

Notes for the Black Dimension in the WL chapter

On the eve of revolution: 1848 + 1861

1848: The first U.S. WL have no direct connection with the revolutions in Europe, and yet it would be completely wrong to think that one did not influence the other. The exact opposite is the fact, both because the Black struggles and their relationship with Abolitionism began as early as the 1830s and, as I showed in P&R, Nat Turner's revolt ~~was~~ so strongly reverberated that though it would be easy to prove with statistics that the 13-year-old boy in Trier, Germany, could not possibly know/about a Black revolt in the South, it is even truer that ~~just~~ within 17 years, Marx, who had opened a new continent of thought ~~at~~ some 4 years before 1848, had not only proclaimed a new stage for the proletariat, but for all people, and soon thereafter there became ~~direct~~ <sup>direct</sup> relations between the Abolitionists, Black and white, <sup>and</sup> Marx.

The point is that when something is in the air, some strong objective and subjective movement, it manages to circle the globe no matter how primitive the <sup>technical</sup> means of communication. This was even truer in the case of the Black dimension when it came to women, because it is through that dimension that ~~white~~ white middle class women who had done nothing more substantial than making picnics and raising money for the movement to end slavery, had been so inspired by the fact that the Black illiterate women were speaking, activists, participating in a leadership capacity ~~in~~ in every phase including the military, that it was then that they hit upon the fact of having an independent women's movement fighting for their own rights.

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1848  
Marx  
Slavery

Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman were among those brilliant orators and activists, Tubman known as "the General", and thinkers, who were not only the inspirers for/whites but for women as a whole. ~~middle class~~ <sup>liberationists</sup> Though there is an immediate international connection and though the women/who appear on British soil--and are denied their rights to speak there--there was no direct connection to the German women's movement, but then the German movement was hardly on the scene. Even in the period after the Civil War in the U.S., the Black and white men were again separated from the women on the grounds that they would never gain suffrage for the freed Black man if they included in that fight for male suffrage also woman's suffrage. The Black women, far from going with their men, went with the white women; indeed Sojourner Truth called the acknowledged greatest leader of Blacks, Frederick Douglass, "short-minded," for making such a ~~sharp~~ separation between men and women. It would take another quarter century before the German Women's movement became mass, and socialist, and brought RL onto the revolutionary scene, but one thing was very clear in RL's life even that early, and that is the Black dimension, even if that Black dimension was then focused on Africa.

Q some of RL on oppression of Africa, women especially.

By then Black had been so isolated into the South and the whole reactionary rise after Reconstruction with the birth of the KKK, that the Blacks seemed nowhere to be seen. Again, it was only appearance. For example, a very nearly ~~entire~~ one-woman campaign against lynching was carried on by Ida B. Wells

Q from her

Actually that is not by any means the way to approach the question. The actual point is not whether a person, a name appears, but a movement, and not whether a question of one-to-one relationships, but something totally different in the upsurge of what we can call, with Melville, "original characters" that actually represent either a movement that has arisen but has not been recognized historically, or one that is about to emerge, that is, the genius of really great literature that, in human terms, seems to do a great deal of anticipation of what is to be, whether we are talking about the great Shakespearean women characters--and that despite the fact that no doubt as a man of the 16th century Shakespeare had as low opinion of women as the dominant ideology. As D.H. ~~Lawrence~~ Lawrence put it in another case, "The ~~author~~ <sup>writer</sup> is a big liar; don't trust him." But the tale, if great he is, will tell you the truth."

And from still another source, once we do know historical materialism, there is a way of getting at the truth even through myths and fairy tales and goddesses and witches. Whether you take the character of Black in Melville's Moby Dick or you take the character of Antigone <sup>in Marx and in Lukacs</sup> in Greek mythology <sup>in German</sup> playwrite, in RL we suddenly ~~see~~ see in a very nearly blinding flash of light affinities between fantastic and seeminly

irreconcilable personages and historical periods and visions of the future, and years later we really do find out that there was an affinity. When I reached the Gambia, <sup>in 1962,</sup> the last sliver in West Africa to be free, and it certainly was nowhere on the historical scene, whereupon the most popular historic event people could tell you--and indeed some there were alive and told me the actual experience--was that they had a general strike in 1914 and that that general strike, in demanding better conditions from the British imperialist rulers, the most popular saying was, "The sun never sets on the British empire, and the wages never rise."

So it isn't a question of trying to stretch a point to prove some preconceived notion. Rather it is a fact that once a revolution happens anywhere, the ramifications <sup>are</sup> world-wide even when it is not known at the time. Be it the 1905 Revolution and its repercussions in the East when suddenly also in South Africa there was the Zulu Rebellion, or be it the 1929 Women's War in Nigeria that we wouldn't learn about until the 1960s, or be it the African struggles of women that we first learn about in our age (Doris Wright article on Africa Feb. 1972 N&L)