

Jailbreak Out of History



**The Re-Biography
of Harriet Tubman**

&

**“The Evil of
Female Loaferism”**

by Butch Lee

Jailbreak Out of History

The Re-Biography of Harriet Tubman

and

“The Evil of Female Loaferism”

by Butch Lee

**HER
SP
EBE
DEB**
2015

Jailbreak Out of History: The Re-Biography of Harriet Tubman
Second Edition
ISBN: 978-1-894946-70-4

Copyright 2015 Butch Lee
This edition copyright 2015 Kersplebedeb

Kersplebedeb Publishing
CP 63560
CCCP Van Horne
Montreal, Quebec
Canada H3W 3H8

email: info@kersplebedeb.com
web: www.kersplebedeb.com
www.leftwingbooks.net

Copies available from:

AK Press
674-A 23rd St.
Oakland, CA
94612

phone: (510) 208-1700
email: info@akpress.org
web: akpress.org

Please note that information about the sources of illustrations
in this book can be found on the publisher's website at
<http://kersplebedeb.com/jailbreak-illustrations>

Printed in the united states

CONTENTS

JAILBREAK OUT OF HISTORY:

THE RE-BIOGRAPHY OF HARRIET TUBMAN	1
<i>Childhood & the Gathering Storm</i>	3
<i>To Understand Harriet, We Must First Understand the War</i>	7
<i>New Afrikan Women's Unique Situation</i>	9
<i>And Children, Too</i>	11
<i>Harriet Steps Forward</i>	12
<i>Increasing Violence and Will</i>	14
<i>"Freedom is the Recognition of Necessity"</i>	18
<i>The Largest Radical Conspiracy in u.s. History</i>	20
<i>"Moses" and "The General"</i>	34
<i>A Revolutionary Politic</i>	41
<i>To Develop Armed Struggle</i>	43
<i>This Wasn't Just About Race</i>	46
<i>A New Afrikan Political-Military Leader</i>	57
<i>A Nodal Point: Blowing Away the Whiteness</i>	61
<i>A Multi-Faceted Reality</i>	66
<i>Warrior as Healer</i>	69
<i>No Civilians There</i>	71
<i>A Four-Sided War</i>	73
<i>The Inevitable Resolution</i>	75
<i>The Exact Spot of the Enemy's Imbalance</i>	82
<i>Harriet Is Still Too Subversive</i>	89
"THE EVIL OF FEMALE LOAFERISM"	97
<i>The Permanent Women's Strike That Changed the u.s. Empire</i>	106
<i>Partial Separation A First Step</i>	112
<i>Wars Within Wars Fought on the Same Ground</i>	116
<i>A Post-Civil War Conspiracy Theory</i>	135
<i>Black Patriarchy vs. New Afrikan Communalism</i>	149
<i>The Pedestal & the Gutter Can Both be the Same Address</i>	159
<i>To Sum Things Up</i>	166
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	169

LC-USZ62-7816



Harriet Tubman (1823-1913)
nurse, spy and scout

JAILBREAK OUT OF HISTORY: HARRIET

Childhood & the Gathering Storm

FOCUS ON AMAZONS. About why we deal with real women as myths. Girls who never *really* existed. Yet and again, are all around us & that we can't bring ourselves to see. Cause seeing through white men's eyes is about non-vision of ourselves. So let's deal with a real Amazon.

Think about Harriet Tubman. Take six months. In fact, take a year & think. Break it on down. What does it mean to be the most famous New Afrikan woman in u.s. history? What does it mean to be stuck in that lie? What's the meaning of being famous while being hidden and dis-figured and dissed? Let's jailbreak Harriet Tubman out of white his-story and place her in Amazon and New Afrikan herstory. Her story, her people's story.

Harriet Tubman's life is a live weapon placed in our minds, showing us what it means to be an Amazon. Which is why the capitalist patriarchy has forbidden us to touch it for so long. **In this, maybe for the first time, we can see Amazons as a future force in the clash of peoples & nations.** Not as myths, but as players in the whole difficult course of world politics. We can also appreciate the bittersweet tang of reality, as the peeling away of layers of propaganda and disfigurement which have hidden Harriet from us exposes how much we assume and how little we've known.

New Afrikan women have already pointed out the significant pattern of Harriet's exclusion. Cultural critic bell hooks said recently: "I mean if we could recover Ida B. Wells and Harriet Tubman to the extent that we have recovered, say, Zora Neale Hurston, I think that's an important contrast because people want to bury that revolutionary black female history ..."

Herstorian Deborah Gray White connects Harriet's treatment to a larger pattern in the mainstream history of slavery, in which Black women "were reduced to insignificance and largely ignored." In examining the influential historian Stanley Elkins, she points out:

"That Elkins seemed to omit women altogether was accentuated by his description of slaves whom he identified as part of an American 'underground', those who never succumbed to Samboism. Among those mentioned were Gabriel, who led the revolt of 1820, Denmark Vessey, leading spirit of the 1822 plot at Charleston, and Nat Turner—an omission, conspicuous by its absence, was Harriet Tubman ... If Elkins had really been thinking of slaves of both sexes he would hardly have forgotten this woman, who became widely known as the Moses of her people."

Patriarchal capitalisms, which only want Amazons to be exotic myths from forgotten ages, have hidden Harriet Tubman in her own fame. They both *trivialize* and *exceptionalize* her. These are tools of oppressor culture. The stripped-down and censored version of her life is told in elementary schools all over the u.s. empire. So much so that everyone thinks they know her story already, although they don't. Harriet Tubman was born in slavery in Maryland around 1820. She escaped to the North when she was 29, but kept returning secretly to the South again & again to help other slaves escape. For this she became known as "Moses." True statements. But by limiting her it becomes clever propaganda against her. And against her people.

Where patriarchy has been unable to deny that women do significant things, it denies the full meaning of what we do by trivializing them. Mary Daly, feminist philosopher, traces the enormity of what patriarchy has done to us. In ancient Greece the goddess Hecate (also known later as Artemis and Diana) was sometimes known as Trivia (and represented by a

three-faced statue). That was also the name used for the intersection of three paths, which in many old cultures were the sites of mystical power. She writes in *Gynecology*:

"In light of the cosmic significance of the term *trivia* as the crossing of the three roads and of the goddess who bears this name, contemporary meaning of the term in English should be examined. The English term, which, according to Merriam-Webster, is derived from the Latin *trivium* (crossroads), is defined as 'common, ordinary, commonplace ... of little worth or importance: insignificant, flimsy, minor, slight.' Of course, according to patriarchal values, that which is 'commonplace' is of little worth, for in a competitive hierarchical society scarcity is intrinsic to 'worth.' Thus gold is more important than fresh air, and consequently we are forced to live in a world in which gold is easier to find than pure air."

So to trivialize Harriet Tubman the capitalist patriarchy pictures her as an idealized woman by their definition, who makes a life of helping others. *Thus her deeds are squeezed into women's assigned maternal role as nurturer, helper, and rescuer of men (who then go on to do the important things).* But Harriet wasn't repping Mother Teresa. She wasn't even any kind of civilian at all. She was a combatant, a guerrilla, a warrior carrying pistol and rifle, fighting in her people's long war for freedom. A war that rocked the foundations of Amerikkkan society and that has never gone away.

Think about what it means to be called "Moses" (which was the code name other New Afrikans gave her, and which became Harriet's famous warrior name in the Anti-Slavery underground). When we check out the bible, we can see that Moses was a ruthless visionary, someone who forced the boldest changes and risks upon his people so that they could survive. Who led them out of captivity. To put it simply, Moses was a leader in a time of war. So, too, was Harriet Tubman.

What trivializing her as a “rescuer” also does is that it takes her out of her own politics. Harriet Tubman was a radical political figure, someone totally involved as a player in the great political ideas and military storms of her day. She was a guerrilla. Someone who lived and taught others to live by the communal and working-class New Afrikan culture that her people had planted in this difficult ground, and a Black Feminist to the end.

In her own lifetime, white people were referring to her as “superhuman,” as “a woman who did what no man could do” (as if this were some exceptional standard). Thus, even then her white supporters needed to *exceptionalize* her, as something unique and singular. This made her less dangerous to them. Easier to handle. Less awesome. After all, picture a nation of Harriet Tubmans.

First of all, there was nothing mythical or superhuman about her. Harriet Tubman was one captive New Afrikan woman among many. And her most striking qualities were qualities she had in common with many other Afrikan women and children, who like her came out of a culture of communal resistance and strength. So to insist on her supposed unique individuality as a compliment, is actually denying her real identity.



Five generations on Smith's Plantation, Beaufort, South Carolina, 1862.

To Understand Harriet, We Must First Understand the War

If they think of it at all, people look back on the Underground Railroad in civilian terms, as a “movement” like Civil Rights. In fact, such comparisons are often made. But the Underground Railroad cannot be understood in civilian terms, *because New Afrikans then were not civilians.*

Here again, it's easy to let ourselves be fooled by the disinformation of patriarchal capitalist history. It's easy to not really understand the distinction between civilian and military.

The meaning of these distinctions is important to us, and yet we never think about it. Harriet wasn't an Amazon because she was oppressed, or even because she dissented or rebelled. You're only military if that's what you are. Just because you're oppressed doesn't mean you're at war. Just because you rebel or protest that doesn't make you a soldier. New Afrikans still are oppressed, but they certainly aren't at war in 2015. That may have been true in the 1960s, the mass ghetto uprisings and the role of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army, but it's not true of the Black Nation today.

When Harriet and the other jailbreak leaders were referred to back then as “conductors,” when the chiefs of local Underground Railroad committees were always spoken of as “station masters” and “brakemen,” that was cover. Civilian-sounding words for illegal military activity. Harriet and the rest of the Underground Railroad had military goals, had military strategy and tactics. It wasn't any accident that Harriet and many of the other guides were armed. They were armed as front-line guerrillas who moved through a genocidal terrain. They were soldiers on a military mission, even though they may have been wearing work clothes and not have had a patriarchal military hierarchy anywhere on them.

Remember, most euro-settler men back then in the South or on the frontier weren't civilians exactly, either, even though they, too, may not have worn what we recognize as uniforms.

Most white men there were armed, as a normal matter. Had to be, when you come to think of it. Most nations of the capitalist metropolis have histories of strict personal gun control, like England and Japan. There, the ruling class was afraid of class warfare. While in settler-colonialist societies such as South Afrika, the u.s.a., and Israel, settler men have always had armed and militarized mass cultures to help conquer and rule over the oppressed.

In its origins as a white men's invasion culture, Team USA itself may have looked civilian to us, but it was really military. The masses of armed settler men were their *own* military. Banding together in militias or Slave Patrols or Committees of Correspondence to commit genocide against Indians. And prison guard their Afrikan and women "property."

The ways of life, the culture created by the young Black Nation in this furnace, were centered on dangerous and illegal resistance of all kinds. Even their music and their personal lives were part of this resistance. *Because without such guerrilla activity they would have had no space or human life at all.* Those were the stakes. And the New Afrikan political struggle against this armed oppressor had definite characteristics; it was not only conspiratorial and communal, embracing all forms of resistance from illegal education and sly sabotage to violence, but *its only goal was the total destruction of the enemy slave-owning society.* That was understood by all. That is, that political culture was inescapably *military* in its full dimensions, just as its situation was military.

Being disarmed is not the same thing as being civilian. A distinction that patriarchal capitalism loves to mess over in our minds.

New Afrikan Women's Unique Situation

For captive women, as Deborah Gray White explains in *Ar'nt I a Woman? Female Slaves In The Plantation South*, *their bondage had another dimension from men because of the threat of rape and the responsibilities for the children.* Even escaping, which every prisoner naturally dreamt of, was something more difficult for most women, who almost always had children to care for.

William Still, Philadelphia "station master" of the Underground Railroad, said that because of the difficulties of fleeing with children "females undertook three times the risk of failure that males are liable to." Deborah Gray White says her own studies of plantation-prison runaways in different areas & times consistently show that women were a minority. "In North Carolina from 1850 to 1860, only 19 percent of the runaway ads described women. In 1850, 31.7 percent of the runaways advertised for in New Orleans newspapers were women."

Many of those women who did escape had to leave children behind. New Afrikan women also resisted violently, as White points out:

"Some bondswomen were more direct in their resistance. Some murdered their masters, some were arsonists, and still others refused to be whipped. Overseers and masters learned which black women and men they could whip, and which would not be whipped. Sometimes they found out the hard way. Equipped with a whip and two healthy dogs, an Alabama overseer tied a woman named Crecie to a stump with intentions of beating her.

"To his pain and embarrassment she jerked the stump out of the ground, grabbed the whip, and sent the overseer running. Women fought back despite severe consequences. An Arkansas overseer decided to make an example of

*
LIFE WAS
OVERALL
ACTIVITY

a slave woman named Lucy 'to show the slaves that he was impartial.' Lucy, however, was not to be made an example of. According to her son, 'she jumped on him and like to tore him up.' Word got around that Lucy would not be beaten. She was sold, but she was never again whipped."

Their greatest resistance was not in these individual acts of anger and bravery, but in what lay beneath it. New Afrikan imprisoned women created communal networks to sustain and guide each other.

"Slave women have often been characterized as self-reliant and self-sufficient," Deborah Gray White reminds us. "Yet, not every Black woman was a Sojourner Truth or a Harriet Tubman. Strength had to be cultivated. It came no more naturally to them than to anyone, slave or free, male or female, black or white. If they functioned in groups..."

* Women more than men were the long-time core of a plantation's multi-generational population. The networks or women's sub-culture they created with their own leaders and values was a communal survival instrument in the face of dehumanization. White adds:

"Few women who knew the pain of childbirth or who understood the agony and depression that flowed from sexual harassment and exploitation survived without friends, without female company. Few lacked female companions to share escapades and courtship or older women to consult about the vicissitudes of life and marriage. Female slaves were sustained by their group activities. Treated by Southern whites as if they were anything but self-respecting women, many bonded females could forge their own independent definition to which they could relate on the basis of their own notions about what women should be and how they should act."

And Children, Too

This was the culture that Harriet Tubman was born into. At age five her childhood as we think of it ended, and she was rented to a white woman to do full-time domestic labor. The white woman believed in torturing Afrikans every day, and the *small Harriet was lashed with a leather whip four times across her face and neck as an introduction before breakfast that first day.* Harriet's first escape attempt (i.e., attempted prison break) came when she was seven years old. Seen by the latest settler white woman she had been rented out to, while trying to steal a piece of sugar forbidden to Afrikan children, Harriet outran the white woman and her rawhide whip:

"By and by when I was almost tuckered out, I came to a great big pig-pen. There was an old sow there, and perhaps eight or ten little pigs. I was too little to climb into it, but I tumbled over the high part and fell in on the ground; I was so beaten out that I could not stir.

"And I stayed from Friday until the next Tuesday, fighting with those little pigs for the potato peelings and the other scraps that came down in the trough. The old sow would push me away when I tried to get her children's food, and I was awfully afraid of her. By Tuesday I was so starved I knew I had to go back to my mistress. I didn't have anywhere else to go, even though I knew what was coming."

Because attempting to escape was the second-most serious crime, Harriet was whipped senseless by the white man of the house. So, Harriet Tubman had become a full-time productive worker, had become familiar with daily violence and utmost danger, had committed crimes and stolen from white settlers, and had tried to escape or prison break. All by age seven. And this was not exceptional in any way, but common, a story shared by millions of New Afrikans.

Harriet's childhood can't be understood easily by us. Certainly not without uprooting the capitalist myth of children, which is implanted like a barb in our minds. A smarmy, romanticized ideology that children are "precious," "cute," naturally "helpless." Who for their own good must be safely isolated and governed within the nuclear family just like women. Powerlessness and being property is masked by a cloying sentimentality (just as the Southern slavemasters always talked on how much they "loved" their supposedly loyal slaves). Instinctively, children know this.

If Harriet had died at age seven, when she made her first prison break and before she had become a leader, we probably would never have heard about her—but she would have been none the lesser. As a person who was self-supporting, who had integrity, courage, and who fought back against oppressors, Harriet at age seven no less than at age seventy, was all that people should be. You can't be more than that. If her example makes you or me remember how often we've backed down, how much we've lost, that's on us.

Harriet Steps Forward

By age fifteen or sixteen, when she had long since become a field hand, an act of open resistance in support of another New Afrikan almost led to her death. One Fall at harvest time she and other captives were working in the fields. One of farmer Barnett's laborers spaced and slid off to the village store. The euro-settler overseer saw this and ran after him. As did Harriet.

"When the man was found, the overseer swore that he should be whipped, and called on Harriet, among others, to tie him. She refused, and as the man ran away, she placed herself in the door to stop pursuit. The overseer

caught up a two pound weight from the counter, and threw it at the fugitive, but it fell short and struck Harriet a stunning blow on the head."

>> In fact, Harriet's skull had been fractured, and she would bear a concave depression where her skull-bone had been crushed in for the rest of her life. Unconscious, she was brought home to her parents' shack. In a deep coma at first, Harriet was thought near death and was bedridden for much of that Fall and early Winter. Only gradually did she regain some strength, helping her mother with work for awhile before returning to the pile of dirty rags on the ground that was her bed. Her injury had also brought on (narcolepsy), and Harriet would fall into a deep sleep at unpredictable times, even when standing up or walking.

Her act of open resistance had placed her, of course, in added danger. Her owner tried to sell away this rebellious worker who was also damaged goods. But when he brought prospective buyers to the shack, Harriet would be lying on the ground seemingly barely able to stand. And her silence toward the plantation owner, together with her visible head injury and narcolepsy, convinced the white settlers that she was now mentally defective, too. Actually, she was thinking sharper than she ever had. Unable to sell her at any price, Harriet's owner gave up and she was mostly left alone to recover.

Using deception "to fool ole Massa" was another military tool in the captive arsenal. However skillful Harriet became at it under life-or-death pressure, it was simply part of the daily survival tactics used by captive New Afrikans. Remember that the most macho pro athletes and capitalistic celebrities of today have never ever in their lives functioned under the kind of pressure that Harriet dealt with calmly every day.

Harriet's act in stopping the white overseer from catching a rebellious worker was her true coming out, her joining the liberation struggle that had been rising all around her. That night other New Afrikans had also been there; had also been

CLOYING
SENTIMENTALITY

DISABLED

*

ordered by the overseer to restrain their brother. Like Harriet, they too refused. Again, she was not unique, but one of a people on the move. Harriet Tubman's coming of age cannot really be understood in isolation.

Increasing Violence and Will

We have to step back a moment and take in the whole sweep of the crisis, as the Black Nation, with increasing violence and will, slowly stood up against the limit of its chains. This was the national crisis that at first deformed the old planter capitalism of the George Washingtons and Thomas Jeffersons. And then destroyed their whole System into the rubble of war. We pick up the larger story from the book *Settlers**:

"The Northern States had slowly begun abolishing slavery as early as Vermont in 1777, in the hopes that the numbers of Afrikans could be kept down. It was also widely believed by settlers that in small numbers the 'childlike' ex-slaves could be kept docile and easily ruled. The explosive growth of the number of Afrikans held prisoner within the slave system, and the resultant eruptions of Afrikan struggles in all spheres of life, blew this settler illusion away.

