

# Building Unity Against Imperialism in the 21st Century—Lessons from African American History and the Necessity of Ending Permanent Wars of Aggression and Conquest

United States wars of genocidal oppression have never benefitted oppressed nations and peoples across the globe

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*Author's note: These remarks were prepared for and delivered in part at a panel discussion sponsored by the Michigan Peace Council. The event was held at the Swords into Plowshares Art Gallery located in downtown Detroit. In addition to Abayomi Azikiwe, other presenters were Steve Boyce of the U.S.-China Peoples Friendship Association in Ann Arbor; Dr. Catherine Wilkerson, an activist from Ann Arbor; and Mixx H., a member of Anakbayan USA Detroit chapter, a Filipino mass youth organization. The event was moderated by Bill Meyer, Chair of the MPC and Linda Rayburn, Vice-Chair.*

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Since this is African American History Month in the United States, I will utilize this fact to illustrate the necessity of building unity against imperialism.

Many African Americans historians such as Dr. Carter G. Woodson, who founded this commemorative month as Negro History Week in 1926; Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois and Shirley Graham Du Bois, pioneers in African and world scholarship and culture; Ms. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, the woman journalist, sociologist and organizer against lynching and for women's suffrage; among many others, based their philosophical approaches on the critical importance of deconstructing the ideological falsehoods under which the U.S. has projected itself domestically and internationally.

Since the Civil War between 1861-65, the U.S. has been consistently exposed around the world for its failure to create a genuinely democratic society. Even with the decisive defeat of the Confederacy along with the passage of the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution, the concepts of full equality and self-determination have remained unfulfilled. During the period of Reconstruction and its abandonment on a federal level in the decades after 1876 to the 20th Century, African Americans were subjected to racial terror through legal and extralegal means while at the same time being compelled to serve in wars which only benefited the capitalist class.

Prior to the Civil War, people of African descent and indigenous people were not citizens of the country. The majority of Africans prior to 1860 lived in the Southern slave-owning states of the South. In many ways over the last 160 years, the actual status of African Americans has not fundamentally changed in a manner beneficial to the majority of the Black population.

If we look back on the so-called Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, Haiti, Libya, Syria and now Ukraine, none of these conflagrations have enhanced the social status of the African American people. In fact, the situation is quite to the contrary, when in the post-war periods within U.S. history there has been a wave of repression aimed further solidifying the yoke of oppression by the ruling interests.

After the conclusion of the Spanish-American War where African Americans participated, there was an upsurge in lynching and other forms of racial persecution. Although African Americans were drafted in great numbers into World War I, they were forced to undergo humiliating forms of segregation while stationed in France on behalf of Washington and its allies, while at the same time Black soldiers were attacked at Camp Logan, near Houston, Texas in 1917, and later executed in great numbers by the military. Two years later the advent of racial terror in post-war events of 1919, popularly known as the Red Summer, resulted in further deaths of African Americans. During the summer of 1919, African Americans were attacked by white mobs, law-enforcement and military personnel in many municipalities including Chicago, Washington, D.C. and Knoxville, Tennessee.

Many African Americans died as a direct result of racial terror from 1919 until the Great Depression of 1929-1941, when the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt directly entered the Second World War in the Asia-Pacific and later North Africa and Europe. Over one million African Americans served in segregated military units during World War II where they were denied the same rights as their white counterparts.

After WWII, when the African American people demanded their rights as human beings living within a state which is purportedly based upon merit and equal opportunity, again on an institutional level, were met with a sharp rise in lynchings, police killings and a further intransigence on the part of municipalities, state and federal governments. We only need to point to the work of William Patterson, Paul Robeson, the Du Bois', etc. when they presented a petition to the United Nations entitled "We Charge Genocide" in 1951.



DECEMBER 17, 1951 - PAUL ROBESON PRESENTS WE CHARGE GENOCIDE BY WILLIAM PATTERSON, TO U.N. SECRETARIAT IN NEW YORK

Paul Robeson presents We Charge Genocide document to UN in 1951 (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

The U.S. invasion of the Korean Peninsula in June 1950 coincided with the Cold War which targeted many African Americans for their commitment to peace, civil rights and the abolition of Jim Crow domestically along with colonialism in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The struggle for fair treatment, equal access and universal suffrage became synonymous with communism by the federal government.

By the early and mid-1960s, the U.S. government under two successive Democratic presidents, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, often hailed for their contributions to Civil Rights legislation, deployed hundreds of thousands of troops to Southeast Asia. After the assassination of Kennedy nearly 60 years ago, in the spring of 1965, a massive intervention in Vietnam had horrendous social consequences for African Americans. Black soldiers were disproportionately sent to the frontlines in Vietnam to die on the battlefield all the while their people were being denied the right to enter private businesses, public schools, neighborhoods and job categories in the U.S.

After the defeat of U.S. imperialism in Southeast Asia in 1975, the urban areas where African Americans had migrated during the course of the 20th century from the Rural South, were well into a spiral of structural and economic decline. The areas of the South where African Americans had toiled and struggled since the conclusion of the Civil War forced millions off the land they had worked for generations extending back into the antebellum era of enslavement.

