

to inject themselves into the political process of their communities. There's immigrants who are working on jail and prison reform issues. There's immigrants working on gentrification and housing, and in setting up their own social services. So, it's happening, it's hard, and I think that, similar to what I said earlier, what we're trying to do is make it such that it's not happening in isolation to what's happening more broadly on all of those fronts.

Closing Remarks Mark Solomon

Whatever we were going to do in one day to explore and reawaken an understanding of the depth and the magnitude of race and racism would be insufficient just given the limitations of time, the complexities of history, and the urgency of the present situation. But - because of the very challenging nature of all these factors, we decided to proceed - to invite as many people as wish to attend, to engage, to listen and speak. Because there was a strong feeling that in the midst of an indisputable crisis, we are faced with a threat that rivals and perhaps surpasses the McCarthy era. And yet at the same time, there is a palpable, measurable trend on the left to back away from fundamental engagement with questions of race and racism. For that basic reason we felt the need to launch a dialogue - not that we are going to come up with any blueprints and formulas, but at least we can begin to reengage and re-ignite the kind of consciousness that for many of us shaped our lives and our commitments. We have to just keep building an antiracist consciousness to the point where it is commensurate with the kind of threat that we face.

Some of you might have seen an item on the Internet by a well known writer for The Nation. He wrote a story about an African American former radical who now works for David Horowitz. The point that struck me about that piece was that this reputed progressive not only expressed sympathy for someone who has now aligned with the worst element of reaction, but supported his view that the left insults the African American community and all oppressed communities by reducing these communities to the level of suppliance and victimization, allegedly failing to respect the powers of resiliency and self-reliance among oppressed nationalities. This struck me as an incredible calumny and falsehood. It suggests that somehow the struggle for democracy, justice, and equality, for realization of the fundamental promise of what this nation is supposed to stand for, is some kind of a crutch which demeans people, which somehow ignores their struggles and their sacrifices. I think every one of us in this room, I dare say, had his or her consciousness raised and were moved and energized by the incredible examples of African American struggle documented in the work that Herbert Aptheker has done in conjunction with those Black scholars who shaped his consciousness. We celebrate and draw strength from the struggles of oppressed peoples and never advance the fight for liberation as some kind of of-

fering or charity to the allegedly weak, but rather something that is profoundly in the interests of our own aspirations for a better world.

Yet, that kind of accusation by a "progressive" commentator underscores that more complex and insidious forms of racist thought that have seeped into left circles. For that reason alone, this symposium was an important event. Tim Wise, with his usual brilliance and remarkable talent for deconstruction of racist concepts talked about the implication of the bumper sticker "shit happens" which reminds me that a colleague of mine once said, "I want a bumper sticker that says "RESISTANCE to shit happens." And that's what we're about.

I have been thinking about this concept of "white privilege." If we listen carefully, there are some differences here in this meeting. Not differences of substance. Obviously we all view the notion of white privilege as ultimately a snare and a delusion that operates in the interest of the ruling class in this country. After all, white privilege is not largesse - it comes with a price, whatever short term advantages accrue to whites, it comes with a frightening price of gutting, undermining, destroying any possibility for transforming change and for really lifting the burdens upon all working people. Racism, and more precisely, white supremacy is SYSTEMIC. That is, while white supremacy takes on a life of its own, it is an inseparable and fundamental aspect of capitalism and its extraction of super profits from those oppressed by racial proscription. From that standpoint, the campaign for reparations resonates because it cuts to the core of the construction of race as a manifestation of super exploitation. Racism does not exist to bestow favors on European Americans, but rather to sustain and strengthen the system by exploiting and dividing all laboring folk. We understand that -- and yet I think some differences were expressed today regarding how we deal with white privilege. Talking about "privilege " abstracted from the realities of capitalism sends us down a road to obscuring the fundamental systemic nature of racism, accepting the false notion of long-term benefits from racial oppression and elevating the futile argument about the need to renounce alleged privileges - something that runs against hard reality. Ultimately we must appeal to the self interest of the vast majority of whites who work for a living. And here I am including people who do in a short term sense embrace the notion of being racially privileged.

In some instances, appeals on cultural, psychological, or historical grounds may resonate with particular strata. But we brush aside the "old fashioned" notion of political and economic self-interest at grave peril. I greatly admire James Baldwin - I am always moved by his argument in "The Fire Next Time" when he says "ultimately the most tragic aspect of racial oppression, of white supremacy, is the totem of immortality that white people adopt and what that does in terms of their ability to live a life without illusion, a life in which they discover their own identity and offer it to humanity for the enrichment of all." Great insight and I have no problem with it. I am not going to pick a fight with Tim Wise who places this as the fundamental argument to combat racism. But to make that moving Baldwin-esque concept the essence of the struggle against racism is to suggest that racism is basically a problem of tragic, heart-rending illusion that can be excised one person at a time - through motivational appeals to spiritual self awareness. There's

a place for that approach under some circumstances. But it is no substitute for building movements against racism, for demonstrating that white supremacy has been the most important brake upon progress for all, for articulating and mobilizing the interests of social classes and all agencies of change.

