historical period of Reconstruction: “We have somewhat of a similar situation in our own history. In the years 1867-1877, a revolutionary dictatorship ruled

\textsuperscript{637} Ford and Allen, \textit{The Negroes in a Soviet America}, 38.
\textsuperscript{638} Ford and Allen, \textit{The Negroes in a Soviet America}, 44.
\textsuperscript{639} Ford and Allen, \textit{The Negroes in a Soviet America}, 39.
the South. The purpose of this dictatorship was to prevent the former slaveowners from returning to power.”640

The suggestions of a “Soviet America” are wonderful dreams for black working and unemployed people who materially had nothing and had even fewer prospects for making a good life. In 1935 the US Congress passed relief measures, but little money was coming down to sharecroppers and unemployed people in the South. The “Soviet America,” the idea of a space for black people to live and prosper, was the most spectacular kind of fiction. But it was also a productive one, a suggestion of something better that pointed to the real problems that black people faced in their everyday lives.

The authors first outline what a “Soviet United States” would look like for all workers, noting that the US would develop much quicker than the USSR because of the already advanced state of its industry and the wealth of natural resources.641 Next Ford and Allen discuss the changes that would come to agriculture and industry, noting the end of unemployment, speed-up, and long hours of work. Rather, they counter, people will have to work less, under better conditions, and they will be more prosperous. They offer hope that “the opportunities of education and culture will be boundless.”642 For black people, who, they note, have suffered particularly under capitalism, there will be opportunities to learn new skills and practice trades. Ford and Allen are careful to point out the historical legacy keeping black people in the most menial of jobs and denying training to most of the black population. Echoing calls for reparations and, later, for affirmative actions, the authors indicate that in a Soviet United States there would be the

mandate to “create even relatively greater opportunities for advance and progress for the Negro than for the white” and that a “Soviet government must confer greater benefits upon the Negroes than upon whites, for the Negroes have started with less.” Finally, Ford and Allen note that “Any act of discrimination or of prejudice against a Negro will become a crime under the revolutionary law,” an obvious redress to the climate of lynching prevalent in the US in the 1930s and echoing the early Soviet laws against anti-nationality prejudice and anti-Semitism. Ford and Allen use the models of the USSR to propose how the new state government would function. They note: “In affairs of State, in the political activities of the country, in management, in all phases of public life, with the removal of all discrimination, the Negro will be playing a prominent part, just as Georgians, Tadjiks, Ukrainians, etc., are today among the leaders of the Soviet Union and its Communist Party.” Thus the “Soviet United States” would be substantially different than the US of the day, redressing the issues of the workers in general and of the oppressed black workers especially.

The above are just the changes brought about in the “Soviet United States,” not to be confused with the “Soviet Negro Republic.” This republic, Ford and Allen note, can choose to ally itself with the “Soviet United States” but would not have to, as is the right of self-determination. To build the fiction of the pamphlet, however, the authors assume that the question of self-determination has to be settled “in favor of federation with the Soviet United States.” Regardless, the area for the “Soviet Negro Republic”

644 Ford and Allen, *The Negroes in a Soviet America*, 38. The Soviet laws were complicated, of course, though there were explicit laws that punished unequal treatment of National Minorities, including anti-Semitism. For more information see: Stalin, “Reply to an Inquiry of the Jewish News Agency in the United States,” *Works*, volume 13, *Marxist Internet Archive*.
would be the Black Belt, industrialized Southern cities, and some surrounding areas; whatever would “assure well rounded economic development” of the area.646

Ford and Allen raise the question of the basis of political power in the new territory. Noting that political power is a function of class rather than one of race, they argue that the new form of power would not be a “dictatorship of Negroes” but a “dictatorship of the workers and the small farmers. Since most of the workers and the small farmers in this territory are Negroes, they would naturally compose the greater part of the personnel of the new [sic] government.” Thus they support an “actually working out of real democracy in this territory – democracy for the majority of the people and not for the minority as under capitalism.”647 This fictitious democracy is important because of how it imagines power to be handled in the state. The CPUSA is still supposing a representative democracy, however one drastically changed by no longer buttressing capitalism. To illustrate this new kind of democracy, the authors again turn to Reconstruction. Here they characterize Reconstruction as “a revolutionary dictatorship” that ruled the South, “a dictatorship of the Northern capitalists and Southern middle class, supported principally by the former Negro slaves [sic] and, at the start, by the poor white farmers.”648 The authors note that during Reconstruction black people served in government, made important state decisions and helped to run the country. They contend that this legacy would be reborn with the “Soviet Negro Republic,” but here designed not to establish capitalism, but to foreground equality and liberty.

646 Ford and Allen, The Negroes in a Soviet America, 39.
647 Ford and Allen, The Negroes in a Soviet America, 40.
648 Ford and Allen, The Negroes in a Soviet America, 41.
The “economic foundations of equality” for both the “Soviet Negro Republic” and the “Soviet United States” rely on changes in land ownership, industry, capital and labor. The “realization of social equality” section ends the pamphlet, outlining in the most specific terms what the Black Nation Thesis would bring to the oppressed black people in the US. Ford and Allen suggest the burning and destruction of Jim Crow signs and symbols of segregation. They hint at the cultural production that will be enabled by free-time and resources accessible to the poor farmers and workers; the educational opportunities and the growth of the public school system that will occur and that will exceed “any previous records in the history of American capitalism;” and the expansion of the healthcare system to include all of the Southern masses. They also underline that there will have to be a campaign to remove all of the traces of white supremacy in the white population, but that socialist education will be up to the task. All of these things together will enable black people to take “their undisputed and equal status besides all the peoples of the world.”

The pamphlet ends with a call to support the Communist Party and its program to build such a world. Ford and Allen offer up the imaginary of both a “Soviet Negro Republic” and the “Soviet United States” as goals to work toward for the Communist Party. This rhetorical styling exposes how the CPUSA was imagining their work with and against the state in the early 1930s. The Negroes in a Soviet America more than any other pamphlet reveals how the CPUSA defined the state, how this definition was tied to their critique of both the policies and practices of the US government but also the politics of other black movements, and finally how the Party suggested a new way of

650 Ford and Allen, The Negroes in a Soviet America, 47.
imagining their world in a Soviet model through the fiction of the Black Nation Thesis. Other pamphlets display more concretely how this vision is unique for its mixture of ideas of nationalism, anti-imperialism, and redress to racial prejudice. However, this pamphlet excels at highlighting the possibility the Communists saw in the argument for self-determination. The “Soviet Negro Republic” was centrally different than the “Soviet United States;” though the needs of black people were addressed in each imaginary, and a redress to historical oppression mentioned in both, the “Soviet Negro Republic” was imagined to be a space of different possibility. Imagining what this possibility might be, Ford and Allen suggest a direct challenge to imperialism and capitalism, a call for a change in the judicial system, and a greater democracy.

For the authors of the pamphlet, the Black Nation Thesis and the “Soviet America” were useful fictions, offering examples of how things could be different for struggling farmers, sharecroppers, and other oppressed people who were nominally part of the Communist Party program. Especially in the work with sharecroppers in Alabama, a pamphlet that outlined different ways to collectively farm and organize labor was a great boon.\footnote{For more on sharecropping practices see: Kelley, 
Hammer and Hoe.} Importantly, the Soviet America the pamphlet suggests was fiction, but even more so was the Soviet reality the pamphlet supposedly builds upon. Though perhaps the US authors of the piece were not aware, the Soviet’s forced collectivization of farmland, especially in the Ukraine, lead to widespread famine 1932-33 and the death by starvation of between 6-8 million. For a recent account, see: Snyder, \textit{Bloodlands}. For other readers of the pamphlet, the stories of a “Soviet America” highlighted the huge economic, social, and cultural disadvantages black people faced. Rather than the Scottsboro pamphlets that focused on legal issues and nine particular cases, the allegory of the “Soviet America” could speak to many and offered a long-term engagement of problems plaguing black people in the South.
Particularly interesting is the way the pamphlet uses the history of a betrayed Reconstruction to suggest a “Soviet America.” In this focus on Reconstruction and an analysis of class, Ford and Allen’s pamphlet echoes W.E.B. Du Bois’ *Black Reconstruction*, published the same year. By drawing upon the specifically US history of Reconstruction, by showing the promise of the decade and the collapse of that promise at the hands of greedy business owners and thus the unequal development of the North and the South, Allen and Ford use the “Soviet America” to illustrate the long history of Southern exploitation and offer a return to what is imagined as a potentially utopian moment of US history. Looking closely at sharecropping, textile mills, and chain gangs, the authors unpack the economic exploitation. Citing the “diseases of poverty [that] will for the first time meet a stronger foe” in a “Soviet America,” they also address health and social issues.\(^{652}\) Finally, they grandly suggest: “President Roosevelt’s present estate in Georgia and the other resorts of the millionaires can be turned into sanatoria, hospitals, clubs, etc. Palm Beach can become the haven of tired workers and toiling farmers.”\(^{653}\) The dreams were large; the promise of a “Soviet America” was only “a mere peep into the vistas of a glorious future for the masses” as pictured on the cover of the pamphlet.\(^{654}\) But this glimpse was an important one, and one that worried the Communists’ critics because it inspired the organizers, allies, and the central committee to do important work with black people in the Southern US.

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\(^{653}\) Ford and Allen, *The Negroes in a Soviet America*, 47.

\(^{654}\) Ford and Allen, *The Negroes in a Soviet America*, 47.
The “Soviet America” as Productive Fiction

Many critics have ridiculed the Black Nation Thesis as a prime example of the failure of the CP platform during the Third Period. In later years, some former Party members and others have argued that with the Black Nation Thesis the CPUSA was reaching too far and misrepresenting the desires and needs of black people. But a more nuanced analysis suggests that the Black Nation Thesis both allowed sometimes difficult rhetorical moves and opened up different, potentially useful conversations about race and class, and, by the 1940s, gender. This work was most readily accomplished through the calls for “self-determination,” a phrase that pointed to the Party’s key theoretical work on race.

