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# Introduction to “Black Power: A Scientific Concept Whose Time Has Come” by James Boggs

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This issue of *e-flux journal* presents one of the most remarkable, and overlooked, conjunctural texts to come out of the Black Power movement: “Black Power: A Scientific Concept Whose Time Has Come,” by James Boggs, an autoworker, organic intellectual, and lifelong revolutionary activist.<sup>1</sup> In this text, which first appeared in the spring 1967 issue of the radical black nationalist journal *The Liberator* and was later included in his 1970 collection, *Racism and the Class Struggle: Further Pages from a Black Worker’s Notebook*, Boggs perceptively analyzes the rising tide of black struggle in the Northern cities in the wake of the civil rights movement, and places these events in the context of anticolonial national liberation projects in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.<sup>2</sup>

Black Power had always been ambivalent as a political slogan since Stokely Carmichael propelled it onto the nationwide stage during the March Against Fear in June 1966. Black Power formulated a pressing need – that black people in the United States obtain actual economic and political power beyond integration – but there were many potential routes to achieve that goal. Boggs attempts to not only refine the concept, arguing that it is grounded in the “specific historical development of the United States”; he also advances a set of tactics and a long-term revolutionary strategy of social struggle with the aim of establishing black political power.<sup>3</sup> Boggs and his wife and close collaborator, Grace Lee, had already elaborated their particular understanding of Black Power in practice. In 1965, they helped form the Organization for Black Power in Detroit, which was a coordinating group of grassroots activists that looked to establish a concrete program for black self-determination centered in the cities, and one of the countless organizing projects the Boggsses would initiate over the course of the 1960s and ‘70s: other initiatives would include the Inner City Organizing Committee, the Committee for Political Development, and the National Organization for an American Revolution.<sup>4</sup> In the rich political context of Detroit, the Boggsses acted as a “resource base” for a new generation of African-American radicals who were interested in the nexus between revolutionary socialism and black nationalism. As historian and Revolutionary Action Movement leader Muhammad Ahmad recalls, “Discussion sessions were held at the Boggs home which provided young Black radicals with insight on concepts, goals, strategy and tactics of socialism and revolution.”<sup>5</sup> These younger activists included the future core of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers: John Watson, Luke Tripp, John Williams, General Baker, and others.

The texts included in *Racism and the Class*

*Struggle* continue and update the fundamental arguments of Boggs's landmark 1963 pamphlet, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Black Worker's Notebook*.<sup>6</sup> Boggs's first book, *The American Revolution*, established him as a leading intellectual force on the US left, a position that would only solidify over the coming years. But the text was both the cause and outcome of an acrimonious split within the Correspondence Publishing Committee, the Detroit-based political organization to which both James and Grace Lee Boggs belonged throughout the 1950s (a continuation under a different name of their activity as the Trotskyist splinter collective the Johnson-Forest Tendency), along with several close comrades, including the famed Trinidadian Marxist theorist C. L. R. James and the radical labor historian Martin Glaberman. The reasons for this split can help lead us into the discussion of Boggs's distinct definition of Black Power.

*The American Revolution* was guided by an effective methodological principle: theoretical analysis would be prompted primarily by conjunctural developments in social conflict. Two historical threads guided the text's argument. First, that automation and technological breakthroughs in US industry had created the conditions for a post-scarcity society; a sufficient amount of socially necessary goods and services could be produced and distributed to all members of the population. Recalling earlier arguments made by C. L. R. James and Grace Lee Boggs in *The Invading Socialist Society* (cowritten with Raya Dunayeskaya) and *Facing Reality* (cowritten with Cornelius Castoriadis), Boggs forecast that the seeds of a "classless" and "workless" society were already present, wherein the masses could "walk out on the streets and get their milk and honey."<sup>7</sup> However – and this is the second thread – the same trends towards automation and cybernetic command had deleterious effects on the industrial labor force, union power, and shop-floor organization. Old forms of labor were becoming outmoded and generated an ever increasing surplus population of the "permanently unemployed," the "underclass," or the "outsiders," predominantly concentrated in urban black communities – a trend demonstrated by Detroit employment statistics tracking the period from 1940–1970.<sup>8</sup>

