

introduction

THE DREAM OF A COMMON LANGUAGE

One winter morning in 1934, the *Sacramento Bee* published a biography of longtime Oroville resident John Widener. The “Oroville Negro,” as the paper referred to the seventy-seven-year-old man, had come to California as a baby—and enslaved (figure I.1). Arriving from Missouri in 1856, during the waning days of the Gold Rush, the infant Widener and his mother had been brought west by an owner intent on striking it rich, preferably through the labor of others.

Amid the declining prospects faced by individual miners confronted with the increased adoption of capital-intensive forms of hydraulic mining, John’s mother was hired out by her owner, as were many enslaved Black migrants to California.¹ After more than a year cooking and cleaning in a Nevada City hotel, Mother Widener negotiated the purchase of freedom for herself and her son. As was the case for all Black Californians in the antebellum United States, their freedom was both precious and precarious. At least one local

Figure I.1.
John Widener, 1934.
Sacramento Bee.



newspaper felt comfortable publishing an advertisement for the sale of an “indentured” Black woman, and the sight of kidnappers openly roaming the streets of Sacramento and San Francisco terrorized African Americans and vexed the state’s abolitionist whites.² Even those who could legally document their own freedom ran the risk of reenslavement. Despite the expiration of California’s fugitive slave law in 1855, federal legislation, combined with the inability of nonwhite people to testify in court, meant that “any dark-skinned foreigner, child, mulatto, Negro or Indian” could be seized “by the connivance and rascality of three or four rogues.”³

Although California joined the Union as a free state in 1850, tens of thousands of pro-slavery whites rushed west to look for gold. As many as fifteen hundred enslaved people entered the state with them.⁴ On the eve of statehood, Southern-born whites constituted more than a third of California's white populace, and both the legislature and the judiciary reflected their influence. Fear of competition from Black workers dominated attitudes among those whites opposed to slavery, moreover, who repeatedly sought to write into the California Constitution prohibitions on the entry or residency of all people of African descent, regardless of status. Against the backdrop of widespread hostility, kidnappings, and paltry legal protections, hundreds of California's Black residents moved to British Columbia, having concluded that actual freedom was impossible anywhere between the Canadian and Mexican borders.

My grandfather's grandfather stayed in California, however, and he spent the next eight decades as a fixture in the towns that dot the Sacramento Valley. From Chico and Oroville to Winters, Gridley, Woodland, Fair Oaks, and Yuba City, records reveal a circuitous lifetime of working-class jobs: bill poster, janitor, bootblack, scavenger, miner, laborer, cook.⁵ Like so many people of color, he entered the historical record largely because of his association with a famous white person. In naming the white John (Bidwell), but not the Black John (Widener), the *Sacramento Bee* indicated its intended subject with a headline that read, "Oroville Negro, Born a Slave, Recalls Bidwell."⁶ Columnist Tom Arden's sketch traced John Widener's impressions of his onetime employer, a celebrated "pioneer" who played a key role in the Gold Rush as one of the first Anglo settlers to arrive overland in California. Arden's column made no mention of Widener's roles in the AME church or his leadership in early Black political organizations like the Colored Citizens Convention and the Afro-American League.⁷ Also unmentioned by the *Sacramento Bee* were John's children, Sherman, Oscar, Robert, and Annie, as well as Henrietta, his wife.

In contrast to John, nobody brought Henrietta to California. Her maternal ancestors had lived in the Sierra foothills and valley meadows of the Feather River watershed since Wonomi and Turtle had joined together to spread land across a world of water. Like many Native Californians, Henrietta's people, who lived in a riverside village close to Table Mountain, named themselves People. The eventual names by which they would be known to outsiders, Northwestern Maidu, Concow, Konkow, Konkau, and others, were anglicizations of a place-based term, *kóyo•mkàwi*, as the Concow Valley was

called by those living there, which spoke to centrality of place in ordering Indigenous conceptions of the world.⁸

The Concow lived in one of the most densely settled parts of Native California, where, as one elder put it, “you go two ridges away and they talk different.”⁹ Reciprocity and relationality shaped an environment characterized by material stability and cultural complexity, as expressed in basketry, stories, songs, games of chance, and ceremonies.¹⁰ Although governed by long-standing traditions, this was a dynamic world, incorporating fire-based land management, extensive alimentary diversity, and trade links that stretched from the Pacific Northwest to the Great Basin, marked out by customary territories that delineated the spaces inhabited by the neighboring Nomlaki, Yana, Nisenan, and related Maidu peoples.¹¹ The custom of burning the bulk of the property of the deceased reduced hereditary social inequality. Political authority within villages was decentralized and impermanent, and conflict with neighbors, while endemic, was generally small scale.

Within a world shaped by kinship and place, one thing that mattered little to the Concow were the yellow nuggets that periodically washed up in creek beds.¹²

Gold brought strangers, though, and these strangers brought disaster. Invaders introduced new diseases, depleted game and other food sources, and polluted waterways. The threat of violence at the hands of whites made the gathering of acorns and other plants a dangerous activity. Murder was common, rape even more so.¹³ Thousands of adults were killed, and their children were forced into domestic servitude as “wards,” in a process given legal cover through the adoption in 1850 of the “Act for the Government and Protection of Indians.”¹⁴ Then, as now, the links between vigilantism and state violence were clear to see. Localities paid cash for every dead body, while the federal government offered land grants to veterans of campaigns lasting more than fourteen days. Military officials, including Secretary of War Jefferson Davis and Adjutant General William Kibbe, provided professional training and advanced equipment to California state militiamen.¹⁵ Between 1846 and 1873, state and federal officials paid more than \$1.7 million in cash bounties to murderers of people whose primary crime was that white people found them inconvenient.¹⁶

Like my African ancestors, my Indian people sought escape from forced labor at the hands of whites, and, like Africans, Native people had prices put on their heads.¹⁷ White American settlers transformed existing practices of labor coercion pioneered by Spaniards and Californios, realizing new profits

by selling captives as “indentures” rather than “simply seizing Indians for their own use.”¹⁸ Historian Benjamin Madley identifies 1862—the year my grandfather Arnold’s grandmother Henrietta was born—as the peak of the “practice of murdering Native Californian adults in order to kidnap and sell young women and children for a profit.”¹⁹ Born around 1836, Henrietta’s mother Polly, her father Henry, her sister Rosa, and her brother John survived years of near unimaginable violence, when more than 80 percent of California’s Indigenous population perished.²⁰ At the behest of settlers, federal officials dispatched soldiers and militia who removed Concow, Maidu, and Pit River People, first to a short-lived coastal reservation near Fort Bragg, and subsequently, having decided that the coastal redwoods were too valuable to cede, to a mountainous area of Mendocino County that would eventually become the Round Valley reservation.²¹

In this context, survival was a victory. Albert Hurtado wrote of how the “grisly statistics of population reduction have overwhelmed” students of California history in ways that have left as a footnote the resilience and determination of Native people.²² As William Bauer demonstrates, the displaced built new lives, incorporating the coming of whites into traditional stories, transforming reservation Christianity, entering the labor force as wage workers, renewing ceremonies, and otherwise making the Round Valley reservation their home.²³ For others, as David Chang shows, the exercise of choice consisted precisely in electing not to move to Round Valley.²⁴ These survivors found kinship and intimacy among others, including Kanaka Maoli, other Indigenous nations, or, in Henrietta, John, Rosa, and Polly’s case, freedpeople in and around the Sierras.²⁵ Fight and flight, negotiation and cultural persistence, kinship and creativity. These were forms of resistance equally familiar to enslaved Africans and Indigenous Americans threatened with extinction. Recalling them is vital, for it makes us subjects of our own history, rather than the objects of a history written by someone else.