"The Haitian Revolution of 1791 marked a decisive point in the politics of both settler and slave. The news from Santo Domingo that Afrikan prisoners had risen and successfully set up a new nation electrified the entire Western Hemisphere. When it became undeniably true that Afrikan people's armies, under the leadership of a 50-year-old former field hand, had in protracted war

* J. Sakai, *Settlers: Mythology of the White Proletariat from Mayflower to Modern* (Montreal and Oakland: Kersplebedeb and PM Press, 2014).

outmaneuvered and outfought the professional armies of the Old European Powers, the relevancy of the lesson to Amerika was intense. Intense.

"The effect of Haiti's great victory was felt immediately. Haitian slaves forcibly evacuated from that island with their French masters helped spread the word that Revolution and Independence were possible. The new Haitian Republic proudly offered citizenship to any Indians and Afrikans who wanted it, and thousands of free Afrikans emigrated. This great breakthrough stimulated rebellion and the vision of national liberation among the oppressed, while hardening the resolve of settler society to defend their hegemony with the most violent and naked terror.

SAME LOGIC
AS LAW +
ORDER

"The Virginia insurrection led by Gabriel some nine years later, in which thousands of Afrikans were involved, as well as that of Nat Turner in 1831, caused discussions within the Virginia legislature on ending slavery. The 1831 uprising, in which sixty settlers died, so terrified them that public rallies were held in Western Virginia to demand an all-white Virginia. Virginia's Governor Floyd publicly endorsed the total removal of all Afrikans out of the state. If such proposals could be entertained in the heartland of the slave system, we can imagine how popular that must have been among settlers in the Northern States.

"The problem facing the settlers was not limited to potential uprisings on the plantations. Everywhere Afrikan prisoners were pressing beyond the colonial boundaries set for them. The situation became more acute as the developing capitalist economy created trends of urbanization and industrialization. In the early 1800s the Afrikan population of many cities was rising faster than that of Euro-Amerikans. In 1820 Afrikans comprised

at least 25% of the total population of Washington, Louisville, Baltimore, and St. Louis; at least 50% of the total population in New Orleans, Richmond, Mobile, and Savannah. The percentage of whites owning slaves was higher in the cities than it was in the countryside. **In cities such as Louisville, Charleston, and Richmond, some 65–75% of all Euro-Amerikan families owned Afrikan slaves.** And the commerce and industry of these cities brought together and educated masses of Afrikan colonial proletarians—in the textile mills, mines, ironworks, docks, railroads, tobacco factories, and so on.

“In such concentrations, Afrikans bent and often broke the bars surrounding them. Increasingly, more and more slaves were no longer under tight control. Illegal grog shops (white-owned, of course) and informal clubs flourished on the back streets. Restrictions on even the daily movements of many slaves faltered in the urban crowds.

“Contemporary white travelers often wrote of how alarmed they were when visiting Southern cities at the large numbers of Afrikans on the streets. One historian writes of New Orleans: ‘It was not unusual for slaves to gather on street corners at night ...’ Louisville newspaper editorial complained in 1835 that ‘Negroes scarcely realize the fact that they are slaves ... insolent, intractable ...’

“It was natural in these urban concentrations that slave escapes (prison breaks) became increasingly common. The Afrikan communities in the cities were also human forests, partially opaque to the eye of the settler, in which escapees from the plantations quietly sought refuge. During one 16 month period in the 1850s the New Orleans settler police arrested 982 ‘runaway slaves’—**a number equal to approximately 7% of the city’s slave population.** In 1837 the Baltimore settler police arrested almost 300 Afrikans as proven or suspect-

ed escapees—a number equal to over 9% of that city’s slave population.

“And, of course, these are just those who were caught. Many others evaded the settler law enforcement apparatus. Frederick Douglass, we remember, had been a carpenter and shipyard worker in Baltimore before escaping Northward to pursue his agitation. At least 100,000 slaves did escape to the North and Canada during these years.

* “**Nor should it be forgotten that some of the largest armed insurrections and conspiracies of the period involved the urban proletariat.** The Gabriel uprising of 1800 was based on the Richmond proletariat (Gabriel himself was a blacksmith, and most of his lieutenants were other skilled workers). So many Afrikans were involved in that planned uprising that one Southern newspaper declared that prosecutions had to be halted lest it bankrupt the Richmond capitalists by causing ‘the annihilation of the Blacks in this part of the country.’



Margaret Garner (called Peggy), who killed her own daughter rather than allow the child to be returned to slavery.

"The Charleston Conspiracy of 1822, led by Denmark Vesey (a free carpenter), was an organization of urban proletarians—stevedores, millers, lumberyard workers, blacksmiths, etc. Similarly, the great conspiracy of 1856 was organized among coal mine, mill, and factory workers across Kentucky and Tennessee. In its failure, some 65 Afrikans were killed at Senator Bell's iron works alone.

It was particularly alarming to the settlers that those Afrikans who had been given the advantages of urban living, and who had skilled positions, just used their relative mobility to strike at the colonial system all the more effectively."

"Freedom is the Recognition of Necessity"

Young Harriet was part of this rising, and aware, despite the prison culture she grew up in, of the larger events. As the explosive ripple of Nat Turner's Uprising spread, for example, she and other captives would illegally gather at night at the shacks of the few literate "free" New Afrikans. The latter were allowed to buy newspapers, and would read aloud to their sisters and brothers about the trials and the political storm that the Uprising had caused.

In 1849, Harriet heard that she and her brothers were about to be sold South. Harriet saw the life-threatening reality and freed herself to deal with it. She had already lost two sisters and their children, who had been sold South and who would never be found again. If she were to be taken on the chain gangs deeper into the South, into malarial rice plantations or harsh plantation lands being cleared in territory strange to her, her chances of escaping were much less.

Harriet was out of there. Time to jet! She joined the Underground Railroad and escaped. Harriet left behind her

husband, who was a "free Negro" and who refused to go. It says it all, doesn't it, that he objected to Harriet's escaping? He who was not in danger of being sold away. John Tubman wasn't willing to risk his privileged status just because his wife was in mortal danger. Hey, he wouldn't go North, and you know he wasn't going further South. You can always get another wife. And he did. Ironically, he should have been more principled, because right after the Civil War he was shot in the back and killed by a white man he had argued with.

Her two brothers tried to escape after hearing the rumors, taking Harriet with them. But that night, without supplies and not knowing where to hide, they decided that the danger of being captured was too great. Forcing Harriet to come along, they gave up and returned "home."

Gathering food, Harriet set out again to escape. Deliberately not telling any of the men, not her husband, not her father, or brothers. Moving alone. "Freedom is the recognition of necessity." She later said that her own thinking had broken through politically in an Amazon way in those few days. She had said to herself:

"There's two things I've got a right to and these are Death or Liberty. One or the other I mean to have. No one will take me back alive; I shall fight for my liberty, and when the time has come for us to go, the Lord will let them kill me."

In escaping, Harriet was re-defining herself. Not only in relation to Southern slavery and the prison warden who claimed to "own" her. But in relationship to men & the patriarchal family. She was constructing herself, creating her new identity as an Amazon. Never again, from that moment on, would Harriet Tubman place herself under the command of men. In politics, war, or daily life. She loved her family, and would return as a guerrilla to rescue as many as she could. However, she was also freeing herself from them.

The Largest Radical Conspiracy in u.s. History

* The Underground Railroad when Harriet found it had already been in existence over fifty years. Not only as the largest radical conspiracy in u.s. history, involving many thousands, but as a major front of the New Afrikan liberation war. Every war has its own character, its unique unfolding. Spontaneously, the mass revolutionary strategy of the New Afrikan slaves had first been to escape, by any means necessary. Stranded on a strange continent, these trickles and streams of escapees flowed together to create "free" communities of New Afrikans in the North, and in the Indian nations. To be seedbeds from which rebuilding offensives would grow. While at the same time robbing the Slave Power of illegitimate "property" and its already thin sense of security. Weakening the pre-Confederate economy.

LARGEST
CONSPIRACY
+
MAJOR
FRONT
IN NEW
AFRIKAN
LIB. WAR

PEOPLE'S STRATEGY We are speaking here of a People's strategy, worked out in practice by masses of captives and escapees themselves, of mass movements breaking out of prison camps and across borders. During the settler slaveowners' 1776-1783 War of Independence from the British Empire, there was a great tidal wave of New Afrikans escaping and allying themselves with the British. It is an irony that today white Left organizations name themselves after the settler patriots' organization of that day, the "Committees of Correspondence." For the original "Committees of Correspondence" organized night patrols of white men in the North to intercept and kill escaping Afrikans. Again, the book *Settlers* gives us a true account of this suppressed story:

"The British, short of troops and laborers, decided to use both the Indian nations and the Afrikan slaves to help bring down the settler rebels. This was nothing unique; the French had extensively used Indian military alliances and the British extensively used Afrikan slave recruits in their 1756-63 war over North America (called 'The

French & Indian War' in settler history books). But the Euro-American settlers, sitting on the dynamite of a restive, nationally oppressed Afrikan population, were terrified—and outraged.

"This was the final proof to many settlers of King George III's evil tyranny. An English gentlewoman traveling in the Colonies wrote that popular settler indignation was so great that it stood to unite rebels and Tories again. Tom Paine, in his revolutionary pamphlet *Common Sense*, raged against '... that barbarous and hellish power which hath stirred up Indians and Negroes to destroy us.' But oppressed peoples saw this war as a wonderful contradiction to be exploited in the ranks of the European capitalists.

"Lord Dunmore was Royal Governor of Virginia in name, but ruler over so little that he had to reside aboard a British warship anchored offshore. Urgently needing reinforcements for his outnumbered command, on Nov. 5, 1775, he issued a proclamation that any slaves enlisting in his forces would be freed. Sir Henry Clinton, commander of British forces in North America, later issued an even broader offer:

"I do most strictly forbid any Person to sell or claim Right over any Negroe, the property of a Rebel, who may claim refuge in any part of this Army; And I do promise to every Negroe who shall desert the Rebel Standard, full security to follow within these Lines, any Occupation which he shall think proper.'

"Could any horn have called more clearly? By the thousands upon thousands, Afrikans struggled to reach British lines. One historian of the Exodus has said: "The British move was countered by the Americans, who exercised closer vigilance over their slaves, removed the able-

bodied to interior places far from the scene of the war, and threatened with dire punishment all who sought to join the enemy. To Negroes attempting to flee to the British the alternatives "Liberty or Death" took on an almost literal meaning. Nevertheless, by land and sea they made their way to the British forces.'

"The war was a disruption to Slave Amerika, a chaotic gap in the European capitalist ranks to be hit hard. Afrikans seized the time—not by the tens or hundreds, but by the many thousands. Amerika shook with the tremors of their movement. The signers of the Declaration of Independence were bitter about their personal losses: Thomas Jefferson lost many of his slaves; Virginia's Governor Benjamin Harrison lost thirty of 'my finest slaves'; William Lee lost sixty-five slaves, and said two of his neighbors 'lost every slave they had in the world'; South Carolina's Arthur Middleton lost fifty slaves.

"Afrikans were writing their own 'Declaration of Independence' by escaping. Many settler patriots tried to appeal to the British forces to exercise European solidarity and expel the Rebel slaves. George Washington had to denounce his own brother for bringing food to the British troops, in a vain effort to coax them into returning the Washington family slaves. Yes, the settler patriots were definitely upset to see some real freedom get loosed upon the land.

"To this day no one really knows how many slaves freed themselves during the war. Georgia settlers were said to have lost over 10,000 slaves, while the number of Afrikan escaped prisoners in South Carolina and Virginia was thought to total well over 50,000. Many, in the disruption of war, passed themselves off as freemen and relocated in other territories, fled to British Florida and Canada, or took refuge in Maroon communities or with

the Indian nations. It has been estimated that 100,000 Afrikan prisoners—some 20% of the slave population—freed themselves during the war.

"The thousands of rebellious Afrikans sustained the British war machinery. After all, if the price of refuge from the slavemaster was helping the British throw down the settlers, it was not such a distasteful task. Lord Dunmore had an 'Ethiopian Regiment' of ex-slaves (who went into battle with the motto 'Liberty to Slaves' sewn on their jackets) who helped the British capture and burn Norfolk, Va. on New Years Day, 1776. That must have been sweet, indeed. Everywhere, Afrikans appeared with the British units as soldiers, porters, road-builders, guides, and intelligence agents. Washington declared that unless the slave escapes could be halted the British Army would inexorably grow 'like a snowball in rolling.' ...

"What was primary for the Afrikan masses was a strategic relationship with the British Empire against settler Amerika. To use an Old European power against the Euro-American settlers—who were the nearest and most immediate enemy—was just common sense to many. **65,000 Afrikans joined the British forces—over ten for every one enlisted in the Continental U.S. ranks ...**

"Even in the ruins of British defeat, the soundness of this viewpoint was born out in practice. While the jubilant Patriots watched the defeated British army evacuate New York City in 1783, some 4,000 Afrikans swarmed aboard the departing ships to escape Amerika. Another 4,000 Afrikans escaped with the British from Savannah, 6,000 from Charleston, and 5,000 escaped aboard British ships prior to the surrender. Did these brothers and sisters 'lose' the war—compared to those still in chains on the plantations?

"Others chose neither to leave nor submit. All during the war Indian and Afrikan guerrillas struck at the settlers. In one case, three hundred Afrikan ex-slaves fought an extended guerrilla campaign against the planters in both Georgia and South Carolina. Originally allied to the British forces, they continued their independent campaign long after the British defeat. They were not overcome until 1786, when their secret fort at Bear Creek was discovered and overwhelmed. This was but one front in the true democratic struggle against Amerika."

When Harriet Tubman reached the first "free" (non-Slavery) city of Philadelphia, she met with William Still, the New Afrikan leader of the Underground Railroad there. Hooked up now, and having a rear base area, Harriet became a self-sufficient "conductor" on the Underground Railroad. Working most of the year as a laborer, cleaning or doing laundry or cutting wood, to support herself and save money for raids in the South. Twice a year, usually in the Spring and Fall, Harriet Tubman would travel hundreds of miles (much of it on foot) infiltrating Slave territory to bring escapees out. She conducted nineteen guerrilla raids, even reaching deep into the Carolina plantation country.

While the Underground Railroad was famous in its own day, especially after being popularized in Harriet Beecher Stowe's best selling novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in 1852, it was very different than the images of daring white Quakers we are spoon-fed today. **It was mainly composed of New Afrikans, not euro-amerikans. There were many white Abolitionists in the North, but relatively few were willing to risk themselves, or even contribute much money.**

In the South, a handful of "free" Afrikans and Anti-Slavery whites played a key role, but the river of New Afrikan prisoners breaking out was, of course, the largest single part of the Underground Railroad. Most of the "station-masters" and "brakemen" (local Underground Railroad coordinators) were

New Afrikan as well. And when it came to the over five hundred "conductors," those frontline guerrillas who acted in the infiltrated Slave territory to lead prison breaks, virtually all were New Afrikan. It was their war.

We've said it before, but we have to repeat it so that we really get it. The Underground Railroad that Harriet joined in 1849 and came to help lead, wasn't civilian, but a military activity. In fact, it was the main Black military activity in their protracted war against the Slave System. It was a mass form of guerrilla warfare. This is the key that opens up an understanding about the nature of war by the oppressed. Which is a level of understanding long denied women, but that we Amazons must break into.

When the capitalist patriarchy praises the Underground Railroad with dusty words, it does so to mislead us. To turn us away from Harriet's own tracks. In our school daze, the Underground Railroad is always falsely praised for being about humanitarian rescue. For being about New Afrikans seeking safety in the white North. As though the Underground were only some Red Cross mission. As though the white North was safe for New Afrikan women. No, not even close to true when we really think about it.

For the Black guerrillas like Harriet the North served as the rear base area in their long war against the Slave System. Rear base areas are little discussed, but essential to guerrillas. This is something precise: a large area or territory, bordering on the main battle zone, where the other side cannot freely operate. Either for reasons of remoteness or impenetrable mountain ranges, or because it crosses political boundaries. The North as a rear base gave New Afrikans the space to rest, repair, and rebuild themselves. This was a deeper process than we've thought about.

In real life, revolutionary guerrillas spend most of their time in rear base areas, not out on raids. In China, Mao Zedong even thought that only one battle every three months was the

U.K. AS A
MILITARY
ACTIVITY

REAR
BASE
LOCKER

19
PHOS

*
REAR
BASE
DEF.

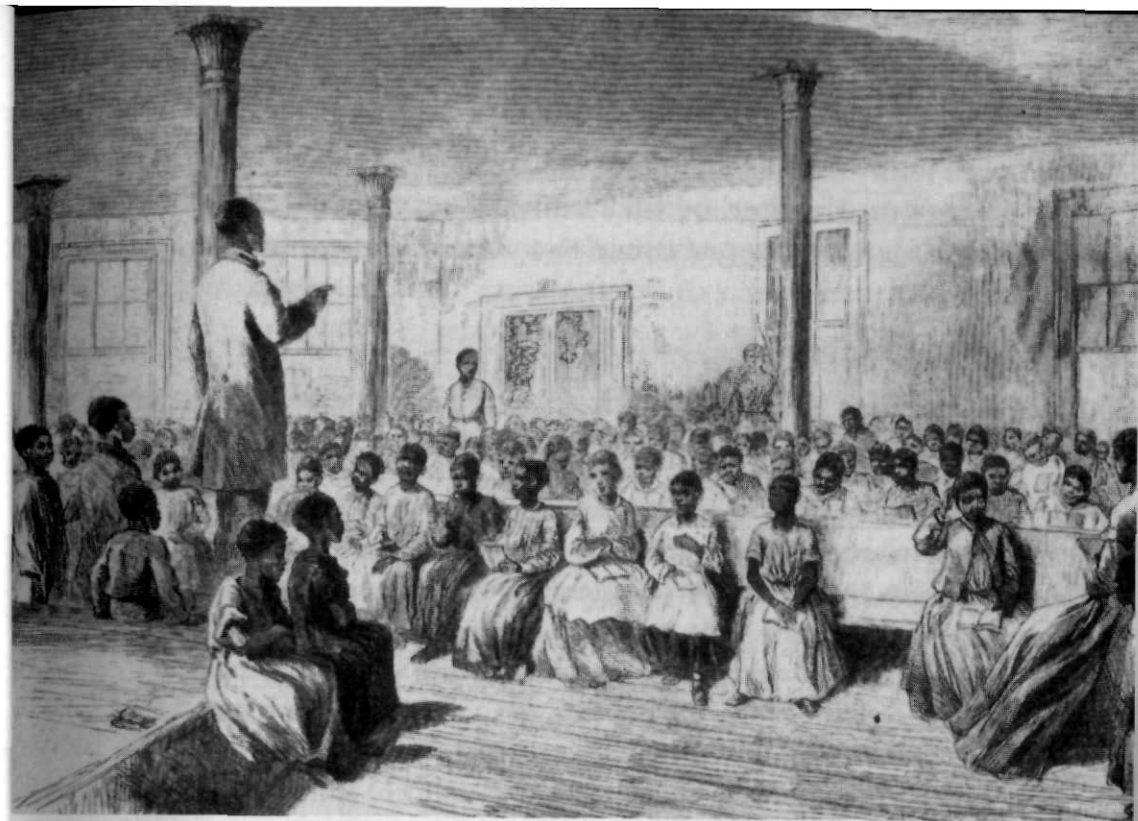
MOST
COMPARISON
BLACK

NOT PRESENTS
 right spacing for full-time guerrilla units. Because it's in the rear base areas that the process of mass change, of the oppressed changing themselves into new people educationally and politically and classwise and in identity, was centered. So rear base areas were and are not passive, not like highway rest stops. And escaping northward for ex-slaves then wasn't an end in itself, but only a beginning.