Boggs recalibrated his strategic outlook accordingly: African-Americans were now positioned as "the chief social force for the revolt against American capitalism." One crux of the split between C. L. R. James and the Boggses came precisely on this point: despite the former's consistent appreciation of the validity and strength of African-American movements for

self-determination and the global reach of Pan-Africanism, James was not simply willing to uphold the black liberation movement as the central front of struggle.<sup>9</sup> Nor did he think the revolutionary process necessarily implied the creation of vanguard organizations to develop instances of proletarian self-activity, as the Boggses would soon insist – for James, this was an indefensible retreat from his conception of socialism as being expressed in bursts of spontaneous proletarian organization.<sup>10</sup> He also adamantly opposed the Boggses increasingly tendentious attacks against Marxism as a relevant revolutionary theory over the course of the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> A passage from the penultimate chapter of *The American Revolution* neatly encapsulates the points James found most objectionable:

American Marxists have tended to fall into the trap of thinking of the Negroes as Negroes, i.e. in race terms, when in fact the Negroes have been and are today the most oppressed and submerged sections of the workers, on whom has fallen most sharply the burden of unemployment due to automation. The Negroes have more economic grievances than any other section of American society. But in a country with the material abundance of the United States, economic grievances alone could not impart to their struggles all their revolutionary impact. The strength of the Negro cause and its power to shake up the social structure of the nation come from the fact that in the Negro struggle all the questions of human rights and human relationships are posed. At the same time the American Negroes are most conscious of, and best able to time their actions in relation to, the crises and weaknesses of American capitalism, both at home and abroad.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the controversy, Boggs's methodological impulse in these pages is striking: the existence, constitution, and trajectory of the industrial proletariat could not be taken for granted. Effective strategies for power had to be grounded in actual motions and political developments. For Boggs, the bus boycotts, sit-ins, armed self-defense groups (led by Robert Williams), the explosive ghetto rebellions in Watts and Harlem (and later Detroit and Newark), and the rapid growth of mass black nationalist organizations, especially the Nation of Islam (in particular the political ideas of Malcolm X), demonstrated the momentum, scope, and "striking force" of autonomous black movements. Like the wildcat strikes of the

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Grace Lee Boggs (left) and James Boggs (right) in an undated photograph.

1930s, they indicated a new phase in the cycle of struggle, with updated programmatic objectives and tactics which would target the fundamental antagonisms of US society and spearhead a collective project of emancipation.

Boggs's approach not only elaborates important features of the trajectory of black radicalism; it also revisits the distinct Marxist problematic of workers' inquiry uncovered by his comrades in the Johnson-Forest Tendency and Correspondence. In several texts – including *The American Worker*, cowritten by Grace Lee Boggs under a pseudonym – and the pages of their newspaper, also titled *Correspondence*, the group investigated the conditions of proletarian life in the US based on the concrete experience and first-person narratives of workers.<sup>13</sup> From these accounts, one could chart changes in the process of production, the autonomous needs of different sectors of the working class, and, most importantly, nascent forms of rank-and-file resistance. The goal of documenting these scattered experiences and elements of discontent was political: to establish connections between workers in their various locations, so that they might realize their shared interests and act collectively against the alienating forces of capitalist production. This historically reflexive attempt to link theory and practice would have a wide resonance, with some theoretical adjustments, in the projects of the Socialisme ou Barbarie collective in France and the workerist and autonomist traditions in Italy.<sup>14</sup>

In a sense, *The American Revolution* advances a class-composition analysis of the relationship between economic conditions and political subjects: the technological breakthroughs, so exalted by Big Three auto executives, recast not only the labor process itself, but also the field of action in which workers could determinately respond to such a restructuring plan.<sup>15</sup> There is a compelling overlap between Boggs and the workerists in their understanding of science and strategy: a consistent striving for historical adequacy over the dangers of anachronism, and an attention to how workers could “bypass existing organizations and form new ones uncorrupted by past habits and customs.”<sup>16</sup> Just as Romano Alquati, Raniero Panzieri, and Mario Tronti meticulously studied the technical conditions on the factory floor in Italy, and articulated appropriate forms of struggle on that basis, so too did Boggs understand scientific analysis as the “systematic examination of the specific conditions, contradictions, and antagonisms in one’s own country and one’s own time.”<sup>17</sup> One major difference, of course, was that Boggs had already moved past a stringent focus on the

factory, and found a class figure which no longer held the ability to sell its labor power for a wage.