Although some Party members were supportive of all of the claims of the Black Nation Thesis for decades to come, not all of the CPUSA was sympathetic to the Thesis in any of its reincarnations. Again, the term productive fiction signals both the important, innovative, and imaginative aspects of the Thesis, but also recognizes that perhaps many of the activists and organizers in the Party did not think a “Negro Nation” would actually come to exist. In both language and scope, the Thesis was out of step with the rhetoric of the United States since it used ideas of nation in ways unfamiliar to the US

655 For sympathetic, but critical, reviews of the Black Nation Thesis see: Foster, History of the Communist Party in the United States; Foner, American Socialism and Black Americans; and Hutchinson, Blacks and Reds. Also see Forman’s collection of responses to the Black Nation Thesis after World War II in: Forman, Self-Determination and the African-American People, chapter 4.

656 For examples see: Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual; The Racism Research Project, Critique of the Black Nation Thesis; Johnson, Color, Communism, and Common Sense.

657 Again, my study here is rhetorical. The CPUSA, in on-the-ground organizing or political maneuvering, was far from perfect and arguably did misrepresent themselves and mislead black communities; indeed, there are many justified critiques of the CPUSA’s work done under the auspices of the Black Nation Thesis, as well as many important successes.

658 Harry Haywood, for example, in his much later autobiography, Black Bolshevik, is unapologetically supportive of the Black Nation Thesis in its many forms, while the four years it took for the CPUSA to publish any meaningful work on the “Negro Question” also speak to ambivalence in the Central Committee.
context and was particularly fuzzy on the distinct ways that race and nation might work both separately and in conjunction with each other. However, in the CPUSA in the 1930s this was not something that could be explicitly addressed while maintaining Party membership, as the resolution was a dictate from the Comintern. In the end, the “Resolution on the Negro Question” was passed at the 1928 Moscow Comintern convention with significant US input from prominent CPUSA members, both black and white. The CPUSA did, however, have to work with this campaign and slogan, all the more so after the 1930 rearticulation of the Resolution. As discussed in Chapter two, the particular history of the CP in the US, specifically a lack of sympathy for claims of “American Exceptionalism,” meant that certain topics could not be discussed with the Comintern. Indeed, because of the fraught relationship to the Comintern, Party members could not suggest that the resolution would not work in America. Rather, the CPUSA between 1930 and 1932 began a massive organizing drive amongst black people in the US on the basis of the Black Nation Thesis.

659 As discussed in Chapter two, the relationship between member Parties and the Comintern was complicated and often mostly one-way, an individual Party subsidiary could not flout the dictates of the Comintern, though everyone was invited to participate in drafting and passing resolutions. For example, the Resolution on the Negro Question was developed with serious input from US comrades, but once in place, it was not possible to suggest that the Resolution was incorrect and maintain party membership. Though small disagreements were often encouraged as important contributions, a serious flouting of the Party line could end in the removal of CP membership such as with Richard B. Moore or Jay Lovestone.

660 Involved in the discussion on the Negro Question were Harry Haywood, Otto Hall, Lovett Fort-Whiteman, Charles Nasanov, Samuel Adams Darcy, Bertram Wolfe, and Sen Kayama, though by no means was everyone in agreement. For more on the politics of passing the 1928 Resolution see: Gilmore, Defying Dixie, pp. 62-64 and Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, pp. 70-77.

661 The first draft of the Resolution on the Negro Question was confusing for many and the Comintern passed an addendum in 1930, see: Communist International, “The Negro Question in the United States Resolution of the Communist International,” The Communist International Journal, 8, 1931.

662 “American Exceptionalism” had been the call phrase of Jay Lovestone as General Secretary of the CPUSA. Lovestone and his supporters had been very publicly ousted from the Party in 1929. Thus any calls for “it’s different in America” would have been met with suspicion and resistance. See: Foster, History of the Communist Party USA, p. 272.
To make the Resolution on the Negro Question work in the US, some significant changes had to be made in the rhetoric of the Resolution. By pitching the Resolution as a productive fiction, as a work of the radical imagination, the important aspects of the Resolution on the Negro Question could be preserved while also working within the US context. Much of the work that was needed to fit the Resolution on the Negro Question into the US context was to reconcile the Soviet experience with the realities of the US and US racial relations. One of the ways the Party did this was by holding the Soviet Union up as an example of the ways that racial relationships could be outside of capitalism. This was a multi-form process, since ethnic differences were most often discussed as nationalities in the USSR. Rather than try to sort out some of these nuances, the CPUSA highlighted the presumed equality of all people in the USSR.

Countless pamphlets end with a section proclaiming the correctness of the Soviet program on any given issue. For example Mary van Kleeck and Wm. O. Thompson’s 1934 pamphlet NRA from Within, which criticizes the National Recovery Act for supporting monopoly capitalism at the expense of the working people, concludes with the section entitled “U.S.A. Is Ripe for Socialism.” The authors claim that: “There is no way out except by the creation of a revolutionary democracy of the toilers, which is at the same time a stern dictatorship against the capitalists and their agents. [sic] There is no way out, in short, except by the abolition of the capitalist system and the establishment of a Socialist Society.” Elliot Cohen’s 1932 pamphlet, The Yellow Dog Contract, agitates against employers’ use of contract to prevent labor organization. This pamphlet also ends with the claim that:

663 van Kleeck and Thompson, NRA From Within, 23.
But the worker must not stop there, if he means to destroy once and for all the yellow dog and the whole foul machinery that the exploiters use to chain him down. In the Soviet Union there is a government of the workers, where industry is organized on a socialist basis, and the workers in possession of all the means of production.664

Even more direct is Margaret Cowl’s pamphlet *Women and Equality* from 1935. In her ending discussion of the importance of agitating for women’s equal rights she calls on the example of the Soviet Union. She argues that part of her goal is: “To make known to broad masses of women the position of the women in the Soviet Union, their complete equality with men, the almost complete eradication of the old ideas about the inferiority of women and that this is all taking place under the Soviet form of government; its also part of the fight for freedom on the part of the women in the U.S.A.”665 Finally, Anna Louise Strong’s 1932 pamphlet, *Modern Farming – Soviet Style*, ends with an example of the promise of collective farms. She gives the example of the Socialist Farm-City Filonova, where she details the construction of a new, modern farm city planned and implemented by the joint work of the farmers and the government.666

From race and gender relations to mining and farming strategies, in the pamphlet literature of the CPUSA, the Soviet Union had achieved perfection.

These proud proclamations at the end of so many pamphlets are what contemporary readers often call propaganda. Using western ideas of propaganda, propaganda as coercive, deceitful, and controlling,667 these readers denounce the CPUSA pamphlets as being uncritical bastions of support for the USSR. In fairness the USSR in

the 1930s was far from perfect in any of the given areas. The nationality policies in the 1920s did support a flourishing of education, print media, and cultural activities in various languages and helped develop and maintain the limited support of some national spaces and communities, but the overall success of these early commitments was uneven. Indeed, by the mid-1930s the Party line changed and promoted Soviet patriotism resulting in what we now know to have been the censorship and repression of national cultures and religious institutions.

Gender relations in the Soviet Union improved under Soviet rule, as women were, at least legally and rhetorically, made equal to men. However, as historian Elizabeth A. Wood argues, the rhetoric was sometimes convoluted, asking for the equality of men and women and then appealing to women in their “particular’ tasks as mothers of the republic.” Outside of the rhetorical, Wood argues that the Soviet Party created the Women’s Section reluctantly, but once established these groups often levied cogent critiques of the Party and secured important benefits for women. The Women’s Section, however, was stymied in its work by calls of “feminist deviation” and forced into subservient roles in the larger Party apparatus. Similarly, after the Revolution girls and boys were afforded equal access to education, something unheard of earlier in Russia, or, indeed, in much of the Western world. However, as Wood notes, this also meant that institutions that had been developed to serve women exclusively were also made co-ed.

672 Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 50.
Though collective farming did bring some benefits to farmers in the long run, many others were deprived of all of their crops and left to starve. In the Ukraine, for example, between 2.4 and 7.5 million people died of starvation in 1932-33.\textsuperscript{673} The famine, also known as Holodomor, or death by hunger, was directly caused in part by the changes in the Soviet farming and agricultural policies, and some historians debate whether the Soviet government particularly targeted the Ukraine because of nationalist sentiments and organizations.\textsuperscript{674}

There is a possibility that the CPUSA authors did not know of the spotted record of the Soviet Union. Although a few of them had traveled there in the 1920s and early 1930s, trips to the USSR were highly controlled to show the Soviets in the best light. Of the major pamphlet authors on the Black Nation Thesis, Harry Haywood spent the most time in the USSR. He went first to study at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East and then later at the International Lenin School. He was in the USSR from the mid 1920s through 1930, working with the Comintern and authoring the Resolution on the Negro Question. In his autobiography he describes trips to the Crimea and other parts of the USSR and his friendships and romantic relationships in Russia. Haywood remarks that in Moscow and while traveling he was an object of interest because of his black skin, but that the interest was decidedly positive or neutral and not racist as in the US.\textsuperscript{675} Overall, he is not particularly critical of the USSR, often commenting on the support he felt as a black man and positively reflecting on the improvements to gender relations. Haywood had left by 1931 and the beginning of the

\textsuperscript{673} Snyder, \textit{Bloodlands}, 53.
\textsuperscript{675} Haywood, \textit{Black Bolshevik}, chapter 5.
Ukraine famine, and does not indicate in his autobiography if he knew of it or other consequences of the economic policies in the Soviet Union.

