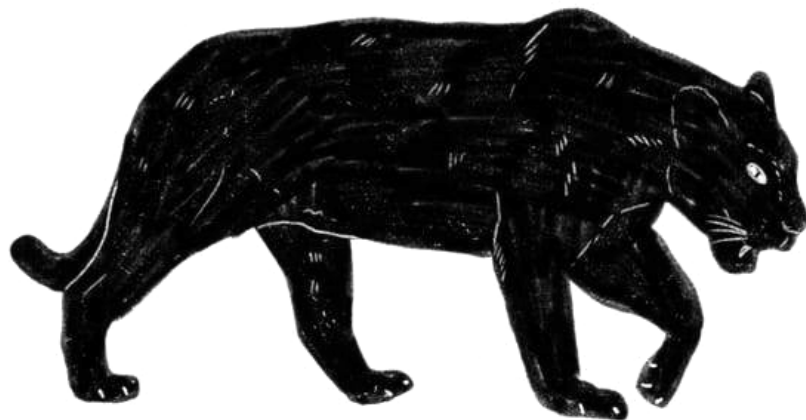


# **MASS Educational Program**

*Theories, Concepts, and Key Vocabulary*



**Week 6: Lowndes County and the Road to Black Power**

**03/01/25**

*MASS screened “Lowndes County and the Road to Black Power”, a documentary about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), their start in Lowndes County, and how their grassroots organizing led to larger fights for black power. This is summarized from discussion that followed.*

## Sustainability & History

### The Regeneration of Grassroots Organizing

- *How do we build something that will outlive us?*
  - If we do our job right, we won't be needed here anymore
- Grassroots organizing regenerates itself in nature
- We must remain knowledgeable and constantly be learning about the people and movements before us to ensure legacies and historical struggles are remembered and referenced in current movements
  - future generations must know the strength and sacrifices of the past movements that got us here today.
  - This includes making sure information is correct and well-sourced, as oppressive forces very often will either distort, lie about, or completely erase history conflicting with their white supremacist worldview and settler-colonial ideology.
  - Maintaining original revolutionary ideals, preserving and communicating their true objectives
- We're putting in place traditions and organizations that will be maintained after we die, and help people really understand that we are doing this for a reason, as people have literally died and put their lives on the line fighting for the same things we are.
  - Continuing the struggle with the martyrs in mind creates a level of respect, obligation, and dedication to the cause that everyone should value.

- As much as it doesn't seem like a very extreme or current struggle (especially in this beautiful neighborhood with the community that's already put into place) understanding that the only reason we're here and have this community is because of people that have died, just making that history be known and weaving it into our daily and long-term activism.

## **How do you integrate into a burning house?**

### **Building Beyond the System**

People have this idea that we have to conform ourselves to work in this (oppressive) system, instead of trying to create something new; we have been stripped of our imagination of a different reality. Education is really important in learning about the past, what was actually going on in those organizations. What we can learn from rebellions/organizations from the past is that there's ways to work outside of the system and create our own.

### **The Concept of the Leader**

- People that feel empowered don't feel the need to look towards that one powerful figure that's going to lead them, they feel the need to act upon it themselves.
- Strong people don't need strong leaders, when people can value what they do, they don't have to wait on someone else to do it for them
- A vital component of organizing is understanding that change comes from collective action, not reliance on a single leader.

*Leaders can be helpful in raising morale, “hyping people up”, providing inspiration or slogans, keeping a meeting moving smoothly, or a speech.*

- At the end of the day what matters is how many people you got, and how down they are to truly help each other.
- That ties into very much like the concept of thinking about how can we build something in this community that will outlast us
  - Community media, educational programs, newsletters, community meetings, all the different things that we do to

imbue this sense that *they* are the ones that will push history forward, or allow it to fall back into barbarism.