The war of liberation was at work just as hard in the Northern rear base area as in the Southern battle zone, although the shape of the activities was clearly different. It is true that relatively few escapees became guerrillas, as Harriet did. Most New Afrikans in the North as *individuals* were largely concerned in their daily lives about finding jobs, caring for children, and all the other difficult demands of survival in Babylon. But as a *community* what they had in common was the liberation war. Their collective efforts, the institutions they built so painfully from nothing in a hostile land, the new leaders they raised up, were all about making war against the Slave System.

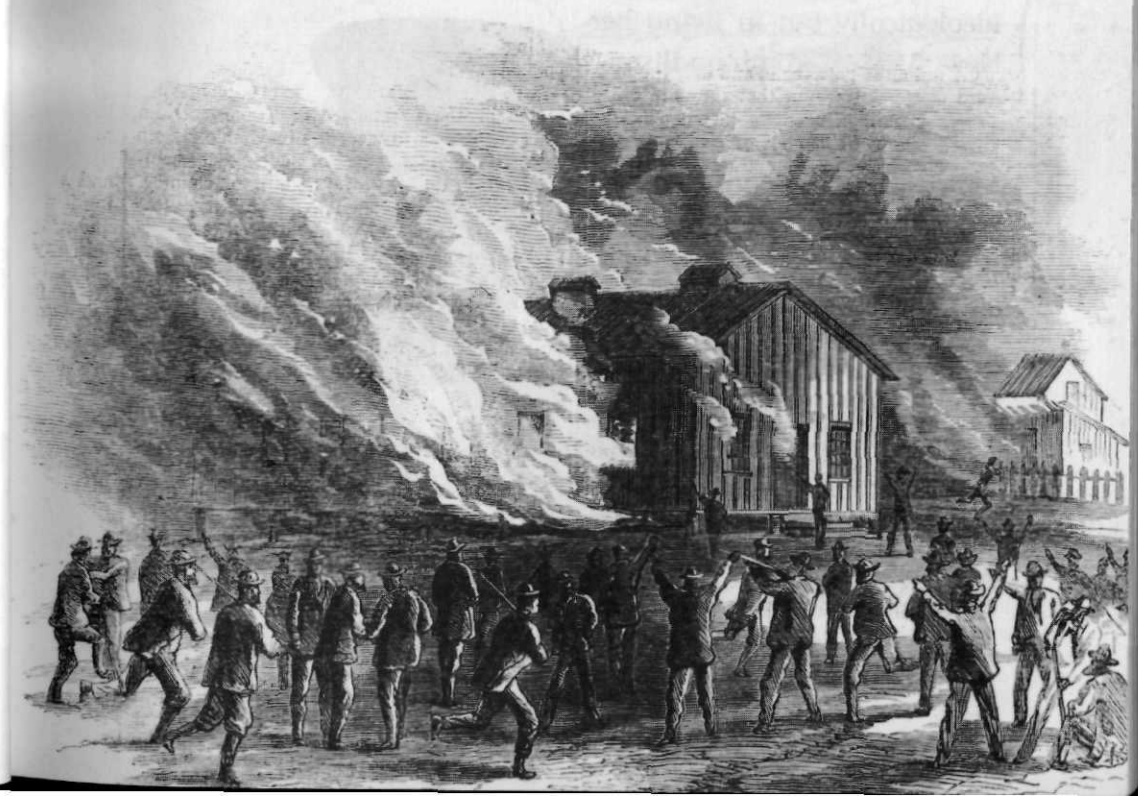
Although the white North back then is sentimentally pictured for us as being "the land of freedom," actually it was cold and barren and hostile for New Afrikans. Before the Civil War many towns and even entire states banned New Afrikans as residents, as did almost all skilled trades, professions, hospitals, schools, churches, and government services. To start a primary school for New Afrikan children in most Northern towns then was seen as a shocking crime, and often such small attempts were burned to the ground by angry white mobs. There was nothing Black, no progress or failure, that was not part of the liberation war.

If Harriet Tubman lived in the North, working as a laborer nine or ten months a year during her guerrilla years, this was not a "time-out." If William Still wore a suit and tie and worked as a clerk in Philadelphia during those years, that didn't make him a civilian. He was a major leader of the single largest Eastern station on the Underground Railroad. Every Black



Above: A Freedmen's school, depicted in *Harper's Weekly*.

Below: The burning of a Freedmen's school in Tennessee, also depicted in *Harper's Weekly*.

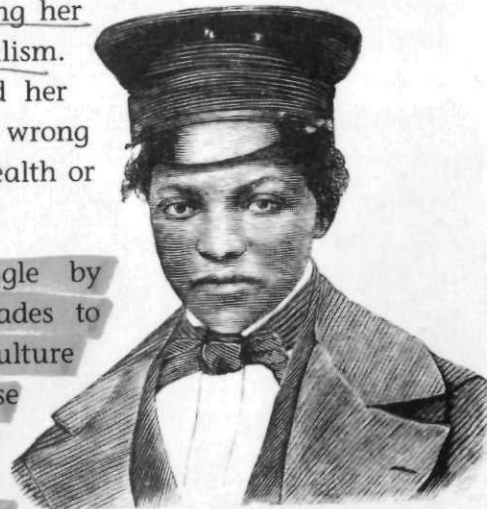


community association or institution back then was involved in the war. The African Methodist Episcopal Church in lower Manhattan was the first formal New Afrikan church. Formed in a split from a white church that wasn't militant enough for them against slavery. For years it and sister churches throughout the North acted against the law as dissident political centers and as hideouts for fugitive New Afrikans.

Again, the rear base area in the North wasn't a passive refuge but an area of possible advantage and also danger that had to be continually fought for, enlarged, and changed. Which Harriet Tubman was very busy doing all the time. Virtually none of this was recorded in men's history, of course, since the actual fabric of women's politics has always been judged too trivial for that. When Harriet took in poor children in a communal way, urging everyone to construct their households in similar communal fashion, this was a political statement so strong that few women here and now can even discuss it.

While there were already anti-capitalists in the u.s. at that time, Harriet's working-class politics weren't expressed ideologically but in living her New Afrikan communalism. Although she never hid her political view that it was wrong to have any personal wealth or advantage whatsoever.

The constant struggle by Harriet and her comrades to build a New Afrikan culture in the Northern rear base area grew more visible after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850. Not only were "slavecatchers" and federal marshals (the



Ann Maria Weems, who escaped the Slave System passing as "Joe Wright"

class politics

1850

forerunners of today's f.b.i.) seizing escaped Afrikans, but in the shadows of this law white kidnapping of any Afrikans in the North for quick sale on the Southern auction blocks was taking place.

A movement of illegal but open mass resistance arose to the u.s. criminal justice system. A mass movement that rescued New Afrikan prisoners and fought the police and courts and federal marshals. Like all true mass struggles, it had many leaders and many brilliant local battles. One of the most famous then was the Battle of Troy, New York. Which was led by an illiterate working-class woman who was herself a fugitive with a bounty on her head. None other than Harriet Tubman. For you see, in real life, "America's Most Wanted" was a working-class New Afrikan woman.

BATTLE OF TROY 1860

On April 27, 1860, Harriet Tubman was traveling to Boston to attend a large Anti-Slavery meeting. Stopping in Troy to visit a relative, she was immediately told that a fugitive New Afrikan,



THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW IN OPERATION.

Charles Nalle, had been captured by the slavers. Federal marshals were holding him at the downtown courthouse, where his so-called "enslaver" was applying to a u.s. commissioner for Nalle's return in chains back to Virginia. Those at the hearing were surprised, for the thirty-year-old Nalle and the slaver looked strikingly alike, differing only in a shade of skin color. They were biologically two brothers with the same father, but one the captive laborer and one the prison warden. Downtown stores had closed, as everyone was going to the courthouse to see the Roman spectacle.

Harriet had helped quickly organize a conspiracy. With her face hidden in a large shawl, carrying a basket, Harriet bent over acting like an old woman. Two other women were by her side, pretending to support her by the arms. Tugging the guard by his coat, Harriet persuaded him to admit the "harmless" women to the courtroom. Where she sank down in the doorway.

Outside, a New Afrikan man named William Henry started speaking to the crowd, covertly warning some among them to get ready: "There's a fugitive in that office. Pretty soon you will see him come forth ... He's going to be taken to the depot to go to Virginia on the first train." Henry, who was an unknown laborer, is believed to be Harriet's brother and the relative she was visiting in Troy.

When the u.s. commissioner ruled against Nalle, the prisoner suddenly leapt for the window and stepped out on the ledge. Cries of support came from below. But his hopes to jump down into the crowd were cut off when Federal agents grabbed him and dragged him back inside. As the local newspaper reported:

"The crowd at this time numbered nearly a thousand persons. Many were black, and a good share were of the female sex. They blocked up State Street from First Street to the alley, and kept surging to and fro."

Nalle's defense attorney, Martin Townsend, delayed the slavers by filing an emergency appeal right then and there. He won an order demanding Nalle's appearance before a judge of the State Supreme Court. As the slavers and Federal agents convoyed the chained Nalle out, Harriet Tubman rose and threw off her disguise. Racing to the open window, she shouted to the Anti-Slavery fighters mixed in the crowd: "Here he comes! Take him!"

Harriet and her Underground group had arranged for a boat to be secretly waiting at the river outside town. She ran down the courthouse stairs, overtaking the Federal party and breaking into their circle. Locking her arms with Nalle's Harriet began pulling him away from the u.s. marshals. "This man shall not go back to slavery!" she shouted. "Take him, friends! Drag him to the river!"

* { In the middle of a crowded downtown street, a small battle raged. Federal agents and police swung their clubs, and some drew their pistols and began firing. New Afrikan guerrillas and their white allies charged into them. Nalle himself fought desperately to get free, side by side with Harriet. Attorney Martin Townsend witnessed it all:

"In the melee she was repeatedly beaten over the head with policemen's clubs, but she never for a moment released her hold, but cheered Nalle and his friends with her voice, and struggled with the officers until they were literally worn out with their exertions, and Nalle was separated from them."

They hurried Nalle down to the river, where a sympathetic ferryman rowed him to the other side. But no sooner had a bloodied and exhausted Nalle touched the shore again than he was recaptured. This time the u.s. marshals and police rushed him under heavy guard to Police Justice Stewart's office, which they barricaded. Just in time, as Harriet had led a rush of four hundred Anti-Slavers on to the steam ferry boat and across the river.

When the u.s. marshals hiding inside started firing wildly at the surrounding force, someone rallied the attackers. "They can only kill a dozen of us—come on!" New Afrikan men charged up the stairs and forced open the door. The first of them was cut down by a hatchet swung by Deputy Sheriff Morrison. His body stuck in the doorway, though, so the door could not be slammed shut. The Anti-Slavery men broke in, but were overcome in hand-to-hand fighting one by one. Then, as Attorney Townsend tells us, it was all on a squad of Black Amazons to win or lose the battle:

"And when the men who led the assault upon the door of Judge Stewart's office were stricken down, Harriet and a number of other colored women rushed over their bodies, brought Nalle out, and putting him into the first wagon passing, started him for the West."

After the battle u.s. marshals tried to hunt them down, but members of the underground hid them well. And an entire New Afrikan Nation protected Harriet. How shallow is today's false image of Harriet as a lone, non-political do-gooder, when we glimpse her reality as an Amazon leader of an entire people at war. What was happening in the guerrilla war was that violent battles were taking place not only in the South but in the North as well. Thousands upon thousands of New Afrikans created new battlegrounds, and endured the real costs and real casualties of bitter struggles. Women easily as much as men. In that long, difficult, and successful process to develop the North as a vibrant Rear Base Area for their war, women and men stepped up to recreate themselves in dignity. "Freedom is never given, but only won."

Underground Railroad leader William Still gave an example of the militancy of escaping New Afrikans. In 1855, six fugitives breaking out of Virginia complete with the owner's horses and carriage, were stopped on the road by a posse of white patrollers:

"At this juncture, the fugitives verily believing that time had arrived for the practical use of their pistols and dirks, pulled them out of concealment—the young women as well as the young men—and declared they would not be taken! One of the white men raised his gun, pointing the muzzle directly towards one of the young women, with the threat that he would 'shoot', etc. 'Shoot! shoot!! shoot!!!' she exclaimed, with a double barreled pistol in one hand and a long dirk knife in the other, utterly unterrified and fully ready for a death struggle. The male leader of the fugitives by this time had pulled back the hammers of his pistols, and was about to fire! Their adversaries seeing the weapons, and the unflinching determination on the part of the runaways to stand their ground, 'spill blood, kill, or die,' rather than be taken, very prudently 'sidled over to the other side of the road' ..."



A BOLD STROKE FOR FREEDOM.

"Moses" and "The General"

All this is the larger context in which Harriet Tubman was a part. To blow away the individualistic fiction of Harriet as a lone rescuer or as a Black superwoman takes nothing that is hers away from her. Instead, it frees her in our understanding to be her true self, a New Afrikan woman who was part of the military and political leadership in her People's war. While her underground name was "Moses," it was meaningful that both John Brown and Union Army commanders who knew her respectfully called Harriet "the General."

MILITARY
+ POL.
LEADERSHIP

Her second biographer, Earl Conrad, pinpointed the widespread lack of understanding of Harriet Tubman's **military** role, and the real influence she had in the major events leading to the destruction of the Slave Power:

MILITARY
ROLE

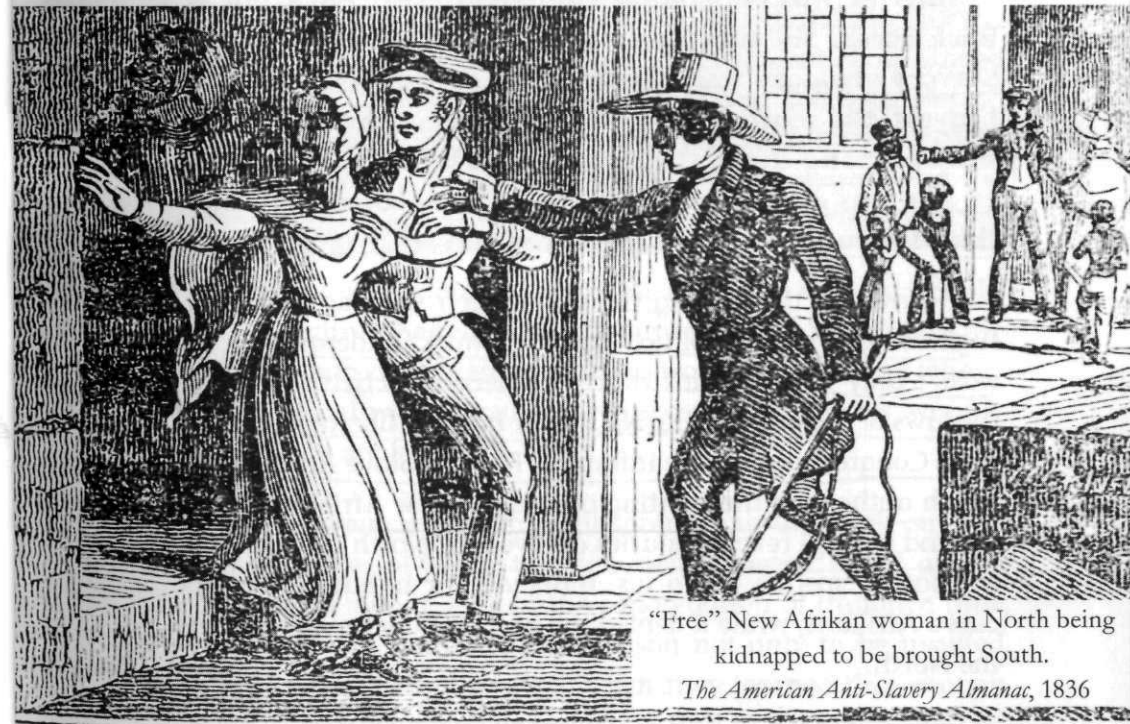
"It has often been said, 'She made nineteen trips into the slave country,' but the meaning of this enormous enterprise has been hidden in the lack of illustration. A trip into the slave territory and the 'kidnapping' of a band of blacks was no less than a military campaign, a raid upon an entrenched and an armed enemy. If it was anything less than a military task then it would not have engaged the attention of such a martial figure as John Brown, as for many years it did. If conducting was not a military assignment then no men would have been hounded, harassed, jailed and wounded, and no lives would have been lost.

"The Underground Railroad era was one of prolonged, small-scale guerrilla warfare between the North and the South, a campaign that, for its activities, was often violent and always perilous. It was so much like guerrilla warfare that it influenced John Brown into the theory that a more extensive development of this type of conflict might be useful as a means of breaking the grip of

the slaveholders upon the economy, the politics and the government of the nation; it was one of the longest campaigns of defiance in the nation's history.

RAIDERS ARE
IMPRESSING PER
FUGITIVE
SLAVES LOW
+ BRINGING
WAR

"When it is remembered that the Underground was an institution in American life for at least a half century, that by 1850 it was an issue so much at the core of the American problem that called forth an ignominious Fugitive Slave Law, and that it was one of the greatest forces which brought on the Civil War, and thus destroyed slavery, then alone is it possible to comprehend its significance. Harriet Tubman's outstanding participation in the Underground in its last and most vigorous phase, from 1850 until the Civil War, must be approached in the light of such a far-reaching influence as that."



"Free" New Afrikan woman in North being kidnapped to be brought South.
The American Anti-Slavery Almanac, 1836

We have to go more consciously into the question of Harriet's politics. For when Amazons and fighting women appear—as we always will—Patriarchal Capitalism tries to contain us ideologically. We are marginalized in one way or another, even if they have to romanticize us as lone exotic super-women. You know, like the talking dog. It isn't what she says that's important, it's that she talks at all that's amazing.

So even when Amazons are supposedly being "honored" it is usually irritating, to say the least. If you saw that wretched television movie about Harriet Tubman, you can catch what I mean. There's elegant Cecily Tyson playing Harriet as some kind of arrogant saint, having to pump up and push ahead the dumb, fearful folks she was freeing. As if Harriet was the only New Afrikan there with any guts. As if Cecily Tyson has anything to do with Harriet. Again, to take women out of our political context trivializes us.

strong
where

Harriet wasn't leading the weak. No, that's got it backwards. She was leading the strong. The great Anti-Slavery struggle was a movement of the best and the bravest, the most serious-minded folks of that day. And it was among these, the strong, that Harriet was a leader. She was an Amazon player in the political decisions that determined the ending of the Slavery System.