Erik McDuffie notes that Maude White, Hermina Dumont Huiswoud, Williamia Burroughs, and other black women traveled to the Soviet Union in the late 1920s and early 1930s. McDuffie notes that these women were positively changed by the experiences in the Soviet Union; Huiswoud and Burroughs returned to the USSR many times. Many of these women noted their experiences in the Soviet Union as being free of American racism, more equal in terms of gender relations, and supportive of their radical beliefs. McDuffie does not note any criticisms these women had, or experiences that would tarnish their positive feeling toward the USSR.

Louise Thompson Patterson, traveling to the USSR in the early 1930s, notes that the Soviet Union “was by no means a paradise;” however an interview with her in the Amsterdam News declares that she “Prefers Russia Now to Living in America.” Many black communists and sympathetic leftists, including Langston Hughes and Louise Thompson Patterson, went to the USSR in 1932 for the production of Black and White, a failed attempt at a Soviet sponsored film about American racism. McDuffie notes that the group of young black people who traveled to the USSR were treated as “honored guests,” were given an extensive tour of Central Asia, and thoroughly enjoyed their adventure, even though the film was cancelled. Indeed, the Black and White actors group was in the USSR during the Holodomor, but was toured around the East of the USSR, not the West.

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676 McDuffie, Sojourning for Truth, 54-57.
677 McDuffie, Sojourning for Truth, 67-70.
In line with Peggy Dennis’ comments, few CPUSA members, even those who traveled to the USSR, had much of an idea of the darker side of Stalinist rule. Little was known worldwide about the Ukrainian Famine or other horrors of the Stalinist regime at the time, in part due to the publicity coming out of the USSR that staunchly denied the deaths. Indeed, the USSR held tight control over media outlets and visits to the famine-stricken country. By the late 1930s many more people were aware of Stalin’s repression in the USSR as the 1936-1937 Moscow Show Trials were publicized, but this was not as readily the case in the early 1930s.

Indeed, in many areas the Soviet Union was making progressive changes that were positively impacting the lives of ordinary people. As Louise Thompson Patterson declares: “Russia was the only place where I was able to forget that I was a Negro… Russians are genuinely interested in us…they were shocked and unable to understand that we were not allowed equal accommodations with whites here in America.” Even more to the point, as black communists came back to the United States after their trips to the Soviet Union they presented black comrades who had remained home with a view of the USSR as succeeding where the US had failed. Gender and racial relations were drastically different in the USSR, and coupled with the promises of Soviet economic fairness, the Soviets were a thrilling and envious example of what life could be like.

Holding out the USSR as an example of how perfect life under socialism could be was obviously overstated, but not completely without merit. Giving the authors the benefit of the doubt that they did not know some of the most horrific crimes of the USSR in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the suggestion of a Soviet America was a radical

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680 Quoted in McDuffie, Sojourning for Truth, 67.
dream of a progressive future. Thus, though the common calls at the end of CPUSA pamphlets to look to the Soviet Union as a shining example of socialist promise can be read as coercive propaganda aimed at duping the unsuspecting public, I read these calls as productive fictions. As productive fictions, these calls help shape Leftist social movements and build a radical imagination that assists in shifting the rhetoric of race, class, and gender in the US.

**Productive Fictions and Contested Histories**

I use the term productive fiction to signal how rhetorical framings are useful for social movements in their desire for developing strategies and practices aimed at achieving broad-based social change. As such, the idea of productive fiction works to shift our understanding of how pamphlet literature functions for social movements. Looking at the Black Nation Thesis as a productive fiction enables a rhetorical analysis of the impact of the ideas presented, while also scrutinizing the various ways that CPUSA authors worked through complicated ideas such as the intersection of race and class through the trope of the Black Nation in the Black Belt.

I highlight these pamphlets as works of fiction. This is not to say that the very real horrors documented in many of these pamphlets were fiction, nor were the economic and social oppression of black people and poor people in the South false. Indeed the CPUSA material arguably offers some of the most honest and forthright portrayals of lynching and chain-gangs produced at the time and catalogues the economic exploitation of sharecropping, tenant farming, and many forms of industrial labor. Rather, the idea of a separate State or Nation for black people in the Black Belt of the US was a fiction.
The early 1930s were marked with a sincere optimism within the CPUSA and the Comintern that the worldwide Communist revolution was around the corner. Indeed, the success of the Russian Revolution and the forming of the USSR was still recent history and the Comintern had seemingly predicted the collapse of the capitalist system in 1929; there were great prospects for huge economic change. If the CPUSA authors believed, as did many of their comrades, that the Communist Revolution was just around the corner, did they likewise believe that the Black Nation Thesis would come to pass? There is not evidence either way to prove whether the CPUSA authors believed that the Black Nation Thesis was an inevitable part of the coming revolution. Allen, writing with the benefit of hindsight, states:

Public debate and polemic centered on the most novel and dramatic program demand of the International resolutions: the proposal for self-determination of Black Americans, based on their majority in the Black Belt of the old South, where they had the right to constitute a republic and choose between separation or federation with the federal government of the United States. The theoretical and historical derivation of this proposition and its subsequent history require further discussion elsewhere. Here let it be noted that this demand, common to most national independence struggles, was applied to the striving for Black freedom in the United States as a matter of general policy, without regard to the specific and unique context within which the struggle was taking place. Eventually, it was to be subordinated and dropped entirely. It did have the advantage at the time of centering Communist attention on the Black majority in the South, the region’s semifeudal formation as the internal source of racism, and most especially on the oppressive conditions of its Black population.

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Allen’s comments that the Thesis was without regard to the “specific and unique context” of the United States, and his noting how the Thesis was “subordinated and dropped entirely” point to his dispassionate feelings, at least in hindsight.

Part of this hindsight might be that the official CPUSA opinion of the Negro Question changed multiple times. The exact meaning of the Resolution on the Negro Question was revised significantly over the first few decades. As shown, in the 1930s the Black Nation Thesis supported self-determination for black people in the Black Belt and was often interpreted to mean a separate Negro Nation. However, this line changed in the late 1930s and early 1940s, only to be brought back in the later 1940s. By the mid-1960s, Foster, in his authoritative *History of the Communist Party*, declares: “The demand for self-determination did not mean, however, that the party advocated the setting up of a ‘Negro republic’ in the South, as its enemies asserted.”

Harry Haywood, a stalwart supporter of the Black Nation Thesis from its beginning through most of the century, argues in his autobiography published in 1978 that his 1948 book *Negro Liberation* had the correct line, the “reaffirmation of the revolutionary position developed at the Sixth Comintern Congress in 1928.” However, his summary of that position does not mention a separate nation for black people in the Black Belt. He argues:

The heart of the position is that the problem is fundamentally a question of an oppressed nation with full rights of self-determination. It emphasized the revolutionary essence of the struggle for Black equality arising from the fact that the special oppression of Black people is the main prop of the system of imperialist domination over the entire working class and the masses of exploited American people. Therefore

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the struggle for Black liberation is a component part of the struggle for proletarian revolution.  

He argues that he used the 1940s census data to make the book as current and useful for analyzing black oppression as possible, noting that the book “laid a solid foundation for the Party’s future work in the field.”  

Haywood’s framing of his thoughts on the Black Nation Thesis in 1948 is instructive for how it is similar to the 1930s discussion but without the fervor of declaring a landed area of the Black Belt nor calling for a separate nation. In part this again reflects changes in the interpretation of the Resolution on the Negro Question in later decades, but also suggests, in Haywood’s framing that his book was true to the “revolutionary essence” of the Resolution, that the authors did not imagine an actual nation to be the outcome of the Black Nation Thesis.  

The pamphlets themselves offer little direct proof of whether the Black Nation Thesis was believed by CPUSA authors, leaders, and rank-and-file members, but they do offer some insight. The pamphlets present the Black Nation Thesis usually in oblique terms, offering generalizations of what might happen, but little or no concrete details. Similarly to the calls for a Soviet America, the Black Nation Thesis is often discussed at the end of pamphlets, as the final call to arouse revolutionary fervor in the readership. For example in Johnson’s pamphlet that opened this chapter, he notes the promises of a Soviet America broadly, for all Americans, only hinting at the Black Nation Thesis or a separate nation in the Black Belt.  

In Margaret Cowl’s *Women and Equality* pamphlet she

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likewise refers to the USSR as modeling good gender relations, but does not suggest that the US will actually have the same.\textsuperscript{688}

In contrast, union integration, economic changes, anti-lynching arguments, and calls to change the system of convict labor were all discussed in concrete terms. In George Anstrom’s \textit{The American Farmer}, published in 1932, the author discusses specific ways that “capitalism crushes the American farm.”\textsuperscript{689} He ends with concrete ideas on how farmers should unionize, and how local unions have been successful in campaigns to protect farmers’ rights, and legal bills that are being prepared or passed to help farm families.\textsuperscript{690} Charlotte Todes’ pamphlet, \textit{The Injunction Menace}, focuses on how to fight legal injunctions, while Vern Smith’s \textit{The Frame Up System} relates how employers are framing workers and then using their legal troubles to further exploit them. Both of these pamphlets offer direct suggestions on how readers can fight back against these threats of capitalism and how the CPUSA is organizing to curtail these actions. Similarly, the CPUSA, while writing many pamphlets in support of the Black Nation Thesis, focused its on-the-ground organizational efforts on campaigning around the Scottsboro and Herndon trials, organizing sharecroppers, building tenants rights committees, and providing relief for the unemployed.\textsuperscript{691} All of these campaigns and organizational activities were immensely necessary and offered vital relief and political support for the many poor and exploited people, black and white. However, none of these activities were directly related to the development of a Nation in the Black Belt.