At a very basic level, Boggs was trying to answer the question: “What has happened within the working class since Marx?” The proletariat, in Boggs’s view, could no longer be grasped as a “homogeneous segregated bloc.” Capitalist development in the US had engendered “changes in the nature of work, the social composition of various strata of the population, the classes within it, and the culture of the population.”<sup>18</sup> The subaltern stratum of the outsiders – a product of a renewed capitalist class offensive and racialized strategies of social control in the US – possessed a class position that transcended the limits of bourgeois political reform and posed an antagonistic challenge to the wage-labor system. More to the point, the outsiders could potentially combine heterogeneous forces of social protest into a universal movement.

Boggs indicated this potential by channeling currents of revolutionary nationalism. He specifically situated the black underclass as an internal colony: “they have grown up like a colonial people who no longer feel any allegiance to the old imperial power and are each day searching for new means to overthrow it.”<sup>19</sup> The political sensibility of this move was important, because it extended lines of analysis, communication, and solidarity to the international level. The qualifier “black” had an eminently political and generic connotation: included in the perspective of Black Power were also the “people of color who are engaged in revolutionary struggle in the United States and all over the world.”<sup>20</sup>

With these provocations, Boggs altered how one maps the territory of revolutionary struggle in the American context. Paolo Carpignano, in an article that appeared in the US autonomist journal *Zerowork*, captures the thrust of Boggs’s broadening of revolutionary agency to “actions and forces outside the work process,” towards connected spheres of social activity:

black struggles demonstrated that the wageless were part of the working class. They unveiled the factory-like organization of society where ghettos, unemployment and poverty were not a byproduct of the system nor a transitory malfunction, but a necessary element in the social reproduction of capital ... Most importantly, they brought working class struggle to the society at large, and at that level they forced its recomposition. By recomposition we do not mean only the extension and the massification of the struggle but primarily the homogenization of its subjective

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contents. In this sense these struggles connected welfare, reappropriation, and armed struggle with the factory. To use traditional terms, they united the factory and the community.<sup>21</sup>

The terrain of social reproduction to which Carpiignano refers – the “socially necessary activities” of community organization, social and public services, education, transportation, public health, and other areas – became the central point of focus for the Boggsses’ vision of Black Power. Through struggles over this institutional infrastructure, Northern ghettos could become red bases of black self-management; concrete demands could be articulated into a more coherent program to confront urban power structures. The founding statement of the Organization for Black Power, included in the Boggsses’ seminal 1965 essay “The City is the Black Man’s Land,” reflects this emphasis on forming a coordinated system of parallel institutions: “The city is the base which we must organize as the factories were organized in the 1930s. We must struggle to control and govern the cities, as workers struggled to control and govern the factories of the 1930s.”<sup>22</sup>

This conception of urban grassroots insurgency was a prescient anticipation of the arenas in which the meaning and import of calls for Black Power would be fought out: welfare boards, newly founded War on Poverty programs, and neighborhood housing coalitions.<sup>23</sup> Crucially, these campaigns for community control would need political leadership to combine them in an expansive dynamic of struggle – through which “mass consciousness of grievances” could translate into a “reorganization of society.”

The Boggsses would embrace the vanguard party as the organizational vehicle for this passage; and indeed, this aspect of their work no doubt appears unsatisfactory today. They would outline the form and tasks of this party in numerous texts, including the final essay of *Racism and the Class Struggle*, “Putting Politics in Command,” and the pamphlets *The Awesome Responsibilities of Revolutionary Leadership* and *Manifesto for a Revolutionary Party*. On one level, it is a quite orthodox conception of the vanguard: a body of committed militants with a clear sense of strategy and tactics, who can

adapt themselves to the painstaking and often unglamorous tasks of building cadre who are dedicated to working in the community, carrying out and developing programs of struggle and projecting political solutions and perspectives of power to which the masses may not immediately subscribe but which they can

begin to understand through a process of escalating struggle.<sup>24</sup>

While this understanding of party organization could certainly seem to tip over into the traps of rigid hierarchy and sectarianism, Boggs does stress the *interaction* between this vanguard party and the masses as a relationship of testing, metamorphosis, and transformation. As Bill V. Mullen notes in his *Afro-Orientalism*, the Boggsses’ “dialectical humanism” implied the creation of new ideologies; vanguard organizations, through the circulation of international revolutionary experiences and the mobilizing force of social struggle, would trigger continuous learning processes wherein the transmission and intensification of knowledge could take place. Their humanist leanings would later spiral off into a politics of personal development in works like *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, with the construction of a “new concept of human identity” taking center stage.<sup>25</sup> But in the final pages of *Racism and the Class Struggle*, James Boggs draws a tight correlation between political practice and the masses’ capacity to think and act:

The people who are striving for power must themselves be transformed into new people in the course of the struggle. Their will to struggle, their vision of what they are struggling for, their social consciousness and responsibility, and their capacity to govern must all be systematically increased. The struggle must therefore be an escalating one, focused on problems the people can learn from. It cannot be hit-and-miss or in reaction to what the enemy does; but must be based on a strategy which has been mapped out in advance and which permits the organization to take advantage of the enemy’s predictable actions or mistakes. Indispensable to victory is the strategic employment of time as a dimension of struggle within which contradictions are deepened, conflicts escalate, and there is an accelerated growth of the revolutionary social forces, not only in numbers and understanding but in organization and sense of community.<sup>26</sup>

Boggs advanced strong criticisms of other political trends in the Black Power movement, which we find in the essay republished in this issue when he draws lines of demarcation between “realists” and “romanticists.” He expressed fierce opposition to cultural nationalist sentiments, and argued for the value and collective power of multiracial

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organizations.<sup>27</sup> But he also had provided sharp rebukes of, for instance, the Black Panther Party, a group that shared Boggs's class analysis and understanding of political power. Although Boggs was appreciative of the historical importance of the Panthers in demonstrating the "tremendous potential among black street youth ... to overthrow racism and capitalism," the Boggesses charged the Panthers with a too-direct importation of Maoist concepts and ideology "without distinguishing what is appropriate to China ... and what is appropriate to the United States." Moreover, Boggs argued that the Ten-Point Program and survival programs, while articulating the correct issues, did not translate into a clear long-term strategy, and that the Panthers' rapid national growth into a "small mass party" resulted in a situation where the organization found itself "being led by those who should be following."<sup>28</sup> Recent scholarship on the Panthers would certainly temper and nuance these claims made by Boggs. For Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Huey Newton's early writings outlined a vanguard party in the US that would articulate the political and military force of the "riotous energy of the ghetto," but "with the practical capacity to build political power and gain leverage to redress the wrongs against black people and meet their needs."<sup>29</sup> And for historian Donna Murch, the Panthers' survival programs were essentially alternative institutions for political education, centered on an organizing practice of grassroots socialism.<sup>30</sup>

Boggs held a positive view of another major Black Power group, one to which he had direct ties: the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW), an umbrella organization formed in 1969 to solidify the mushrooming wave of Revolutionary Union Movements (RUMs) at automobile plants across the Detroit region.<sup>31</sup> In an essay written while a series of wildcat strikes and walkouts rippled through the Dodge and Chrysler plants, Boggs hailed the League's ability to organize black autoworkers outside of traditional institutional structures, especially the United Auto Workers union. As he writes, "the demands and the expectations of these young black workers far exceed the wildest dreams of the labor movement and of earlier generations of workers even in their militant days."<sup>32</sup> Boggs's text was written in the early stages of the LRBW's formation, and thus it appears to temper the group's explicit revolutionary strategy and shop-floor initiatives by emphasizing demands to hire "a black plant doctor, fifty black foremen, even a black chairman of the Board of Directors." The first leaflets put out by the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, the most active RUM, did call for the direct representation of black workers in the factory and the union: a clear "reformist"

approach.<sup>33</sup> But later on, John Watson, one of the more publicly visible LRBW members, would stress that the organizational structure of the League was intended to support rank-and-file workers' struggles "in different industries and different plants," through an insurgent system of communication and united action with the ultimate aim of developing a "national general strike."<sup>34</sup> In any event, the LRBW's combination of immediate demands and long-term strategy was in line with Boggs's own prescriptions, and even sought to bridge the gap between the factory as a primary site of struggle and battles over the social wage and community defense.