The story of John and Henrietta raises the first core concern of this book, the political excavation of historic interactions among communities of color. Jack Forbes argued that understanding the conquest of the Americas necessitated placing the experiences of Americans—and by this he meant Indigenous people across the hemisphere—and Africans in a common frame.²⁶ Doing so requires acknowledging the high degree of intermixture between Native American and African people across multiple centuries—“the political economy of plunder that pillaged Black lives and Indigenous lands,” of course, but also the presence of Afro-Native communities, nations, and families.²⁷ It is likewise vital to recognize patterns by which official sources shift between



Figure I.2. Demonstration march against racism, the Ku Klux Klan, and neo-Nazism in Oroville, California, 1982. Photograph by Larry Sharkey. Los Angeles Times Photographic Archives, UCLA Library Special Collections.

defining Native people as “Indian,” “colored,” “mulatto,” and “Black.”²⁸ Such was our experience. To the Bureau of Indian Affairs officials who oversaw the allotment of Round Valley, we were “diggers.”²⁹ For the racists living around the Citrus Heights and Roseville neighborhoods where I spent summers, we were “niggers” (see figure I.2). As survivors of American slavery and the California Indian genocide, my relations lived not only at the intersection of settler colonialism and anti-Black racism, but alongside an imperial crossroad that brought Mexicans, Chinese, Chileans, and Native Hawaiians to the mines, farms, and fields of Central California.³⁰

The effect of US racial capitalism upon these communities is the second theme of *Third Worlds Within*.³¹ John and Henrietta Widener lived firsthand both primitive accumulation and capitalism, at a breakneck pace and amid furious violence.³² They married a few months before Karl Marx wrote his friend Friedrich Sorge on November 5, 1880, to ask for an update on economic conditions in California. “California is very important for me,” Marx told the founder of the oldest socialist party in the United States,

“because nowhere else has the upheaval most shamelessly caused by capitalist centralization taken place with such speed.”³³ John Widener’s introduction to Concow people came at the Chico rancheria owned by John Bidwell, where Widener worked as a servant as a teen and where many Concow and Mechoopda moved to escape the violence swirling around them. Bidwell played a critical role in California’s early Anglo history, working as a business manager on the farm where the gold rush began, serving in Congress during Reconstruction, and pioneering the commercial production of melons, raisins, almonds, and walnuts. In keeping with Cedric Robinson’s view that capitalism emerged not as a revolutionary break from feudalism, but as part of an evolutionary process that betrayed its strong links to a feudal past imbued with developing ideas about race, “Don Juan Bidwell” cast himself in the manner of other Californios, adopting Spanish pretensions, acquiring multiple Mexican land grants, and styling himself, like his onetime employer John Sutter, as “patriarch, priest, father & judge” to the Indigenous people on whose labor his initial wealth was built.³⁴

Although recalled today mostly as a politician and a so-called pioneer, Bidwell was among the most influential capitalists in Central California. A onetime ally and eventual rival of Leland Stanford, Bidwell had interests that extended from agricultural mechanization to transportation. Bidwell’s insistence upon maintaining a racially mixed labor force made his holdings a locus for both interethnic engagement and racial animus.³⁵ In this sense, Bidwell serves as an early exemplar of managerial techniques that fostered competition among races and that imagined white supervision as the key to the development of putatively inferior peoples.³⁶ He defended strenuously the employment of Chinese workers in the face of arson attacks and death threats by working-class whites—but used Native labor to break a strike by Chinese almond workers on his farm. He authored a proposal for the treatment of Native workers that guaranteed labor rights, pay, legal representation, and access to traditional hunting and fishing grounds, but voted in favor of the 1850 law that included none of these. He demanded Indigenous people embrace monogamy, temperance, and wage labor, but complained when they demanded better pay.³⁷ A radical reconstructionist Congressman between 1865 and 1867, Bidwell opposed slavery, voted to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, and supported the impeachment of Andrew Johnson (who had come to his wedding). Despite his abolitionist attitudes, Bidwell married a woman whose DC upbringing was reflected in her “preference” for Black household labor, and a visiting Mississippian compared the domestic organization of Bidwell’s mansion to those maintained by “the better plantation owners back

home.”³⁸ Bidwell also defended his participation in a punitive “Indian killing” expedition, had a whipping post built on his rancheria, and angrily rebuffed charges that he held “his” Native workers in bondage.³⁹

For Native people, Bidwell’s rancheria was a place of both land theft and wage labor, a refuge from outright murder and a point of departure for a forced removal.⁴⁰ It was likewise a place of employment for Black, Chinese, Hawaiian, Mexican, and white workers. As a physical space, it reminds us that US capitalism is both global and inherently racial, a system of accumulation that linked “slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide,” while realizing profit through the production of racial difference.⁴¹ As with capital, so too with the state.⁴² The processes witnessed by John and Henrietta Widener and John Bidwell—Indigenous dispossession, Chinese exclusion, and debates over the legal status of people of African and Mexican descent—would return time and again to twentieth-century California, where, as Harsha Walia writes, state formation took place via white supremacy.⁴³ From segregated classrooms and Native boarding schools to mass incarceration and Japanese internment, through waves of deportations, racist ballot propositions, and police departments famous worldwide for their violent brutality, these deployments of state power remind us that California senator James Phelan’s slogan, “Keep California White,” was as much a political imperative as a demographic aspiration.⁴⁴ Capitalism, racism, and the state shadow the communities whose struggles this book documents.

Finally, Henrietta and John’s story brings to the fore the final theme of *Third Worlds Within*: US imperialism and the multiracial struggle to defeat it. John and Henrietta lived through not only the abolition of US slavery and the establishment of the reservation system, but the European partition of Africa, the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, and the seizure of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. The California they inhabited was a colonial space, stolen twice, where existence was tied to extraction, and extraction was shaped by race.

As the terminus of the transcontinental railroad, a financial center, and a military-industrial powerhouse, California was the place where the continental empire met the overseas empire, a key node on the circuits of power that would bring the United States of America into a dominant position in the world.⁴⁵ From the rival Panama-Pacific and Panama-California exhibitions held in San Francisco and San Diego in 1915 to Kaiser Steel and General Atomics, and on to the University of California’s central role in the development of contemporary drone warfare technologies, California, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore puts it, “is in some key ways, first among first” in the development of successive forms of the

military-industrial complex.⁴⁶ California was also the space where racialized and colonized bodies entered the United States, by land and by sea. Far from Ellis Island, many of the latter were detained at Angel Island Immigration Station, a facility built upon the leveled site of a Miwok village. With all this in mind, we might paraphrase Marx, amending his note to Sorge to read something like “California is very important to me, because it furnishes an unusually clear example of the confluence between capitalist transformation, racial violence, and imperialist expansion—in both its continental and overseas modes.”