\textsuperscript{688} Cowl, \textit{Women and Equality}, 13.
\textsuperscript{689} Anstrom, \textit{The American Farmer}, 3.
\textsuperscript{690} Anstrom, \textit{The American Farmer}, 29-30.
\textsuperscript{691} See specific arguments made in Chapters 3, 5, and 6 and pamphlets on the Scottsboro trials, the Harlem tenants rights movements, and chain gangs. By the 1940s the Party was also very active in anti-Peonage campaigns, especially in the South.
On the whole, CPUSA pamphlets present the Black Nation Thesis in such a way that, though never dismissed as implausible, the Thesis is never afforded the thickness of a conviction. The placement of the calls for a Black Nation Thesis at the end of pamphlets as the crescendo of the argument, the vague and future-oriented wording of the Thesis, and the focus of organization work indicate that the Black Nation Thesis, while an important tool, was not believed to be revolutionary certainty by the Party.

As shown throughout the dissertation, this separate nation, the very backbone of the Black Nation Thesis, was not always mentioned in the pamphlets, though the ideas of self-determination were often central. It was these ideas, I suggest, that were more the point of the Black Nation Thesis, while the Thesis itself, the idea of a Nation in the Black Belt, was a way to think through the ideas of self-determination in a more concrete and useful way for Party leaders, organizers, and rank-and-file members. In this the separate nation suggested in the Black Nation Thesis was a fiction: an imaginary, if plausible, idea of a future world with different social, cultural, and economic relationships.

Framing Productive Fiction: Social Science Fiction and Radical Utopia

Thinking of the Black Nation Thesis as a fiction resonates with various histories of fictions used to think about social, cultural, and economic issues. The strongest current of this trend, Social Science Fiction, highlights how science fiction texts are useful to think about changes to the political, social, and economic reality. A subset of speculative fiction, Social Science Fiction, started in the US in the 1930s and popularized after World War II, is a genus of fiction that presents a constructed future, suggesting the idea that the future is contingent and changeable, and noting areas in need of social,
cultural and economic redress. In their article “Introduction: A History of Social Science Fiction,” Neil Gerlach and Sheryl N. Hamilton argue that: “social science fiction is a productive institutional exchange, cultural site, and evolving epistemology – a rich and flexible mode of thought for examining key issues of late modernity.” Their idea of productivity, which I highlight in my term productive fiction, is important here. It is not that these fictions are without grounding, rather they are necessary for examining current social experiences.

Most authors trace Social Science Fiction to works of the 1950s and 1960s, foregrounding the work of Harlan Ellison, Samuel R. Delany, and George Orwell, though their roots can be traced to mid-1930s white authors H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, and Isaac Asimov. Since its humble beginnings, African Americans have written social science fiction and science fiction; and Sheree R. Thomas collects much of the early important work in the edited volume Dark Matter. This volume includes the 1920 short story “The Comet” by W.E.B. Du Bois as well as a segment from the 1931 book Black No More by George Schuyler. Black No More, a satire of racial desire, involves a scientist who invents a process that makes black people into white people and traces the economic and cultural impacts of the procedure. Schuyler, a staunch conservative and anti-communist later in his life, critiques social ideas about race and class in the novel while also trading barbs about prominent leaders in the black community including the NAACP and Marcus Garvey.

Social science fiction, as a literary genre, helps to think about, and often agitate for, important broad cultural changes. Indeed, Asimov, in his groundbreaking article

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entitled “Social Science Fiction,” concludes: “The contribution science fiction can make to society is that of accustoming its readers to the thought of the inevitability of continuing change and the necessity of directing and shaping that change rather than opposing it blindly or blindly permitting it to overwhelm us.”

In this Asimov highlights the role of science fiction in thinking about the possibility of, and preparing for, future change. Similarly, though with a different focus, the Black Nation Thesis pamphlets highlight change, but change in the societal view of race and class, rather than science and technology.

Gerlach and Hamilton recognize the pedagogical potential of social science fiction; they argue: “sf [science fiction] offers a wealth of insight into diverse social structures, problems, and relationships, enabling students to visualize and explore possible social arrangements.” They specifically note that such a pedagogical approach to science fiction was one of its first uses by social scientists, and they also suggest that it can be a “an intellectual mode with a direct cultural impact on technoscientific practices and futurological thinking.” Furthermore, they contend that social fiction should be “considered less as a literary genre than as a mode of speculation and reflection – that lends itself to the work of social analysis.” Social Science Fiction is often associated

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693 Asimov, “Social Science Fiction,” in Modern Science Fiction, 196. In this article Asimov is particularly dismissive of racial prejudice, noting it as an anachronism that will be done away with because of technological advances; however, I want to suggest that his framing of science fiction can help us to understand the various ways that fiction can be used to think about the future and social change. Therefore, it is the thinking about the future and even, perhaps, preparing for the future, that Asimov highlights as the role of science fiction, which is important for this discussion.


with alternative discussions of the scientific, commercial, and military establishment. Feminist science fiction authors and critics have also noted the important role of science fiction in thinking through gender, and sometimes racial, relationships.

I highlight social science fiction and feminist science fiction here to give a touchstone for my analysis of productive fiction. Productive fiction differs from science fiction in that the CUPSA authors, though sometimes discussing scientific methods of farming, were not primarily concerned with scientific or technological change. Indeed, the Black Nation Thesis pamphlets were concerned with social, cultural, and economic change, specially the reworking of understandings of race and class, and, to a limited extent, race, class, and gender. However, I want to suggest the Black Nation Thesis used many of these same forms as social and feminist science fiction to rethink social conventions of race and class. Specifically, the Black Nation Thesis created an imaginary, future world for the purpose of exploring the potentials of social development. In such, the Black Nation Thesis worked with typical fictional tropes of literary study.

As fictions, therefore, these pamphlets were productive. The pamphlets were specifically useful for the CPUSA to think critically about concrete problems and issues, and provide a social analysis that would ground the alternative future envisioned through

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697 Chris Leslie notes that Social Science Fiction authors often “self-consciously provide an alternative to the scientific-commercial-military establishment, leading discussion about their proper use of technology, the effects of the diffusions of technology, and the place of the individual in technologized society, hoping that their stories would inculcate ethics among scientists and technologists, secure a future protected and enhanced by science by creating a sense of possibility in the young, and awaken the general public to the importance of scientific inquiry.” *Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice*, 1314.


699 Fiction, as defined by the OED, “4. The species of literature which is concerned with the narration of imaginary events and the portraiture of imaginary characters; fictitious composition. Now usually, prose novels and stories collectively; the composition of works of this class.” OED online.
the fictions of the Black Nation Thesis. Thus, the pamphlets framed these problems in ways that members of the social movement could think through and with. The ideas presented in the pamphlets were timely, culturally relevant, and geared toward a specific audience. The audience is particularly important, and I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation how the CPUSA reached out to different audiences with different kinds of pamphlets all relating, broadly, to the Black Nation Thesis.

The concept of productive fiction straddles utopianism and pragmatic policy, traversing the desire, speculation, and imagination of utopian thinking and the concrete engagement with the everyday struggles of black people living in the South. To try and further explicate this idea I will work through three definitions of utopia, suggesting which parts of each are relevant to productive fiction.

Ruth Levitas, writing in the *Journal of Political Ideologies*, contends that utopia is “both prevalent and necessary” in Western political thought and especially for leftists. She pushes for an understanding of utopia as a method, one that is “accompanied by a recognition of provisionality, responsibility and necessary failure.” The methodological potentials of utopianism as described by Levitas are interesting in the present case. Though she builds her account around traditional fictional texts, novels, and literary criticism, I want to suggest that the methodological uses of utopia might be instructive. If utopianism is “the expression of the desire for a better way of being,” then the method of utopia would, for Levitas, suggest the attempt at the creation of such an expression. She duly notes that: “Utopia in this sense, utopia at its best, is a necessary

failure, but will fail us less in its absence.”

Utopias are important precisely because they offer a means through with which to think about a different world, a better way of being. The CPUSA’s Black Nation Thesis, as discussed, was always already a failure, but important to imagining a better way of living for black people in the US, especially in the South.

David Leopold argues for a four-part definition of utopia: “an intentional community, a vision of an ideal society, a detailed description of an ideal society, and a literary genre.” He also contends that: “although utopia is not necessarily always socialism, socialism is always utopian, at least, in the second of our four senses.” He counters that though there is a long history of anti-utopianism in socialist groups, that indeed socialism is often caught up with ideas of utopia, at least in some of its meanings. His delineation of utopia as a genre and utopia as a historically grounded idea of intentional communities is important. The CPUSA was not founding an intentional community with their declaration of the Black Nation Thesis, though the discussions of the Black Nation in the Black Belt, at times, suggest such a utopian project.

Darren Webb argues in *Marx, Marxism and Utopia* that utopia “refers to a) an imaginary state or society which b) is regarded as better than the one in which its author lives and c) is described by that author in a variety of aspects and with some consistency.” Webb explicates an “anti-utopian utopianism” in Marx’s thought, which he notes arises out of “the problems of generating radical hope without foreclosing the future; of capturing the spirit of revolution whilst remaining faithful to the principles of

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703 Leopold, “Socialism and (the rejection of) Utopia” in *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 222.
proletarian self-emancipation and self-determination.” It is this tension between inspiring hope for the future and giving space for people to create their own fortune that is important for productive fiction. Rather than using Webb’s “anti-utopian utopianism,” a clunky turn of phrase for sure, I want to suggest something similar with productive fiction. As shown through the pamphlet *Negroes in a Soviet America*, CPUSA authors were also trying to inspire dreams for the future while not proscribing the future nation. Thus, I use productive fiction to engage many of the ideas explored through utopian literature, and particularly for how these ideas are framed around more concrete, if fantastical, policy recommendations.