Of course, the Boggesses' conception of a revolutionary vanguard yielded its own problems. The enduring outcomes of the Black Power movement seem to be the demobilization of once-powerful grassroots insurgencies coupled with the rise of "black officialdom" and the realignment of ruling-class strategy to absorb popular movements. In Adolph Reed's words, "the imperatives of managing racial subordination" won out among mainstream African-American politicians; as more electoral routes to political participation opened for communities of color, lines of communication with radical activists and organizing groups fell through or were actively cut.<sup>35</sup>

The driving forces of capitalist development have shifted since the 1960s, after the crisis of Fordism; many of the effects of automation and technological unemployment that Boggs foresaw in *The American Revolution* are now our reality (sharp rises in precarious and informal employment, the production and racialization of "wageless life").<sup>36</sup> As a consequence, new forms and articulations of racial oppression need to be taken into account. The uneven, differential impact of social processes like mass incarceration and police violence is a clear effect of devastating mechanisms of economic exploitation and control (infrastructural and social service transfers, debtors' prisons), fortifying the determinations of race and class struggle in our current conjuncture.<sup>37</sup> With the emergence of new sets of demands for black self-determination (the program of the Movement for Black Lives<sup>38</sup>) in tune with resurgent networks of grassroots activism (coalitions between Black Lives Matter chapters and Fight for \$15 campaigns), James Boggs's analysis of Black Power as both a scientific concept rooted in the history of the US social formation and a political condensate with concrete strategic implications might yield new insights and clarity for the present.

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1

For a recent study and intellectual history of Boggs’s extraordinary life and his personal and political relationship with Grace Lee Boggs, see Stephen M. Ward, *In Love and Struggle: The Revolutionary Lives of James and Grace Lee Boggs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

2

James Boggs, “Black Power: A Scientific Concept Whose Time Has Come,” in *Racism and the Class Struggle: Further Pages from a Black Worker’s Notebook* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 51–62.

3

This historical perspective of Black Power necessitated a study of working-class formation and capital accumulation in the US, in particular the constitution of internal divisions within the working class along racial lines through the legacy of slavery – a perspective which was to also be advanced by the theorists of “white-skin privilege.” See Noel Ignatin (Ignatiev) and Theodore W. Allen’s 1967 pamphlet *The White Blindspot* (published in 1969 by SDS’s Radical Education Project), available online at <http://www.sds-1960s.org/WhiteBlindspot.pdf>. Another essay in *Racism and the Class Struggle*, “Uprooting Racism and Racists” (146–60), discusses debates tracing “the parallel between the rise of capitalism and the rise of racism”: “The historical fact is that without African slavery the class struggle between capitalists and workers could not even have been joined in the first place. For the capitalist, it served the functions of primitive accumulation. That is, it provided both the initial capital and the labor force freed from the means of production which is a prerequisite for the process of capitalist accumulation inside the factory.”

4

Not to mention their involvement in the formation of the Freedom Now Party in Detroit in 1964, and their role in organizing the 1963 Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference in the same city, where Malcolm X gave his famous “Message to the Grassroots” speech.

5

See A. Muhammad Ahmad, “The League of Revolutionary Black Workers: A Historical Study” <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/rbwstudy.html>. See also Dan Georgakas’s eloquent recollection of Boggs and his influence: “The person who made the strongest immediate impression on us, particularly among the Blacks who would become the nucleus of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, was James Boggs. He had been through numerous rank-and-file

movements and racial initiatives within unions, and he spoke eloquently about his experiences. Although Marty and others in the group also worked in factories, Boggs was the only one who seemed to be the kind of militant who spoke and acted in terms that had immediate application. When he spoke about workers, he described the kind of people we all knew rather than the idealizations projected by other radical groups and even other members of his own circle. Boggs was especially intriguing when he enumerated the shortcomings of the class and its internal problems, emphasizing underdevelopment among Black as well as white workers. Later, of course, he and his wife would develop these ideas more fully in a number of writings.” Dan Georgakas, “Young Detroit Radicals, 1955–1965,” *Urgent Tasks* 12 (Summer 1981) <http://www.sojournertruth.net/detroitradicals.html>.

6

James Boggs, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker’s Notebook* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963). The text was originally released as a double issue of *Monthly Review* in the summer of 1963, and was published as a separate pamphlet later that year. The complete text of *The American Revolution* has been collected along with many of Boggs’s other important writings in *Pages from a Black Radical’s Notebook: A James Boggs Reader*, ed. Stephen M. Ward (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011).

7

Boggs, *The American Revolution*, 53.

8

See Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 275. Sugrue also traces the effects of automation on employment in the auto industry over the course of the 1950s and ‘60s (130–35).