As such, it hardly surprises that California offers so many examples of resistance to the same. The end of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth century brought variegated forms of communal activism, including legal challenges, new protest organizations, labor unions, and even the occasional armed confrontation. In the 1930s, waves of strikes by multiracial groups of lettuce and cotton pickers, cannery packers, and longshoremen made California a “seething cauldron of industrial unrest,” and the legacies of Depression-era struggles persisted in everything from the United Farm Workers to the interracial beatnik avant-garde of 1950s-era San Francisco.⁴⁷ Later moments—Alcatraz and the I-Hotel, the Watts rebellion and the Delano Grape Strike—confirmed the state as a locus for the imagination of “alternate societies militantly pursued . . . by those who sought to make impossible the future we live today.”⁴⁸

At their most visionary and expansive, these movements crossed the barriers of race, ethnicity, and citizenship status that define and divide working people of color inside the United States. As they did so, they tried to strike a blow, from within, against the militarism and expansionism of the so-called American Century. Often, these movements were intensely local, set in *this* field, *that* wharf, *those* classrooms, and yet global in their connections and import. For this reason, this book stretches from Oroville to Oaxaca, from Los Angeles City College to Bangkok’s Thammasat University, illustrating how the dual contradiction between the racist production of difference and the relations of multiethnic communities, on the one hand, and between imperialism and internationalism, on the other, formed new communities of resistance here, there, and everywhere.

A WORLD TO WIN

I was born in 1973, a year marked by the US military withdrawal from Vietnam, the Wounded Knee occupation, and the overthrow of Chile’s democratically elected socialist government in a US-backed military coup. By that

time, my parents had been actively involved in political struggle for more than a decade. The children of mechanics and maids, from families linked by Pentecostalism but divided by race, Carolyn Hazell and Michael Widener grew up on opposite sides of South Los Angeles. They entered a University of California that was both free and open to people like them, working-class children of working-class people who were the first in their families to pursue higher education. As an interracial couple looking for housing in segregated Los Angeles, they had accidentally, but not coincidentally, found a longtime member of the Communist Party for a landlord. Younger than the Old Left, and older than the New Left, they were foot soldiers in a long march through the many movements that strove to remake Los Angeles. Across the arc of civil rights, fair housing, Black Power, school blowouts, second-wave feminism, the Chicano Movement, gay and lesbian liberation, the counterculture, and Vietnam, their political lives provided the backdrop to my childhood.⁴⁹

Together, they had participated in an early community police-monitoring project of the sort later made famous by the Black Panther Party and the Community Alert Patrol. My mother had gone with other civil rights activists to Georgia and had been a strike captain at Crenshaw High School during the 1970 work stoppage that established the United Teachers of Los Angeles. She had started a new job at East Los Angeles College a few weeks before the Chicano Moratorium march, at which marauding Los Angeles sheriff's deputies attacked peaceful antiwar protesters, injuring dozens and killing four, including journalist Ruben Salazar. My father had seen his Watts neighborhood go up in flames, and he joined hundreds of community witnesses who gathered outside the Black Panther Party headquarters as it came under attack from the Los Angeles Police Department's new Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team. School officials transferred him from South Los Angeles to Watts to Pacoima to North Hollywood, hoping to find a school where students would reject his radical ideas. My parents had left an antiwar demonstration in Century City moments before the Los Angeles police launched a brutal attack on the crowd, and they had been outside the Ambassador ballroom the night Robert Kennedy was killed. They had lived through the political murders of Malcolm and Medgar, of King and the Kennedy brothers. They had seen their students go to war or go into hiding, and they had packed their own bags more than once.

As one result of this legacy, I grew up with a vague sense of belonging to a very different moment, of having missed a crucial period in US, or even world, history. I carried this feeling through a childhood spent in two venerable Los Angeles neighborhoods. The Echo Park of my childhood was

multiracial, vibrant, and radical, but it was a far cry from the happenings of the late 1960s, or the Red Hill of the 1950s, when my parents' social world included Abraham Lincoln Brigade vets, gay rights pioneers of the Mattachine Society, and former affiliates of the Los Angeles chapter of the Committee for Protection of the Foreign Born (see figures I.3 and I.4). Nor was my Venice the Venice of the 1950s and 1960s, of the beat poets and the Doors. Rather, it was the Venice of the Shoreline Crips and V-13, of Exene Cervenka and Alex Cox, of Ghost Town and Suicidal Tendencies. Abbot Kinney Boulevard, proclaimed "the coolest block in America" by GQ, was West Washington, a dilapidated strip of struggling businesses—many Black owned—and the famous canals were stagnant pools of brackish slime.⁵⁰

I came to politics toward the end of what Bradford Martin terms "the other eighties," when liberation struggles for every continent surrounded me and my friends.⁵¹ From Northern Ireland and Palestine to Central America and Southern Africa, the local and the international fused at every turn.⁵² In the back room of a law office off Western and Adams, former Panthers and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) members pushed us to see the liberation of Southern Africa and South Los Angeles as a common fight. Queer activists from ACT UP LA, many of them HIV-positive, organized caravans to Orange County, where we confronted the antichoice zealots of Operation Rescue and the police who protected their efforts to blockade reproductive health clinics.⁵³ We learned to mix anarchist glue (wheat paste), and, equipped by artists like Robbie Conal, we put our knowledge to good use. We came to detest *la migra* as much as we reviled the cops. On weekends, we cruised the 'shaw, or brawled with the neo-Nazi skinheads of Tom Metzger's White Aryan Resistance outside the Roxy, the Palladium, and the Country Club.⁵⁴ Our solidarities were not a market exchange—they were a way of life, of seeing the world, and of acting upon what we saw.⁵⁵

And we hated the police. It wasn't just the constant harassment, petty humiliations, and occasional violence. It wasn't the mass arrest facilities set up outside a publicly owned stadium that had once hosted the first integrated team in the National Football League.⁵⁶ Nor was it the way in which they ran their low-budget COINTELPRO games on us, claiming that *eses* were crossing out our tags or talking shit about us, even as they told the *vatos* the same thing. It wasn't even their periodic acts of organized fury, like the 1990 police riot in Century City that left an indelible mark on the local labor movement. For me, it was their simple omnipresence, from the ss-like black garb of the LAPD, with their dum-dum rounds, ghetto birds, and Vietnam analogies, to the SA-like thugs of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, with



Figure I.3. Frank Carlson, cofounder of the California Labor School and education director, Los Angeles Branch, Communist Party of the United States of America, upon his release from jail, 1952. As a member of the Terminal Island Four, Carlson was among those charged under the draconian McCarran Internal Security Act of 1950. In a landmark case, the US government insisted upon its right to detain Carlson indefinitely as “an alien eligible for deportation.” His case ultimately wound up before the US Supreme Court. Los Angeles Herald Examiner Collection, Special Collections, Doheny Memorial Library, University of Southern California.

their brown shirts, double lightning tattoos, and not-quite-secret neo-Nazi deputy gangs.⁵⁷ Added to this were the junior varsity departments, from Los Angeles Unified to Pasadena, who tailed us at every turn. I know that I don't speak only for myself when I recall the joy I felt when, for a few days in 1992, we pushed them off the streets.