Productive fiction, finally, is largely indebted to Robin D.G. Kelley’s concept of the Black Radical Imagination. In his vivid collection of essays, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, Kelley outlines a black radical imagination that he traces through black people organizing in collective social movements throughout the twentieth century. He begins the book recalling his mother’s dreams for him, her relentless assistance in helping him achieve the place where dreams can come true. Citing traditional definitions of utopia, he credits his mother with his belief “that the map to a new world is in the imagination, in what we see in our third eyes rather than in the desolation that surrounds us.” This belief, he argues, propels his need to write the book as an expression of his wanting and needing “the strength to love and to dream.” Indeed, the book chronicles the work of “renegade black intellectuals/activists/artists” as they:

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706 Webb, Marx, Marxism and Utopia, 2.
707 Kelley, Freedom Dreams, 2.
708 Kelley, Freedom Dreams, xi.
challenged and reshaped communism, surrealism, and radical feminism, and in doing so produced brilliant theoretical insights that might have pushed these movements in new directions. In most cases, however, the critical visions of black radicals were held at bay, if not completely marginalized.\textsuperscript{709}

Thus the book traces a “brief, idiosyncratic outline of a history of black radical imagination in the twentieth century.”\textsuperscript{710}

Kelley is clear in his belief that “social movements generate new knowledge, new theories, new questions” and it is this generative potential of social movements that incubate and feed the radical imagination.\textsuperscript{711} He looks at Third World organizing, Black Feminism, Reparations, and Surrealism as just a few examples of places where social movements have inculcated new radical knowledge. The book follows a few moments of black radical imagination, offering lessons both in history but also in hope. Of the Black Nation Thesis, Kelley writes:

black self-determination was not simply a matter of guaranteeing democratic rights or removing barriers to black political and economic power, nor was it a matter of creating a nation wherever black people found themselves to be an oppressed minority. It was about promoting and supporting an independent black radical movement that would lead the way to a revitalized international working-class assault on racial capitalism.\textsuperscript{712}

These are some of the dreams of a black radical imagination that Kelley foregrounds in his collection of essays. These dreams, and the collective imagining that make these dreams possible and keep these dreams alive, are essential components to any radical imagination, but especially the black radical imagination.

\textsuperscript{709} Kelley, \textit{Freedom Dreams}, 6.
\textsuperscript{710} Kelley, \textit{Freedom Dreams}, 6.
\textsuperscript{711} Kelley, \textit{Freedom Dreams}, 8.
\textsuperscript{712} Kelley, \textit{Freedom Dreams}, 54.
Utopianism and Social Science Fiction both offer useful foils to think about what I am calling here productive fictions. Utopian literature, much of which addresses socialist movements and their relationship to future thinking, highlights the importance of thinking about, fantasizing about, a better way to live. Similarly, perhaps, social science fiction encourages readers to imagine how social structures shape modern life, opening up the possibilities of change through speculation and reflection. These ideas all resonate with Kelley’s dreams of a black radical imagination, trying to reflect on histories of change and revolution in black communities. Productive fiction, therefore, brings these trends together, trying to account for the myriad of ways that speculation about the Black Nation Thesis imagined a better world, opened the way for change, all the while reflecting on the social realities facing black communities in the 1930s.

Some Conclusions

Many, if not most, social movements use productive fictions to galvanize participants and to think about social change. Productive fictions are a leap of the imagination, not just a proposition that a social movement puts forward to its constituents, nor a demand that the movement makes of itself or of some outside force. Indeed, the positing of a speculative future to ruminate on contemporary issues is one of the core needs of a social movement to suggest cultural or social change. The Communist Party USA pamphlet material produced around the Black Nation Thesis is a particularly good example of the kind of work that productive fictions enable, both the positive and the negative.
Productive fictions are positive in that they are speculative: they suggest new courses of action, enable different negotiations of social expectations, and allow movements to suggest deep critiques of cultural norms. The CPUSA pamphlets, for example, use the productive fiction of the Black Nation Thesis to ruminate on race and class in the US. The suggestion of a separate nation for black people in the Southern United States enables the Party to examine ideas of nationalism in the US, to think about reparations and legal justice, to suggest the connection between race and class, and to develop the meaning of self-determination. As Kelley, Forman, and Franklin all demonstrate, the idea of self-determination for black people as explored by the CPUSA in the pamphlet literature of the 1930s had a lasting impact on left organizing and the black radical imagination.  

These same productive fictions can be negative or detrimental to social movements, as movements make claims that are either not true or are not believed by the movement participants or by sympathizers. The very spectacular nature of speculative claims can backfire and rather than offer a space for reflection can discredit the movement to the larger public. The CPUSA pamphlets, and their chilly reception in some circles, also speak to these pitfalls. The CPUSA was accused of duping the public and especially black radicals in the 1930s with its focus on the Black Nation Thesis and then the general abandonment of the Thesis principles in the later 1930s. On the other hand, some of the ideas expressed in the Black Nation Thesis are dismissed as something the Party had to say because of dictates from the Soviet Union. In this

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713 Kelley, Freedom Dreams, especially the chapter “‘The Negro Question’: Red Dreams of Black Liberation;” Forman, Self-Determination and the African American People; and Franklin, Black Self-Determination.

714 One of the most striking narratives of this is Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man, though many of these themes are picked up in later critiques of the CPUSA’s work in the 1930s such as Draper’s American Communists and Soviet Russia and The Roots of American Communism.
analysis the Black Nation Thesis, and the productive fiction it offers, is no more than the CPUSA trying to work with the dictates from a higher authority (the Comintern) and make these ideas relevant to the US. For critics who believe the latter, the CPUSA is again duping the public and the speculative potential in the Black Nation Thesis is only a veil to cover-over the untenable goals of the Thesis, or worse: the influence of an outside power.

Indeed, the CPUSA's Black Nation Thesis was an upshot of the Comintern's Resolution on the Negro Question and as such was deeply indebted to the Comintern policies on nationalism, colonialism, and Marxism. However, as I have argued, the Black Nation Thesis also worked with the cultural and social possibilities available in the US. It is this unique combination of Comintern dictate and US cultural heritage that makes the Black Nation Thesis a potent productive fiction for the CPUSA in the early and mid-1930s. The Black Nation Thesis worked with US history, regularly referencing the impacts of slavery on wealth and land ownership, the betrayal of Reconstruction, and the claims made in the rhetoric of the Revolution and Emancipation. Similarly, the Black Nation Thesis engaged issues that were pertinent to black communities in the US, both practical issues such as lynching and chain gangs, but also theoretical issues such as nationalism and liberation. In outlining the practical issues, the CPUSA took liberally from legacies of black organizing, such as the anti-lynching campaigns of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and most often with no acknowledgement of the groundbreaking work of previous black organizers. However, the CPUSA was very successful in raising awareness around lynching atrocities in the US and pushed their analysis of lynch law into public consciousness. In theoretical matters the CPUSA worked with ideas that had percolated for many years in black communities, such as Black Nationalism and black
liberation, and worked with these ideas in new ways through a productive engagement with Communist ideas and ideals. In all of these instances, the historical, the practical, and the theoretical, the CPUSA's Black Nation Thesis offered a productive fiction that fomented positive changes in the US black communities and beyond.

Productive fictions are important for social movements: they enable movement members and leaders to reflect on movement goals, imagine possible futures, and work and educate toward large socio-economic change. The *In A Soviet America* series shows how pamphlets can be useful spaces to create and deploy productive fictions for internal movement development. Indeed, the pamphlet *Negroes in a Soviet America* is intended for a CPUSA or allied audience, with frequent references to Party rhetoric and an expected familiarity with the Soviet Union. Yet, productive fictions need not be limited to movement audiences. As the conservative reprinting of *Negroes in a Soviet America* demonstrates, other audiences are likewise moved by the pamphlet's claims even in ways that are contrary to the intentions of their authors.

The CPUSA's externally focused pamphlets produced around the Scottsboro trials also employ a productive fiction to communicate new ideas about race and class. This fiction, imagining a world without lynching and with equal access to justice for black people in the US, is subtler than the claims of a Black Nation Thesis, though perhaps more powerful for such subtlety. The Scottsboro pamphlets also rely on a spectacular imagination of freedom and equality, but do not engender the same kind of considered discussion of Party politics or economic and cultural revolution. These pamphlets, produced for a wider audience and employing a variety of strategies to reach people with varying degrees of literacy and who were not familiar with Party rhetoric,
did not employ fictions to engage their readers in a larger speculation about race relations. Rather, these pamphlets were more traditionally styled as propaganda, pushing for the freedom of the Scottsboro defendants, through suggesting direct action and raising money for the defense work. However, these pamphlets still built on a dream of freedom and equality for black people, as of yet unrealized in the early 1930s.

Indeed, even the re-imagining of internationalism, a Black Nationalism that worked across national boundaries based on common economic oppression and racial solidarity, employed aspects of productive fiction. In respective pamphlets, discussed more fully in Chapter four, the idea of black nationhood is further developed by looking at nationalist struggles around the globe and particularly referencing anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist struggles in US colonies and in Africa. *Negroes in a Soviet America* also employs some of these tropes to further explicate the importance of black liberation. Specifically, Ford and Allen note that the “oppressed people of the American colonies – the Philippine Islands, Cuba, and of South and Central America who are under the domination of the capitalists of the US” are important allies in the fight for black liberation.\(^7\)


Not all pamphlets worked in the genre of productive fiction. Some pamphlets were grounded in very concrete struggles and only vaguely referred to the Party’s larger speculative work, such as those developed in local chapters to detail local issues such as tenant rent control, or practical works outlining the program of a new organization or a candidate’s political platform. The CPUSA produced many such pamphlets that were not engaged in speculation or productive fiction. However, the Party deftly employed
speculative strategies, what I have here called productive fictions, to ruminate on Party policy and educate on important cultural shifts like issues of race.