Harriet did this during the years when she was a wanted fugitive and doing political-military work underground. It wasn't only in the South that her guerrilla activity violated the laws of the u.s. empire. No sooner had she liberated herself than Congress passed the infamous Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which authorized the hunting of escaped New Afrikan prisoners and wanted revolutionaries all over the North as well. The act paid a special fee to u.s. marshals for handing over accused Afrikans, while it denied the accused any bail or trial in the North.

1850s
Ca: Fugitive Slave Act

This unleashed a legion of Southern agents and bounty hunters throughout the country. Harriet and many others had to shift their base of operations. For seven years, Harriet and those of her family she had helped escape lived in exile in St. Catharines, Ontario in Canada. This undeveloped town was one of the first "free" New Afrikan settlements and was much looked to. While whites and Indians lived there as well, to New Afrikans, it was a temporary rear base area. The battle lines had shifted, the North was no longer safe for escaped prisoners, and Harriet used Canada as her rear base to rest up between raids, to take new fugitives to.

Eventually, the Slaveocracy would put bounties totaling \$40,000, in 1850s dollars, on Harriet's head. It wasn't her guerrilla raids on their plantations alone that hurt the planter capitalists, but the growing effect of her example to others and her larger political role. Confederates would even point to her later with frustration as one of the causes of the rebellion. On June 1, 1860, for example, feminists gathered in Boston for the annual New England Anti-Slavery Society Conference staged their own "Drawing Room Convention" at Melodeon Hall to discuss women's role in culture. Harriet Tubman was one of the speakers. A newspaper reported the appearance of the wanted Amazon:

"A colored woman of the name of Moses, who [is] herself a fugitive, has eight times returned to the Slave States for the purpose of rescuing others from bondage, and who has met with extraordinary success in her efforts, won much applause."

The pro-slavery writer John Bell Robinson would single out that day as a special injury to white men's power: "Now I ask all the candid men to look at the congregation of traitors a little, and see if the South had no reason not only to be insulted, but alarmed to the extreme, when they learned that enough such men and women at Melodeon Hall in Boston in 1860, to

densely fill it, and would laugh and shout over such wickedness in a poor weak-minded Negro woman, in trampling upon the rights of the South with impunity. What could be more insulting after having lost over \$50,000 worth of property by that deluded Negress, than for a large congregation of whites and well-educated people of Boston to endorse such an imposition on the constitutional rights of the slave states."

Fun to laugh at that frustrated white supremacist, but home in on the fact that even 150 years later women have, in our own way, as much difficulty accepting Harriet as he did. That's why the capitalist patriarchy has so easily disfigured her. Harriet was a guerrilla not just in the obvious way, but on a deeper level. We have trouble seeing her as real because she totally disobeyed the patriarchal and hierarchical rules that we still live by; in which people's lives are strictly bar-coded by dress and role, race and gender, and, above all, by class.

It's a take on us that the capitalist patriarchy has so easily conned us into thinking that Harriet was only a goody two-shoes. When she was an Amazon, and one of the most subversive players in u.s. history. Check us out on that.

Frederick Douglass is considered the preeminent New Afrikan leader of the 19th century. A brilliant and persuasive public speaker and writer, Douglass was a towering public figure of that age. But Harriet was no less a leader of her people. As Douglass himself wrote to her: "I have wrought in the day—you in the night. I have had the applause of the crowd and the satisfaction that comes of being approved by the multitude ... The midnight sky and the silent stars have been the witnesses to your devotion to freedom and your heroism. Excepting John Brown—of sacred memory—I know of no one who has willingly encountered more perils and hardship to serve an enslaved people than you have."

While Douglass became a spokesman for the Anti-Slavery cause, Harriet for years concealed herself and her work as a

*
*
DISOBEY
BUST
RULES
& LAW

*Douglass at
+ Robinson
"SUPPORT"
FOR HARRIET*

guerrilla. What could Douglass' speeches have been without the growth of the Underground Railroad and the mass resistance which Harriet played such a part in building? And in the underground, it was Douglass who was the supporter to Harriet, sheltering in his Rochester, New York, house the fugitives she was leading on the last leg to safety in Canada.

Just as Douglass fits our programmed image of a leader while Harriet does not, Harriet does not register with our patriarchal image of a soldier. Having no official rank or uniform or place in men's hierarchy. Yet & again, she was the first woman to serve in the Union Army, and in retirement kept as her proudest possession the army rifle she had carried in action in the Civil War. While Dr. Martin Delany, the early Black nationalist, is recognized as a soldier for being the first New Afrikan commissioned as a Major in the u.s. army, Harriet had been conducting guerrilla raids on the plantations for over twelve years before there was a Civil War. **Breaking the rules as an Amazon.**

*LATE
1850s*

By the end of the 1850s the irresistible progress of New Afrikan liberation had forced the end of the old u.s. and brought the crisis to a head. Where once captive New Afrikans escaped by the ones and twos, now prison breaks were assuming a mass character. In one famous 1857 Maryland prison break, organized by none other than Harriet herself, thirty-nine New Afrikans escaped heavily armed with stolen revolvers, sword-canes, and butcher knives. Women no less than men. Armed resistance was once so shocking when done by Nat Turner and his men in 1831, but was becoming universal.

Harriet herself, despite her secrecy, had become a legend. The plantation owners' hatred of her was expressed not only in bounties and wanted posters, but in public discussion of which torture devices would be used by the would-be captors on her before her slow death. Feeling that the general alarm for Harriet as the South's "Most Wanted" made her capture certain, white abolitionists urged her to retire. With no success. A

letter survives written by Colonel Thomas Higginson, the fighting Abolitionist minister who was a supporter of John Brown and who would command a Black regiment in the Civil War, after a visit from Harriet:

"Dear Mother,

"... We have the greatest heroine of the age here, Harriet Tubman ... I have known her for some time and mentioned her in speeches once or twice—the slaves call her Moses. She has had a reward of twelve thousand dollars offered for her in Maryland and will probably be burned alive when she is caught, which she probably will be, first or last, as she is going again. She has been in the habit of working in hotels all summer and laying up money for the crusade in the winter. She is jet black and cannot read or write, only *talk*, beside acting ..."

Higginson emphasized "talk" because to those fighting slavery, Harriet's quiet speeches, telling of operations in the South against the Slaveocracy, were electrifying. Harriet was an Amazon spearhead, leading by doing. The Canadian Anti-Slavery Society would send funds for her to pick up at *Frederick Douglass' Paper* in Rochester. So would the Irish Anti-Slavery Society. In Scotland, Elize Wigham of the Glasgow Anti-Slavery Society and other Scots women raised support for her raids.

The greatest tribute to her work was the emergency convention of slave owners in 1857, on the Eastern shore of Maryland, where she had been so active. It was called out of panic, about all the prison breaks that Harriet and many other Black guerrillas were doing. It was the first of the slaver capitalist conventions that would soon lead the Slave States into secession, trying to stop the tide of prison breaks with even tighter slave laws. Along with the re-enslavement of "free" Afrikans, many of whom were suspected of being agents or supporters of the underground. Their self-destructive frenzy of repression was understood to be a signal that the end was nearing. The *Antislavery Standard* newspaper wrote happily:

"The operation of the Underground Railroad on the Maryland border, within the last few years has been so extensive that in some neighborhoods nearly the whole slave population have made their escape, and the convention is a result of the general panic on the part of the owners ..."

A Revolutionary Politic

These special conventions begun in Maryland were important. Facing the death of their social order from internal bleeding, patriarchal capitalists in the one Southern state after another held these assemblies to decide their next move. It was these state conventions that decided to leave the u.s.a. and form a new nation just of their own. Which they named the Confederate States of America. So we can see a direct connection between the steady guerrilla war waged by the Underground Railroad and the determining political events of the day. Harriet herself directly helped precipitate the start of the Civil War. She was at the center of the whirlwind.

By 1857, her presence at key meetings began to be noted. She was usually introduced simply as "Moses" or with a fictitious name. On August 1, 1859, she addressed the New England Colored Citizens Convention opposing Colonization, the popular white plan to resolve their "African Problem" by deporting all Afrikans to an Afrikan colony. Abraham Lincoln and Harriet Beecher Stowe were two of its main backers:

ON COLONIZATION

"Miss Harriet Garrison was introduced as one of the most successful conductors on the Underground Railroad. She denounced the Colonization movement, and told a story of a man who sowed onions and garlic on his land to increase his dairy production, but soon found the butter was strong, and would not sell, and so he concluded

PROTHERTON
WAR OF
U.G. RAILROAD
AS IMPACT
↓
HISTORICAL
MOTOR

to sow clover instead. But he soon found the wind had blown the onions and garlic all over his field. Just so, she stated, the white people had got the Negroes here to do their drudgery, and now they were trying to root them out and ship them to Africa. 'But,' she said, 'they can't do it: we're rooted here, and they can't pull us up.' She was much applauded."

✓ Portrayed by the Capitalist Patriarchy as a woman without politics, Harriet was the total opposite. She fought for and lived out the most radical politics of her age. For her to fight at mass New Afrikan meetings against Colonization, which was the main white neo-colonial plan then, was only typical. At a time when most settler Abolitionists expected New Afrikans to remain their inferiors and subordinates, even inside the movement, Harriet joined with Frederick Douglass and others to build New Afrikan-led organizations.

COLONIZATION
AT 1850-
COLONIAL
SETTLERS

Now, armed New Afrikan resistance to the Slaveocracy way back then in the 19th century has been made retroactively respectable. But it wasn't back then, even in much of the Abolitionist movement. The most famous of the white Abolitionist writers and leaders, William Lloyd Garrison, and his American Anti-Slavery Society, held to the strict doctrine of Christian non-violence and battle by "Moral Suasion" only. The revival meeting speaker and Feminist, Sojourner Truth, crisscrossed the North arguing against those who advocated armed slave resistance. Her verbal skirmishes with Frederick Douglass on the issue of violence were dramatic.

ROBIN-
NEVIN
1805-1881

Harriet, who traveled armed with a concealed pistol and had sworn never to be taken alive, was on the most radical edge of freedom "by any means necessary." Feminism was a concept even less acceptable to white society than Abolition back then, but Harriet, as a New Afrikan woman, was always an open Feminist. Not only as an associate of Susan B. Anthony, and one who participated in Feminist conferences

GEMINA
1817-1878

into old age. But as an Amazon. She didn't support the Warrior, she was the Warrior. In fact, never in Harriet's life, once she freed herself, did she put herself under the command of men. A fact never discussed by men. Again, she led by actually living the most radical politics of her age.

* It's wrong to think of Harriet's politics in civilian terms, because she wasn't a civilian and that wasn't her frame of reference. Her entire life she had been at war. Moreover, Harriet had grasped the main line that led into the future: that the Anti-Slavery struggle was inevitably growing towards all-out war, and only in such total conflict could the issue of her people's enslavement be finally resolved.

To Develop Armed Struggle

As the settler political parties, including the new Anti-Slavery party, the Republicans, vacillated and tried to compromise to avoid secession, Harriet moved and moved others to develop armed struggle. "They may say 'peace, peace!' as much as they like: I know there's going to be war!" Harriet said in one of her most famous statements. Her political-military work was like an arrow on a direct and one-way journey towards ever greater armed conflict. Each successively larger wave of the struggle saw her on the leading edge.

In 1858, Harriet Tubman joined John Brown's conspiracy to start a permanent guerrilla army inside the South. Her friend Frederick Douglass arranged for the Rev. J.W. Loguen, one of the leaders of the New Afrikan community in Syracuse, N.Y., and a well-known Abolitionist, to take Brown to meet with Harriet in St. Catharines, Ontario. Brown stayed on as Harriet's guest in her house for some days, discussing the plan. ✓

* Harriet's participation in this attempt brings us to the edge of a deeper understanding. We are always told that John

Brown's conspiracy was the brave but hopeless gamble by a small handful of zealots. Why, then, was Harriet so eagerly involved? She was, after all, herself the veteran of ten years of guerrilla warfare. Someone who rarely in the war zone put her foot down wrong. Intensely practical.

* The answer is that while Brown's last minute decision to seize the Federal Arsenal at Harpers Ferry, W. Virginia, in order to publicize the campaign, was a poor decision and poorly executed, their overall strategy was both simple and practical. It received serious discussion among many of the leading New Afrikan activists of the day. It was a logical next step.

Lightning strikes raids
Brown had envisioned a small guerrilla force, roaming up and down the length of the Allegheny Mountains, sheltered in its terrain. Harpers Ferry, W.E.B. DuBois said, was a natural entry point to the Alleghenys, and thus to the mountains running further to the South. Like a tapeworm growing within the Slave States, this army would come down and raid the plantations of Virginia and the Carolinas in lightning strikes. Constantly growing by the recruiting of freed New Afrikans, while sending larger streams of escapees North via the Underground Railroad.

A secret convention was held May 8, 1858, in Chatham, Ontario, home to the largest Black community in Canada. There a group of thirty-three New Afrikans and twelve euro-amerikans approved the guerrilla army and its constitution. There were New Afrikan men such as the Nationalist and physician, Dr. Martin Delany, the prominent Baptist minister, W.C. Monroe, the Underground Railroad leader G.J. Reynolds, the gunsmith and Oberlin college graduate, James Jones, and James Harris, the future u.s. congressman from North Carolina.

* Brown's dangerous attempt received so much interest because it was an idea whose time had come. This was the next higher stage in the struggle. One that years of growing prison breaks and violent resistance had made inevitable. If the Civil

War and Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation had never happened, the capitalist Slave System would have been crushed nevertheless. The idea that New Afrikans would soon free themselves in a major war was one that was common at the time.

Harriet
Wendell Phillips, Garrison's brilliant associate in the American Anti-Slavery Society, publicly linked John Brown to this expectation of New Afrikan self-determination. Before a crowd of thousands he praised "... the spirit, that looks upon the Negro as a Nation, with the right to take arms into its hands and summon its friends to its side, and that looks upon that gibbet of John Brown, not as a scaffold of a felon but as the cross of a martyr."

* Brown's plan had actually grown out of the experience of Harriet and other conductors, who used the Allegheny Mountains as a guerrilla highway. He saw the Underground Railroad as the other half to his small army, bringing supplies and communications from the North while it was an outer network of intelligence and propaganda ahead of his mobile force. Of course, Brown knew far less of the ground he proposed to fight on than Harriet.



John Brown

So we can understand how important Harriet's participation was to him. After meeting her he wrote to his son: "I am succeeding to all appearance, beyond my expectation. Harriet Tubman hooked on his whole team at once. He is the most man, naturally, that I ever met with..."

This Wasn't Just About Race

Brown's pen, in his fervor, suddenly had to jump-cross genders, as he had no words for women sufficient to express his admiration. Which opens the door for us. John Brown was, of course, a patriarch, in his own eyes even. Important affairs were manly affairs, to him. At the Chatham secret convention, a New Afrikan man proposed recruiting women to the conspiracy. Brown strongly opposed this, and according to one participant "warned the members not to intimate, even to their wives, what was done."

So even back then it was necessary for men to exceptionalize Harriet. John Brown's conspiracy and armed band were all male, by deliberate intention. Yet, perhaps the single most crucial person and guerrilla they needed was a New Afrikan woman, and Amazon. It's easy to see how John Brown had to redefine Harriet as a "man" in his mind. And thought that his supreme compliment, too.

From women's point of view, John Brown's campaign and the secret men's convention in Canada are like an x-ray into real politics. Weren't we always taught subliminally that only white men had serious politics & serious political debates? Yet & again, the Anti-Slavery movement in Harriet's time seethed with the contradictory visions of nationhood, race, and gender. Then, as right now, these were only the outward forms that deeper class politics took on.

When Harriet Tubman, Dr. Martin Delany, and John Brown came together in Canada that season, there was a life-or-death unity between them. There were also intense class differences moving just beneath the surface. John Brown had called his secret men's convention to hammer out a "Provisional Constitution of the Oppressed People of the United States." His conspiracy needed such a rule, because questions of national strategies and allegiances were in the air. This wasn't just about race.

Brown's Army AS BLACK GUERRILLA NATION

The Brown expedition was a Black guerrilla nation in its intention. Their goal was not to make raids or free some captives, but to create a sovereign nation—just as in living memory some other men had started the u.s.a. as a brand-new nation. This is why they needed a "provisional constitution." The one they drafted, although written solely by men, guaranteed voting rights to women as well as men. Even encouraged all women to arm themselves.

This was at a time when new capitalist men's nations were being created all over the world. Both in the decay of old pre-industrial empires and in new anti-colonial struggles. After all, the u.s.a. was a new settler nation itself. People could see that making nations or wiping out nations was just the ordinary work of politics. Same with us, sis.

Everyone then had heard of Toussaint L'Ouverture, who had come to be called the "Black Napoleon." After he had led the 1791 Haitian Revolution, and set up the first self-governing Black nation in the Western Hemisphere. Just as Mexican landowners had ended Spanish colonial rule in 1821, creating a new Mexican nation. And in 1836 euro-amerikan "pioneers" led a war of secession against that new Mexican nation, founding their own, independent slaveowner nation of the Republic of Texas (which later joined the u.s.a. as a state). So leaving nations and constructing nations were much on people's minds then.

If John Brown's guerrilla army had been successful, it would have been like the Maroon colonies of fugitive Afrikans. These colonies and camps had sprung up not only in Jamaica and Brazil, in Central Amerika, but in Southern u.s. swamps and forests, too. By their very nature they were self-governing communities, outside of all colonialist laws & government. For that reason, John Brown felt it important to aim the rebellion's ultimate loyalty to the new United States. They would have no goal other than to "Amend & Reform" the u.s. constitution. They would have no flag, he declared, other than the "Stars and Stripes" itself.

One New Afrikan immediately spoke up at the convention, saying that as an ex-slave he owed no allegiance to the flag of slavery. "The old flag is good enough for me," Brown replied. "Under it, freedom was won from the tyrants of the old world, for white men. Now I intend to make it do duty for Black men." Revealing words.

Dr. Martin Delany spoke up to support Brown, and to favorably move the question of his proposed constitution. But Delany did so with his own nationalist slant, stressing the political & social separatism of the future New Afrikan community: "The independent community that Captain Brown proposes to establish will be similar to the Cherokee Nation of Indians or the Mormons in Utah territory."

See, there were a number of self-governing societies then on the fringes of the territory claimed by the u.s. settler empire. Years before, the adventuresome Delany had crossed the Slave South alone to the Texas frontier, looking for a land that New Afrikans might emigrate to away from settler society. With a horse lent him by the Choctaw, he had ridden through the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations as a guest. What is now the state of Oklahoma was then named the Indian Territory, set aside by u.s. law for the Native nations expelled from the Southeast in the 1830s.