9

For a comprehensive account of the divergence between Boggs and James on the question of Black Power, see Stephen M. Ward, “An Ending and a Beginning: James Boggs, C.L.R. James, and the American Revolution,” *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 13, no. 3: 279–302. For James’s definitive statement on the independent validity of black struggles for civil rights in the US, see C. L. R. James, “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States,” *C.L.R. James on the “Negro Question,”* ed. Scott McLemee (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996) 138–47 <https://www.marxists.org/arc/hive/james-clr/works/1948/revolutionary-answer.htm>.

10  
James and Grace Lee Boggs, "CLR James: A Critical Reminiscence," *Urgent Tasks* 12 (Summer 1981).

11  
James famously suggested that James and Grace Lee Boggs needed to take "education classes in Marxism" if they believed Marx had not grasped the link between automation and unemployment in capitalist development, one of the central arguments of chapters 15 and 25 in volume 1 of *Capital*. See Nicola Pizzolato, "The Revolutionary Task of Self-Activity: A Note on Grace Lee Boggs," *Viewpoint Magazine*, January 4, 2016 <https://viewpointmag.com/2016/01/04/the-revolutionary-task-of-self-activity-a-note-on-grace-lee-boggs/>.

12  
Boggs, *The American Revolution*, 85.

13  
Paul Romano (Phil Singer) and Ria Stone (Grace Lee Boggs), *The American Worker* (New York, 1947) <https://libcom.org/history/american-worker-paul-romano-ria-stone>. Other pertinent texts include Charles Denby (Si Owens), *Indignant Heart: A Black Workers' Journal* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978); Marie Brant (Selma James) and Ellen Santori (Filomena D'Addario), *A Woman's Place* (Detroit: Facing Reality, 1970), later republished in a famous pamphlet alongside an essay by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (London: Falling Wall Press, 1972).

14  
For a thorough account of this theoretical lineage, see Asad Haider and Salar Mohandesi, "Workers' Inquiry: A Genealogy," *Viewpoint Magazine* 3 (2013) <https://viewpointmag.com/2013/09/27/workers-inquiry-a-genealogy/>.

15  
For a careful presentation of the concept of class composition, see Salar Mohandesi, "Class Consciousness or Class Composition?" *Science and Society*, vol. 77, no. 1 (January 2013): 72–97.

16  
Boggs, *The American Revolution*, 32. In some sense, the encounter between Boggs and Italian workerism did take hold at the level of practice. As writers including Nicola Pizzolato, Steve Wright, and Michael Staudenmaier have demonstrated, there was a robust exchange and circulation of ideas, texts, and experiences of struggle between the radical milieus of Detroit and Italy during the 1960s. In 1968 Boggs embarked on a lecture tour of

Italy, organized by Roberto Giammanco, which coincided with a wave of campus occupations in the cities of Milan, Turin, and Trento. He and Grace Lee Boggs provided reports and analyses of the Black Power movement and the Detroit political scene, and this visit made a lasting impression on Italian activists. See Nicola Pizzolato, *Challenging Global Capitalism: Labor Migration, Radical Struggle, and Urban Change in Detroit and Turin* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 85, 132–33; Michael Staudenmaier, *Truth and Revolution: A History of the Sojourner Truth Organization, 1969–1986* (Oakland: AK Press, 2012), 44–45, 279–80. Nicola Pizzolato, "Transnational Radicals: Labour Dissent and Political Activism in Detroit and Turin (1950–1970)," *International Review of Social History* 56 (2011): 1–30; Sergio Bologna, "Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism: A Review of Steve Wright's *Storming Heaven*," trans. Arianna Bove, *Strategies: Journal of Theory, Culture & Politics*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2003). John Watson of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers would also travel to Italy in 1968, to speak at a conference on anti-imperialism.

17  
For representative texts: Roman Alquati, "Organic Composition of Capital and Labor-Power at Olivetti" (1961), trans. Steve Wright, *Viewpoint Magazine* 3 (2013) <https://viewpointmag.com/2013/09/27/organic-composition-of-capital-and-labor-power-a-t-olivetti-1961/>; Raniero Panzieri, "Socialist Uses of Workers' Inquiry" (1965), trans. Arianna Bove, *eipcp* (2006) <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0406/panzieri/en>; Mario Tronti, "Lenin in England" (1964), in *Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis: Italian Marxist Texts of the Theory and Practice of a Class Movement: 1964–79* (London: Red Notes, 1979) <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/it/tronti.htm>.

18  
Boggs, *The American Revolution*, 14–16.

19  
*Ibid.*, 52.

