

Black Revolutionaries' Adoption of Maoism

Key Definitions

Maoism: An evolution of Marxism and Leninism that takes the theoretical application of both ideologies and applies them to a practical application (originally in 1950s China). In Maoism, everyone possesses the revolutionary willpower to transform themselves and society.

Labor aristocracy: A pseudo-ruling class that is bought out by the actual ruling class to maintain power over the proletariat. Their standard of living is dependent on capitalism, so they work to uphold it (middle managers, landlords, etc.).

Anti-revisionism: A belief system that challenges the erasure/modification of leftist history for the benefit of Western dominance and capitalism. Revisionism vilifies leftist revolutionaries like Huey P. Newton, Mao Zedong, and Malcolm X.

Who is Mao Zedong?

Mao Zedong, also known as Chairman Mao and Mao Tse Tung, was the founder of the People's Republic of China and leader of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The Chinese Cultural Revolution was an anti-capitalist and anti-revisionist proletariat revolution that aimed to eradicate Western capitalist and imperialist thought from China.

Chairman Mao and the Black Panther Party

Mao and his ideology had a heavy influence on the operations and direction of Black radicalism in the 1960s. The Black Panther Party (BPP) and its leadership was a Communist organization guided by Maoist principles. *Black radicals saw China as a place where freedom could be accomplished; it was a formerly colonized state that successfully led their people toward a leftist revolution.*

Huey P. Newton, the BPP founder, described China as a "sensation of freedom—as if a great weight had been lifted from my soul and I was able to be myself, without defense or pretense or the need for explanation. I felt absolutely free for the first time in my life—completely free among my fellow men."

The BPP extended their support to China in their battle against imperialism and Soviet influence during the Cold War. In a 1969 address, Newton supported the Chinese Communist Party's anti-revisionist efforts against the Soviet Union and the United States:

"Trends in [the United States] to form closer ties to the Soviet Union... are further indications of the revisionism which has led the people of Russia and the people under her control, closer into the gaping jaws of colonialism and the searing teeth of capitalism."

Why was Maoism attractive to Black revolutionaries?

The Black Panthers were not the only Black revolutionaries inspired by Mao. Leaders such as Vicki Garvin and Malcolm X drew influence from Maoist principles. The Black liberation struggle was framed as a domestic issue, cutting connections to the international struggle against colonialism and capitalism. As described by Robert Williams, "the Afro-American's struggle for liberation is a part of an invincible world-wide movement. Chairman Mao was the first world leader to elevate our people's struggle to the fold of the world revolution."

Maoism also underscored ethics and morality in the revolution. This was attractive to religious Black radicals like Malcolm X. Additionally, the order and self-discipline that Mao promoted appealed to Huey P. Newton and the BPP.

The Maoist Internationalist Movement

The Maoist Internationalist Movement (MIM) is a modern application of Maoism started in the late 1990s out of Los Angeles. They interpret current manifestations of white supremacy and capitalism, like state police violence and the intentional imprisonment of Black people, through a Maoist perspective. The MIM operates off three main principles:

- 1) Once the working class assumes control of the means of production in a socialist revolution, there is an unfortunate possibility of a resurgence of capitalism under a new bourgeoisie. This was seen with the Soviet Union after Stalin, and China after Mao.
- 2) The Chinese Cultural Revolution is the most successful communist revolution in history.
- 3) Imperialism extracts resources from the Global South and sells their capital to buy-out the labor aristocracy.

The MIM combines the material conditions of settler colonial states in North America with Maoist beliefs. One way they demonstrate a resistance to imperialism is in intentional re-spellings of certain words:

Womyn and Persyn: de-gendering the way we refer to people.

I\$rael, Kanada, and the United \$nakes of AmeriKKKa: All colonial states that maintain colonial rule.

They exclude Mexico when they say "North Amerika," because "k" stands for the gluttony and effects of imperialism. They also exclude those indigenous to the continent who do not benefit from "U.\$ minimum wage laws and the welfare state."

Taking Black Maoism Into the 21st Century

The Maoist-Marxist-Leninist principles that influenced the Black Panther Party played a huge role in its destruction. Maoist Internationalism is a contemporary perspective on historically theoretical principles. Black revolutionary movements can adopt Maoism at the core of their work, building off the international and cross-cultural connections that were built in the 1960s. Combining Maoism with the organizing history within the Black American community can lead to successful leftist revolution.

Read more:

Kelley, Robin D. G. and Esch, Betsy(1999) 'Black like Mao: Red China and black revolution', Souls, 1:4, 6 -41.

Newton, Huey P. 1969. "Why We Support China." *The Black Panther*, April 20, 1969.

Williams, Carine. 2018. "Why Black People Need Maoism in 2018." Hampton Think.

<https://www.prisoncensorship.info/archive/etext/bpp/index.html>