

Latino named Tony, agreed with Bill's assessment, but added, "let us face the demon head on." There are now over two million Americans who are incarcerated. It is time to face the demon head on.

---- **Manning Marable** is Professor of History and Political Science and Director of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia University, and Member of the CCDS Advisory Board.

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## Racism and Its Impact on Nationalities in the USA

**Elizabeth (Betita) Martinez**

Good morning, buenos dias.

As Charlene mentioned in her talk, there is no way to separate racism from capitalism. I would add that there is also no way to separate racism from colonialism and imperialism. For the United States, that began when the land of the Native American peoples—a whole hemisphere—was taken from them in the most brutal form of colonialism ever seen. Part of the stolen land formed the basis for what is now the U.S., and it was extended with the takeover of half of Mexico in 1848 through a war provoked by President Polk. Later came the takeover of Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and other Pacific islands.

This colonization was carried out in the name of Manifest Destiny, which said the U.S. as a superior white nation should dominate the hemisphere. We can see a direct link between that spirit and what's going on today in U.S. foreign policy. Manifest destiny is raging all over the world.

It is important to see the linkage between colonization and slavery as foundation stones of this country and its capitalism. That linkage appears in connections between the historical experiences of different peoples, including the ways we have often struggled together against common oppressors. Seeing that linkage is key to building the movement that Manning Marable was talking about.

We don't know our histories well enough to realize that there is a tradition of alliances, as between Blacks and Seminole Indians in Florida, or white frontiersmen and servants with slaves in Bacon's Rebellion of 1676. That uprising so frightened the plantation owners that, after it was defeated, the whites were given the right to carry arms, own land, be in militias, and other privileges. The white elite had perceived correctly that a black/white alliance was a very serious threat; it had to be eliminated by privileging whiteness.

An important black/brown alliance also developed when Mexicans helped some 4,000 slaves escape across what became the Texas border in the early 1800's. By that time Mexico had abolished slavery. When the slave owners came to get back their "property" (worth \$3.2 million at the time) the Mexicans resisted those armed efforts and defended the ex-slave settlements.

Today relations between peoples of color have become more complex for various reasons. A major reason is, of course, demographic changes. In 1990-1998, two thirds of the growth of the US population was from African-American, Native Ameri-

cans, and Latinos. California's population is already a majority people of color. New York City is now 27% Latino. Asians are the fastest growing population of color and San Francisco is already 31% Asian. Latinos are 27% of New York City and 47% of the population of Los Angeles. Half the people in California were born in Mexico. We can expect the whole country to become a majority people of color during this century.

That growth, particularly of Latinos, is striking also because it can be found everywhere, including the southeast: North Carolina, Georgia, Florida—areas where workers have been predominantly African American for many years. The population changes are sometimes accompanied by tension between the native-born and migrant workers. It is therefore good to see southern organizers making efforts to create understanding and solidarity between Blacks and Latinos against common enemies, particularly as workers. They have been ahead of California and other areas in that respect.

Common enemies include not only exploitation on the job but also the forces of state repression, from police abuse to anti-immigrant agencies. (Remember that the Border Patrol is in fact the nation's largest police force.) Efforts to build solidarity should include shared information about California propositions like 187 and 227 as well as other new state and federal laws. Often deadly attempts to reduce immigration have multiplied, with the U.S. military playing a major role, such as helping to build a new triple fence on the border near San Diego. INS policy has forced migrant workers to try to cross in areas where there's less vigilance by the Border Patrol, so they freeze to death in remote mountains or die of heat in desert areas. A recent Houston report cites over 1000 deaths in the last few years.

That's one way to cut down on immigration. Just make 'em go die somewhere out of sight. So much for trying to get work and feed your family back home.

Here in San Francisco, Latino day laborers have been under attack in their long struggle to get a site where a proper hiring hall can be located so they do not have to stand on the street hoping to be picked up for work. As a result of harassment by the police chief and city authorities refusing to approve the site the workers have identified as suitable, we still see the line-up of men who come from Mexico to a place that used to be Mexico on a street named for one of this country's great labor leaders—Cesar Chavez, a Mexican. Their struggle is now 10 years old.

All this makes it clear why some Blacks have said "immigrants are the new n\*\*\*\*\*s," and we must fight together, not against each other.

This is not to deny the historical differences or to minimize the material conditions that have made African Americans resentful about job competition, for example. First is the general economic crisis, which makes any kind of cutbacks particularly painful. There's also just plain perception. You go to a hotel in the South, where the service staff all used to be African American and now they're Latino. Or a Latino goes to a gas station in the Mission and sees Vietnamese or Cambodian attendants where there used to be Latinos. These are visual realities and should not be ignored simply because, according to a 1997 report by the National Research Council, job loss from immigration was less than 1% for Black men (no statistics for women). These are realities we have to be looking at. We can't

just wish the problems away; at the same time we can't just be negative about them.

Electoral politics is another area of competition, which is increasing from New York to Los Angeles. One result already seen is the election of a conservative white candidate because of competition between black/brown/or Asian candidates who may well be more progressive.

Language can also be an area of conflict. For example you go to an office, a workplace, where some workers are Spanish-speaking, and folks who don't speak Spanish may feel, "Oh, they're talking about me." Or they might say, "Talk English; you're in America now." That calls for discussion, explanation and understanding about how language has been used to negate the value of peoples of color and keep them divided. Think of all the debate about "black English." Black and Brown can and should come together in opposition to language oppression. And let me add a postscript on this: America is a hemisphere, not a country. Calling this country "America" enshrines manifest destiny, a synonym for imperialism, and it particularly insults indigenous and Latino peoples. All the colors should unite in refusing to use that term for the U.S.

In working for solidarity, we must recognize how class can be a divisive force. As Latinos become citizens and new generations emerge in the U.S., many move into the middle class. They start looking down on their own lower-class folks. So, during the so-called Rodney King riots, you could hear aspiring middle-class Latinos saying, "The ones who riot, they're just immigrants." Those same class attitudes often extend to blacks.

For African Americans and Latinos, there are so many reasons why people should be uniting against common enemy forces. Year after year, statistical reports confirm that. In terms of poverty, health care, education, job status, red-lining, housing; police abuse and racial profiling, those two communities are at the bottom of the list, sometimes along with white women. So we do have all these contradictions to deal with, carefully, but we must also look for the positive side.

I truly believe in our potential for a historic, new solidarity. You can see a spirit of oneness among youth, and I think that culture is a major part of it. We can credit the politically radical hip hop folks for much of this; they have been doing very multicultural, multiracial work for years. We also see youth of color coming together on educational issues like ethnic studies, challenging the SAT, the underfunding of schools particularly in Black and Brown neighborhoods, and so forth.

The Left in general has to be taking a stand to build those alliances, to combat those forces of division, to make everybody see what we have in common as well as our differences. This certainly includes white activists and organizers. More and more whites are learning about white supremacy, including in their own often-unconscious attitudes. More and more are attending workshops to challenge white supremacy. White folks should challenge white supremacy, just like men should challenge male supremacy, right?

So, go for it. All of us. All the time. Thank you.

---- *Betita Martínez* has been an anti-racist activist for 40 years and is the author of six books on the struggle for social justice. Currently she is director of the Institute for Multiracial Justice in San Francisco, and is an editor of War Times.



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