Pamphlets using productive fictions are particularly suited for pedagogical pursuits because of their form. The pamphlet form, longer than a journal or a newspaper article, enables authors to further explore ideas, with more space to develop the context, arguments, and examples. Yet, productive fictions, utilizing accessible language, images, and current issues which impact readers’ lives, enable authors to grapple with concrete, practical problems through broader ideas and concepts. Similarly, pamphlets enable these more developed conversations to reach a wide audience within and beyond social movements. Indeed, conversations on race, which are fundamental to the very fabric of social relations in the US, are often ignored or swept under the rug, even in activist circles. Productive fictions are useful in this instance because they facilitate the engagement with sensitive but important topics. In the case of the CPUSA’s engagement with the Black Nation Thesis, the Thesis was used to foreground a cultural conversation about race, nation, and class.

This conversation about the intersection of race, nation, and class, begun in the 1930s but resonating through the CPUSA and other allied organizations’ work well through the 1970s and even today, was partially possible through the productive fiction of the Black Nation Thesis. Indeed, ideas from the Black Nation Thesis are taken up again and again in Party and other leftist groups organizing around race, and by the 1940s, race and gender. As discussed in the brief Coda of this work, the Black Nation Thesis had a profound impact on the 1940s articulations of the superexploitation of black women by Claudia Jones, on trials for many black people facing the American justice system on trumped up charges, and on decades of leftist political social
movements. Of the latter, the impacts on the Black Panther Party are the starkest, with the clear influence of the CPUSA ideas on the Panthers’ ideas of imperialism and the justification for armed self-defense and the occupying army.\footnote{716} Indeed, some groups in the 1970s reprinted entire pamphlets from the 1930s, demonstrating the impact these early works about self-determination and the links between race and class had on later activists.\footnote{717}

The notion of self-determination, though a clunky term for many rank-and-file organizers by all accounts, was incredibly instrumental in changing the way the Party focused on black organizing. Kelley, Solomon, McDuffie, and Naison document the fervor with which the Party undertook organizing in the South and in Harlem, and other places where there were large communities of black people. The shift in Party focus to direct organizing with black people and on issues of importance to many black communities is part of the changes wrought by the Resolution for Self-Determination. This Resolution also enabled the creation of the Black Nation Thesis. That ideas of a black nation and national liberation, drawing directly from the Garvey movement and other black-nationalist sentiments, shifted into a class-conscious framework through the CPUSA, was one of the greatest lasting effects of the Black Nation Thesis.

In the 1930s, notions of race were greatly in flux, with white supremacist and fascist organizations, liberals and progressives, and radical organizing groups all articulating a different rhetoric about race. Most prominent depictions of race focused on sexuality, and often used sexuality to foment racist fears, as was so apparent in the

\footnote{716} See: Carmichael and Hamilton, Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America.

\footnote{717} For example, see: Revolutionary Review Press, Resolution on the Negro Question and the Chicago Worker’s Congress publishing of documents around the 1936 National Negro Congress.
Scottsboro case.\textsuperscript{718} The pamphlets discussed here sharply contrast this representation of race, thinking about the impacts of class on racist violence, how it was linked to sexism, and the ways that race and class implicated each other in the lives of poor black Southerners.\textsuperscript{719} Though these pamphlets are not the only place where race and class were being knitted together,\textsuperscript{720} the CPUSA pamphlets brought this discussion to the public through an organized, influential, and growing social movement. Specifically, the pamphlets’ function and form enabled Communist Party activists to both spread the word about CPUSA activities and values, but also to discuss and disseminate material that suggested a different kind of future.

Communist Party USA Black Nation Thesis pamphlets demonstrate the important space of pamphlets in social movement small press literature. The CPUSA used the longer pamphlet form, and the positioning of pamphlets as more accessible than books but more in-depth than news or journal articles, to open up speculative conversations about race, class, nation, and, eventually, gender. As productive fictions these pamphlets functioned as essential tools for the CPUSA to challenge the prevailing attitudes on race, class, and gender that would have impact on decades of activism to come.

\textsuperscript{718} See Davis, “Myth of the Black Rapist,” in \textit{Women, Race, and Class}, and Giddings, \textit{Ida: A Sword Among Lions}.

\textsuperscript{719} By the 1940s Claudia Jones’ pamphlet and editorial work would also take gender into account, talking about the “super exploitation of Black Women.” This work was building off of earlier, but not as widely read, declarations of “super exploitation” by Maude White and other Party activists. For more on black women in the Party, Jones and White in particular, see and Davies, \textit{Left of Karl Marx} and McDuffie, \textit{Sojourning for Freedom}.

\textsuperscript{720} Du Bois’ foundational work \textit{Black Reconstruction} was also published in 1935.
The Black Nation Thesis had a discernible impact on leftist activism in the decades after 1940. In this brief coda, I trace the Black Nation Thesis through pamphlet literature of the CPUSA in the postwar decades and demonstrate how the Black Nation Thesis as a productive fiction in the 1930s allows for an analysis of its resonances in later material. I note both the rhetorical and the formal aspects of the Black Nation Thesis, specifically how pamphlets use the rhetorical framings of self-determination for black people in the Black Belt as well as the various forms of analysis utilized and developed through the Black Nation Thesis. The 1930s pamphlet material identified key ideas and concepts around which the Communist Party continued to publish pamphlets from the 1940s through the 1970s. Seeking continuity across later decades, I offer a conclusion.

looking at the influence of the Black Nation Thesis on other, non-Party affiliated, leftist groups in the 1970s.

The internal structures, personnel, and focus of the Party changed significantly in the 1940s and 1950s, changes that had a profound impact on the development of the Black Nation Thesis. The respective ideas, concepts, and trends I briefly identify here proceed thematically and along a general chronology, tracing the development of the Party through internal and external challenges. Although the CPUSA produced the most pamphlets on the Black Nation Thesis in the 1930s, around 75, there were on average fifty pamphlets produced each decade through 1970. These pamphlets have received almost no academic analysis and little mention even in histories of these decades and movements.

These later pamphlets continue the CPUSA’s work around issues of importance in the 1930s including trials, black candidates and politicians, and the political and theoretical changes of the CP’s position on the Negro Question. I look at the pamphlets produced around trials and racially motivated frame-ups and electoral campaigns with a particular emphasis on the Smith Act trials of black Party leaders. Other trends also emerge in the later work addressing salient problems including war, gender, and African American history. Many of these pamphlets address World War II and black soldiers, using tropes of masculinism to discuss Jim Crow policies in World War II. I continue looking at gender by thinking about Claudia Jones and Beulah Richardson’s work, noting how crucial it was to the development of an understanding of the “superexploitation” of black women along the axes of race, class, and gender. New for the 1940s are both the

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722 For a complete listing of the pamphlets I have identified, please see the appendix.
predominance of historical pamphlets offering important insights into African American history and culture and theoretical works about the redeployment of the Black Nation Thesis after William Z. Foster ascended as Party Chairman. Across these disparate issues the CPUSA pamphlets continue to deploy the Black Nation Thesis as a productive fiction, useful for speculating on the importance of race for cultural, political, and economic development.

Finally, the reprints of CPUSA pamphlets by other leftist groups in the 1970s are of key importance for understanding the larger impacts of the Black Nation Thesis. Almost fifty years after the original issuing of the Resolution on the Negro Question, the CPUSA’s continued to deploy the Black Nation Thesis as a productive fiction, offering a powerful vision for social movements and activists. On the other hand many of the groups reprinting the Thesis approach it as a guide to revolutionary struggle. I use these reissued pamphlets as a spring board to talk more broadly about the impact of the CPUSA’s Black Nation Thesis outside of the Party itself, looking at its echoes in later pamphlets and ephemera.

As the 1930s drew to a close so did the Popular Front model of organizing for the CPUSA. From the 1939 non-aggression pact between Nazi Germany and the USSR and the invasion of Poland by both sides to the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, the CPUSA was rocked by the changing policies and practices of the Comintern and the USSR. After the war, and the Party policy of unionism without striking, the CPUSA struggled internally with the ousting of Earl Browder and William Z. Foster’s rise again
to Party Chairman in 1945.\footnote{For histories of the CPUSA see: \textit{Foster, History of the Communist Party of the United States}; \textit{Draper, Roots of American Communism}.} Outside influences on the Party included the US government’s renewed crack down on Communist organizers and organizing. From the 1947 Loyalty Oath Program through the 1954 Internal Security Act, the US government essentially outlawed the Communist Party.\footnote{The 1954 Internal Security Act (McCarren Act) defined Communists as agents of the Soviet Union seeking the overthrow of the U.S. Government. Furthermore, it required members of the Party to register their membership with the government. Registration of Communist Party membership meant that one could be arrested under the 1940s Smith Act which made it illegal to be a member of an organization that advocated the overthrow of the government by force and violence. The Act was partially overturned by a 1965 Supreme Court Ruling.} Meanwhile politicians, especially J. Edgar Hoover, Senator Joe McCarthy, and Richard Nixon, relentlessly pursued the CPUSA and Party organizers and particularly targeted many black Party leaders.\footnote{See pamphlets addressing the government’s targeting of Ben Davis, Pettis Perry, Claudia Jones, Paul Robeson, and Henry Winston, among others. Pamphlets produced by the National Committee to Defend Negro Leadership, include: \textit{Jones, Ben Davis Fighter for Freedom}; \textit{Boyer, Pettis Perry: The Story of a Working Class Leader}; \textit{Brown, Stand Up For Freedom! The Negro People Versus the Smith Act}.} By the mid 1950s the CPUSA was a shell of its former self and under heavy surveillance by the FBI.