Since 1975, there have been several genocidal wars in which the U.S. has participated as

instigators and underwriters directly and indirectly. The Angolan war of liberation was opposed by the U.S. between 1961-1975. The post-independence war in Angola from 1975-89, was largely fueled by Washington and Wall Street in order to preserve their interests in Southern Africa. It was the Republic of Cuba, Soviet Union and other socialist states which supported the revolutionary movements against colonialism, settler-colonialism and apartheid at a time where the U.S. sided with the forces of reaction.

For these reasons alone, we must today oppose the U.S. proxy war in Ukraine. As the people of the U.S. and Western Europe continue to live under conditions of impoverishment and uncertainty caused by the ongoing class exploitation and national oppression, the administration of President Joe Biden has pledged over \$100 billion to continue the war. The corporate and government-controlled media has played its traditional role of providing propaganda and psychological warfare aimed at confusing the U.S. population in regard to the real reasons behind the war.

## Our Position in Opposition to the Ukraine War

Since the beginning of the Russian special military operation in neighboring Ukraine on February 24, 2022, there has been an array of talking points enunciated by the Biden administration and the Pentagon as to why it is necessary to send massive amounts of arms, material aid along with continuing diplomatic cover provided to the Zelensky regime. The first point is to portray the Russian Federation as the aggressors in the war which attacked Ukraine without provocation.

It is important to note that this conflict did not begin on February 24, 2022. The war has been developing since February 2014 when the U.S. engineered the overthrow of the Ukrainian government of Viktor Yanukovich forcing him to flee the country. After a brief interim period there was the election of Petro Poroshenko. However, the character of the so-called "Revolution of Dignity" was in fact a counter-revolution aimed at the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) including Ukraine and other states into this imperialist alliance established in 1949 during the Cold War.

The government of Yanukovich was overthrown utilizing billions of dollars from taxpayers in the U.S. while at the same time gravely misinforming the public about the situation in Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the entire region of Eastern Europe. Amazingly enough, many people in the U.S. who wanted to argue against Russia and in favor of U.S. and NATO assistance to continue the war, are not even aware of the events of 2014 and the role of the then administration of former President Barack Obama. Victoria Nuland, a State Department functionary, made it explicit that the U.S. would determine the future political trajectory of Ukraine even without the European Union and other NATO members.

The coup of February 20, 2014 could not have been carried out without the direct leadership of neo-fascist elements in Ukraine. These extreme rightist parties and militias claim their political heritage to those same forces that fought alongside the German Nazis during World War II.

When the special military operation began in February of last year, there was the open and obvious presence of neo-fascist militias which made it clear that they were the first line in the defense of NATO and its imperialist backers. African students studying in Ukraine were attacked by racist mobs, denied admission into public transportation in efforts to flee the country and excluded from any form of humanitarian assistance being delivered by the

West.

As early as 2014, monuments to the Red Army which fought and defeated Nazi Germany during WWII, were vandalized and removed by the Ukrainian fascists. Russian speaking Ukrainians, who constitute at least one-third of the population were immediately disenfranchised. The Russian language was banned on an official level while the Ukrainian military bombardments of the Donbass region proceeded leaving thousands dead and displaced.

These facts are necessary to recount when decisions are being made over which approach to take in relations to the Ukraine situation. What has happened in Ukraine represents the ongoing efforts by Washington and Wall Street to expand NATO while encircling the Russian Federation.

Therefore, our position is quite similar to that of the African Union (AU), the 55 member-states organization based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia which represents the 1.3 billion people on the continent. We want to see an immediate cessation of hostilities and the negotiation of a peaceful resolution to the war. This position has been bitterly opposed by the Biden administration which has no Ukraine policy beyond the sending of weapons, the propagation of a rationalization for the expansion of NATO, while creating the conditions for a wider war with Russia and the People's Republic of China.

Moreover, we say what the AU cannot mention at this time for diplomatic reasons. However, the masses of African people on the continent and within the nations of the Asia-Pacific and Latin America are articulating and expressing solidarity with Russia and China. In countries such as Mali and Burkina Faso in West Africa there have been demonstrations in solidarity with Russia in the war. Recently, the Republic of South Africa held joint naval exercises with their counterparts from Moscow and Beijing in defiance of the Biden administration and other imperialist states.

Billions around the world represented by the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) Summit, which represents far more people than exist in the U.S. and the NATO states combined, have not condemned the Russian Federation and its government. This holds true for other multilateral organizations such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which as Fidel Castro once said over four decades ago that "we represent the immense majority of humanity."

Any genuine anti-imperialist, antiwar, peace and social justice organization can in no way welcome the expansion of NATO based upon the historical legacy of imperialism over the last century-and-a-half. We must move from a world of unipolarity to multipolarity, where the majority of the world's population can take center stage in determining the future of our planet and its people.

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Featured image: W.E.B. Du Bois and Shirley Graham Du Bois (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

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