In recent years, the languages of anti-imperialism, solidarity, and the possibility of revolutionary alliances across nonwhite populations have fallen from favor, pushed aside by rival visions characterized by fantasies of changing the world without seizing power, the narrow nationalism of porkchop (Afro)pessimism, and impossible demands for safe spaces in a country built upon and dedicated to violence. Widespread agreement about the targets of our resistance—patriarchy, capitalism, anti-Blackness, settler colonialism, and state violence toward immigrant communities—has not been accompanied by clarity about where we want to go or how to get there. This is not an accident, but follows logically from a lack of class analysis, cynicism regarding the efficacy and necessity of solidarity, and the disavowal of direct and reciprocal links between intellectuals and mobilized communities outside the academy. As a result, we are left with what Fred Hampton identified so

Figure I.4. Frank Carlson in Echo Park, Los Angeles, 1974. Infant at bottom is the author. Personal collection of author.



many years ago: “Answers that don’t answer, explanations that don’t explain, and conclusions that don’t conclude.”⁵⁸

In his 1963 speech at King Solomon Baptist Church in Detroit, Malcolm X told his audience, “Of all our studies, history is best qualified to reward our research.”⁵⁹ Historical examples offer concrete lessons that “minimize the risk of reductive abstraction” and that help us to see that “there are two sides to every question, but only one side is right.”⁶⁰ In this vein, *Third Worlds Within* takes as its starting point the value of learning from earlier moments when multiracial movements rooted in strategy—and in the belief in victory—rather than the constant proclamation of difference, formed a basic element of the political lives of nonwhite people living in the United States. It is written first and foremost for those who refuse “to remain transfixed at the point of racial abjection, repeatedly bearing witness to the bareness of life stripped of well-being, rights, and physical protection.”⁶¹ It likewise rejects the idea that our struggles are somehow “incommensurable.” Instead, it recounts a “dream of a common language,” a possible history for an age of new contradictions and uncertainty.⁶²

The term *incommensurable* is taken from Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s influential essay, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor.” Their essay offers a uniquely valuable critique of how emancipatory mobilizations often ignore or are even complicit with settler colonialism. Yet Tuck and Yang are imprecise in their approach to the status of people of African descent in the US settler-colonial state. Their argument about “racialized” subjects who “occupy and settle stolen Indigenous land” would seem to imply that Black claims to redress in the form of land or other territorial concessions invariably bolster the ongoing process of Native dispossession.⁶³ Indeed, by stating, “It is no accident that the US government promised 40 acres of Indian land as reparations for plantation slavery,” this point is made explicitly.⁶⁴ This perspective is historically inaccurate.⁶⁵ It is also at odds with views put forth by many radical Indigenous activists. Wounded Knee veteran Woody Kipp, for example, argued that reparations to African Americans should take the form of collectively owned land (reservations) inside the borders of the present-day United States.⁶⁶ Vine Deloria Jr. concurred, saying, “I think it was an absolute disaster blacks were not given reservations” and that “to survive, blacks must have a homeland where they can withdraw, drop the façade of integration, and be themselves.”⁶⁷ More recently, formations like the Red Nation and the NDN Collective have defended the inextricable link between Indigenous and Black Liberation, with Red Nation arguing that “we must align ourselves with our relatives in the African diaspora and on the African continent as many of our ancestors first did against settler colonialism.”⁶⁸

The decision not to engage the links developed between Indigenous struggles and a wide range of Black radical figures of disparate dispensations, including Angela Davis, Kwame Ture, Dick Gregory, Fran Beal, the Nation of Islam, the Third World Women's Alliance, and the Republic of New Africa, is another curious silence, though one that follows logically from an avoidance of the connection between Indigenous decolonization and other national liberation struggles. As a result, an entire history is lost. Tuck and Yang's dismissal of "Third World in the First World" frameworks as "ambiguating" Indigenous claims and constituting a colonialist masking seems to leave little place for the affinities expressed between organizations like the African National Congress and the Black Panther Party ("Third World" and "First World"), or between George Manuel and the Tanzanian Revolution ("Fourth World" and "Third World"), or between the Black Panther Party and the Native Alliance for Red Power, whose parallel ten- and eight-point programs range across the common concerns of police violence, economic exploitation, the criminal injustice system, and the meaning of self-determination.

The notion of incommensurability obliterates an entire range of actually existing solidarities.⁶⁹ What of the American Indian Movement and Sinn Féin, who found common cause around language revival, the repatriation of remains, armed struggle, and a range of other issues? What about Sandra Izsadore, the Black American woman from Los Angeles who played such a pivotal role in radicalizing Nigerian Pan-African Afrobeat avatar Fela Kuti? What was Nasser doing uptown, anyway? Where does a framework that negates the connection between internal colonialism, external colonialism, and settler colonialism leave West Papuans, Aboriginal Australians, and Torres Strait Islanders, whose radicalism reflected both their own traditions and their engagement with Black radical circuits, from Jack Johnson and the UNIA (United Negro Improvement Association) to the Panthers, Caribbean revolutionists, and independent West African states like Senegal and Guinea-Bissau? What of the many links between US-based Latinx radicalisms and the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional), or the formation of DQ University, a project aimed at producing a revolutionary education for Chicana and Native people?

Instead of incommensurability, we might choose to return to an older political vocabulary centered on the idea of "contradictions among the people."⁷⁰ Doing so allows us to understand how the enslavement of Africans by Indigenous nations and the homesteading of Indigenous lands by Black freedpeople were ultimately part of a conjoined logic of "Removal" that featured as a constitutive element the production of an oppositional

relationship between Black and Indigenous people.⁷¹ The point here is not to negate the unique violence of settler colonialism, in either its historic or continuing iterations, but rather to argue that revolutionaries see their problems in light of the oppression suffered by others. Our situations need not be identical to be commensurate.

A parallel vision of incommensurability exists at the heart of the intellectual impasse known as Afropessimism. Afropessimism posits a world order based upon a categorical opposition between Blackness and humanity in which Black agency is an oxymoronic fiction. Multiple theorizations shape this framework, including the idea that the spectacular and hideous violence experienced by enslaved Black people is exceptional and cannot be analogized; that the idea of social death under slavery remains the essential character of Black life today; and that society is shaped in the first and last instance by a structural hostility to Black people. For obvious reasons, this framework rejects a politics of common struggle.⁷² It likewise finds history, both as an intellectual methodology and as a register of human activity, deeply inconvenient. The point is not to deny the centrality of anti-Black violence to the entire enterprise of US nationality or Western capitalism. Rather, it is to point out that to perpetuate a worldview in which Blackness somehow equals permanent and unalterable social death is to adopt precisely the white supremacist worldview that our forebears knew was untrue.

As with history, so too with geography. Afropessimist ahistoricism is compounded by an unwillingness to acknowledge the efficacy of Black self-activity throughout the world, where, Brent Hayes Edwards reminds us, we mostly do not speak English.⁷³ Afropessimists, notes Kevin Ochieng Okoth, “frequently erase or distort beyond recognition, the various Black liberation movements that fought against racism, colonialism, and imperialism throughout the Global South.”⁷⁴ They have to, since it is difficult to engage seriously what Denise Ferreira da Silva identifies as the “intrinsically multiple quality of black subjectivity” when you reject the idea that Black people have any subjectivity at all.⁷⁵

Much of this self-activity, it should be pointed out, involves work with other mobilized communities. In Brazil, Indigenous communities, *afrodescendentes*, landless people, and environmental activists have found common cause against violence and deforestation.⁷⁶ In Bolivia, the plurinational, Indigenous-led government of Evo Morales has advocated specific constitutional entitlements and recognized the ceremonial monarchy of the Afro-Bolivian royal house.⁷⁷ In Guyana, we can point to the drawing together of the Working Peoples Alliance and the Guyana Action Party in tracing political alliances

between Indigenous, Black, and immigrant Indo-Guyanese populations. In Mexico, Colombia, and Ecuador, *afrodescendiente* and Indigenous organizing has repeatedly overlapped. Even within North America, the pessimists are wrong, given the mutual affinity between, for example, the Republic of New Africa, the Black Panther Party, the American Indian Movement, and the Native Alliance for Red Power, as well as between SNCC and the United Farm Workers, to say nothing of the millions who took to the streets in the aftermath of the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. Here we might turn again to Cedric Robinson's caution against ignoring historical examples in favor of reductive abstraction.