Throughout this difficult time the CPUSA continued to produce pamphlets to educate members and attempt to influence potential supporters. Pamphlets covered many topics, switching from messages supporting the fight against fascism to pamphlets protesting for peace to supporting the war effort. The continued shifts in Party policy in the early 1940s led to pamphlets that were blatantly contradictory, some advocating for peace, others supporting the war. However, all of these pamphlets, across the changing policy dictates of the Comintern and the CPUSA, built upon underlying systems of thought that did not change. One of these, as evidenced by CPUSA pamphlets of the time, was the importance of black liberation and concern with Jim Crow and its impacts on African American soldiers. Claudia Jones, John Henry Williams, Max Yergan, James
Ford, and Henry Winston all wrote pamphlets on black people and the war, often focusing on the impacts of Jim Crow policies both in the Armed forces and in the US. Pamphlets such as James Ford's *The War and the Negro People*, Pettis Perry’s *The Negro's Stake in This War*, and Claudia Jones’ *Jim Crow In Uniform* offer important ruminations on war and nationalism, and race and gender through analyses that undercut the shifting position of the Comintern.

Claudia Jones’ later pamphlet work for the CPUSA also takes up race and gender intersections. Her powerful pamphlet *An End to the Neglect of the Problems of Negro Women!* is one of the clearest early articulations of the Black Nation Thesis in the 1940s. She introduces the concept of the superexploitation of black women to explore race, class, and gender. This pamphlet builds explicitly on the Black Nation Thesis, using the framework of race and class analysis to understand the position of black women in the US and in the Party. The pamphlet credits Eugene Gordon and Cyril Briggs’ earlier *The Position of Negro Women*, exploring both the economic and the social aspects of the oppression of black women along multiple axes. Another important pamphlet is Beulah Richardson’s *A Black Woman Speaks… of White Womanhood, of White Supremacy*, published in 1951 for the Communist influenced group American Women for Peace, which builds on the Party’s work on white chauvinism and many of the critiques first voiced by Jones.

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727 Beulah Richardson took the stage name Beah Richards and became a well known performer in theater and on television.
Another important trend in CPUSA pamphlets is evident in the series of historical pieces produced in the 1940s. As the war progressed, the CPUSA began to produce a series of pamphlets on important African American historical figures and white leaders who were instrumental to emancipation. Pamphlets include: Earl Conrad’s *Harriet Tubman Negro Soldier and Abolitionist* from 1942, Elizabeth Lawson’s *Thaddeus Stevens: Militant Democrat and Fighter for Negro Rights*, also published in 1942, and *Lincoln’s Third Party* published in 1948, and pieces by and about Fredrick Douglass, such as his own *Negroes and the National War Effort* from 1942.

The historical interventions offered by these pamphlets were theoretically expanded on in other pamphlets such as Doxy Wilkerson’s *The Negro People and the Communists* and Ben Davis’ *The Path to Negro Liberation*. The Party also issued new policies on the Negro Question in pamphlet form including the 1945 *The Communist Party and the Negro People* and *The Communist Position on the Negro Question* in 1947. Important and prolific authors such as Herbert Aptheker, Ben Davis, William Patterson, and Pettis Perry continued trends seen in the 1930s pamphlet literature combining theoretical works and more popular pieces.

Herbert Aptheker began publishing important historical interventions in the 1940s in Marxist academic journals such as *Science and Society*. He did not, however, publish many pamphlets in the Party until the 1950s. One of his first pamphlets, *Negro History: Its Lessons for Our Time*, in 1956, and *Freedom in History*, from 1958, were particularly important discussions of black history written for a more popular audience. Furthermore, Aptheker’s pamphlets *John Brown American Martyr* and *American Civil War*,

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728 Earl Conrad is the Party name of Earl Cohen, another Jewish pamphleteer publishing under a pseudonym.
published in 1960 and 1961, respectively, also built on the Party's established pattern of publishing important historical pamphlets on abolitionists and abolitionist activism. Ben Davis’ pamphlets such as *Communist Councilmen From Harlem, The Path to Negro Liberation,* and *Upsurge in the South: The Negro People Fight for Freedom,* are also important pieces that speak concretely to activists and organizers. Pettis Perry’s *White Chauvinism and the Struggle for Peace* and *The Party of Negro and White* take up the early 1930s work on White Chauvinism for a later audience, showing the continued importance of thinking about the position of white people within the Party. William Patterson’s *We Demand Freedom* and *We Charge Genocide* demonstrate the potential of the CPUSA's platform and show the impacts of the Black Nation Thesis, as well as the change of the Party’s platform, achieved by 1951. The latter pamphlet, *We Charge Genocide,* was prepared as a petition to the United Nations following the adoption of its Convention on Genocide. It documents lynchings and economic oppression of black people and was published the same year with a introduction by W.E.B. Du Bois.

Pamphlets produced around many trials of black men and women on racially motivated charges echo the 1930s pamphlets on the Black Nation Thesis, and more specifically, the Scottsboro Trials. In both their form and their content, pamphlets addressing the lynching of Emmet Louis Till and the trials of Wesley Robert Wells, Willie McGee, the Ingram family, the Trenton Six, and many local cases draw from the successful Scottsboro model.729 In later decades, the CPUSA supported campaigns to Free Angela Davis, and the many pamphlets produced around the trial by Davis, Charlene Mitchell, Lee Goldsmith and others also build on the Scottsboro model and

further develop the CPUSA’s analysis of race through the means of a large trial campaign.\textsuperscript{730} Also similar to Scottsboro, these pamphlets use various methods to connect with wide audiences, including the use of images, simple and direct explanations of systemic injustice, and moving depictions of the accused and their plight.

The usefulness of political campaigns as organizing platforms to discuss race continued from the 1930s; particularly salient were the CPUSA candidates in US Presidential races. When the Party ran a presidential ticket they ran black candidates: Charlene Mitchell, the presidential candidate from 1968, was the first African American woman on a Presidential ballot alongside the white youth leader, Michael Zagarell. Later Jarvis Tyner would be a vice presidential candidate alongside Gus Hall in both 1972 and 1976, to be replaced as Gus Hall’s running mate by Angela Davis in 1980 and 1984.\textsuperscript{731}

Finally, in the late 1960s and the 1970s, the work of the Party and the reprinting of Party pamphlets by other leftist organizations demonstrate the lasting impacts of the Black Nation Thesis as well as its transformations over time. Tracing this history allows for a different accounting of struggle, looking at the resonances between the 1930s and 1970s social movements and the continued need for spaces of political imagination. The Black Nation Thesis held an obvious place of importance for other leftist groups as evidenced through reprintings of CPUSA pamphlets by other organizations, reissuing of unprinted material by CPUSA activists, adoption of rhetoric from the Black Nation Thesis by many groups across the political spectrum of the left, including Maoist, Marxist-Leninist, Trotskyist, and others, and the publication of pieces critical of the

\textsuperscript{730} For more on the trial see: Aptheker, \textit{The Morning Breaks}; Davis, \textit{Angela Davis: An Autobiography.}

\textsuperscript{731} Glasrud and Wintz, \textit{African Americans and the Presidency.}
Black Nation Thesis. These pamphlets raise the questions: What does it mean that these pamphlets, so revolutionary in the 1930s, are being resurrected and reprinted in the 1970s? What are the 1970s activists getting from these pamphlets? It is important to note that many of these groups do not take up the Black Nation Thesis as a productive fiction, but rather as a blueprint for social change, proposing specific plans to achieve black nationhood, though the specifics often differ from the Communist plan.

A full understanding of the legacy of these pamphlet first requires coming to terms with how the Black Nation Thesis had undergone a shift. The most prolific pamphleteer of the time, Henry Winston, offered important insight and revisions of the Black Nation Thesis in his pamphlets such as: *Negro White Unity, Black and White – One Class One Fight*, and *Strategy for a Black Agenda*.\(^{732}\) Perry Nelson, Herbert Aptheker, Claude Lightfoot and others also offered pamphlets on the shifts needed in the Black Nation Thesis to adapt and respond to changing cultural realities. These pamphlets continue the trend of engaging with the Black Nation Thesis as a fiction, an enticement to think about race and class in different ways. Specifically, Winston uses many of the tropes of the Black Nation Thesis to think about who counts as “black” or “Negro.”

Winston’s work contrasts sharply with Harry Haywood’s *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question*, which was issued in 1975. The Party did not publish Harry Haywood’s work, written as a speech for the 16th National Convention in the mid-1950s, as it was critical of the CPUSA position at the time. In this pamphlet Haywood, one of the activists responsible for the development of the statement on self-determination for black people in the Black Belt at the Comintern, lays out his understanding of this

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\(^{732}\) *Strategy for a Black Agenda* was also the title of a book-length work published in 1973, the pamphlet I mention here was a precursor to that work published in 1972 but distilling many of the same arguments.
statement and the party politicking that has lead to the repudiation of the Black Nation Thesis in the later 1950s. Haywood’s pamphlet functions very much like the reprints of CPUSA pamphlets from the 1930s, suggesting the importance of the original Party theorization of the Black Nation Thesis.

The 1970s also saw the wholesale reprinting of the 1930s works, sometimes with a limited introduction reframing some of the important issues or giving the political and cultural history of the 1930s CPUSA and Comintern. For example, in 1975, the Revolutionary Review Press, housed in Washington DC, published the original texts of the 1928 and 1930 resolutions on the Negro Question in the United States as they appeared in the CPUSA press of that time. In his introduction to the reprinting, Lowell Young specifically notes that this reprint is a response to the many “new communist groups that have thus far taken a position on the Black National Question,” quoting and discussing the texts of these resolutions while the resolutions have not been made widely available for thorough study and analysis.\textsuperscript{733} To this end Young and the Revolutionary Review Press do not take a stand on the Black Nation Thesis more than favorably laying out the historical background of its development and passing at the Comintern. Another example is the Chicago Workers Congress reprinting of documents around the 1936 National Negro Congress in 1971. This pamphlet, collecting four pamphlets published in the mid-1930s, is also introduced as a forum to discuss the 1930s tactics and strategy. Though the editors note: “we would be dogmatic to just mechanically copy the tactics of the 1930s” they strongly follow the lead of Harry Haywood and his impassioned analysis of the drive for self-determination.\textsuperscript{734} Similarly, groups such as the

\textsuperscript{733} Young, “Introduction,” \textit{The 1928 and 1930 Comintern Resolution on the Black National Question in the United States}, 2.