Again, I don't think there is a single way to fight racism. We heard great things today about the Durban conference's declaration, about various ways of moving and fighting back. I am not so sure that some of the so-called old arguments about economic and political self interest are that terribly irrelevant any more, or "somewhere down the road" as Tim said. Two examples: we must reenergize the trade union movement as a fundamental source of fighting for labor's rights and democracy. How on earth can we rebuild that project today when the composition of the trade union movement is increasingly made up of workers in a service economy that has wrung out industrial jobs? How can we rebuild without addressing the growing composition of African American, Asian, Pacific Islanders, and Latino populations in the labor force? So when European American workers face the need to rebuild and advance the labor movement, how can they not address the special demands of historically oppressed nationalities? The demands of African American workers and all oppressed nationalities impact and transcend class at the same time. Those demands cannot be met simply on a trade union basis. They often reflect the need to take special steps to elevate the trade union movement to a level of genuine equality as a basis for impregnable solidarity. Thus, race and racial justice become absolutely central to the deepest class interests of labor. I think that is a very fundamental question. Ultimately, we must appeal to the self interest of the vast majority of whites who work for a living. And here I am including people who do in a short term sense embrace the notion of being racially privileged.

Secondly, on the political front, how did Bush get into the aptly named White House? He got there through the systemic, calculated, predetermined suppression of the African American vote in Florida, in Tennessee, and in other places. Conversely, how do we get out of this box? One thing is for damn sure, never let it happen again. In everybody's interest - fight it tooth and nail. And when the NAACP and other organizations talk about the mobilization of millions of voters of color -- and counting their votes -- in this coming Congressional election and in the 2004 election, European American working people should recognize the importance of that objective and support it.

On the question of the intersections of race and class: there is a very healthy current manifested in a number of ways. The latest book co-written by Lani Guinier, for example, makes some very compelling arguments about the appeal of class interest as a pathway to racial liberation. I am not totally out of sympathy with the arguments of William J. Wilson of Harvard who has for years talked about the importance of placing class over race. But there is one fundamental problem with that. In order to move to the primacy of class we must deal with the primacy of race and racism in undermining democracy, wounding working class interests, and thwarting thoroughgoing change. Again, we need to address the special demands of African Americans and all oppressed nationalities. Otherwise general appeals to unity won't wash. Can we expect that workers of color will be persuaded to unite on grounds of class if abstractions are advanced that are out of touch with their consciousness and with

their material interests? Thus, how can we not advance issues like defense of affirmative action, the justness of reparations, ending racial profiling, ending a racist legal system, ending the prison industrial complex and other assaults on social justice? We need to conduct those battles with renewed passion and determination grounded in awareness that the construction of race and the reality of racism have indeed been central to generating the super profits that have driven the development of the largest and most successful capitalist economy in history, the most pervasive and destructive imperialism, and now of course, the present Washington-dominated global system replete with the projection of unconscionable military power and preemptive war.

With that awareness, there is need to reiterate Charlene's words this morning that within the pivotal importance of the battle against white supremacy is the centrality of African American liberation and its crucial relationship to the movement for the liberation of all oppressed nationalities. We should be clear that there are no hierarchies of oppression. Every manifestation of racism directed at any oppressed nationality must be addressed with equal force. At any given moment the primary task of battling institutional racism will depend upon a particular challenge. It might be defense against the assault on bilingual education in California; in New York, it may be to stop the bombing of Vieques. At a given instance nationally, it may be the battle for just immigration policies, or defense of the Arab community against vile harassment and attack. At the same time, we have to recognize a couple of important facts: historically, the enslavement of African peoples and the denial of democratic rights to African Americans after slavery fostered a rupture of democracy for all, truncating the completion of the nation's democratic revolution. Segregation and de facto discrimination, became the template for every conceptual and structural form of racial and national oppression. Add to that the fact that African Americans remain the most strategically placed population, concentrated in urban centers and providing a national framework for progressive battles (reflected in the advanced role of the overwhelming majority of Black elected officials). Thus, this community provides the vital link that pulls the chain of unity and progress.