- Draw on the history and what was successful in the past in empowering people, investigate and address hyper-local oppression in the community

## **Documentation in Preserving Struggles**

- This documentary, “Lowndes County and the Road to Black Power” was specifically interesting because of their combination of modern-day scholars analyzing history, as well as real people who were in the revolutionary organizations that the film was about
- This created a more objective, impactful and meaningful sense of history, as it seems like there was no part of the story missing
  - A movie with only scholars and historians may feel disconnected from the grassroots organizing going on
  - A movie with only interviews from people involved may lack historical context and international/theoretical analysis.
  - This movie also included some white women that were living in Lowndes county at the time, giving space for the viewer to understand the tangible aura of racism present in the county at the time (and still today)
- Being able to see them fighting and protesting in the archival footage is thanks to those documenting the moments in real time, moments that could’ve been lost and forgotten but aren’t because of these videographers and documentaries

# Strategies for Involvement

## Tenant Organizing

- New (unaffordable) housing developments are constantly threatened to be put up (with no objections from Shahana Hania), but many buildings have already been put up in Kensington.
- How do we get up in there and start some tenant unions, because a bunch of people living in one building, it's like the easiest organizational body ever – you're each other's neighbors
  - Even though we oppose them being built because there's so much empty housing and we know that it's only to enrich the developers anyway.
  - How can we transform that into something that is empowering to the community and to a detriment of the developer?
- Housing rights as hyperlocal focus – it's something that is a common factor in the country, in all of Western world right now, because it's a commodity like everything else in our society,
- There's a lot of laws that were originally put in place to protect people and their housing rights, which are now all helping developers exploit tenants now
  - A comrade knows about a bunch of housing codes, he explained that some laws put in place during the Robert Moses/ Jane Jacobs era were done to specifically 'protect' property, segregate minorities from historical sites in the city.
- **More Than A Single Issue** – how do we take that force of tenants fighting for a lower rent and transform it into tenants fighting for the building, abolishing landlords, etc.
- Being stuck in this f-cked up situation doesn't mean we don't have the power to get people to think about new solutions
  - capitalism hates the idea that we can work to create a world that doesn't rely on exploiting as many people and natural resources as possible

## Balancing Structure

*How can we organize and communicate effectively with different groups of people organizing ultimately for the same thing?*

- Starting a separate list for activists, organizers, people with their own knowledge, connects, and expertise to bring to the table
- In the case we start tenant organizing, instead of hitting 100 people individually, we could hit 10 people that have networks of 100, 200 people, then boom we have a protest with like 500 people.

## Shared History & Struggle

- Using collective and local history to connect with neighbors, ask them questions and learn about the neighborhood from people who could be living there for 60 years!
- **Kensington Specific** – The Prospect Park Expressway displaced 66,00 people when it was constructed. Majority of those 66,000 people were minorities
  - Similar situation with the construction of the Cross-Bronx Expressway
- Speaking about these realities in the neighbors in which they happened can help people understand their blocks history, as well as understand the problems that the community is collectively facing
- Large-scale developers don't seem like a real threat to most people living comfortably in Brooklyn/ New York in general, but people at the first community meeting seemed very concerned with this issue so It's hopeful.

## Media and Communications

*HYPOTHETICAL CONVO – ALL IN THE SPIRIT OF LEARNING*

- **Graffiti:** Writing strategic large-scale messages, targeting corporate developments, public places, etc.
  - Use painting to start to get people to think about things, specific phrases, statistics, information, anything

- Obviously illegal to do and defacing property, this is speculation to explore different methods of communication
- Someone on their way to work or walking in their neighborhood can now be exposed to new information
  - “I didn't understand the statistic about the history of all of New York City and now damn I got to do something about it”
- Graffiti influences the thought process of: What the f- is this fool doing or why is he doing it and like why are people even writing on walls in the first place?
  - People will be looking, especially in places that aren't already filled with graffiti
- **Cartoons/ Illustrations:** zines, pamphlets, posters,
  - A comrade revealed she found out about us through some zines we had at a music show, reflecting their effectiveness in snappy information, easy-to-understand pieces, and eye-catching drawing
  - Strategic topics like rent control, vacant apartments all over the city, and who's actually benefiting from the manufactured housing crisis

## Go Outside

How is community fostered? One could argue it's as simple as **being outside.**

- Being on the sidewalk, interacting with people and becoming part of each other's lives. It's about reaching people where they already are, rather than expecting them to come into revolutionary spaces.
- Bridging the gap between individual and collective interests – meeting people literally where they are.
- Creating engaging, welcoming events – art nights, jam sessions, etc
  - These can serve as initiation points for political discussions, instead of structured educational events or media screenings
  - Goal is to have an environment where people naturally start having these conversations.
- We can make a rule keep your phone outside, get people together and not be attached to these things that very much control us