Dr. Delany had been impressed that the Choctaw had still kept their own society even under euro-capitalist rule. Their nation still retained a semi-autonomous status. Not only did they have their own territory and economy, however poor it was, but their own schools and language, their own laws & court system. Their leaders were recognized in Washington as the diplomatic representatives of another sovereign people. In Dr. Delany's eyes such a semi-autonomous status would be a big transitional step upward for four million New Afrikans, almost all of whom were still en-slaved.

Harriet and Dr. Martin Delany were a contrast. She had been captive for 29 years, born a slave, while he had been born

a "free Negro" and come of age in the North. She was working-class, and unable to even read the bible. He was a pioneering Black middle-class professional. One who through perseverance found white sponsors to learn medicine & even spend a year at Harvard medical school. And while Harriet's political work was in the South as a guerrilla, Dr. Delany's political work was as an intellectual in the North.

Dr. Delany was one of the very first Pan-Afrikanist educators, and his imprint is still on the politics of the Black Nation. While working in Pittsburg as a cutter (a lay healer who bled blood from the ill, a much prescribed remedy back then) he started what was at the time the only Black Anti-Slavery newspaper in the country. Then, Frederick Douglass recruited him to help publish his famous newspaper, *The North Star*. Dr. Martin Delany even tried becoming a novelist, writing the first Black radical novel, *Blake*. The story of an international conspiracy of the en-slaved that finally seizes Cuba, *Blake* was the first New Afrikan book advocating revolution and denouncing whites as a race. And it ends with the angry words, "Woe be unto these devils of whites, I say."

Dr. Delany was a forerunner, an early nationalist whose work helped inspire W.E.B. DuBois, the Nation of Islam, and other groups. He understood that New Afrikans were a colonized nation: "We are a nation within a nation—as the Poles in Russia, the Hungarians in Austria; the Welsh, Irish, and Scotch in the British dominions."

Along with Rev. Henry Highland Garnett, the militant pastor, Delany was one of the first advocates of Afrikan nationalist migration. Although he agreed that Black people were u.s. citizens and should fight for all their rights here, Delany proudly argued that his people deserved an "even better" development of their own society and their own leadership. White society would never offer them justice in any case, he said.

He advocated initial Afrikan settlements in Central America and the Caribbean, to learn from, before migration back to

Afrika. In his pioneering expedition to Nigeria he gathered examples of Afrikan products and signed a commercial treaty with an Afrikan chief. Wearing Afrikan robes, Dr. Delany toured the North after his return, telling fascinated Black audiences hungry for news from Afrika about the societies and economic potential he had seen.

There's no question that Dr. Delany made significant contributions to radical Black self-assertion. We need to explore these gender and class differences not to diminish anyone, but to illuminate the meaning of the choices people made. Because Dr. Martin Delany is used to dis Harriet. Men have come to imply and assume what a recent, much-acclaimed "history of African-American literature," Dr. Eric J. Sunquist's *To Wake the Nations*,* explicitly states: that Dr. Martin Delany was one of the great founders of the Black "revolutionary" viewpoint, while → Harriet Tubman is dismissed as "less militant." Outside of the obvious, that it's just like men to decide that the most brilliant guerrilla leader this side of Geronimo was "less militant" than her male compatriots, there's a poisoned idea implanted here. Dr. Delany is implied to be the more political one, the mover, while once again women are implied to be only supporters and → doers of tasks. Although in Harriet's case the little woman's task was destroying the Confederacy and its whole system.

The unexplored political difference between Harriet and Dr. Martin Delany was a gender difference. Which is a class difference? They represented and tried to give leadership to different classes in the Black Nation. They had different ideas on what the Black community should become, with Harriet's ideas being the more radical & the more Afrikan.

It was no coincidence that Dr. Martin Delany was inside the Chatham convention reaching agreements with John Brown, while Harriet & all other women were out in the cold. Just cause and effect, girl. Just the inescapable gravitational pull

* Published by Harvard University Press in 1993.

of gender & class. Stick with us here, we have to detour some through these men's politics. Because they are the background to see Harriet's own course.

John Brown's politics there carried the internal contradictions of u.s. anti-racism. Contradictions still alive right now. If successful, the conspirators would have created a guerrilla liberated zone in the Southern mountains, one in which New Afrikans would be a self-governing people totally outside u.s. control. Yet & again, Brown was an amerikkkan patriot, a small businessman who believed in the sacred cause of the u.s.a. as a god-given land for white men & their Black brothers. The unity containing these violent opposites was an unconscious neo-colonialism. His "Provisional Constitution of the Oppressed People ..." committed New Afrikan rebels to not even overthrow any Southern state governments, but only to "Amend & Reform" the u.s. constitution to end chattel slavery. John Brown, who so willingly gave his own life and his sons' lives for justice, also simply assumed as natural a patriarchal capitalist hierarchy to life. That's why he was "Commander-In-Chief" over Black men, and New Afrikan women not even allowed in the room when political decisions were being made.

To Brown and Delany, women were still the led, the governed. That Dr. Martin Delany himself envisioned a male ruling class is clear. As he said in his famous slogan: "Africa for the African people, and Black men to rule them."

Gradually, we have drawn Harriet and Martin together in our story, side by side, so that we can catch the meaning that existed in their relationship. From different origins their lives came to cross each other's, and then to separate. Both lived in log cabins in the hard Canadian exile communities in the 1850s. They were even neighbors, in nearby towns, who knew of each other as comrades in their rising freedom struggle.

Yet and again, Harriet and Martin were also profoundly alien to each other, the working-class Amazon and the entrepreneurial patriarchal nationalist. Magnetic polar opposites

in the developing gender-class contradictions. For Harriet and Martin stood on opposite sides of a rapidly growing divide in the world, engulfed in the explosive onrush of a world class struggle.

For the Black Nation, you see, was not apart from world politics, not apart from world history. So often patriarchal capitalism gives us a post-surgical kind of Black history that seems to be just about itself. That pretends to exist in a little history bubble, separate from the rest of the human race's story.

But Harriet and Martin's time was also the time when the world was first welded together under an industrial euro-capitalist rule. While they were building their Canadian rear base area, Commodore Perry's u.s. navy "black fleet" was bombarding Japan and forcing the shoguns to accept u.s. trade. A time when predatory industrial ecology and white settlerism were removing the Indian Nations ever westward, on ever shrinking patches of ground, until the survivors of u.s. genocide became small communities of prisoners. A time when Black Afrika was being investigated and mapped for european colonial armies arriving and soon to come.

A time when in numerous indigenous societies of Asia, Afrika, and the Western hemisphere, women, as a people unto ourselves with our own economic power, our own self-rule, our own mystery, were broken by capitalist colonialism into isolated individual "pieces" and assigned to the nuclear family of man.

It was no accident that Dr. Delany was being applauded at a gathering of the Royal Society in London, signing commercial treaties in Nigeria, and publishing books. While Harriet was a fugitive conducting protracted, long-range guerrilla raids on the plantation prisons to free New Afrikan prisoners. They were both caught up in what we can now see was a global class struggle, of the malignantly expanding euro-capitalism on one side against indigenous communalistic cultures on

the other. A gender-class divide that would razor through the heart of the Black Nation.

Dr. Martin Delany's dreams were male dreams, of Black capitalistic men rising to join their european brothers in building new commercial empires and nations. He had an honest vision, of the elite of Black men mobilizing themselves to be a proud part of a "man's world." Hand in hand with their white partners, Delany's vision saw the most ambitious New Afrikan men becoming indispensable equals with the european powers in exploiting the great mineral wealth, labor, and trade of Black Afrika. Not enemies at all for Martin, but male partners.

So while men have pointed to Dr. Martin Delany as a revolutionary model of anti-white defiance, his actual politics were much more complex. His vision of Black independence had a closely constructed capitalism of class and gender. In his most famous writing, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, Martin called for "an Expedition of Adventure to the Eastern Coast of Africa." The large funding necessary to in effect take over East Afrika, and establish a ruling nation of Western-educated Black emigrants from the u.s., he amazingly believed would be given to them by the British and French empires:

"... To England and France, we should look for sustenance, and the people of those two nations—as they would have everything to gain from such an adventure and eventual settlement on the EASTERN COAST OF AFRICA—the opening of an immense trade being the consequence. The whole Continent is rich in minerals, and the most precious metals ... with a settlement of enlightened free-men, who with the immense facilities, must soon grow into a powerful nation."

What was most chilling to me about his words was the unconscious implication that East Afrika then was empty, wide open territory for any band of capitalist men who decided to

settle there and start their own nation. Isn't this so achingly familiar? Like the "empty" North Amerika that euro-capitalism gave itself the right to move into, settle, fill up, cleanse. >> Weren't there existing Afrikan societies already there, then? Existing masses of women, children, and men? What rights or role would those native societies have had? Or would they have unintentionally been the equivalent to Indians in the final working out of Martin's capitalistic vision?

This guy-think is really typical for all patriarchal capitalism. Even the Black separatism of that day. The seductive illusion that there can be a benign, "good" capitalism if done by the formerly oppressed, is just that. Martin's nationalistic colleague, the Rev. Henry Highland Garnett, and his African Civilization Society, argued for emigration back to Afrika on a program of defeating the South with Black capitalism.

Challenged by Garnett to debate emigration, Frederick Douglass repeated their program with dry sarcasm:

"The African Civilization Society says to us, go to Africa, raise cotton, civilize the natives, become planters, merchants, compete with the Slave States in the Liverpool cotton market, and thus break down American slavery."

Left unspoken was the obvious question of how anyone could undercut the price of Southern cotton produced by unpaid imprisoned labor. That's even if introducing the capitalism of cotton plantations, planters and all, to Afrika would have been anything less than a eurocentric home invasion. Even if, or especially if, it were done by some Black men themselves. Dr. Martin Delany's own Black migration strategy was a plan for the rise of a small New Afrikan bourgeois male class. Logistically not even all the clipper ships in the world could have moved four million New Afrikans back to Afrika faster than their population increase. To say nothing of where millions of Black laborers in a place they'd never been might obtain huge tracts of farmland, tools, supplies. No, Dr. Delany's actual plans were for the small migration of Black businessmen, who

NAT'L BOURGEOISIE
would become Afrika's Western educated merchants, plantation owners & entrepreneurs. The middlemen selling Afrika's handicrafts, agricultural products, and minerals to the world.

The reality about such well-intentioned male nationalist dreams was that underneath the surface layer of seeming practicality, of self-assured guy-talk about the man's world of power economics and power politics, their plans were really naive and impractical. Brilliant and serious as Martin was, he wasn't even close to the ball park. Dr. Delany and Rev. Henry Highland Garnett and their associates inwardly assumed the basic neutrality of capitalism. That men would always want to play ball with men. In real life, of course, capitalism doesn't play. After the Civil War, the Black men's trading venture with Afrika that Dr. Delany started went bankrupt after their hired sea captain defrauded them in order to pick their ship up cheaply for himself at bankruptcy auction.

While in the bigger picture, world capitalism was entering its stage of high imperialism and colonial empire monopolies. Britain and France didn't need Dr. Martin Delany at all to enrich themselves on Afrika. His plans at best were an anachronism from earlier centuries. The European colonial powers threw themselves into "the scramble for Africa," which ended with Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, and Italy invading and almost completely dividing up the Afrikan continent, its ecology and peoples, among themselves by 1895. Millions of Afrikans there were captives and semi-slaves in the new capitalist mines, plantations, highway projects. Millions were dying from starvation and brutality. Dr. Delany had long since been frozen out of Nigeria, his treaty torn up under British orders. Afrikan emigration, while exploring a militant rejection of u.s. injustice, was a dead end.

Even more to the point, it was a class plan for only a small minority of the "best & brightest." This did not go unnoticed by other New Afrikans. In 1860, the newly-elected Abraham Lincoln found his Union dissolving. The Southern states were seceding even before his Inauguration. The new President

*ROOTS OF
BLACK
CAPITALISM*

tried to calm settler fears about possible masses of freed New Afrikans by picking up Dr. Delany's own plan for Central American settlements. He promised that as quickly as New Afrikans were "freed" they would be deported. The Lincoln administration and Congress appropriated funds to establish a colony for ex-captives in Panama. Overwhelmingly, the Anti-Slavery movement attacked Lincoln playing the Black colony card as a racist move. To get rid of the Black community's boldest & most resourceful, potential leaders, as well as divide their people just as the Crisis was upon them. A few, notably the nationalist forerunner Rev. Henry Highland Garnett, did support Lincoln. Dr. Delany, on lecture tour in the West, wasn't in the debate.

It is true that Harriet was not a public leader and writer in the way that Frederick Douglass and Dr. Martin Delany were. It's also true that these debates among "free Negroes" in the North were only in the periphery of her vision. Harriet was focussed on guerrilla war in the South. Where the great majority of her people still were, workers & laborers just as Harriet was, isolated and in chains. She always likened Slavery to being literally in Hell, and her attention was concentrated on the immediacy of jailbreaking her people out of Hell. An Amazon warrior, she was busy at war.

While Dr. Martin Delany's vision of Black businessmen building a new nation empire in Afrika won him lasting recognition, Harriet had no such vision that history has recognized. For Harriet had no politics that men would recognize as politics then or now. Not having a political party or a written doctrine or a plan for hierarchical government. Strong as her politics were, they existed hidden in different form. Of the three leaders whose paths came together then in Canada—John Brown, Dr. Martin Delany, and Harriet Tubman—it was Harriet who had the most rooted vision. For hers was a radical, people-centered way of life that in and of itself stood in war-like opposition to the madness of capitalism. This is important to us, and we'll come back to it later.

The New Afrikan volunteers that Harriet & Dr. Martin Delany had recruited, working together in the Canadian exile communities, drifted away to other activities. Delany himself left on a pioneering Pan-Afrikanist expedition to Nigeria. By the time the Harpers Ferry raid finally took place over a year later, Harriet had been taken ill while traveling & was out of contact with John Brown.

Sympathetic historians have always been at pains to stress how Harriet had unexpectedly been brought down by sickness, as though her absence at Harpers Ferry somehow needed explaining. The plain truth was that Harriet wasn't spending her life waiting around for white men to get it together. She had her own guerrilla work, her own political agenda, and she was pursuing those while the dedicated but disorganized John Brown was figuring out what to do. She wasn't the supporter, remember, she was the warrior and leader herself. Even as strong a personality as John Brown couldn't make her into a follower. Harriet raises for us the question of what it means to be an Amazon, to unite the questions of culture and war into your own life and body.

A New Afrikan Political-Military Leader

Harriet's involvement with the failed John Brown conspiracy in 1858-59 signaled a shift.* She moved into a different period, in which her guerrilla work merged into the larger & more

* John Brown's plans were upset right after he returned from Canada in that May of 1858. In your typical case of male bonding, Brown had hired a European military mercenary to give his band some of that male military expertise. The mercenary decided the best strategy would be to betray the conspiracy and sell his story to the highest bidder. There was panic among Brown's wealthy New England backers, and the conspirators had to lie low and postpone everything. Many thought the plan was dead.

open clash that would be the Civil War. But these armies were settler men's organizations. The Union Army was purely a patriarchal and hierarchical structure. And Harriet Tubman was an Outsider, biologically marked in race & gender as one of amerikkka's subject proletarians. But if we ask what Harriet did with the Union Army, the truest answer might be: anything she wanted.

To get this we have to sidestep a moment in our story, shaking off our indoctrination even more & refocusing on Harriet's real life as an Amazon. Harriet's singular characteristic wasn't bravery, as we're always told. That's another sly put-down of women. After all, many other New Afrikan women had also resisted in every way. Took part in prison breaks. Died under torture after attacking settlers. Took part in the Civil War. No, courage was as common as blood to those sisters.

What so distinguished Harriet was that she was a pro. She was one of the most brilliant professional practitioners ever at the art of war. As a guerrilla, so elusive that she could strike fatal blows and never be felt. Lead battles and go unseen. As an Amazon, she conducted warfare in a zone beyond men's comprehension. But her blows still fell on point.

Her professional skill as a guerrilla, operating behind enemy lines in the Underground Railroad, is well documented. Season after season, in nineteen raids, she evaded & misdirected the Slaveocracy. Her always changing tactics were like textbook lessons. Coming under suspicion, she would lead her escapees with forged papers onto a train going South, not North, then circle back. Disguises were sometimes used, disguising women as men or vice-versa. Something Harriet herself did. Once, knowing she might meet her former prison-warden in town, she dressed even more raggedy. And she carried an armful of live chickens. When she saw him, she "accidentally" let the birds loose. Her former prison-warden passed by in amusement at the apparently hapless old Black woman—her face averted as she scrambled on the ground to catch her chickens.

COURAGE
AS COMMON
AS BLOOD

PRO @
ART OF
WAR

TRANS-
LIBERATION

Other times, when a slave would weaken during the difficult journey & want to go back, Harriet would simply put her pistol to his head and give him her only choices: "Dead niggers tell no tales." What i'm saying is, she could walk that walk.

Harriet never put down her personal thoughts, her story as she saw it. She lived in a more personally reticent and cautious age, when women were far less open in proclaiming their personal tactics & strategies. An illiterate ex-slave woman in a hostile land, her only surviving autobiographical accounts were additionally filtered through the motives of interviewers for largely white audiences. No matter how well-intentioned.

The reason we need to be reminded is that Harriet couldn't leave any direct words. Like all those countless sisters lost in history. To counteract the capitalist patriarchy's whiteout of her identity. Unlike, for example, Malcolm X. We have to look at the trail signs she left in the forest of herstory, where her footsteps led. The improbable picture given out now of Harriet is someone who was a bold opponent & tormentor towards the white settlers of the South, but who was a simple, loyal, political go-along towards the white settlers of the North. When we put it that way, how likely is that? Truth was, Harriet had a guerrilla relationship towards all of white amerikkka, North and South. She had, in a deeper sense, an Amazon guerrilla relationship to the Union Army itself.

Harriet, who never hid being a feminist, did not challenge the patriarchal military institutions to end "discrimination." Nor did she put on men's uniforms and try to pass in a regiment. She wasn't trying to be admitted to West Point or get white men's permission to become a soldier. She already was one. Harriet was in a hurry and she wasn't aiming to be a rifle-carrier in a settler men's army. Her aim was far beyond that. As a New Afrikan political-military leader her aim was on the actual mass liberating, arming, and organizing of her people. While doing this she also aimed to assist, prod, guide, and at times even lead, the huge but often clueless Union Army and

its white men's government into smashing the Slave States into the dust. This was a military role so ambitious that it seems inconceivable to us. Who are conditioned into accepting the horizons patriarchy permits us. Yet & again, that is precisely what Harriet did.

Even as the new Republican Party president, Abraham Lincoln, was taking office in March 1861, eleven Slave States were seceding & forming their "Confederate States of America." Their gathering Confederate armies threatened Washington, d.c. itself, which was only a Southern Slavery city sandwiched between the two Slave States of Virginia and Maryland. Lincoln called for white volunteers nationwide, and ordered regular Federal troops from the North, under Gen. Benjamin Butler, down to defend the capital.