\textsuperscript{734} Workers Congress (Marxist-Leninist), \textit{National Negro Congress Documents 1936}, 2.
Communist Labor Party, the Revolutionary Union, the Black Workers Congress, the October League, the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization, the August Twenty-Ninth Movement, and the Congress of Afrikan People, just to name a few, have taken up ideas from the Black Nation Thesis. Some of these groups take up the 1930s rhetoric very vaguely, others basing their political program off of the earlier Communist work.

The pamphlets supporting some of the claims of the Black Nation Thesis also elicited critical responses. Most notable of these is the Racism Research Projects’ *Critique of the Black Nation Thesis*. The Racism Research Project, a group out of Berkeley, CA that came together under this name just for this pamphlet, presents a thorough critique of the Marxist analysis of the Black Nation Thesis. This critique argues that the idea of a nation is illogical in the 1970s, though they direct their attention to the Black Nation Thesis of the 1930s, which is a bit anachronistic. The critique raises interesting questions about the usefulness of some of the nationalist rhetoric, though its main focus is to think critically about race and racism and come up with an analysis of race that is useful for their time.

Other aspects of 1970s organizing and activism also drew upon the rhetoric of the Black Nation thesis. Specifically, the rhetoric of the Black Panther Party, and the rise of Black Power, highlight resonances of the important articulations of race, class, and imperialism and demonstrate the lasting power of the CPUSA’s Black Nation Thesis.735

Some of these resonances are critiqued in Henry Winston’s pamphlet addressing the Black Panther Party, *The Crisis in the Black Panther Party*. Others become visible in a comparison of the 1967 text by Kwame Ture (Stokely Charmichael) and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, a key text to the development of the Black Panther Party, with 1930s works such as James Allen’s *An American Negro* and Allen and James Ford’s *Negroes in a Soviet America*.

*Black Power* and the Black Panther Party are stark examples of the influence of the Black Nation Thesis on later groups. Of course, the Panthers were also drawing on many other sources, specifically the work of Frantz Fanon, the writings of Mao Tse-Tung, and other Black Nationalists. The impact of the CPUSA’s Black Nation Thesis on these thinkers has not been studied and thus it is difficult to suggest a direct link between the rhetoric of the Panthers and the CPUSA. However, there are many examples of how framings either developed or popularized by the CPUSA are further elaborated in *Black Power* and the work of the Black Panthers. One clear example is the impact of the CPUSA ideas on the Panthers’ concepts of imperialism and the justification for armed self-defense and the occupying army.\(^{736}\) The CPUSA’s language about the role of American imperialism in controlling the black population in the South, for example in Allen’s *An American Negro*, resonates with the Panthers’ emphasis on armed resistance to resist American Imperialism.\(^{737}\) More broadly, the rhetoric of the Black Power movement takes strongly from the earlier struggles: arguments around nationalism, though by no means started in the 1930s, gained momentum through the Black Nation Thesis, more


so, the call for self-determination directly links back to the call for self-determination for black people in the Black Belt, building on this legacy for a new movement.738

The Black Panther Party’s position of armed self-defense also sparked discussion within the CPUSA. As one of many responses, the CPUSA published a pamphlet *Racism and Reaction in the United States: Two Marxian Studies* in 1971. This book collected Herbert Aptheker’s keynote speech at the Convention of the Black Panther Party in Oakland in 1970 as well as an essay by Bettina Aptheker about the social function of prisons. These pieces, alongside other important CPUSA and Black Panther Party texts, demonstrate the conversations between the two social movements, many of which circled the tenants of the Black Nation Thesis.

For decades after its initial articulation, the Black Nation Thesis provided a space, sometimes fictionalized, for activists to work out ideas of race and racism. Pamphlets continued to be a primary site for the development of this work, especially in the CPUSA but also across other social movements. Pamphlets also demonstrate the lasting impact of the Black Nation Thesis as a productive fiction that challenged hegemonic beliefs and practices. Looking carefully at CPUSA Black Nation Thesis pamphlets from the 1940s through the 1970s particular trends develop and others continue. Ruminations on war, gender, and African American history, combined with theoretical works and pamphlets addressing specific trials and political campaigns, serve as important analytical sites to understand the continuing development of the Black Nation Thesis. The legacy of CPUSA pamphlets reverberates through the Party’s

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pamphlets as well as other leftist groups, works on race and racism in both aspects of form and content. Indeed, the Black Nation Thesis did important work by opening up a space to envision justice around issues of race, class, and gender and the end of inequality. Finally, the persistence of Black Nation Thesis pamphlets demonstrates that pamphlets are important tools for social movements. Cheaply produced and distributed, pamphlets provide space for critical analysis in accessible form, address concrete issues while placing them in larger frameworks, and open up productive fictions for social movements.
APPENDIX
LIST OF PAMPHLETS

Note on the Pamphlet List

This is a preliminary document based on my research of Communist Party pamphlets on the Black Nation Thesis undertaken primarily at the University of California Davis Walter Goldwater Radical Pamphlet Collection in the Special Collections Library, the Smithsonian Institution and Library of Congress, and the New York University Tamiment Library and Wagner Labor Archive, especially the Reference Center for Marxist Studies Collection.

I define a pamphlet as a single signature booklet with a simple binding (stapled, tied, or glued spine.) I have not included larger booklets of multiple signatures, though there is a strong argument for their inclusion based on their small size and ephemeral quality. Pamphlets have been divided into those published by the Communist Party USA and affiliated organizations, such as the International Labor Defense, on the subject, defined broadly, of the Black Nation Thesis; those published by the communist Party USA and affiliated organizations on other topics, though these pamphlets might also include mention of issues tied to the Black Nation Thesis or black Communities in the US; and pamphlets published by other organizations.

Generally, I follow the attribution of authorship, publisher, and date developed in the Reference Center for Marxist Studies, the library of the Communist Party USA, which is now archived, in its entirety, at the Tamiment Library. Some pamphlets were published multiple times. In this instance I try to use the first publication date. Many pamphlets do not include an author on the title page. If an author is refereed to later in the pamphlet, I include the attribution here.
Communist Party USA and Affiliated Organizations
Black Nation Thesis Pamphlets


A Political Biography of Angela Davis. Los Angeles: National United Committee To Free Angela Davis, nd.


*Civil Rights Congress Tells the Story...* New York: Civil Rights Congress, nd.


*Communist Call to Africa*. np: np, nd.


Davis, Angela. Lectures on Liberation. New York: Committee to Free Angela Davis, nd.

Davis, Angela and Fania Davis. The Black Family the Ties that Bind. np.: n.p, nd.


Deadly Parallel. New York: Civil Rights Congress, nd.


Fight Racism - Overtur the Bakke Decision. Berkeley: National Committee to Overturn the Bakke Decision, nd.


Ford, James W. Imperialism destroys the people of Africa. New York: International Pamphlets, 1934?.


*Freed By the People*. San Francisco: National United Committee To Free Angela Davis, 1972.


*Help Free Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram from Georgia “Justice”*. New York: National Committee to Free the Ingram Family, nd.


*In Honor of Paul Robeson*. New York: Communist Party USA, nd.

Jackson, Esther Cooper. *This is My Husband Fighter for His People Political Refugee*. Brooklyn: National Committee to Defend Negro Leadership, 1953.


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Patterson, William H. *Sikeston Hitlerite Crime Against America*. St. Louis: Communist Party of Missouri, 1942.


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The Case of Claude Lightfoot. Chicago: Lightfoot Defense Committee, nd.

The CIO and the Negro Worker. Washington, DC: Congress of Industrial Workers, 1941.


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*Victory Decisions of the United States Supreme Court in the Case of Angelo Herndon, April 1937*. New York: International Labor Defense, nd.


*War in Ethiopia: An Interview with Teche Hawariate, Ethiopian Ambassador*. New York: Harlem Section of the Communist Party, nd.


*What the South Means to the Nation*. np.: National Education Department, Communist Party, USA, nd.


“Wisdom, Justice and Moderation” the Case of Angelo Herndon. np.: Joint Committee to Aid the Herndon Defense, 1935.


**Communist Party and Affiliated Organization Pamphlets**


*Buddy, Can You Spare the Time?*. Chicago: Communist Party of Illinois, nd.


Dunn, Robert W. *Spying on Workers.* New York: International Pamphlets, 1933.


Thomas, Martha. *High Cost Living Program of Struggle Against the High Cost of Living*. Chicago: Workers Library Distributers, 1935.


**Other Organization Pamphlets**

*A New Day for the Colored Woman Worker.* np.: n.p, 1919.


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- Herndon, Angelo Papers
- International Labor Defense Records
- Manchanda, Claudia, Collector. Claudia Jones Memorial Collection
- Moore, Richard B. Papers
- Perry, Pettis Papers
- Sherwood, Marika, Collector. Claudia Jones Research Materials

Smithsonian Institution Museum of African American History
- National Museum of African American History and Culture

Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Archives, New York University
- Communist Party of the United States of American Collection
- Communist Pamphlets. Radical Pamphlets in American Collections.
- Printed Ephemera Collection
- Reference Center for Marxist Studies
- Twentieth Century Political Pamphlet Collection
- The Radical Pamphlet Literature Collection, 1817-1970

University of California, Davis, Special Collections Library
- Walter Goldwater Radical Pamphlet Collection


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