As has happened so many times in the history of the West, the continent of Africa suffers specific erasure in both a narrowly conceived settler colonial studies and an insular Afropessimism. As Robin Kelley writes, Patrick Wolfe's formulation of settler colonialism as elimination cannot encompass African history, with the result that Africa is once again cast aside, with deleterious repercussions for Indigenous people in the Americas, since actually existing postsettler states fade from view.⁷⁸ In asking why Black North American academics would employ a term—*Afropessimism*—that has a long and pejorative history in reference to the African continent, Okoth draws attention to the neoliberal capture at the heart of an academic fad that negates “the possibility for anti-imperialist solidarity between racialized people across the world” in favor of “pseudo-politics” that is “more useful for academic promotions, Instagram hashtags, and Nike adverts.”⁷⁹ Betita Martínez had a name for this kind of viewpoint. She termed it the “Oppression Olympics.”⁸⁰

In the chapters that follow, internationalist politics and alliances across communities of color come together. Independent Black radical activity is at the heart of most of the stories told herein. At other moments, the focus is on the expansive vision of global Indigenous struggles, the challenges of Black/Brown solidarity, or the influence of East Asian revolutionary movements on the US Third World Left. In taking up Black, Indigenous, Asian, and Latinx communities, I have tried to write a history that is simultaneously Black and Third World, one that is “anti-racist, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist, rooted in the experiences of Third (and Fourth) World Communities in the First, who come together as a class faction without downplaying the cultural differences between them.”⁸¹

To be sure, struggles emanate from specific historical experiences, political contexts, and cultural understandings of the world. What Cedric Robinson describes as “the Black Radical Tradition” differs from the unique relations to land, culture, and sovereignty that are at the heart of Indigenous survivance,

just as the transnational resistance of racialized Latinx and Asian populations to empire, exploitation, and exclusion demands specific attention and understanding. The search for what Daniel Martinez HoSang terms “a wider freedom” is by its very nature heterogenous, disparate, and uneven.⁸² Indeed, this variation is part of how interdependent and coproduced struggles create wider conditions of possibility. Sometimes organizations or activists are at the center of the narrative. At other moments, artistic genres or cultural formations constitute the interpretive lens. Certain chapters address specific campaigns, while others are grounded in place. The variety is deliberate. Movements are built from each of these blocks.

Taken together, the chapters that make up *Third Worlds Within* offer a compendium of struggles grouped around the two central themes of inter-ethnicity and internationalism. The first of these concerns the production and navigation of difference among communities of color, as well as the production of community, affective bonds, and political coalitions in shared nonwhite spaces. The second theme tracks how anti-imperialism shaped antiracist activity within the United States. Keeping these frameworks together is both a political and intellectual imperative for those who intend to confront “the predatory solution of token reform at home and counter-revolutionary imperialism abroad.”⁸³ As Nikhil Pal Singh points out, severing the analogy between external (colonialism) and internal (racism) oppression allowed a “domestication” of politics in which a narrow racial identification “submerged more expansive arguments about the relationship between race, ethics, political economy and foreign policy.”⁸⁴ “Domestication” refers here to more than just a geographic orientation, for the domesticated creature is obedient, harmless, and tame. In politics, domestication replaces self-determination with diversity, promotes inclusion rather than independence, and offers equity in place of liberation. In short, it replaces a moment of world making with a world of making do.⁸⁵

A purely domestic agenda focused on civil rights—or whatever “diversity, equity, and inclusion” is meant to be—offers a formula that both liberal humanism and US militarism can live with. After all, the US military is more integrated than most schools in the United States, and a commitment to hegemony abroad is the only real example of bipartisanship the US political system consistently shows. The promise of entry into the consumptive affluence of the American dream is a powerful lure—and it is easy to live inside the empire without asking where your shirt, shoes, or phone was made. In contrast to a domesticated rights-based framework that both oppresses and makes complicit the nonwhite citizens of the United States, the simultaneous

struggle against empire and white supremacy constitutes an alternate geography, a “cartography of refusal” that stretches across all the cities and continents that this book surveys.⁸⁶ Alongside this alternate geography, interethnic internationalism offers an alternative approach to thinking about historical time, a possible history whose critical moments replace the major milestones of US settler history—Yorktown, Gettysburg, Midway—with global markers of resistance. The Haitian Revolution. Little Bighorn. Cuito Cuanavale. Tet.

Other examples abound. In 1915, as Kelly Lytle Hernández recounts, Mexican anarchists hatched a quixotic “Plan de San Diego” whose centerpiece was an insurrectionary “liberating army for races and peoples” that promised land return to Indigenous peoples, the Black children of the formerly enslaved, and landless Mexicanos in Texas.⁸⁷ The same year, Charlemagne Péralte began his military struggle against the US occupation of Haiti. Aboriginal Australians at the First International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World heard Marcus Garvey describe Black nationalism as an antidote to genocide in Australia. *Negro World* detailed the “vile horrors” of white rule in New Caledonia, calling them worse than those seen in South Africa.⁸⁸ Connecting conditions in the US South with the Caribbean, W. E. B. Du Bois decried “the reign of terror” imposed upon occupied Haitians by “southern white naval officers and marines.”⁸⁹ Black American newspapers followed the rebellion of Augusto Sandino intently, with the Pittsburgh *Courier* writing that the nations of Latin America were “about as independent as a Negro worker in Bogalusa, L.A.”⁹⁰ In a colony where the epithet “nigger” was directed with equal frequency at both Filipinos and Black servicemen, a white military observer concluded that African American soldiers “were in closer sympathy with the native population than they were with the white leaders and policy of the U.S.”⁹¹ The National Council of Negro Women and the Asociación Cultural Femenina created circuits of travel and activism dedicated to combating the parallel oppressions faced by Black North American and Afro-Cuban women.⁹² Harlem rallied to defend Ethiopia and Spain. Revolution in Mexico drew in Black North American, Latin American, Asian, and South Asian radicals.⁹³ The creation of the Soviet Union and the rise of imperialist Japan did the same.

Engagement with these global events changed the configuration of race relations inside the United States. Japanese and Indian revolutionists proved instrumental in promoting the idea that Black North Americans constituted an oppressed nation entitled to independence from the United States. Writing in 1927, Black Bolshevik Harry Haywood argued that African Americans were “a captive nation, suffering a colonial-type oppression while trapped

within the geographic confines of one of the world's most powerful imperialist countries."⁹⁴ With the publication of "The Mexican Question in the Southwest," the Black Belt thesis spread from Black to Brown.⁹⁵ First arrested at age sixteen, labor activist and "Mexican Question" co-author Emma Tenayuca "read everything [she] could on anarchism," joined the Communist Party, and became "la pasionara de Tejas."⁹⁶ A young Vietnamese, not yet known as Ho Chi Minh, journeyed from Boston to New York to hear Marcus Garvey speak on "Africa for the Africans—and Asia for the Asians."⁹⁷ Across the Pacific, US officials nervously watched ports and printing presses, as immigrant Filipinos, Japanese, and Indians built interethnic unions, agitated for the liberation of each other's colonies, and established links with like-minded Black radicals. In the interwar Caribbean, anarchist Puerto Ricans and Cubans rejected both US colonialism and American citizenship—a vision that likewise guided Cayuga leader Deskaheh's denunciation of US and Canadian attacks on the rights of Haudenosaunee citizens. A generation later, this parallel refusal would draw Wallace "Mad Bear" Anderson to revolutionary Cuba and prompt American Indian Movement cofounder Vernon Bellecourt to claim that "the only way we are going to bring an honest relationship between Native people and the US government is to raise this sovereignty issue as Puerto Rico is raising it."⁹⁸

Of course, the empire struck back. The internationalist racial rebellions of the interwar period produced a massive repressive response. The US state constructed a vast structure of surveillance and disruption. It used spies, police, and ordinary racists to bring the Partido Liberal Mexicano to heel. It assisted its fellow imperialists in tracking elusive Asian radicals like M. N. Roy and Sen Katayama from British Columbia to Mexico City. It deported Garvey. Like the British and French, it deployed "Black soldiers of imperialism" across the territories it controlled, from Pine Ridge to the Philippines.⁹⁹

More subtly, it produced differences across a great many registers. It continued to exclude people of African descent even as it forcibly assimilated Indigenous people. It told Asian people in California they could neither become citizens nor own land. Having decided who would be fit to be citizens, it made citizenship into a category that would divide Mexican and Mexican American families. From Hawaiian pineapple plantations and Californian strawberry fields to schoolyards and jails, it fostered interethnic conflicts among people of color. It made social progress for nonwhites contingent upon their distance from Black folks. And of course, it continuously updated the greatest fiction of all: whiteness.