As Butler's forces moved slowly on foot through Maryland, New Afrikan captives began escaping from plantations and taking refuge with the Union Army. According to William Wells Brown, an ex-slave himself and Underground Railroad worker who spoke with Harriet after the War, she was unofficially on the scene. Harriet had hurried down from her hide-out in Canada & just attached herself to the army. As her biographer, Earl Conrad, says:

"Harriet followed Gen. Butler's army as it marched through Maryland on the way to the defense of Washington during the months of April and May, 1861, when Maryland debated whether to secede and when the Federal troops met with violence at Baltimore. It was, after all, her home country; she knew how to get in and out of here speedily, and she had friends who could shelter her. It was an opportunity to stimulate slaves to escape to the Union Army or to take care of them as rapidly as they came into the Federal camps ... Harriet, 'hanging upon the outskirts of the Union Army', was possibly the first American woman to visit or work on the battlefields of the Civil War."

It was to be in the military theater of the deeper South, however, that Harriet's work with the Union Army was to reach full impact. The Summer and Fall of 1861 were frustrating months of sporadic clashes in Virginia, of Union setbacks, of gathering forces. Radical Abolitionists and New Afrikans were critical of the white-supremacist Lincoln, who was unwilling to either legally end slavery or arm New Afrikans. His first commander, Gen. McClellan, hated Blacks and publicly promised that his troops would join the plantation capitalists to "crush" any Black uprising. Harriet, temporarily back in New England, publicly scorned the settler hopes that by compromising the white family feud could be healed. "Never wound a snake, but kill it!" she warned.

A Nodal Point: Blowing Away the Whiteness

Then, in the Winter, came the news of the Union victory at Port Royal Harbor, South Carolina. Carried by the blockading Union Navy, Federal troops seized the rich plantations of the Sea Islands off the Carolina Coast, Hilton Head, and, on December 8, 1861, the mainland town of Beaufort, S.C. Thousands of formerly en-slaved saw the white settlers fleeing for the interior. While thousands of other New Afrikans would make their way through the forests and swamps and Confederate troops to reach this Union-held territory in the Deep South. Or die trying.

The importance of this victory was much greater than it has appeared. While attention has always been fixed on the main dueling armies—the Union's Army of the Potomac & Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia—the process that would eventually doom the Confederacy first emerged in the Deep South. That was the Black regiments, inexhaustibly growing as they drew on the millions of the Black Nation. Harriet was right there, one of the military participants & a player in the creation of her people's military strength.

General
Striker
Begins

All this has been whited-out, of course, by the capitalist patriarchy. It is laid down for us that "Harriet Tubman was a nurse and spy for the Union Army." While technically not a lie, this is deliberately misleading. First place: we automatically, when we hear the word "nurse," picture a nice, respectable civilian profession, with lots of humanitarian white women nurturing the wounded. Not true. At that time in amerikkka, nursing with an army was a male military role. Nursing in general wasn't a profession, and women didn't yet do it.

It was a soldier's job and a "male" role. So much so that, as feminist herstorian Drew Gilpin Faust points out, the few Southern women volunteering as Confederate Army nurses were ...

"... subjects of gossip and speculation. Women working in hospitals seemed in the eyes of many southerners to display curiously masculine strengths and abilities. Clara MacLean confided to her diary that her neighbor Eliza McKee, recently departed for Virginia as a nurse, had always possessed such strength as to seem 'almost masculine—Indeed I used to tell her I never felt easy in her society if discussing delicate subjects; I could scarcely persuade myself that she was not in disguise.' And Mary Chestnut, the famed South Carolina diarist, felt much the same about the intimidating strength of her friend McCord [nurse Eliza McCord], who seemed to possess 'the intellect of a man.' Nurses were not truly women, but in some sense men in drag."

Harriet was an outsider to those white gender restrictions, since New Afrikan women were not considered "real" women any more than butches were. And she didn't work in any sterile hospitals. There were no MASH units, no antibiotics, no IV drips, no plasma, neither sophisticated surgery nor protective gloves, no medivac out of there. Standard military nursing then was mostly bringing food and water, and cleaning up the blood and dirt and shit. With lots of danger from infectious diseases.

So you'd better believe that Harriet wasn't hanging out on the New Afrikan ward with crowds of white civilian women. Nor was it some minor "helping" role she created.

Again, what we find is that exceptionalizing Harriet, making her this individualistic super-woman torn out of her political context, pretends to honor her but actually trivializes her. We were given this picture of heroic Harriet, the lone Black woman nurse and spy, helping out at the side of the gigantic white men's Union Army. Seen that way, her deeds were brave, of course, but insignificant to the real deal, the big bloody battles between settler men's armies that would determine her people's fate. Isn't that the impression we were slyly poisoned with? As though a New Afrikan Amazon could only be a "helper" at the side of the big boys?

Placing Harriet back into her politics, back into her people's struggle, totally changes our understanding of what she was doing. The capitalist patriarchy loves to describe Harriet's army duty as nursing, because it civilianizes her. Since we associate nursing with nurturing & maternal care of white men, it redefines her as a loyal woman to patriarchy. When actually she was subversive to the core.

Harriet wasn't helping a white army, although that's the impression given us. In the Civil War, Harriet was a woman warrior in a Black army. Just as Harriet was not the only New Afrikan woman who took weapon in hand against the planter capitalists, just as she was not the only New Afrikan child who rebelled, so she was not the only Black woman warrior by far. She was one of many, there at the creation.

We know that other New Afrikan women fought. Like Maria Lewis, who served as a cavalry trooper in the 8th New York Cavalry Regiment. Lewis "wore uniform & carried a sword & carbine & road & scouted & skirmished & fought like the rest" (in the words of a contemporary account). She was one of the New Afrikan soldiers who presented seventeen captured Confederate battle flags to the War Department, in

MARIA
LEWIS

SUSIE KING TAYLOR
 1000's OF BLACK WOMEN
 a Washington ceremony. Fourteen-year-old Susie King Taylor was led out of slavery in Georgia, along with other children, by her uncle. She had already secretly learned how to read, and ended up attached to the 1st South Carolina regiment as a literacy teacher for the soldiers, nurse, and laundress. Thousands of New Afrikan women worked in Union camps, as laborers and nurses, cooks, laundresses, teachers.

Harriet Tubman might not even have been the most celebrated New Afrikan woman spy of the war. Mary Elizabeth Bowser, who worked at the Confederate White House in Richmond, secretly listened to President Jefferson Davis' strategy sessions & kept the Union informed. Under suspicion, she split with \$2,500 and left the Confederate White House burning behind her. The Confederacy was riddled with New Afrikan spies, both women and men. Mary Louveste, who worked at the Confederate Navy Yard where the top-secret ironclad warship *Virginia* was under construction, took the plans to the Union Navy in Washington so they'd be ready.

Despite all the publicity around the movie *Glory*, with Denzel Washington, the Civil War has always been like white men's personal property. Their personal war, which is why so many thousands of them love to play in costume at Civil War "re-enactments." But in blood-soaked real life, the stalemate that dragged on for years between Union and Confederacy was finally snapped by the New Afrikan Nation, which imposed its own agenda and forced the Confederacy to surrender.

It's true that the New Afrikan 54th Massachusetts Volunteers of *Glory* fame was special, a regiment that represented much of the New Afrikan leadership in the North. Sojourner Truth's grandson served in it, as did Martin Delany's son, and two of Frederick Douglass' sons. But thousands of New Afrikans had already taken up arms before the 54th was formed. New Afrikan militias had been formed in a number of places. Not the least of which were the Sea Islands.

Although it's seldom discussed, maritime convention and need had always let ships have multi-national and multi-lingual crews. Sailors, even white ones, were still semi-slaves at that time, without full citizenship rights and legally wards of the government. So the u.s. navy had always had many New Afrikan sailors on its ships. 30,000 New Afrikans served in the Union Navy during the war.

New Afrikan soldiers helped fight back Lee in Virginia in 1864, and led the capture of Charleston in 1865. It was known that General Sherman may have marched through Georgia, but the saying back then was "the Black regiments held open the door." The Black regiments would make up 180,000 troops, ten percent of the Union armies by the last major battles. And one-third of the standing Union Army months later at the end of 1865. These regiments were largely ex-plantation escapee forces, forming out of the substance of the South itself like an auto-immune disorder in Slavery.

And it can hardly be a surprise that they fought with a determination that struck whites on both sides.

Naturally, it was the plantation owners more quickly than anyone else who understood that New Afrikan soldiers made their downfall inevitable. Judge John Underwood of Richmond said after the war: "I had a conversation with one of the leading men in that city, and he said to me that the enlistment of Negro troops by the United States was the turning point of the rebellion; that it was the heaviest blow they ever received. He remarked that when the slaves deserted their masters, and showed a general disposition to do so and join the forces of the United States, intelligent men everywhere saw that the matter was ended."

A Multi-Faceted Reality

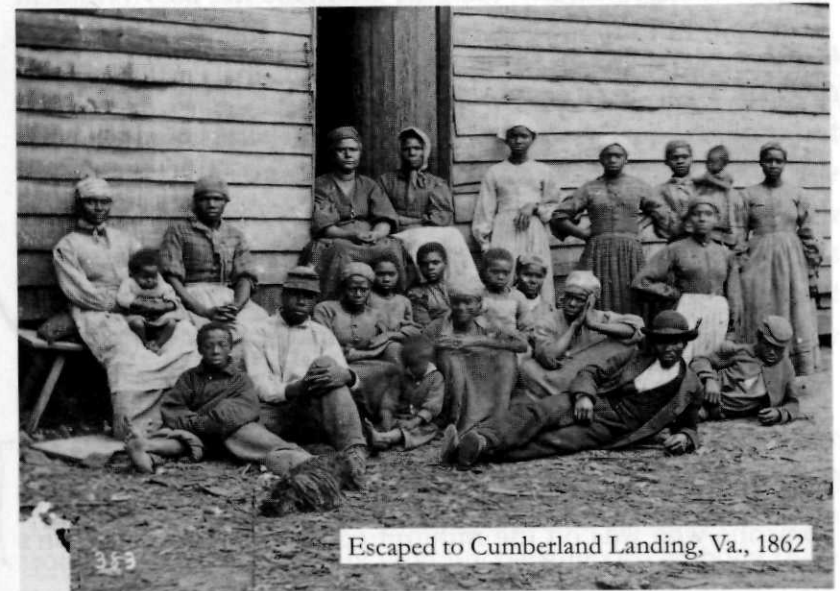
This should help us to come to grips with war in a deeper way. The patriarchal view of war is two-dimensional, dividing up the flowing reality into constricted boxes of macho dualities: ruler vs. subject; mind vs. body; men vs. women and children; fighting vs. building; army vs. community; military vs. political. And so on. This isn't stupidity on their part, merely a necessary construct for their kind of alienated universe. In the popular macho view, fighters are only those hitting or killing someone. Unless Harriet, for example, had put on a Union Army general's uniform and had done a book signing tour talking about how many men she had killed, she can't be recognized as a warrior. Although she saw more danger and combat than a Colin Powell or most generals and admirals, by far.

Even making a hit movie about the Black regiments only perpetuates that ideological domination. Historian Jim Cullen points out: "*Glory* obscures the ambivalence, the ambiguity, and disillusionment that military experience held for many African-American men and women during the Civil War. Indeed, the absence of Black women in the film belies their presence in many military encampments as civilians, nurses, or, in the case of Harriet Tubman, crucial strategic combatants."



When we speak of the flow of reality, we mean, for instance, that the explosion of the New Afrikan troops was only a part of and the inevitable flowering of the mass prison breaks and over fifty years of guerrilla work in the Underground Railroad. Harriet was both a participant and one of the foremothers of the Black regiments. While they wore the Union "blue" and were under white settler officers, these soldiers were in reality a part of the New Afrikan nation and its political movement. They had a dual identity, living the possibilities of both regular soldiers of the u.s. settler empire and New Afrikan rebels against it. Unresolved for that brief moment, they wore both possibilities, one superimposed upon the other.

Even inside the u.s. military these New Afrikan soldiers took part in mass resistance against the u.s. government, against the racist policies of the Lincoln Administration. Units refused to take their pay at all, rather than accept the half of settler troops' pay that President Lincoln had ordered for them. There were protests and fights daily against colonial treatment, and even many rebellions. Eighty percent of the Union soldiers executed for mutiny during the Civil War were New Afrikans, just like in today's u.s. empire.



Harriet was part of this struggle, criticizing Lincoln for his white supremacist policies. This is an important point. While Harriet is pictured today as a loyal supporter of the u.s. government and President Lincoln, in real life she never supported Abraham Lincoln until he was safely dead. Harriet, as a leader in the Anti-Slavery cause and someone who always had valuable information from behind Confederate lines, was welcome in official Washington. She had an official open invitation to visit at the White House. Any time she was in Washington. Very conspicuously, Harriet refused to speak with Lincoln, whom she correctly perceived to be a crude white-supremacist.

"... I didn't like Lincoln in those days," she said later. "I used to go see Mrs. Lincoln but I never wanted to see him. You see we colored people didn't understand then that he was our friend. All we knew was that the first colored troops sent South from Massachusetts only got seven dollars a month while the white got fifteen. We didn't like that."

Harriet would drop by the White House to talk politics & the conduct of the war ... but only with Ms. Lincoln. Mary Todd Lincoln is described today in history books as just another insane woman, a "shrew" who was unkind to her busy President husband. But among her contemporaries she was considered much more intellectual and radical than the President. And more sympathetic to the Black cause.

When she was in d.c., Harriet would not only meet with Mary Lincoln, but stay with u.s. secretary of state William H. Seward. Who was a supporter of Harriet's from when she was a fugitive, even though he was then a u.s senator. Harriet could tell her friends from her enemies. Although, after Lincoln was forced to sign the Emancipation Proclamation and then got assassinated, Harriet had to tactically go along & say a few nice words about him. We shouldn't be misled. Harriet was not only, in her subversive way, a player in national politics, but someone who was on the militant edge of the Black Nation's politics.

Warrior as Healer

Certainly, Harriet was respected in the Black regiments. The escaped captive William Wells Brown writes: "When the Negro put on the 'blue' 'Moses' was in her glory and traveled from camp to camp, being always treated in the most respectful manner. The Black men would have died for this woman."

Not because she was an icon, but because she was one of them & valued for what she did. Even today diseases & exposure often cause more casualties in wartime than enemy fire, and in the age before antibiotics and medivacs that was even more true.

For every white soldier who died in battle with the Union Army, two died from diseases—it was geometrically worse for New Afrikans. Due to poor health from slave life and Union racism, like being forced to do the heaviest labor and do the dirtiest jobs, living under the worst conditions. For every Black Union soldier who died in battle, ten died from diseases. In fact, one of every five New Afrikan soldiers in the Union Army ended up dying of disease. To them, a healer was as militarily essential as a skilled artilleryman or sharpshooter. Or more so.

At that time there were few useful medicines in Western medicine, and Harriet's contributions from New Afrikan healing were much in demand. Dysentery from contaminated drinking water was epidemic throughout the war in the Union camps, so often fatal. Harriet used herbal remedies New Afrikans had learned from indigenous peoples. Giving soldiers a tea she made from the powdered roots of pond lilies and parts of a flower called cranesbill, she saved many lives where settler doctors were helpless.

This shouldn't surprise our expectations. It's true that the mind of the capitalist patriarchy unnaturally divides healing from fighting, insisting that these activities be kept so separate, so isolated, that only separate persons can embody them. Like the saintly Dr. Marcus Welby, M.D. and his twin, the

ESTABLISH
MILITARY TRADITIONS
70

* bloodthirsty Gen. George Patton. Yet, in the Eastern martial arts we have to learn respect for our bodies, stretching & listening to our body, as well as strikes. This is elementary. And many noted martial arts masters have been healers, and spiritual teachers as well.

↳ During the famed Long March in 1935, Chinese communist commander Chu Teh would give basic health lectures to the guerrillas at night: About sanitation, about the simple importance of washing their feet carefully after a day's march. Is that surprising, under conditions when a blister or a dirty cut could result in crippling or fatal infection?

After arriving at Beaufort, S.C. in May 1862 on a military transport ship, Harriet reported to Gen. David Hunter, Union commander of the Department of the South. She immediately began organizing escaped New Afrikan workers in the camp, and took over the "Contraband Hospital" at Beaufort.* In a dictated letter she wrote back North:

"Among other duties which I have, is that of looking after the hospital here for contrabands. Most of those coming from the mainland are very destitute, almost naked. I am trying to find places for those able to work, and provide for them as best as I can, so as to lighten the burden of the Government as much as possible, while at the same time they learn to respect themselves by earning their own living."

Again, Harriet was leading in doing, helping other New Afrikan women in practical ways to build a liberated community from

* In the early period of the War, escaped slaves were officially designated as "contraband." This was a legalism. Since the Lincoln Administration still recognized chattel slavery as legal, the Union had to justify not returning escaped slaves to their owners. As Rebel "property," the Army held that ex-slaves were "contraband" subject to government seizure. The name spread into common usage.

ground zero up. Her biographer writes: "She taught Negro women how to adjust to the new conditions, to produce and create articles for their own consumption ... and to make and sell various articles to the soldiers." With two hundred dollars in pay (the only government pay she would ever get, in fact) Harriet had a laundry shed built, where women could run a cooperative business doing cleaning for soldiers.

Because of the Sea Islands' importance as the first "free" territory in the Deep South, the Union had issued a general call for Abolitionists to come assist the new community. Many women, New Afrikan as well as white, came from the North to be teachers & community workers. Clara Barton, the founder of the Red Cross, came to help nurse in the hospital. To say nothing of the many formerly en-slaved "contraband" women, like the teenage Susie King Taylor, who came there.

Contrary to today's thinking, in which women say we can't do anything unless we get a grant, Harriet even gave up her few government personal privileges to better organize her people. A report to the u.s. government noted:

"When she first went to Beaufort she was allowed to draw rations as an officer or soldier, but the freed people, becoming jealous of this privilege accorded her—she voluntarily relinquished this right and thereafter supplied her personal wants by selling pies and root beer—which she made during the evening and nights—when not engaged in important service for the Government."

No Civilians There

↳ It's important to see that Harriet's women's organizing was only part of the many-sided flow of her life as a warrior. Isn't it true that when we hear of women & community organizing we assume without thinking that this is civilian activity,

↳ LIFE AS A WARRIOR

like the PTA or block improvement committee? Even our word "community" has peaceful & civilian overtones in our minds. But that wasn't it at all. Because there were no civilians there. And that temp community was a rear base area right in the war zone.

That "free" community that Harriet & many others were building was a small beachhead isolated far behind Confederate lines. Like a Maroon colony or a guerrilla base. While in the event of a defeat, the Union Navy might evacuate by sea the few units of Northern settler troops and settler civilians, for the many thousands of New Afrikans there would be no retreat. It was win or die.

Every person had chosen to risk their life in resistance. Whether they had hidden in the swamps & escaped through Confederate lines, or were among the thousands who had defiantly stayed behind when their so-called "owners" fled. If their community were overrun, recaptured, many would be killed and not a few like Harriet would be tortured to death. With no history, few resources, new escapees arriving daily, life was raw & chaotic in those camps. No one knew what would happen. When Harriet taught becoming self-reliant, she was preparing her sisters for survival. Even if they had to flee again & scatter. When she organized New Afrikan men & women, helped them to strengthen themselves as a people, this was life & death to them. Part of their own war. And an integral part of Harriet's life as a woman warrior.

