

Reparations and the Liberation of the African American People

Cuba Caravan Visits Detroit. Solidarity work continues amid the intensification of the blockade by the United States

By [Abayomi Azikiwe](#)

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Note: These following remarks were made by Abayomi Azikiwe at a public meeting held at the Cass Commons in Midtown on June 19 to celebrate the annual Cuba Caravan which arrived in the city at the invitation of the Moratorium NOW! Coalition. Rev. Dr. Luis Barrios of the Inter-religious Foundation for Community Organizations (IFCO) and a faculty member at John Jay College of the City University of New York (CUNY), was the featured speaker.

154 years ago today in the state of Texas, Africans in this area of the United States were formally notified of their release from chattel enslavement, more than two years after the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation by the-then President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863.

Africans were enslaved for 250 years in the areas now known as the United States of America.

The 13th Amendment to the Constitution was introduced in Congress in January 1865 and ratified by the end of that year. The Civil War between the Confederate States of America (CSA) and the U.S. ended during the early days of April 1865.

The economic system of slavery connects Africans in the U.S. with Cuba, where involuntary servitude flourished for a period beyond what existed in the U.S. Slavery did not end in Cuba until October 1886. Slavery in Cuba had begun under the Spanish Crown in the 16th century even prior to the advent of British colonization of Virginia beginning in the first decade of the 17th century.

African people in Cuba and their counterparts in the U.S. have very much in common: a centuries-long struggle against slavery, colonialism, racism and imperialism.

Juneteenth and the Debate over Reparations

An historic hearing today on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. before the judiciary committee was illuminating. This debate on re-activating consideration for H.R. 40 comes at a time of much media focus on the upcoming 2020 national presidential elections.

This hearing came one day after comments by Kentucky Republican Senate leader **Mitch McConnell** who said that he was opposed to any notion of reparations for the enslavement

of African people in the U.S., since no one is alive today who were involved in the slave system which ended more than 150 years ago. McConnell went on to suggest that reparations had already been paid to African people in the U.S. throughout the passage of Civil Rights legislation during the 1950s and 1960s and the two-term presidency of Barack Obama.

McConnell continued by declaring that no reparations study legislation would pass as long as he was leader of the Senate. Consequently, the following day he was answered sufficiently by **Ta- Nehisi Coats** and **Danny Glover** who had addressed the hearings held earlier today.

Quite simply proponents of the passage of H.R. 40 noted that European Americans continued to benefit from the legacy of African enslavement. Other scholars over the previous decades of the 20th century have chronicled the dialectal relationship between the super-exploitation of Africans and the rise of industrial capitalism.

All of the major sectors of capitalist enterprise including banking, commerce, shipping, steam technology and mass commodities production found their profitable origins within the economic system of involuntary servitude. Slavery laid the basis for colonialism in Africa and its contemporary iteration, neo-colonialism, is a direct by-product of the attempts by imperialism to maintain dominance over African land, resources and labor.

IFCO History and its Relationship to the Movement in Detroit

Image on the right: Cuban President Fidel Castro and Rev. Dr. Lucius Walker



IFCO has a long history in partnership with the activists' community in Detroit. 50 years ago in late April 1969, the National Black Economic Development Conference (NBEDC) was held at Wayne State University. Organized by the late IFCO founder **Rev. Dr. Lucius Walker** along with local and national organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW), the conference set off alarm bells among the ruling class interests in the U.S. and internationally.

This conference was the backdrop for one of the first comprehensive calls for reparations in the modern era. **Dr. James Forman**, the former Executive Secretary and later International Affairs Director of SNCC issued the Black Manifesto at the NBEDC on April 26, 1969. The document issued by Forman was adopted by the NBEDC which demanded between \$500 million to \$3 billion in reparations from white Christian churches and Jewish Synagogues in order to establish a host of institutional projects aimed at the liberation of the African

American people.

Image below: James Forman and Lucius Walker, 1969



Following the conclusion of the NBEDC, Forman on May 4, interrupted services at the Riverside Church in New York City to read the Black Manifesto. The events of April and May 1969 gained worldwide press coverage thrusting Forman into the media spotlight once again.

Recent Alliance Work with IFCO in Detroit

The late Rev. Dr. Walker was our guest at the annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Rally & March in January of 2008. Following the lead of the IFCO founder in cooperation with former City Councilwoman **Jo Ann Watson**, we formed the Doctors for Detroit Committee which provided assistance for a number of students from the city to study at the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM).

Just two years later in January of 2010, **Rev. Thomas E. Smith** of IFCO, who recently joined the ancestral realm, served as the keynote speaker for MLK Day in Detroit. This event paid tribute to the late Rev. Dr. Walker and his work on behalf of African and oppressed people worldwide from the U.S. to Central America, Palestine, Southern Africa and Cuba.

Earlier this year, in January 2019, the current IFCO Director **Ms. Gail Walker**, the daughter of Rev. Dr. Walker, served as our keynote speaker for MLK Day held at the Historic St. Matthews-St. Joseph's Church in the North End section of Detroit. During this event we commemorated the legacy of MLK and the 50th anniversary of the NBEDC along with the Black Manifesto.

Tonight we are honored to have **Dr. Luis Barrios** of New York City. As a board member of IFCO and professor at John Jay College at CUNY, he is well equipped to continue the legacy of Rev. Dr. Walker, Rev. Smith among others.



Abayomi Azikiwe with Moratorium NOW! Coalition members and supporters at the Cuba Caravan public meeting featuring Dr. Luis Barrios, June 19, 2019

The Cuba Caravan has come to Detroit every year as an act of solidarity and defiance. We here are committed to strengthening our work demanding the removal of the illegal and unjust blockade of Cuba by the U.S.

Cuba, only 90 miles off the coast of Florida, is a proud socialist country committed to building a better future for its people and the working and oppressed masses around the globe. Cuban internationalists were instrumental in the liberation of Africa from the nation of Algeria in the early 1960s to sending hundreds of thousands of its own military personnel to Angola in the struggle to defeat the racist South African Defense Forces (SADF) from 1975 to 1989.

In recent years Cuba has educated thousands of African and Latin American medical students creating the ability of these youth to serve their people on a scientific and principled basis in building independent and united continents. The intervention of Cuban medical personnel during 2014-2015 played a critical role in arresting the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) pandemic in three West African states: Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Conakry. These accomplishments have been recognized internationally including by the government of the U.S. Similar efforts have also been noted by the Republic of Mozambique when Cuban health specialists assisted in recovery work stemming from the devastating impact of Cyclones Idai and Kenneth earlier this year.

Therefore, we will continue in alliance with IFCO until the blockade is totally lifted and the people of the U.S. and Cuba are able to enjoy full and unprejudiced relations moving into the future.

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Abayomi Azikiwe is the editor of Pan-African News Wire. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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