In the end, none of it really worked to forestall radical challenges to either racism at home or empire abroad. Such was the power of antiracism linked to anti-imperialism.

In thinking about Black radicalism, internationalist politics, and connections among communities of color inside the United States, *Third Worlds Within* follows a relational model of thinking about race inside the United States. Rather than taking race relations as a matter of how separate racialized groups interact with the white citizens or structures of the United States, relational, interethnic, or polycultural approaches to understanding racial formation (the process by which collective identities are organized and achieve social meaning) foreground the idea that race making and antiracist struggle often happen as part of a dynamic and multisided process.¹⁰⁰ These approaches attune us, for example, to the links between Indian removal and the expansion of slavery, how citizenship struggles waged by Black freedpeople after the conclusion of the American Civil War generated legal protections used today by immigrant rights activists, or how the model minority discourse was deployed in response to growing Black insurgency. Relational approaches highlight how the production and management of difference forms an integral element of both racial capitalism and the contours of US imperialism, as well as the possibility of new understandings and affiliation across these divides.¹⁰¹ By decentering whiteness, relational approaches allow us to grasp with greater accuracy how increasing numbers of people of color inside the urban United States live their daily lives.

Part of this story can only be told via a social history of relational political activism. This point neither minimizes the value of community studies of interethnic neighborhoods, nor more sociological approaches that illustrate how the state and capital shape racial identities. If changing this country is our aim, we must understand the long history of affinities, collaborations, and alliances among Indigenous, Black, Asian, and Latinx people within the United States. We must recognize that “Black and Third World Peoples need to be made actively conscious of the commonality of heritage and interest.”¹⁰² In doing so, we can recall compelling alternatives to racial division and class rule. At times, politically moderate forces joined together across racial lines.¹⁰³ At other moments, these projects emerged within singular organizations linked to the international Left. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, enduring connections were built by radical nationalist forces.

In this vein, Lakota scholar Vine Deloria Jr. described Black Power as “a godsend to other groups,” claiming that “it clarified the intellectual concepts

which had kept Indians and Mexicans confused and allowed the concept of self-determination to suddenly become valid.”¹⁰⁴ Métis activist Howard Adams concurred, saying, “The parallels between Black people in America and Indian people in Canada are obvious, since they both live in a white supremacist society.” Dismissing the view that the specificity of Black and Native oppression rendered alliances between Native and Black people problematic, Adams argued, “I felt very strongly about their oppression. . . . As colonized natives we understood one another immediately.”¹⁰⁵ World Council of Indigenous Peoples cofounder George Manuel described an “unwritten alliance . . . emerging between the Indian, black, and Chicano youth across North America.”¹⁰⁶ Amid the twin context of racial strife and an unpopular war, radicals of color forged new links across the bounds of racial difference. These links lay at the heart of new struggles against police brutality, for labor rights, for education, and against war.

This book approaches race and politics from a perspective that is internationalist as well as interethnic.¹⁰⁷ For this reason, it is my hope that *Third Worlds Within* will be read as part of a broader boom in the study of transnational radicalisms that animated what has been called the Third World, the tricontinental, and the Global South. This framework is conceptual, not physical. As Vijay Prashad says, the Third World was a project, not a place.¹⁰⁸ From Cuba and Tanzania to Vanuatu and British Columbia, proponents of Third Worldism sought both a new international system and a new path to cultural and social development for their peoples.¹⁰⁹ The vision of anti-imperialist self-determination that raced around the world resonated profoundly within the United States.¹¹⁰ Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, this mutuality of interest fostered an “anticolonial vernacular” among Native, Black, Asian American, Puerto Rican, and Chicano and Chicana activists, and the idea that communities of color formed part of a worldwide alliance lay squarely at the heart of efforts to build revolutionary relationships across racial difference within the United States and, indeed, throughout all the overdeveloped countries of the world.¹¹¹

Radicals within the United States adopted comparativist frameworks that took colonialism as a global structure with domestic analogies. The notion of African Americans and Chicanos as internally colonized groups characterized by geographic concentration, cultural oppression, and economic superexploitation at the hands of a dominant Anglo society provided both a mechanism for understanding US racism and a contact point with liberation struggles abroad.¹¹² Writing in 1962, Harold Cruse observed, “From the beginning, the American Negro has existed as a colonial being.” Drawing attention

to the parallel between US domestic colonialism and external European expansion allowed Cruse to argue that “the revolutionary initiative has passed to the colonial world, and in the United States is passing to the Negro.”¹¹³ In the case of Indigenous nations in North America, ongoing patterns of land displacement and forced assimilation made the colonial framework even more stark. For Filipinos, the legacies of US colonialism and decades of labor struggle shaped a particular dual line of antiracism and anti-imperialism. For Puerto Ricans, whether living in the “oldest colony in the world” or part of the diaspora driven to migration by the continued realities of external control, colonialism was reality, “despite all the clever phrases like ‘commonwealth’ and ‘Free Associated State’ created to confuse the issue.”¹¹⁴

Colonial analogies rested upon a global web of real-world connections. South African officials journeyed to Canada and the United States, where the operation of First Nation reserves and Indian reservations became one template for the spatially bound “native reserves” (Bantustans) for Africans that were a staple of apartheid. The US-backed military dictatorship that ruled Bolivia sought the immigration of up to 100,000 white Rhodesians and South Africans, in the hope that white flight from African decolonization might become an instrument of Indigenous displacement. Closer to home, the US advisor responsible for training South Vietnamese police, Frank Walton, had been deputy chief of the Los Angeles Police Department—where he had commanded a precinct located in Watts.¹¹⁵ A fellow advisor had come from San Quentin, and would go on to oversee prisons in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Iraq. This is a twenty-first-century story too. Having pioneered a racist “broken windows” policing theory that led to a dramatic rise in incarceration rates and highly visible cases of police violence, onetime military policeman and former NYPD chief Bill Bratton advised failed Venezuelan coup plotter Iván Simonovis. Bratton was in Caracas as police commanded by Simonovis killed nineteen protesters who had flooded the streets to defend Hugo Chavez.

