The American Left and Black Lives Matter: A Symposium

written by New Politics | July 10, 2020

Historian Cedric Johnson's essay "The Panthers Can't Save Us Now," published in 2017 in the socialist journal Catalyst*, generated a lot of discussion and won the Daniel Singer Memorial Prize.*

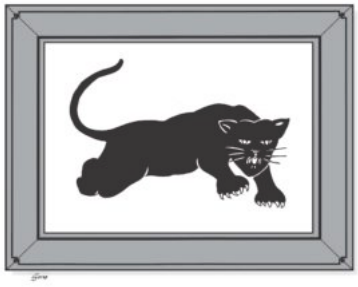
Addressing a historic discussion about the tensions between race and class for socialist strategy, Johnson argued against the legacy of racial essentialism in contemporary political movements, and for a class analysis rooted in a materialist understanding of Black political life.

We asked Cedric if he would be willing to extend his argument for New Politics *and he graciously agreed to do so. We published his article in our Winter 2019 issue, along with essays by three scholars and activists — Jay Arena, Touré Reed, and Mia White — who were asked to comment on the significant political issues he raised, though they wrote their pieces without having seen Johnson's new essay.*

We invited further contributions to this discussion and subsequently published a response to Johnson by Kim Moody, a reply by Johnson to Mia White and Moody, an analysis of black leadership by Lester Spence, and a further comment on Johnson by Brian Jones.

All of these articles are linked here. We hope this collection of essays helps clarify issues critical to building an effective socialist movement in the United States.

Who's Afraid of Left Populism?



Cedric G. Johnson
New Politics, Winter 2019, No. 66

My 2017 *Catalyst* article, “The Panthers Can’t Save Us Now,” was addressed to a specific conundrum within contemporary left politics and anti-policing struggles in particular: that is, the strategic problem of building a counterpower capable of winning in the context . . .

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Only a Class Politics Can Save Us From Police Violence and Fascism

Jay Arena
New Politics, Winter 2019, No. 66

How Johnson’s critique of the Black Lives Matter movement elaborates on Luxemburgist themes and provides a path to addressing not only police killings, but also the larger capitalist assault that drives them.

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Black Exceptionalism and the Militant Capitulation to Economic Inequality

Touré F. Reed
New Politics, Winter 2019, No. 66

Cedric G. Johnson’s “The Panthers Can’t Save Us Now” is a compelling, historically grounded critique of contemporary anti-racist campaigns against police brutality and mass incarceration. While Johnson is encouraged by the swell of organized opposition to . . .

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In Defense of Black Sentiment

Mia White
New Politics, Winter 2019, No. 66

Johnson asks the reader not to pivot on certain ethnically motivated political affiliations lest we lose our class-conscious focus, and yet I find myself thinking about the ways Blackness is constructed in the arguments presented and how that matters.
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Cedric Johnson and the Other Sixties' Nostalgia

Kim Moody
New Politics online, March 1, 2019

There is something politically familiar in Cedric Johnson's two essays in *Catalyst* (Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 2017) and *New Politics* (No. 66, Winter 2019). Because his political conclusions are very general, even vague, ones that build "on broad solidarity . . .

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Coming to Terms with Actually-Existing Black Life: A Response to Mia White and Kim Moody

Cedric G. Johnson
New Politics online, April 9, 2019

My central contention with both White and Moody lies in their reluctance to engage in meaningful class analysis of black political life.

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The Future of Black Leadership

Lester Spence
New Politics online, October 9, 2019

What is the future of black leadership? In the wake of the Movement for Black Lives on the one hand and the “election” of Donald Trump (and the forthcoming presidential election) on the other, a range of intellectuals, pundits, activists, . . .

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Continuing the Discussion on Black Politics

Brian Jones
New Politics, Winter 2020, No. 68

Replying to Cedric Johnson: I think Johnson over-diagnoses the problem. Where he sees danger, I see opportunity and where I see opportunity, he sees danger.

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Recovering the Dialectic of Race and Class Struggle in the USA: In Defense of Richard Wright & Cedric Johnson’s Actually Existing Black Marxism

Joseph G. Ramsey
New Politics online, August 31, 2021

Insights from Richard Wright and Cedric Robinson lend support to Cedric Johnson’s view of Black Marxism.

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