- I think it would create a immediate like change within community
- Once more people understand how important like community is and knowing your neighbors, they become more impassioned to help each other
- Helping them come to understanding that just because things are a certain way and have been for your whole life, doesn't mean that's how it should be

## People Used To Be More Resilient

### What's Different Now?

- Looking back in history it seems as tho people were more resilient and active in the struggle for liberation,
  - "I feel like a lot of times people are just Talk, they want to do something but they're not really doing anything, or they believe in these things but they're not spending time or taking action with it."
- Online culture makes this worse – anonymizing opinions and allowing for posters to never step foot outside to defend their views
- **Pandemic Impact**
  - Being isolated became normal and suddenly we had to teach ourselves how to cope with being alone all of the time
  - People lost energy and desire for socializing, community building, being out with people
- **Social Media Impact**
  - TikTok, Instagram allow 'doom scrolling', a pattern of endlessly scrolling through apps chasing a dopamine hit you'll never get again
  - People will express their hatred and anger through comments or posts, creating fights out of thin air
- Rebuilding a sense of real-world community is important if people want to start taking real action for collective liberation



## **Revolution as an Aesthetic vs. Action**

- This rise of individualized online culture changes how people engage with activism, often taking on a very performative affect
- Example: the romanticization of revolutionary visuals, taking inspiration from real art made during revolution and refusing to engage with deeper political discussion or analysis
  - Tiktok POV's of Gen-Z being part of fictional movements like those in Les Mis, The Hunger Games, etc.
- Centering themselves in these fantasies of 'storming the capital' or revolutions in ways to make them look cool, not going past surface level thinking or analysis
- No change in how they act in the real world or further thought, the revolution is only on tiktok for them

## **Blame and Scapegoating**

- Passing blame to marginalized communities is another technique used by capitalism to try to stop any possibility of class solidarity.
  - Immigrants, trans people, etc, can almost be considered the new communists of the 60's
  - This is effective and dangerous because:
    - There's a whole social class of people that are starting to lose things (rights, money, power), so they look to their neighbor with less and say "whew at least I'm better than him", in an effort to maintain any semblance of a power structure
    - Instead of challenging real power structures, they turn against those with even less.
- **Documentary Example:**
  - A white woman in the film said she grew up around people of color and "had no problem with them", which seems obvious since they were taking advantage of them and stripped them of autonomy!
  - They were benefiting from those people's labor and exploiting them
- This reflect today's administration's treatment of immigrants: a class of people who's physical labor keeps this country afloat who are constantly blamed and scapegoated for problems that are American-Borne
  - Reinforcing systemic oppression rather than addressing real causes

# Re-Education

## Private Property

- Laws were put in place to protect private property, things like conservation.
- It's so important we do this educational program/study/understand what we're fighting for and what we're fighting against
- As socialists we do oppose the institution of private property but
  - It's important to understand why
  - We need to know the difference between private and personal property
- When we don't think or study deeply enough, it's easy to make mistakes politically, organizationally, and socially
  - Especially in this country since we come up learning about history in a messed up twisted way

*“We had the struggle in Lowndes where they were able to win certain positions and gain certain power, now it becomes a national struggle against the racist system in the first place”*

*– paraphrased from Kwame Ture*

## Conservation

- Nature conservation as a concept is a weapon of White Supremacy
  - National Parks, “conservation movements”, and other colonial/settler orgs consist of expelling indigenous people from their land – “conserving” for who?
  - They impose idea that the ‘wild lands should remain untouched’, not understanding that they’ve been taken care of for thousands of years before by indigenous tribes
  - A mowed lawn isn’t necessarily a sign of it being taken care of, a natural lawn is more useful
  - Conservation movement is used as a shield by white supremacist governments, oil companies, different multinational corporations that devastate land

- Land grabs, exploitations, displacement, industrialization
- The system will use any tool at its disposal to co-opt a movement to maintain capitalist values.
- “Developer” is too harmless of a term for the destruction caused by land exploitation