20  
James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs, "The City is the Black Man's Land," in *Racism and the Class Struggle*, 50.

21  
Paolo Carpinano, "U.S. Class Composition in the Sixties," *Zerowork* 1 (1976): 7–32.

22  
Boggs, "The City is the Black

Man's Land," 46.

23  
The literature on the Black Power movement has exploded in recent years. For an overview of the movement at the local level, see Rhonda Williams, *Concrete Demands: The Search For Black Power in the 20th Century* (New York: Routledge, 2015). For an enduring examination of the stakes of campaigns for community control and empowerment, and the problems with confronting entrenched municipal regimes and social welfare programs, see Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 215–55.

24  
James Boggs, "The American Revolution: Putting Politics in Command," in *Racism and the Class Struggle*, 187.

25  
Bill Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

26  
Boggs, "The American Revolution: Putting Politics in Command," 183.

27  
See the still-relevant line in "The City is the Black Man's Land": "Because Afro-Americans were the first people in this country to pose the perspective of revolutionary power to destroy racism, I have been using the word 'black' as a political designation ... It should not be taken to mean the domination of Afro-Americans or the exclusion of other people of color from black revolutionary organization" (50). For his criticisms of cultural nationalism, see his essay "Culture and Black Power," in *Racism and the Class Struggle*, 63–69.

28  
Boggs, "The American Revolution: Putting Politics in Command," 182–85.

29  
Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 69.

30  
Donna Murch, *Living For the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 179.

31  
The best history of the LRBW remains Dan Georgakas and Martin Survin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998 (1971)). See also James A. Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 1977). On its decline, see Ernie Allen, "Dying from the Inside: The Decline of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers," in *They Should Have Served That Cup of Coffee: Seven Radicals Remember the '60s* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999), 71–109. For a strong recent account, see Elizabeth Kai Hinton, "The Black Bolsheviks: Detroit Revolutionary Union Movements and Shop-Floor Organizing," in *The New Black History: Revisiting the Second Reconstruction*, eds. Manning Marable and Elizabeth Kai Hinton (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 211–28.

32  
James Boggs, "The Future Belongs to the Dispossessed," in *Racism and the Class Struggle*, 99. In addition to being a mentor of sorts to the future core leadership of the League, Boggs was a regular contributor to *Inner City Voice*, a newspaper that catalogued RUM activities and other community struggles in Detroit, and which functioned as a central coordinating tool. For a detailed account of the importance of *Inner City Voice* as the "focus of a permanent organization ... a bridge between the peaks of activity," see John Watson's 1968 interview with *Radical America*, "Black Editor," recently republished by *Viewpoint Magazine* <https://viewpointmag.com/2015/01/13/black-editor-an-interview-1968/>.

33  
Georgakas and Survin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 36. The authors' description of the RUM strategic approach is worth examining: "More like the IWW of an earlier generation of radicals than like a trade union, DRUM had many aspects of a popular revolutionary movement that could go in many directions."

34  
See "To the Point of Production: An Interview with John Watson of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers," reprinted in *The Movement*, 1969 <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/1960-1970/watson.pdf>. For an excellent recent study of the League's "radical imagination," from their reading of social conditions in Detroit to their robust legacy of cultural production, see Jordan T. Camp, *Incarcerating the Crisis: Freedom Struggles and the Rise of the Neoliberal State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 43–67.

35  
See Adolph Reed Jr., *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 117–62. See also Cedric Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). The

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experience of the Congress of African People, the Black Power group led by Amiri Baraka, in supporting the election of Kenneth Gibson as the first black mayor of Newark, New Jersey is an exemplary case of the dynamics at work in the ascendancy of the black political class and the abandonment of the radical perspective of Black Power. See Komozi Woodard, *Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

36

For a clear presentation of Boggs's account of "postindustrial" society, see Cedric Johnson, "James Boggs, the 'Outsiders,' and the Challenge of Postindustrial Society," *Souls*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2011): 303–26. On the historical and structural relationship of unemployment and wage labor, see Michael Denning, "Wageless Life," *New Left Review* 66 (November–December 2010): 79–97.

37

To start: Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Donna Murch, "Paying for Punishment: The New Debtors' Prison," *Boston Review*, August 1, 2015 <https://bostonreview.net/editors-picks-us/donna-murch-paying-punishment>.

38

See <https://policy.m4bl.org/>.

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