

Between the International Slave Plantation and BRICS

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A cartoon drawn by Robert Minor, a political cartoonist who was also a member of the American Communist Party, has been rediscovered by a new generation who have avidly shared it on various social media platforms. It portrays three hulking figures representing China, India and Africa who tower over three cowering, horsewhip-wielding figures who represent US, French and British imperialism.

A Soviet soldier can also be observed grinning in the background. Considered an incendiary image in its time for inciting hatred against "the white race", many of those who share the image today are not invoking the original intended goal of international communism liberating oppressed non-whites, and instead are drawing parallels with the developing multi-polar world envisioned by BRICS which seeks to break free from the neocolonial stranglehold held by the West on the conduct of international trade and development.



Cartoon captioned “On the International Slave Plantation” on the front page of the Daily Worker, June 27, 1925. (Credit: Robert Minor).

When the cartoon appeared on the front page of the Black American newspaper *The Negro Champion*, which dubbed it “The Big Three”, Joseph Wise, the Staff Correspondent of the International Labor News Service, referred to it as a “vicious cartoon” and Minor as “the notorious communist cartoonist”.

Wise complained that the “entire contents of the publication are designed to arouse race prejudice and antagonism and to array the peoples of China, India and Africa against the white race.”

The editor of *The Negro Champion*, Lovett Fort-Whiteman (1889-1939), was a functionary of the Communist International (Comintern) who was the lead organiser of the American Negro Labor Congress. Fort-Whiteman would die from malnutrition in a Stalinist gulag in 1939 after he was accused of being a Trotskyist.

Victor A. Olander, the secretary-treasurer of the Illinois State Federation of Labor, to whom Wise would refer to in his syndicated article, saw Fort-Whiteman as a Soviet proxy whom he likened to a man “carrying a flaming torch through dry grass.” Yet, while Olander criticised the cartoons which appeared in *The Negro Champion* of ignoring “economic and political issues almost entirely” while making “a direct appeal to racial antagonism”, he was ignoring the fact that race lay firmly at the heart of economic relations in the United States, a state of affairs which applied to the globe because the Chinese, Indians and Africans were at the time victims of long-term colonial exploitation of their lands and human resources.

In 1925, China was still in its “Century of Humiliation” which lasted from 1839 to 1949.

India was Britain’s most prized colony, and most of Africa was ruled by the French, British and Portuguese.

Even after the ostensible process of decolonisation, the Western-run global economic institutions have maintained a grip on the economies of the Global South through the Bretton Woods institutions. The policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have typically indebted nations regardless of whether those policies were encouraging of socialist-orientated development economics or were inspired by neoliberalism.

Former colonial powers also continued to wield economic power in regard to their former vassal states. The economic relations between France and its [former colonies](#), as well as the extractivist rationale for the creation of the [European Union](#) in relation to the mineral-rich African continent affirm the racial context of global economic relations.

The quest of the Western world to maintain global economic hegemony is no less the case when it comes to post-Soviet Russia and China.

There has been an enduring project aimed at pressuring Russia to surrender its sovereignty so as to enable to West to have unfettered access to and control of its vast resources, while China’s rise in economic power has caused apprehension on the part of the United States.

A closer examination of the relations between the West and these two powers reveal a racial subtext which few are willing to admit.

In the provocatively titled “[Slavs and the Yellow Peril are ‘niggers, brutes and beasts’](#)”, in the eyes of the Western Empire”, Jeff J. Brown explained that:

Westerners cannot write about their racial superiority and the perceived subhumaness of non-Westerners, like they were able to do so freely until the 1950s. But it is still manifestly the fundamental principle that drives America’s “exceptionalism” and the West’s “shining beacon on a hill” superiority, thus legitimizing ongoing Western genocide, wars, government overthrows and economic and resource exploitation, through the “benign, invisible hand” of capitalism, across Planet Earth.

This attitude was reflected in the writings of the late Zbigniew Brzezinski, a hugely influential US foreign policy theoretician, who wrote the following in his 1997 book *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*:

To put it in a terminology that harkens back to the more brutal age of ancient empires, the three grand imperatives of imperial geostrategy are to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together.

Japan may once have had the opportunity of breaking away from Western economic domination through its Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, a plan which boldly proclaimed “Asia for the Asiatics”. But the extreme cruelty and intense chauvinism that it deployed in its quest to expand its empire alienated its neighbours in east Asia and the Pacific.

Japan’s chief competitor for the allegiance of the countries in this area, the United States, militarily defeated it and incorporated it into its post-war alliance of nations. But the new global hegemon, now involved in an ideological war with the Soviet Union on a global scale inherited the attitudes and methods of its Anglo-Saxon predecessor in enforcing the compliance of states to the dictates of resource control.

An excerpt from an editorial written for the *New York Times* on August 5th, 1954, the year after “Operation Ajax”, a regime change endeavour in Iran which was orchestrated by the American Central Intelligence Agency with help from the British Secret Intelligence Service, will suffice:

Underdeveloped countries with rich resources now have an object lesson in the heavy cost that must be paid by one of their number which goes berserk with fanatical nationalism.

The coup overthrew the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Mohamed Mossadegh which had nationalised its British-controlled oil industry and replaced him with the pliant Shah who ruled Iran as a dictator. It would, of course not be the last such endeavour where American economic interests were threatened by independent thinking political leaders.

Minor’s cartoon may resonate strongly with those who can relate it to the growing Eurasian world and development of BRICS at the heart of which are Russia, China, and India. The developing [multipolar world order](#) which is being characterised by the phenomenon of de-dollarisation and various geopolitical confrontations such as Russia withstanding the “shock and awe” sanctions regime imposed on it by the West and the ejecting of France from a number of Sahelian countries, in a sense represent a movement away from the so-called “international slave plantation”.

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This article was originally published on the author’s blog site, [Adeyinka Makinde](#).

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Featured image: China's Belt and Road Initiative will be given new momentum with new RCEP trade pact. Photo: iStock

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