Ironically, the laundry shed that Harriet had built for a cooperative women's enterprise was later seized by the officers of a Northern regiment, to use as their HQ. While Harriet was away on a mission to Florida. This was typical of the daily class conflicts on the Union side between settlers and New Afrikans. We have to keep in mind that this wasn't any fairy tale war of good against evil. Nor was it simply "the war to free the slaves." No way. Even as they were winning battles and dying by the thousands, many Black soldiers were completely unpaid. Since

they were on wage strike & refusing to accept their apartheid pay from the u.s.government.

While in private, Lincoln & some of his generals were secretly thinking of the total elimination of the Black troops.

A Four-Sided War

The Civil War was actually a four-sided war, in which all the parties maneuvered for their own interests. In part, this was the fratricidal & incestuous "white man's war" as many described it at the time. Northern industrial capitalism and the Southern slave-owning plantation class were forced into civil war to settle which white patriarchal society would rule the continent. To both of them, New Afrikans were a factor, but only as valuable subjects for "real" people to fight over.

As we know, New Afrikans used this "falling out among thieves" to advance their own liberation. In the early months of the War, once it became clear that Northern capitalism was trying to keep New Afrikans disarmed and powerless, there was widespread sentiment among them *against* the Union war effort. Frederick Douglass spoke for many when he said that the War started: "...in the interests of slavery on both sides. The South fighting to take slavery out of the Union, and the North fighting to keep it in the Union. The South fighting to get it beyond the limits of the United States Constitution, and the North fighting for the old guarantees—both despising the Negro, both insulting the Negro."

It soon became clear that the Union would be forced, reluctant step by reluctant step, to encourage en-slaved prison breaks, to shelter escapees, to enlist New Afrikans as soldiers, and finally to end chattel slavery, to once and for all destroy the planter capitalist class and their system. Most New Afrikan activists politically united & converged on this great

①
WHITE MAN'S
WAR

②
WHITE BTR/UN
NORTHERN
CAPITALISM &
SOUTHERN
SLAVEOWNING

③
NEW AFRIKAN
LIBERATION

breakthrough, to put to death chattel slavery. Sojourner Truth put aside her pacifism to become an army recruiter; Dr. Martin Delany dropped his plan of Afrikan nationalist emigration and put on the Union "blue"; and Harriet Tubman stepped-up her guerrilla activity a thousand-fold by using the Union Army as a lever.

4)
INDIGENOUS
NATIONS

The fourth side to the Civil War were the indigenous nations, who were drawn into this decisive war of change. Native Amerikans took different angles to it, for both tactical & strategic reasons. Some, for example, allied with the Confederate States, under duress. But also because the first total war between white settlers & the splintering of the u.s. empire held possibilities for their own sovereignty. The Union victory was indirectly a disaster for the indigenous nations, since it resolved the major conflict holding back the westward settler aggression. The decades after the Civil War saw new "final" offensives against Native Amerikans in the West, and the birth of the attempted genocide of the reservation system.

We raise all this to stamp out lingering racist stereotypes we carry with us that the Union represented the cause of justice & that Black people reacted to the War only as enthusiastic supporters of a benevolent u.s. government.

New Afrikans as a Nation maintained their own independent politics, their critical distance. Including their own internal political debates and struggles. Not only in a need to end Southern chattel slavery, but with a healthy distrust of and need to maneuver around white settlers on both sides. Northern white society rarely saw this side because of its own white supremacy. And because New Afrikans often took over stereotypes in a transgressive way, as protective camouflage. New Afrikans on the Sea Islands, for example, tried to conceal their Gullah language & distinctive culture from the occupying Union troops.

As early as 1861 in Virginia, escaped plantation workers formed a number of outlaw guerrilla colonies, and operated as "land pirates" preying on Confederate and Union troops alike in an equal opportunity experiment. These New Afrikan guerrillas lived in hidden camps & were aided by a supply and intelligence network of those still on the plantations. When Gen. McClellan's Union Army of the Potomac advanced into Virginia in 1862, so many Union convoys were held up and white Union troops killed by New Afrikan raiders that they had to travel heavily guarded even behind their own lines. Keep in mind that Gen. McClellan was the Union Army's commander-in-chief, who had not only threatened to temporarily join the Confederates in killing any slave revolt, but whose Union troops regularly returned escaped New Afrikans to their Confederate owners. That was the first year of the white gentlemen's "War Between the States."

This was the difficult & conflictual war zone that Harriet moved through. The Union Army's Department of the South stretched along the Southeastern coast from Charleston, S.C. to Jacksonville, Florida. In her work as an Amazon warrior & New Afrikan general, Harriet ranged up & down the coast, carried by Union ships. Now as a spymaster, then as a forward scout leading a raid, after that as a healer or organizer. She flowed, with deceptive ease and without fuss, from role to role. Any one of which might have been thought a major achievement.

The Inevitable Resolution

In October 1862, the inevitable nodal point in change was reached; as the growing quantity of New Afrikan rebellion made a qualitative change in the War. Arming the New Afrikan man had always been the wild card, the most dangerous strategic weapon that both sides held back in reserve. Staring at defeat,

the war unpopular, the Union Army repulsed in bloody setback after setback & even starting to shrink, the white men's government in Washington decided to form Black regiments.

As a safeguard for settler power, no more New Afrikans would become militia officers, and new units would be commanded only by white men. This was a last resort step that even the Confederacy itself would take two years later, arming thousands of its own captive New Afrikans. Hoping too late to form a "loyal" Black mercenary army of 200,000 to save it. While both sides refused to recruit women into their armies. Although over three hundred women are known to have served as regular soldiers in Union "blue" regiments. Some Confederate white women began demanding gun training. Their reason wasn't to fight the Union, but to protect themselves from the plantations' New Afrikan forced laborers while their husbands were away. And in some areas Confederate officials did give pistol classes for settler women.

The white Union cavalry regiments occupying Beaufort & the Sea Islands were needed elsewhere, so the 1st and 2nd South Carolina Regiments were formed from "freed" New Afrikans. The 1st South Carolina Regiment had been formed months before Lincoln's new order, against War Department policy, and thus was the first New Afrikan unit in the u.s. army. Both regiments were commanded by white associates of John Brown and Harriet herself. One, Col. James Montgomery, had prior experience at commando warfare against the slavers, from the informal combat before the Civil War in "Bloody Kansas." During the Winter of 1862-63, the new regiments trained and started practicing their trade.

Harriet was called to organize an Intelligence Service for the Department of the South. She recruited seven New Afrikan scouts who knew the region well and were experienced at evading the Southern patrols. She also recruited two New Afrikan river pilots, who were familiar with the coastal waters & river systems. The ten of them made contact with networks of

hundreds of anonymous New Afrikans still in chains in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, providing detailed information on every Confederate move. Did you think that Harriet could personally spy on hundreds of miles of enemy territory?

*BLACK
INTELLIGENCE
NETWORK*

This fills in a picture for us. Instead of Harriet as a lone superwoman spy for a white men's army, which is what the capitalist patriarchy has wanted us to think, we can see that she was the "Commander" of a sizeable Black intelligence network. With a capital "C" as it was always put, guiding units of New Afrikan troops. Who were the spear & shield of a war zone community of embattled women, children, and men who were all liberating themselves.

Part of Harriet's work with the Black regiments then was as an intelligence officer, leading her detachment. But she also personally served as a scout, going armed with a rifle to guide the advance when the regiments struck. After the War, Gen. Rufus Saxton wrote of her: "I can bear witness to the value of her services in South Carolina and Florida. She made many a raid inside the enemy's lines displaying remarkable courage, zeal and fidelity."

Harriet herself rarely spoke of her battlefield experiences. But her grand-niece Alice Stewart remembers her & her mother visiting the elderly Harriet. The young Alice played in the tall grass of the field:

"Suddenly I became aware of something moving toward me thru the grass. So smoothly did it glide and with so little noise. I was frightened! Then reason conquered fear and I knew it was Aunt Harriet, flat on her stomach, and with only the use of her arms and serpentine movement of her body, gliding smoothly along. Mother helped her back to her chair and they laughed. Aunt Harriet then told me that was the way she had gone by many a sentinel during the war."

After months of training, the first Black regiment was ready to fight. In January 1863, the New Afrikan troops, carried by Union gunboats, raided plantations up the St. Mary's River that divides Georgia from Florida. While that first raid brought back large quantities of rice, livestock, lumber, bricks, and iron to the hard-pressed Sea Islands, a more valuable prize soon became their target. The 2nd South Carolina Regiment was still understrength. All the intelligence reported that many still in chains there were ready to join up as soon as they saw a way to escape.

Just as the original mass jailbreak strategy of the New Afrikan nation and the experience of the Underground Railroad gave shape to John Brown's guerrilla plans, so it continued in the building raids of the Black regiments. On March 6, 1863, Gen. Saxton wrote Secretary of War Stanton about Florida, based on the reports of Harriet's Intelligence Service: "I have reliable information that there are large numbers of able-bodied Negroes in that vicinity who are watching for an opportunity to join us."

Four days later both regiments went up the St. John's River, with orders to capture Jacksonville, Florida. The ambitious Union plan was to stay and win back all of the state from the Confederacy. While the Black regiments easily seized Jacksonville, Confederate reinforcements over the next several weeks made their situation unpromising, and the regiments had to retreat back offshore. New soldiers had been recruited in Jacksonville, however, and the experience of those campaigns led to a new military strategy that Harriet herself would initiate.

Several months later the most famous episode of Harriet's life happened, when she initiated and led the Combahee River raid in June 1863. It began when Harriet told Gen. David Hunter that her plantation spies along the Combahee River in South Carolina had reported the location of all the floating mines, or "torpedoes" as they were then called, that the Confederates had placed to guard against Union attacks upriver. She felt

that the rich agricultural area along the River was now ripe for invasion.

Gen. Hunter asked her, according to Harriet, "if she would go with several gunboats up the Combahee River, the object of the expedition being to take up the torpedoes placed by the rebels in the river, to destroy railroads and bridges, and to cut off supplies from the rebel troops. She said she would go if Col. Montgomery was to be appointed commander of the expedition Accordingly, Col. Montgomery was appointed to the command, and Harriet, with several men under her, the principal of whom was J. Plowden ... accompanied the expedition."

Harriet led the raid. She wanted Col. Montgomery as the official commander because of their working relationship. Before their troops even set out, Confederate intelligence had received advance warning from agents in the North: "The *N.Y. Tribune* says that the Negro troops at Hilton Head, S.C. will soon start upon an expedition, under the command of Colonel Montgomery, differing in many respects from any heretofore projected." That was definitely a historic understatement, it turned out.

Remarkable as the night raid was, it might have been lost in history, as so many of Harriet's activities were, if it hadn't been caught in a reporter's dispatch printed in the Boston newspaper, *The Commonwealth*:

"HARRIET TUBMAN

"Col. Montgomery and his gallant band of 300 black soldiers, under the guidance of a black woman [emphasis in original], dashed into the enemy's country, struck a bold and effective blow, destroying millions of dollars worth of commissary stores, cotton and lordly dwellings, and striking terror into the heart of rebeldom, brought off near 800 slaves and thousands of dollars worth of property, without losing a man or receiving a scratch. It was a glorious consummation.

"After they were all fairly well disposed of in the Beaufort charge, they were addressed in strains of thrilling eloquence by their gallant deliverer ... The Colonel was followed by a speech from the black woman, **who led the raid and under whose inspiration it was originated and conducted.** For sound sense and real native eloquence, her address would do honor to any man, and it created a great sensation."

The Confederates, placing too much confidence on the river mines which Harriet quickly had disabled, were caught off guard and fled in disorder. New Afrikan soldiers advanced rapidly along both banks of the river, torching four plantations and six mills. Hundreds and hundreds of plantation prisoners reached the river, despite the plantation owners' efforts to drive them all inland. More than the three gunboats, overloaded, could carry. Harriet remembered the morning:

"I never saw such a scene. We laughed and laughed and laughed. Here you'd see a woman with a pail on her head, rice-a-smoking in it just as she'd taken it from the fire, young one hanging on behind ... One woman brought two pigs, a white one and a black one; we took them all on board; named the white pig Beauregard [a Southern general], and the black one Jeff Davis [president of the Confederacy]. Sometimes the women would come with twins hanging around their necks; it appears I never saw so many twins in my life; bags on their shoulders, baskets on their heads, and young ones tagging behind, all loaded ..."

Opposite page: "We laughed and we laughed and we laughed," Harriet would recall. From *Harper's Weekly* July 4, 1863, illustration shows New Afrikan 2nd South Carolina Volunteers' raid on the rice plantations of the Combahee, led by Harriet Tubman the month before. Plantations can be seen burning in the distance as New Afrikan captive proletarians take advantage of the mass jailbreak.



Official Confederate Army reports admitted: "The enemy seems to have been well posted as to the character and capacity of our troops ... and to have been well guided by persons thoroughly acquainted with the river and country."

The Exact Spot of the Enemy's Imbalance

While there was a dead-on significance to the event itself, to a New Afrikan woman leading troops into action against those who believed that they had a right to "own" her people, there was also a broader impact not in Harriet as a person but in what she helped start. The use of the regiments in a New Afrikan guerrilla way, in utilizing superior intelligence to avoid confrontation & strike unexpected blows, freeing large numbers of prisoners while sinking the enemy economy, was strategic. As a warrior, she put her hand on the exact spot of her opponent's imbalance.

This was grasped by Gen. Hunter, who the next day wrote u.s. Secretary of War Stanton that the Combahee action was but an experiment of a new plan. He felt that with this approach the entire, fertile coastal areas of the Deep South, which contributed so much to the Confederate economy, would have to be completely abandoned by the Slaveocracy. All without any Northern settler reinforcements. New Afrikans would do it all themselves. Hunter immediately planned for more such raids, "injuring the enemy ... and carrying away their slaves, thus rapidly filling up the South Carolina regiments of which there are now four."

Suddenly, like a momentary clearing in a storm, we can see a brilliantly sharper picture of wars within wars. Hidden within the war of Union vs. Confederacy was always the subversive power of the New Afrikan Nation to carry out their own war. To be their own liberators. And in Harriet's life as an Amazon

we see the hidden striving of millions of women as a People unto ourselves. To defy the capitalist patriarchy and to put our will upon the world.

Exhausted from several years at the front & receiving word that her aged parents needed her, Harriet took leave and went back to N.Y. in June 1864. After months of recuperation, she became involved in a new military plan. News had reached the North of a desperate Confederate effort to create a 200,000-man Black army of the South to hold back the Union. The New Afrikan mercenaries themselves would be made individually "free," of course, in return for fighting for the Slave System.

In February 1865, Confederate President Jefferson Davis told his people to recognize a bitter truth: "We are reduced to choosing whether the negroes shall fight for us or against us." Confederate soldiers sent petitions to Richmond supporting the controversial proposal, as their front lines crumbled. Finally, on February 18, 1865, General Robert E. Lee asked the Confederate Congress to authorize a Black mercenary corps: "The negroes, under proper circumstances, will make efficient soldiers." Such legislation passed at the war's end, too late to make any difference. The State of Virginia had already gone ahead and was training its first two companies of Black Confederate soldiers.

Dr. Martin Delany saw this as an opportunity. Meeting with Lincoln at the Whitest House, Delany proposed that a separate u.s. Black legion be created, officered by Black men, to prevent that Confederate threat. Delany saw this new army boldly advancing straight into the Confederate heartland: "Proclaiming freedom as they go, sustaining it and protecting it by arming the emancipated, taking them as fresh troops..."

President Lincoln, knowing that a large mercenary army fighting for the Confederacy could change the whole situation, surprisingly agreed to Dr. Delany's plan. Delany was tested

by an army board for days & then given the rank of Major of Infantry, the first & in the Civil War the only New Afrikan to reach that rank. He was given orders to start forming his Black army in the Sea Islands. The New Afrikan strategy of the Underground Railroad, of John Brown's raid, of the Carolina regiments growing out of armed jailbreaks, reached its final form in this projected Black legion.

Of course, Delany realized just as John Brown had that the expedition needed the intelligence & propaganda services of the Underground Railroad, moving through the plantations ahead of it. His biographer writes: "Certain leading spirits of the 'Underground Railroad' were invoked. Scouts incognito were already 'on to Richmond,' and the services of the famous Harriet Tubman, having been secured to serve in the South..." Delany & Harriet, having once worked together recruiting volunteers in Canada for John Brown's guerrilla effort, again found themselves comrades in a new and even more ambitious Black military effort.

All this time, even while she had been Commander of the Intelligence Section of the Union Department of the South, Harriet had never been on the books. She was a freelance Amazon, who worked with the Union Army but who supported herself and led herself. As is our way. Not that this prevented her from making claims for money rightfully due her once the War was over. Her herstorical vision stamped its mark again after she had joined the Delany-Lincoln New Afrikan legion project.

On March 20, 1865, Harriet was in Washington to pick up her papers from the u.s. Department of War giving her passage on a transport ship from New York harbor back to the Sea Islands. A trip she never completed.

While traveling through Philadelphia on her way up to New York, Harriet was intercepted by representatives of the u.s. Sanitary Commission. They asked her help in dealing

with terrible conditions in the New Afrikan hospitals run by the u.s. government near Washington, d.c. Putting a hold on her assignment, Harriet immediately traveled to the hospitals and began trying to save as many as she could. Major Delany himself had not yet sailed for the South, and wouldn't arrive there until April 3, 1865. That was the day that the triumphant Union Army captured the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia. Seven days later, Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered his starving Army of Northern Virginia, and it was done.

Harriet was still more than busy, working in the hospitals for months after the War's end. In July 1865, she returned to Washington to protest the conditions in the hospitals. The result was that on July 22, 1865, u.s. surgeon-general Barnes appointed Harriet Tubman as the "matron" or woman manager of the Colored Hospital at Ft. Monroe, Virginia. Her military travel pass back there still survives. But with the end of the War her appointment never took effect, and eventually Harriet returned to Auburn, N.Y. Her parents and other family were there, and Harriet would spend the rest of her life there. Still in exile from "home," the Eastern Shore of Maryland. It was never going to be safe for Harriet to go home. She would always be a target for assassination.

It is said that Harriet "retired" after the Civil War. This is yet another misdirection. The fall of the Slave System ended an entire historical period, and began a new period where the oppressor system was based on neo-colonialism. In that new political environment Harriet was repressed out of official politics, as all New Afrikan women were. Not that she nor they ever stopped working at building the new base for the New Afrikan Nation. Or stopped publicly supporting women's struggle.

We know that Harriet is hidden in a manipulated fame, her Amazon identity dis-figured by a femmed-up image as men's supporter and helper. Even Black Nationalists have been drawn into this white tactic, paying lip service to Harriet's Amazon

legacy by occasionally saying her name but really dismissing her. We need to talk about Harriet not just as a doer of heroic deeds but as a person.