The restructuring of the world system in the wake of the collapse of the USSR and associated states of Eastern Europe, the consequent acceleration of globalized capital based upon neo-liberal "free markets," and the assault on wages and living standards both in the Global South and at home - are grounded deeply in racism. The connections between the domestic tradition of white supremacy and growing assault on the property and lives of nonwhite peoples are manifest and unmistakable. Under globalization's impact, the movements for liberation, against racism, and against war are linked inseparably. That is a point that socialists in particular must drive home as a mandatory aspect of building a united and effective peace majority.

I would suggest that today we have re-ignited some vital concepts in the struggle against racism. In light of the crisis presented by the most reactionary administration in memory and the intensified racism which is a crucial component of the right wing agenda, we need a renewed commitment to fight to protect the votes of African Americans and to defend Black elected officials from attack, to defend hard won social programs, to resist the manipulated politics of racial resentment, to support and

strengthen the movement for reparations. And on the left, we need to rekindle the refusal to countenance acts of racial insult, offensive language, and cultural insensitivity which have at times seeped back into the socialist and left community. We should embrace more firmly than ever the best socialist and left traditions of advanced, unrelenting struggle for justice and equality. And -let's keep moving on!

---- **Mark Solomon**, a founder and Co-Chair of CCDS, is an historian and author of *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African-Americans, 1917-1936*.

END OF SYMPOSIUM



Trent Lott -- And Racism -- Must Go!

A Statement of the National Coordinating Committee of the Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism

(Adopted on December 15, 2002)

Trent Lott's endorsement of Strom Thurmond's segregationist legacy was no slip of the tongue. It illuminated an entire political career rooted in racist politics and association with racist groups. Even if one were to grant Lott's ridiculous claim that he was only citing Thurmond's "conservatism, anti-communism and fiscal responsibility" in wishing that Thurmond had become President, those concepts and acts themselves have perpetuated racism by being invoked to smear the civil rights movement, bust unions in the South, and viciously undercut social and economic justice for African Americans and other working people.

Yet, Lott has climbed to the fulcrum of political power, confirming the long-standing and continuing centrality of racism in shaping and influencing the nation's political institutions. The fact that the designated Senate Majority Leader's disgraceful record is only now being "discovered" by much of the political establishment in both parties also illustrates the scope and extent of retreat from engagement with racism that drives so much of the nation's politics. For all the talk heard today of creating a "bigger Republican tent", that party's ascendancy (personified by Lott) in the South and North has been built by promoting, exploiting, and manipulating racist and segregationist currents. George W. Bush and other

Republicans did not utter a word of rebuke until public outrage became deafening. Lott's outrageous endorsement of segregation initially induced little more than a forgiving shrug from Democratic Senate leader Tom Daschle. Daschle's recent "explanation" that he had been "unaware" of the "full context" of Lott's record defies credulity and again underscores the growing insensitivity and palpable retreat from the struggle for racial justice and equality by Democratic as well as Republican leaders. The media silence for days after Lott's paean to segregation also reflects wounding insensitivity and downgrading of honest reporting of continuing assaults on racial justice.

The issues are far greater than Trent Lott's personal fate. They concern the efforts by the Ashcroft Department of Justice to reduce its Civil Rights Division to ineffectiveness and turn the clock back on civil rights. In Florida and elsewhere the near-systematic disfranchisement of African American voters has wrought disastrous consequences for all. The gutting of affirmative action, attempted dismantling of public education, intensified racial profiling, attacks on the constitutional rights of communities of color in particular, growing denial of health services to those communities, escalating joblessness and incarceration especially among African-Americans, and a relentless push to war in the Middle East accompanied by a cascade of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim hatred have been cornerstones of a right wing racist offensive that threatens the well being of the vast majority.

CCDS calls for the censure of Trent Lott and his resignation not only as majority leader but also from the Senate itself. We urge messages to members of the Senate and to the White House (www.gov.com provides contact information) with this demand. We also urge that letters and messages be sent to local media demanding Lott's resignation from all posts along with a commitment by the nation's elected leaders to reinvigorate an equal rights agenda. A renewed public awareness of the racist character of a heretofore "respected" political leader opens the door to a deeper understanding of the depths of racism running through the nation's political life and thus compels us to confront not just the public figure but the policies that he and others have pursued. With a Supreme Court majority poised to further gut affirmative action, there is an urgent need for concerted pressure to preserve that vital policy; with the crisis in public services impacting first African Americans and all communities of color, there is a need for renewed efforts to end both the racist-driven war on public services and the planned war on Iraq.

Trent Lott must go. At the same time every manifestation of racism, the nation's greatest single obstacle to progress, must go as well.

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