## **Reformism**

- Finding a balance between what motivates people (the direct issues they face, like housing) while maintaining political principles and deepening understanding toward revolutionary movement.
- Example: The peasant movement in China before the revolution had big organizations that came together to push for higher wages or lower rice prices.
  - They would wage a struggle, win a small victory, and then be satisfied, even though the fundamental power structure (a small percentage of people owned all the rice) didn't change
- Mao and the Chinese communist party empowered the masses to go beyond the simple reform of ‘let's bring down the price of rice’, to push for a revolutionary change where the rice-growers control its price in the first place.
- The ruling class grants concessions to pacify movements, making revolutionary change more difficult.
  - The more that are granted, the more comfortable people become, squashing ability for them to see an alternative, the ability to imagine the possibility of revolutionary change
- An undervalued aspect of organizing is showing people not only what's possible, but what's needed, highlighting the reality of their conditions and searching for viable alternatives
- The ruling class grants concessions to pacify movements, making revolutionary change more difficult

*“Revolution seems impossible until it happens, and then everybody thinks it was inevitable” - paraphrased quote*

# Capitalism L

## It Doesn't Work

- There is no successful example of capitalism, its barely 200 yrs old
- Between 3 and 5 billion people don't even have \$5 per day
- Understanding the actual true history of this country – how little of it has been successful for general population – is important
  - this system has never existed in history successfully before
- Capitalism requires brutal and constant colonial violence, exploitation of indigenous people like Native Americans for example
  - Crazy white settlers deciding to displace a whole civilization, kill them, all rape them, then declare “This is our dream” and haven’t stopped since
- This system is not sustainable (pandemics, financial crashes, global warming, increased floods globally) and if we are not able to organize against it, it will descend into barbarism

## Self Preservation through Individualism

- The system preserves itself by fostering individualism, convincing people they can escape it through personal success and hard work
- It creates this superstructure, societal institution, that prevents collective struggle, reinforcing capitalism’s micro and macro structures.
- People know deep down capitalism doesn't work, but we're all conditioned to be a little bourgeois, living in a capitalist society
  - We have the power to overthrow this shit, unlearn those values. Individually, it does not feel like it, but in these types of situations we can start to understand it.

## The Global South Rejects

The global south is rejecting capitalist systems as they recognize its failures; people are waking up to the fact that the system benefits nobody but the people in power. “Trickle Down” isn’t real. The wealthiest nations are losing influence as their tactics become more apparent.

## **Question: Why do so many people that are uncomfortable think they are comfortable?**

### **Self-Justifying Discomfort & Resilience**

- It's easy to be like “I'm f-cked I'm gonna stay f-cked”, easier to accept your condition and convince yourself everything is fine
- Getting stuck (or conditioned) into the mindset of “this is the best it's gonna get”, no imagination for anything outside of the system
- Similarly to how the brain processes trauma, your brain will justify pain (discomfort) to almost make yourself feel better short term
  - zoning out to protect yourself in a painful situation is similar to the way we block out the pains of capitalism because we aren't able to picture a different reality
  - Your brain creating protections not necessarily in the best interest of long term liberation, but for your own sanity in the moment/ in the reality that is this capitalist hellscape
- The role of scientific socialism is to say it's not about morality, it's about each person's experience with their material conditions, education, etc.
- **Indomitable Human Spirit**
  - For example people in Gaza suffering under a genocide and still finding community and hosting classes in a bombed building with no ceiling, all the kids are paying attention and learning how to do math, finding moments of joy.
  - The human ability to adapt and be resilient

### **Thankful but Never Satisfied**

- Once you reach a certain understanding of how the world works, that your personal struggle is the world's struggle, your interests as a human being naturally become tied to uplifting the human race.
  - Recognizing that we definitely aren't supposed to be living in capitalist society

- The difference between denying your own feelings and struggles and accepting the things that you're not going through, using that to help others
- **Turning privilege into strength:** “I'm not going through this so that means like I'm a little bit stronger and I can move forward and do something else”
  - Versus “I'm not going through anything bad, why am I upset”

## “The American Dream”

- Second or third generation immigrants often *want* to believe in the dream because of the sacrifices their parents made to get them here in the first place.
  - Trying to undo this narrative is hard, it feels like dismissing their struggle
- Example: Comrade’s grandpa left his family in Croatia when he was 16 years old to escape the draft, then came back for the first time married with a kid 20 years later.
  - The sacrifice of “integrating into a burning house” and generations of attempting to build stability in a system of exploitation makes it hard to say “this isn't working”
  - It’s difficult for people to accept that what they built was never meant to serve them
- Capitalism forces people into survival mode
  - a parent with two kids making a life for her family might know there’s something beyond that struggle but doesn't have the physical capacity to imagine or fight for something different
- People want to escape but don’t because we have to work, feed ourselves, survive no matter how we feel about it