The erasure of the line between law enforcement and the military is both a central element of political repression and a familiar story, from Buenos Aires and San Salvador to South Central Los Angeles and Wounded Knee. With support from the United States, Israeli police instructed their US peers alongside Colombian paramilitaries and Guatemalan soldiers—while the Israeli state provided a vital lifeline to apartheid-era South Africa. In addition to compiling dossiers on more than 55,000 people in Los Angeles, officers assigned to a clandestine LAPD counterinsurgency squad liaised illegally with former CIA and National Security Council (NSC) officers attempting to evade

congressional bans on US assistance to paramilitary groups abroad.¹¹⁶ Salvadoran death squads roamed the streets of Los Angeles, kidnapping, sexually assaulting, and threatening to kill exiles and dissident activists.¹¹⁷ Some, no doubt, had been to the United States before, courtesy of the training courses held at the School of the Americas, a Department of Defense training center located at the US Army base at Fort Benning, Georgia. Others, to be sure, will learn the same lessons if a planned Cop City supported by Atlanta's Black mayor, Keisha Lance Botttoms, is built.

Recognition of these connections drove not only a greater engagement with struggles abroad, but a new cognizance of the connections between communities of color inside the United States. In this sense, anti-imperialism drove interethnic convergences. During the Korean War, the Civil Rights Congress noted that "the genocidal doctrines and actions of American white supremacists have already been exported to the colored peoples of Asia." At the same time, in Los Angeles, New York, Detroit, and Texas, Civil Rights Congress chapters worked closely with the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, recognizing that deportation threats aimed at alleged subversives threatened Caribbean, Mexican American, and Asian radicals (alongside whites), many of whom were actively involved in opposition to the war in Korea.¹¹⁸ Upon his release from prison, where he had been held along with fellow "Terminal Island Four" detainee Frank Carlson, Korean independence activist David Hyun described how "Negro people supported us, the trade unionists supported us, Mexican Americans supported us. . . . I learned that clear lesson that civil rights is also a fight for peace, for trade unions, for the Negro people . . . as well as a fight for the foreign born."¹¹⁹ In issuing a landmark indictment that described in detail the genocidal conditions faced by African Americans, the Civil Rights Congress took up language that echoed a parallel report issued by an anti-imperialist women's commission that had toured wartime North Korea.¹²⁰ Amid the repression of the early Cold War, leftist activists produced transnational networks that were simultaneously antiracist, feminist, anticolonial, and dedicated to defending the rights of noncitizens.

These sorts of connections expanded during the era of Black power and the US war against Vietnam. The Third World Women's Alliance described how "the development of an anti-imperialist ideology led us to recognize the need for Third World Solidarity," in which "Asian, Black, Chicana, Native American and Puerto Rican sisters . . . were all affected by the same general oppressions."¹²¹ Revolutionary women like Yuri Kochiyama, Denise Oliver, and LaNada Means moved between Asian, Black, Native, Chicana,

and Puerto Rican formations and organizations even as they worked for international solidarity, against US interventions abroad, and for the development of the specific communities from which they came. A *Black Scholar* issue dedicated to the Third World placed updates on liberation struggles in Eritrea and Angola alongside an interview with American Indian Movement cofounder Dennis Banks and an essay on the struggle of the United Farm Workers written by Cesar Chavez. The introduction to the issue began by asserting that “the Third World—the world of the oppressed peoples of Africa, Latin America, and Asia—exists just as certainly within the United States as it does outside its borders.”¹²²

Whether across neighborhoods or national borders, mobility played a critical role in generating interethnic and internationalist solidarities.¹²³ As Elisabeth Armstrong shows, Black North American women Eslanda Robeson and Thelma Dale attended the weeklong Asian Women’s Conference held in Beijing in 1949, which sought to consolidate an anticolonial and antiracist feminist movement that directly connected women in both colonized and colonizing spaces.¹²⁴ In the decades that followed, the idea of Black, Brown, Asian, and Native people as engaged in the same general struggle unfolding throughout the world drew African Americans to Mexico (Elizabeth Catlett) and China (Vicky Garvin) and brought Indigenous radicals to revolutionary Cuba (Wallace “Mad Bear” Anderson), Ireland (Madonna Thunder Hawk), and Tanzania (George Manuel). Pat Sumi joined an “Anti-Imperialist Delegation” to North Korea, China, and Vietnam, where her Vietnamese hosts dismissed her praise by telling her, “You’re just like us, and we’re just like you.”¹²⁵ Jamaican historian Lucille Mair and Black North American educator Thais Aubry traveled to Suva for the 1975 Pacific Women’s Conference, which brought together Indigenous women from throughout Oceania who spoke on nuclear testing, women’s rights, decolonization, traditional culture, and the comparative histories of Oceania, the Caribbean, and North America.¹²⁶ Aboriginal Black Power activist Cheryl Buchanan joined a delegation to China, while other radicals from Oceania attended the Congress of Afrikan People (Atlanta, 1970), the Sixth Pan-African Congress (1974, Tanzania), the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts (1977, Nigeria), and the founding conference of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (Port Alberni, 1975). A cognizance of connections prompted Chicana activist Betita Martínez, who had earlier authored a firsthand account on the early years of the Cuban Revolution, to write, following a visit to North Vietnam, that “the history of the war in Vietnam began because of the land. Many years ago, the peasants lost their lands to the large landowners . . . (just like what happened to our ancestors).”¹²⁷

Revolutionary forces around the world reciprocated. Speaking of the role played by the Venceremos Brigade, a solidarity organization that organized annual delegations to Cuba in violation of the US ban on travel to the island, Cuban official Orlaida Cabrera described how working and living together allowed Cubans and North Americans to learn to see each other as “comrades in a common struggle for humanity.”¹²⁸ The same logic led South African I. B. Tabata to write that the Watts rebellion “reminded me of my own country, and I saw that we are indeed the same people,” and prompted Amilcar Cabral to proclaim, “we are with the Blacks of North America, we are with them in the streets of Los Angeles, and when they are deprived of all possibility of life, we suffer with them.”¹²⁹ The African National Congress issued a communique “to express our solidarity with the Black Panther Party,” describing “fascist racism” as a common enemy and acknowledging that “our struggle like yours is part of the larger struggle against international imperialism now being conducted in Vietnam, in the Middle East and most of the Third World.”¹³⁰ These connections lasted well into the 1980s. Having begun by drawing attention to the presence of representatives of the African National Congress (David Ndaba) and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (Dr. Zehdi Terzi), Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop told a cheering crowd at New York City’s Hunter College of a US Department of State memo that warned of the “dangerous appeal” posed by the presence of an English-speaking Black socialist state in the Caribbean.¹³¹ Seven years later, over the objections of New York’s African American mayor David Dinkins, a visiting Nelson Mandela told a quartet of former Puerto Rican political prisoners that he was honored to be seated next to them since he supported “the cause of anyone who is fighting for self-determination.”¹³²

Black Panther Party cofounder Huey Newton came to describe this ideological horizon as *intercommunalism*, a kind of postnational internationalism meant to recognize the central importance of locality in the lived experience of oppressed peoples. Claiming that “we see very little difference in what happens to a community here in North America and what happens to a community in Vietnam . . . [between] a Chinese community in San Francisco and a Chinese community in Hong Kong . . . in what happens to a Black community in Harlem and a Black community in South Africa,” Newton placed nonstate categories alongside state and nation as viable units for identification and affiliation.¹³³ Although Newton cast what he was doing as novel, it was more like a return to the source, since the idea of an internationalism that went beyond nations was a recurring concept in Black radical thought.¹³⁴

Of course, there were theoretical perspectives that drew upon poor analogies, or that had limited efficacy in terms of reaching people. Newton spoke

frankly of getting booed offstage when trying to explain his ideas, while the colonial analogies proposed by the Revolutionary Action Movement, Malcolm X, and Kwame Ture, among others, proved incapable of surmounting the clear obstacles of the sort identified by Francee Covington, including the uniquely co-optive elements of US society, the specific challenges of revolutionary activity in urban settings, and the lack of a unifying cultural force like language or religion common to Black Americans and absent in their oppressors.¹³⁵ The lack of sustained attention to hierarchies of gender and class on the part of multiple early theorists of internal colonialism led to the outright dismissal of the entire idea.¹³⁶ There was a tendency to dissolve heterogeneous areas, historical experiences, and political situations through facile comparisons, as in arguing for the sameness of Chinese or Black communities separated by language, culture, and thousands of miles. African Americans often transposed their specific experiences with racism in ways that mapped unevenly in places like Cuba, Mexico, or Brazil. Independent states proved unwilling or incapable of providing the sort of aid some in the United States hoped they would. Personality conflicts, ideological schisms, fears of infiltration, and outright unprincipled behavior split multiethnic organizations like the Venceremos Brigade and nationalist formations like the Panthers and the Brown Berets alike. As Judy Wu so eloquently puts it, radicals operating “in the belly of the beast . . . at times also reproduced the beast within themselves.”¹³⁷ Theorists of internal colonialism gave too little thought to the problem of the white majority. None of these problems were resolved by the time the movements that sought to interpret the world through a global/local continuum were destroyed.