The truth is that Harriet makes amerikkkans uneasy. Because she wasn't what women are supposed to be. Yet was much more. That's why she was & is exceptionalized in such a way. Take her celebrated physical powers. Harriet's military deeds are often implicitly linked to tales of how amazingly strong she was. Not even biologically like "real" feminine women, it's silently implied. This actually has its origins right in the slaver's mouth.

Her prison-warden when she was a teenager was proud of his supposed human property. He would exhibit Harriet boastfully to his white friends. Harriet would "lift huge barrels of produce and draw a loaded stone boat like an ox." This picture is no accident. For Harriet and other New Afrikan women were only a kind of animal to euro-capitalism. Not "real" women, at all.

Some of Harriet's relatives later complained that white journalists had played up her muscular strength, making her into a freak. As we know, many New Afrikan women were physically strong. For the same reason that some six foot white u.s. marines over in 'Nam found that they couldn't carry as much as some 80-pound Vietnamese peasant grandmothers. Harriet had spent years in the fields at hard labor. Often lifting heavy weights from sunup to sundown. Plowing, handling horses, hauling logs by hand, chopping and loading heavy chunks of timber hour after hour. Developing muscles was natural in those circumstances for women as for men.

While Harriet in her youth may well have been as strong as any man on their plantation, there is no evidence of anything more. We do know that at least twice in middle age she got into scuffles with white men and, outnumbered, lost both times. The second time she was knocked unconscious. Our sis

wasn't superstrong or superhuman, and she took her lumps in the rough and tumble of life. She was, however, an Amazon.

Just as a glamorous actress played Harriet on television, on several book covers she is shown as tall, muscular, and threatening. Harriet would have probably had a good laugh at that. Because, in real life, Harriet was five feet tall, slight of build, beginning to be stooped over by the time of the Civil War, missing her front teeth. She wore the cheap cotton dresses that working-class women wore then. Her one act of styling was the brightly colored bandanna that she always wore around her head. Maybe to hide the mark of her childhood injury. There is an early photograph actually showing Harriet with a group of ex-captives she has led to freedom. Harriet is hard to pick out. Short and somber, with worn face and clothes, Harriet just fades back into the band of successful escapees. So common as to be invisible.

Sometimes in science we can suddenly penetrate an ecology or culture not by what is overtly there, but by what is missing. Seeing the pattern of what is not there. While certain things about Harriet are played up, what is never discussed is Harriet's relationship to men. Both personally and in the larger sense, of her relationship to the roles for women that patriarchy made.

Harriet wasn't what women are supposed to be. Her life wasn't centered around men, she didn't swerve from her course to suit men, and she wasn't even vaguely interested in the role women were assigned. Like, Harriet never had children. Not any. Perhaps she was infertile or maybe she used birth control, but in an age when u.s. women were expected and required by the capitalist patriarchy to have six, eight, or twelve children, Harriet had none.

When she did decide to close in on a child, in 1856, she did so by just up and kidnapping her favorite niece, Margaret Stewart. On a secret visit back to Maryland, Harriet took the small child back with her without bothering to tell her brother

or sister-in-law. Of course, being too busy waging war to actually raise the eight-year-old girl herself, Harriet simply dropped Margaret off with Mrs. Seward, the wife of the Governor of New York and later a u.s. senator. Sounds hard to believe, but it's a fact that Margaret grew up as an honored guest with that household. Much beloved by Harriet, Margaret nevertheless never lived with her, although they remained close all of Harriet's life. Her family said that Margaret and Harriet even looked much alike. Margaret remembered that whenever Aunt Harriet came back North, she would be sent in the Governor's horse and carriage to visit her. So much for the nuclear family.

Harriet did marry again twenty years later, in 1869, when she was about 49 years old. A young veteran in his twenties, who had met Harriet down South during the War, came to her house in Auburn, N.Y. seeking help. And Harriet took him in. That this was no romance was widely known to friends and family, and her biographer, Earl Conrad, wrote: "It has been said that her husband, Nelson Davis, spite of being a large man was not a healthy man, that he suffered with tuberculosis, and she married him to take care of him." In other words, under the family values of the times it would not have been respectable for them to live together otherwise. Davis' small pension as a Civil War veteran was the only steady income that Harriet's communal house, with its guest population of homeless children and elderly, had.

While women are supposed to be dependent, Harriet lived independent. Just like the wives of Frederick Douglass and Dr. Martin Delany, who lived working-class lives and raised their children. Anna Douglass worked as a laundrywoman and Mrs. Delany as a seamstress, to feed and clothe their children. While Frederick and Martin were often living elsewhere for years, traveling frequently, in their roles as New Afrikan leaders. But because Harriet wasn't a wife or mother, there were less obstacles to her going into combat.

Harriet Is Still Too Subversive

If men are still uneasy about Harriet, over a century later women are even more afraid to recognize her on the street. There's a continuous police action in the culture to domesticate Harriet, to rub her out as an Amazon. This continuous patriarchal theme is to erase Harriet politically. A key part of this is to whiten Harriet, to misrepresent her as being without Black feminist politics or as a "moderate." Many people have bought into this because they wanted to, even those who should know better.

Harriet's political decisions were serious decisions, and can only be understood in her situation, in its limitations and choices. I think it's exactly the radicals who don't understand their past who haven't learned to understand their own conditions, and also how to move ahead.

Women need to de-mythologize politics. There's a corrupt habit today among radicals of all kinds of demanding that the past only be a costumed fantasy to affirm our latest fashions and opinions. Of only projecting what's current back onto it. This is disingenuous, and totally harmful. One way it's corrupt is that it insinuates that politics is a verbal patriarchal power trip. Where Harriet can be politely dismissed for not talking bad enough, while men whose bold statements were only illusions that they could never make work are pointed to as positive models.

We can forget too easily how unprepared the Black Nation was; how little New Afrikan women had. They didn't have a government, although they were ruled. They didn't have schools or libraries, hospitals or churches. They had few books of their own. And a people who had not been permitted childhood naturally had nothing for children. As a people they didn't even have permanent addresses. Entire settlements were springing to life or being abandoned, in the chaotic transition out of the Slavery System. The New Afrikan community as we

think of it today didn't yet exist. It had to be built. All of this had to be created for the first time, in large part by women.

Harriet stayed her course. Unlike many Anti-Slavery leaders, who took the Union victory as time to cash in their chips, Harriet lived the communal & working-class life of her people. Like many other New Afrikan women, she put her life into building the first Black institutions, the foundations of their new communities.

Development also meant self transformation, because New Afrikan women knew how unprepared they were. Almost all were illiterate. While the learned Dr. Martin Delany could write one of the first books opposing Charles Darwin and his new theory of evolution, Harriet could not read a wanted poster or a battle map. A veteran of a hundred guerrilla raids and campaigns, she once fell asleep unknowingly under her own wanted poster. Sojourner Truth, the feminist orator, was illiterate, as were her daughters. Anna Douglass, whose husband, Frederick, was the most famous Black man in amerikkka, was also illiterate. Harriet never learned to read or write, but she did throw herself into the New Afrikan literacy movement that swept the South.

There was a spontaneous mass hunger for knowing, for the power of knowledge and communication that had been denied them under Slavery. New Afrikan women could be seen outside during a work break, primary school textbook in hand trying to sound out words. Schools were set up in cabins and shacks, teaching children by day and adults at night. Harriet sent all the funds she could raise (and much of her personal earnings) to help support two of the new community schools.

For years, as Harriet would lead her fellow fugitives through the North, on the way to Canada and temporary safety, she would use the first African Methodist Episcopal churches as shelters. Where the band of escaped fugitives could hide among sisters & brothers, rest and be fed. These few churches

were the only centers an oppressed people in a hostile land had. Deeply moral, Harriet joined with other New Afrikan women in the area to conduct revival meetings, to start new churches wherever they could. Her own house in Auburn, N.Y. she turned into a communal resource. She put up children whose parents could not afford to support them, elderly Anti-Slavery movement veterans and guests. She wanted to set up a self-supporting farm, which would operate the "John Brown Home" as she called it. As a resource for the community. She lived her life constructing the grassroots of the Nation, upon which the Ida B. Wellses and countless other women of later generations would stand.

Victory and defeat change everything. Harriet Tubman was the product of an en-slaved communal nation. That's why she was so military. Her movements were more natural because she was never subordinate within her people. Harriet could work in the Underground Railroad *with* men and not be a subordinate.

The death of Moses was a signal event. An Amazon that Slavery and armed white men had not been able to stop. But Harriet could no longer be the General, could no longer be Moses. Again, this isn't just about one Amazon. Here in modern history, not thousands of years ago before recorded time, we can see in detail how the development of patriarchal classes changed the nature of women and men in war. This is a modern change, that can be remade or reversed in our lifetime. This is the subject here.

Harriet is still too subversive, still really hard to deal with. One reason even radicals fall into the trap of treating her non-politically. Dis-missing her as a simple minded woman. They don't say it, but they mean it. What's so hard to swallow is that her deeds didn't come from super abilities, like an Einstein, but from qualities that we're all supposed to have. And that, embarrassingly, most of us have only momentary glimpses of.

More than anything else, Harriet was deeply rooted. In herself as an Amazon and in her New Afrikan people. **And being so centered, there was a deceptive fluidity to everything she did. For her there was no distance between "I should" and "I did." She simply lived her politics to the fullest.**

If Harriet wasn't what women are supposed to be, even more threatening was that she was much more. Not only independent of men, but a player in their closely monopolized territory of war and politics. Harriet was out of men's control, but as a New Afrikan woman was also considered by white men to be lowly and unimportant. An attitude Harriet took big time advantage of. In fact, had she tried to join or reform the patriarchy she never would have gotten anything done. Harriet took guerrilla advantage of her informal, unorthodox status to slip beneath the radar of men's restrictions. After all, as "Private Harriet" or "Corporal Harriet" she never would have been able to confer with Union leaders and generals, or guide their decisions by shaping their Intelligence.

We need to go back to something we said earlier: Once out of Slavery, Harriet never put herself under the command of men. Make no mistake, Harriet understood hierarchy & patriarchy quite well. Literally under the lash for 29 years, bearing whip scars she would carry all her life, working with fugitive slaves and Union commanders alike, she had a very practical grasp of men's hierarchy. But she never followed it.

Harriet worked with male leaders of the Anti-Slavery movement, not under them. Just as she worked with the Union Army, but reserved the right to do whatever she felt best at any time. She wasn't confined by a career or a rank in the hierarchy. And you know she wouldn't have been able to fight a war if she had to be home for dinner.

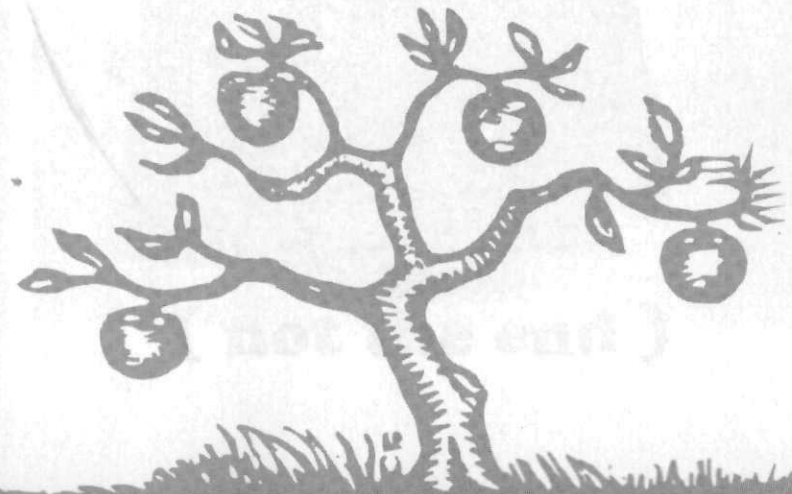
Harriet rode the waves of her People's struggle, and became a leader. Their victories and losses, their choices right & wrong, were the preconditions for the Malcolm Xs and Audre Lordes

that came later. Harriet didn't have to always win, or save her People single-handed. What's crucial is that as an Amazon, Harriet took her turn at bat. She made political choices. She did what she had to do to fight out the great issues of the day.

Guerrilla, farmhand, lumberjack, laundress and cook, refugee organizer, raid leader and Intelligence commander, nurse and healer, revival speaker, feminist and fundraiser. Harriet flowed, without fuss, from need to need, task to task. Having no power, she could live with immeasurable power. That's what makes her such a difficult model. You can't get a grant to be Harriet. And while the capitalist patriarchy has a million schools, women still do not have even one school to teach what Harriet could do.

In her old age a newspaper reporter from the *N.Y. Herald* came to interview her, one of the last surviving heroines of the Anti-Slavery struggle:

"She looked musingly toward a nearby orchard, and she asked suddenly: 'Do you like apples?' On being assured I did, she said: 'Did you ever plant any apple trees?' With shame I confessed that I had not. 'No,' said she, 'but somebody else planted them. I liked apples when I was young, and I said: "Some day I'll plant apples myself for other young folks to eat," and I guess I did.'"



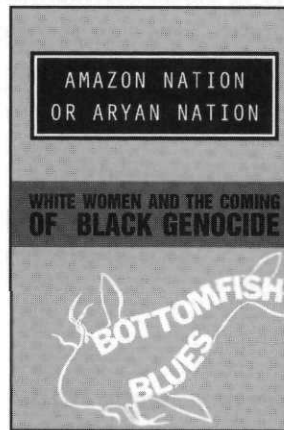
Acknowledgement

i am not a herstorian, but use a lot of herstory in my work. While i've learned from more sisters than can easily point to here, there are some whose insightfulness shaped this essay. My thanks to them:

Paula Giddings ❖ Jacqueline Jones ❖ Deborah Gray White

Butch

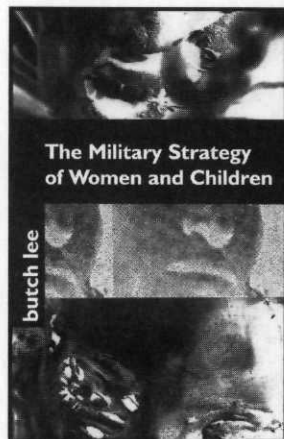
SIMILAR BOOKS FROM KERSPLEBEDEB



Amazon Nation or Aryan Nation: White Women and the Coming of Black Genocide

Bottomfish Blues • 978-1-894946-55-1
168 pages • \$12.95

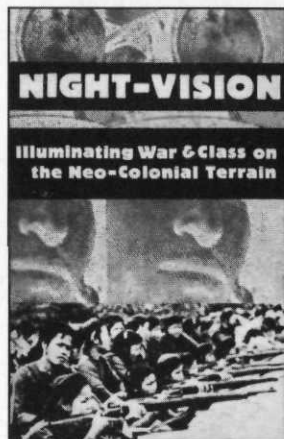
The two main essays in this book come from the radical women's newspaper Bottomfish Blues, which was published in the late 1980s and early '90s; while a historical appendix on "The Ideas of Black Genocide in the Amerikkkan Mind" was written more recently, but only circulated privately. These texts provide raw and vital lessons at the violent crash scene of nation, gender, and class, from a revolutionary and non-academic perspective.



The Military Strategy of Women and Children

Butch Lee • 0973143231
116 pages • \$12.00

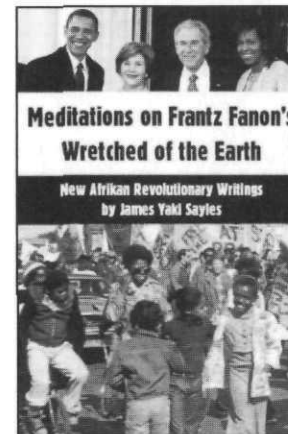
Lays out the need for an autonomous and independent women's revolutionary movement, a revolutionary women's culture that involves not only separating oneself from patriarchal imperialism, but also confronting, opposing, and waging war against it by all means necessary.



Night-Vision: Illuminating War and Class on the Neo-Colonial Terrain

Butch Lee and Red Rover • 1883780004
187 pages • \$14.95

bell hooks: "Night-Vision was so compelling to me because it has a spirit of militancy which reformist feminism tries to kill because militant feminism is seen as a threat to the liberal bourgeois feminism that just wants to be equal with men. It has that raw, unmediated truth-telling which I think we are going to need in order to deal with the fascism that's upon us." A foundational analysis of post-modern capitalism, the decline of u.s. hegemony, and the need for a revolutionary movement of the oppressed to overthrow it all.

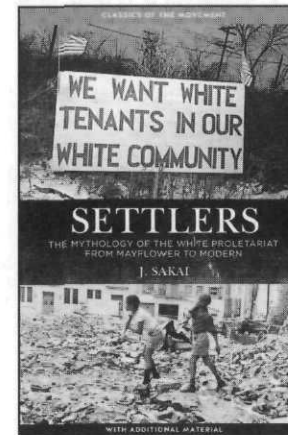


Meditations on Frantz Fanon's Wretched of the Earth: New Afrikan Revolutionary Writings

James Yaki Sayles • 978-1-894946-32-2
399 pages • \$20.00

One of those who eagerly picked up Fanon in the '60s, who carried out armed expropriations and violence against white settlers, Sayles reveals how, behind the image of Fanon as race thinker, there is an underlying reality of antiracist communist thought. "This exercise is about more than our desire to read and understand Wretched (as if it were about some abstract world, and not our own); it's about more than our need to understand (the failures of)

the anti-colonial struggles on the African continent. This exercise is also about us, and about some of the things that We need to understand and to change in ourselves and our world." —James Yaki Sayles



Settlers: The Mythology of the White Proletariat from Mayflower to Modern

J. Sakai • 978-1-62963-037-3
456 pages • \$20.00

J. Sakai shows how the United States is a country built on the theft of Indigenous lands and Afrikan labor, on the robbery of the northern third of Mexico, the colonization of Puerto Rico, and the expropriation of the Asian working class, with each of these crimes being accompanied by violence. In fact, America's white citizenry have never supported themselves but have always resorted to exploitation and theft, culminating in acts of genocide to maintain their

culture and way of life. This movement classic lays it all out, taking us through this painful but important history.

TO ORDER THESE AND
MANY OTHER TITLES



KERSPLEBEDEB PUBLISHING
CP 63560, CCCP VAN HORNE
MONTREAL, QC, CANADA H3W 3H8
EMAIL: INFO@KERSPLEBEDEB.COM
WEB: WWW.KERSPLEBEDEB.COM
WWW.LEFTWINGBOOKS.NET

KERSPLEBEDEB

Since 1998 Kersplebedeb has been an important source of radical literature and agit prop materials.

The project has a non-exclusive focus on anti-patriarchal and anti-imperialist politics, framed within an anticapitalist perspective. A special priority is given to writings regarding armed struggle in the metropole, and the continuing struggles of political prisoners and prisoners of war.

The Kersplebedeb website presents historical and contemporary writings by revolutionary thinkers from the anarchist and communist traditions.

Kersplebedeb can be contacted at:

Kersplebedeb
CP 63560
CCCP Van Horne
Montreal, Quebec
Canada
H3W 3H8

email: info@kersplebedeb.com
web: www.kersplebedeb.com
www.leftwingbooks.net

Kersplebedeb