## Petty Bourgeois & Neoliberalism

- Mao understood early on that the petty bourgeois mentality prevents collective struggle and reinforces capitalism’s emphasis on individualism, sidelining the importance of community
  - “I'm going to make it for myself, I'm a small guy, I'm not going thru all that”

- “yeah, ideally that's how it would be, this is what it is right now, so what I'm going to do is try to make the most money that I can and I'll escape the system that way”
- “I'm gonna work myself out of this and I'm gonna make as much money as I can and I don't agree with the people around me and I don't feel a sense of community so I'm just gonna retreat into myself”

## Tech and Digital Proletarianization

Tech companies profit off of every second you spend scrolling on social media, it's capitalism's biggest tool of distracting you, keeping you on your phone and out of your community

- “Bed-rotting”: Gen-Z term for wasting away in bed on your phone
- In political terms, scrolling should be regarded as work
  - The labor of scrolling mindlessly, interacting (even scrolling past) ads and campaigns that directly fund the companies
  - Creating content that drives traffic/interaction, and turning yourself into a meme bot that regurgitates content all day
- If it's free, then you're the product

## Internationalism

### The Impact of Imperialism

- Imperialism and its impacts are undeniable. We must listen to and prioritize the needs of those who struggle the most, especially immigrants who run this country but get nothing in return.
- Understanding our privileges helps us see how essential it is to fight alongside the most oppressed.

*“Imperialism has laid its body over the world, the head in Eastern Asia, the heart in the Middle East, its arteries reaching Africa and Latin America. Wherever you strike it, you damage it, and you serve the World Revolution.”*

*- Palestinian revolutionary and novelist Ghassan Kanafani*

## Pan-Africanism and Global Unity

- Something that emerged legitimately throughout the recording of this documentary is the shift in focus from hyperlocality to internationalism (see *Kwame Ture* quote on page 9)
  - Ture's work emphasized global unity among Black people and supported liberation through collective effort.
- He makes the point that if people in Africa are not doing good, Black people in this country will never be doing good
  - That concept extends to the entire Global South – we have to keep the focus on the most oppressed.
- Socialism existing in one country by itself will never fully succeed, it needs to be an international phenomenon or it will be crushed. We must be internationalists in that regard.

## Gangs?

- Groups officially classified as “terrorist” like the cartels in Mexico, are demonized by US media
  - They are sometimes highly regarded in their communities, performing duties people think a government should be responsible for.
- The US government (FBI and CIA) are literally a gang, terrorizing people domestically and internationally

Being careful in how we perceive such groups, the news sources we get information from, critically examining narratives being pushed.

## Revolution is International

- **Marx & Engels** theorized that revolution was most likely to occur in the industrial core, which at that time was Germany, the UK, and London.
- Since then the productive forces that generate goods and services we use have moved significantly to the Global South and the periphery.
- We're seeing the results of that politically, the most revolutionary and politically engaged societies are now in the Global South
  - Africa, India, Bangladesh, and South America.



- **Ghassan Kanafani**, a Palestinian academic, spoke about the tendrils of imperialism, explaining that every time you ‘cut one off’ you serve the world revolution.
  - As we observe, different countries in the Global South are revolting, kicking out the multinational corporations that have been exploiting their resources and wealth.
    - These countries are not poor – they are rich.
    - It’s the people who are poor, they have been robbed, exploited, and stolen from.
  - For example the **Sahel Region** and other countries nationalizing mining operations and creating programs to benefit their own people.
  - As this happens, the imperial core (US and European centers of imperialism) will suffer because we benefit from the exploitation of the rest of the world
  - With that suffering conditions in the imperial core will worsen, revolutionary potential will grow.
- Liberals resist these ideas of international revolution, as they see this as something that will negatively impact people in the US, and that is their main concern.
- As organizers we should support this, even though the people in this country may suffer as a result; people everywhere else will benefit
  - Eventually the people here will benefit too, they will fight back & realize their issues are directly tied to imperialism.
- The fact that the US is only 4% of the world’s population but still controls 25% of the world’s resources is proof of this theft.