Others, as Quito Swan reminds us, were “blinded by Bandung.” Swan argues that amid the heroic elements of Third Worldism, the Indonesian slogan of “unity in diversity/*Bhinneka Tunngal Ika*” covered a refusal to acknowledge the self-determination of West Papuans, leading to occupation, mass murder, and war that continues to this day.¹³⁸ Other silences and failures, from the Cuban Revolution’s unwillingness to countenance independent Black political activity, to the Sandinista revolution’s disastrous treatment of indigenous Miskito people, to the repression of Kabyle people by the Algerian state, all form painful legacies of our attempts to realize our freedom dreams.¹³⁹ It is no accident that Indigenous people, national minorities, and migrants—bodies cast as beyond the national frame—often suffered the greatest violence after the arrival of political independence.

Many of the failures of postcolonial states, including impatience, corruption, and the inability to break free of the wider systemic constraints in which

they existed, were experienced, albeit on a smaller scale, in the localities governed by Black, Latinx, and Native people during and after the 1970s and 1980s. Austerity is austerity, and if the analogy between neocolonialism in the global South and neoliberalism in the metropole bothers academics, it should be their burden to explain why crushing cuts to education and health care, state-sanctioned intercommunal violence, and a persistent lack of regard for human lives in Pine Ridge, Compton, or Redfern is somehow intellectually incompatible with parallel experiences in Kingston or Conakry.¹⁴⁰

Internationalism is a perspective. The relational racial frame is a tool. What is recovered in the link between the two is simple but profound, an understanding that *we are not a minority*. Our lack of power is temporary, not a permanent condition of our being. The chapters included in this book are meant to be illustrative and evocative, rather than comprehensive or definitive. They explore subjects as disparate as the meaning of Black opposition to the Korean War, the visual elements of Indigenous internationalism, and the role of global events in the production of multiracial communities in urban Los Angeles. Sometimes the analysis tracks major social movements or vital organizations. At other times, the focus is on cultural convergences, neighborhood interactions, or other more prefigurative pursuits. Their utility is meant to extend, through stories of struggle, the observation made by Natalia Molina, who argues for the possibility of “seemingly unlikely antiracist alliances . . . when groups recognize the similarity of their stories in the collective experiences of others.”¹⁴¹ Written at a moment of intensifying struggle, this book seeks to show how, in the past, these recognitions of similarity lay at the heart of many polycentric radicalisms. Perhaps in our present and future moments, they might do so again.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Third Worlds Within is divided into three thematic parts. The first of these, “Communities,” explores how complex patterns of urban interaction unfold amid local and global concerns, and how politics grounded in antiracist struggles generate new relationships between African American, Latinx, and Asian American people. Chapter 1 examines the interrelated history of African Americans, Japanese, and Japanese Americans in Los Angeles, from the interwar period until the 1970s. In highlighting the history of mixed Black and Asian American neighborhoods, this chapter tracks an inter-ethnic community through parallel patterns of migration and segregation, interwar radicalism and world war, and finally through the solidarities and

divergences that arose in the context of postwar struggles for racial equality inside the United States. I argue that between the informal spaces of shared neighborhoods, the experience of cultural convergence, and the appeal of radical politics, Black and Japanese residents of Los Angeles developed an interethnic affinity rooted in both politics and place.

Chapter 2 explores the use of visual culture to restore interethnic affinities amid worsening tension between Mexican American and African American working people in the aftermath of the 1992 Rodney King rebellion. Public art, art shows, and the active engagement of photographers, artists, and arts educators sought what Guyanese revolutionary Andaiye termed “neighborliness” in the face of tensions over demographic change and the social conditions driven by mass incarceration, economic recession, and generalized racial discord.¹⁴² This, too, was part of a global story, as the visual interventions aimed at detailing the connections between Black and Mexican people living in the United States drew upon a growing activism on the part of people of African descent in Mexico.

“National liberation,” argued Amílcar Cabral, “is necessarily an act of culture.” Taking heed of this, part II, “Cultures,” transitions from place-based examinations of multiethnic community to the role of revolutionary cultures in exploring how activists used popular music and political posters to produce internationalist antiracist visions. Chapter 3, “People’s Songs and People’s War,” traces the organizational history and creative output of Paredon Records, a US-based company created by two veteran Jewish activists with roots in the worlds of folk music and the Old Left, Barbara Dane and Irwin Silber.¹⁴³ Founded in 1970, Paredon released fifty records generated by political movements across the world, including Palestine, Greece, El Salvador, Angola, the Dominican Republic, Northern Ireland, Haiti, Mexico, and the United States. This chapter explores records covering struggles in Thailand, the Philippines, China, and Vietnam, as well as albums detailing the Asian American and antiwar movements, as an example of a musical tricontinental solidarity.

Chapter 4 moves from the musical to the visual. In highlighting how global Indigenous struggles have made use of political posters—arguably the most visible and effective of radical visual materials—this chapter builds upon the visions of radical Indigenous internationalism and Left/Indigenous struggles analyzed by Glen Coulthard, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Nick Estes, Steven Salaita, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Jeffrey Weber.¹⁴⁴ Drawing attention to the global reach of these struggles, as well as more localized struggles against ecological degradation, patriarchy, and police violence and for cultural renewal, sovereignty, and liberation, this chapter

argues that visual culture reveals one realm in which both internationalism and interethnicity have been central to Indigenous struggles both within and beyond the Americas.

The book's final part, "Campaigns," presents two case studies of Black internationalism. Chapter 5 tells the story of Black resistance to the Korean War. Unlike the World War II-era Double V campaign, or the explosion of antiwar activity that accompanied Black participation in what the Vietnamese call the Resistance War against the United States (Kháng chiến chống Mỹ), the Korean conflict remains as generally obscure in Black history as it is in US history as a whole. Rather than offering a comprehensive study or recapitulating the Korean conflict's status as a footnote in the broader story of Cold War civil rights, this chapter examines antiwar activism, the treatment of Black servicemen and women, and Black debates over the nature of the conflict.

Chapter 6, "Continent to Continent," offers a local microhistory of how the Black community in Los Angeles mobilized around the liberation of Southern Africa. Three dimensions are taken up. The first of these concerns efforts to draw parallels between the conditions faced in South Central and South Africa. Second, the chapter recounts efforts to sever the links that fostered collaboration between multinational corporations and the South African and US governments. Finally, the chapter concludes with efforts to block cultural collaboration between African American entertainers and the apartheid state.