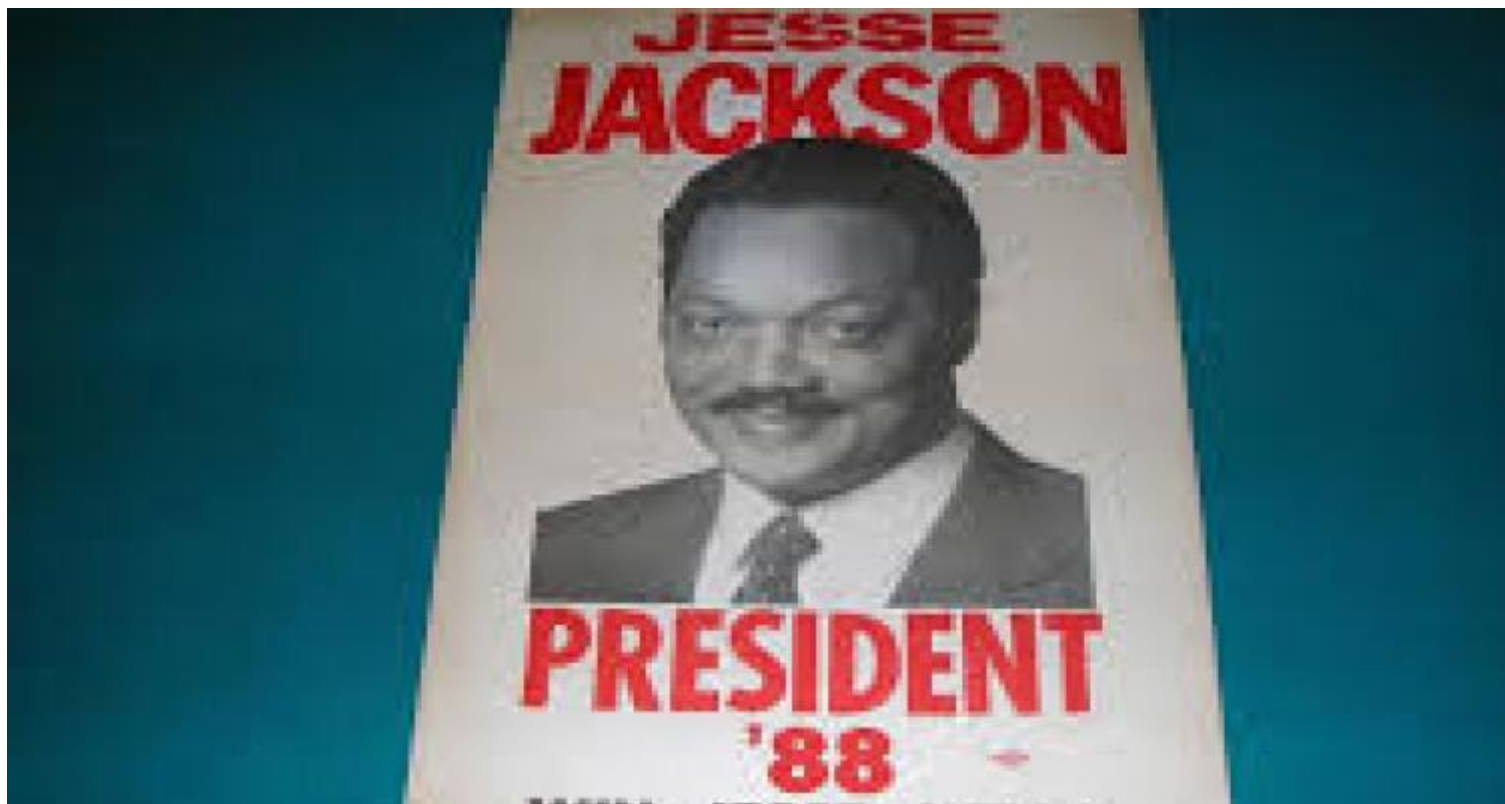


Can we retake the project of Malcolm, Martin, and Jesse?



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By Charles McKelvey

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From 1930 to 1965, the African-American movement, through mass action campaigns in the North and South, compelled the federal government to take decisive action in defense of the political and civil rights of black citizens, culminating in the Civil Rights and Voting Rights laws of 1964 and 1965. These changes were fully consistent with the simultaneous transition of the world-system from colonialism to neocolonialism.

In the period of 1964 to 1968, Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., formulated a comprehensive project from an African-American perspective that challenged the neocolonial world order. The proposal included black control over the institutions of the black community, in order to promote the economic and social development of the community; a multiracial alliance that would pressure the government to act in defense of the social and economic rights of all citizens; and a foreign policy that set aside imperialism and respected the sovereignty of all nations. The proposals of Malcolm and Martin pointed to the necessary road from the perspective of the people; but they stood against the requirements of the

neocolonial world order. They were ignored by the political establishment, just as the 1976 proposal of the Non-Aligned Movement for a New International Economic Order was ignored by the global powers.

In his presidential candidacies of 1984 and 1988, Jesse Jackson stood against the national turn to the Right and resurrected the project of Martin and Malcolm. He called for the formation of a Rainbow Coalition of whites, blacks, Latinos, indigenous persons, women, gays, workers, farmers, small businesspersons, and the poor; a coalition that would be the foundation for the empowerment of the people. In foreign policy, he called for an anti-imperialist policy based on the principle of North-South cooperation, which has been a long-standing demand of the governments of the Third World. Jackson was rejected by the political establishment, as incompatible with the established neocolonial world order; and by white society, which had a limited understanding of his proposal.

What political possibilities are emerging from economic, social, and political conditions today? These conditions include the sustained structural crisis of the world-system, a consequence of the fact that the world-system has reached and overextended the geographical and ecological limits of the earth, and therefore the conquest of new lands and people can no longer be the engine that drives the expansion of the world-system, as it was for four centuries. And in addition, the colonized peoples of the earth no longer accept the role that the world-system has assigned to them, that of accommodating suppliers of natural resources and cheap labor. In the United States, this situation of global crisis is compounded by the U.S. fall from hegemony; it is no longer the dominant economic, financial, and political power that it once was. All of these dynamics demonstrate the unsustainability of the neocolonial world order.

Such conditions give rise to a resurgence of fascism and racism in the core zone, where the majority of the people materially benefitted from the colonial and neocolonial world-system, when it was functioning. The logic of fascism, which is of course a false logic, is strengthened when such conditions are combined with the elimination of restrictions for persons of color in the core zone. Especially vulnerable to the false logic of fascism are those that were not the most well off in material terms, but enjoyed certain material and status privileges in relation to people of color. They experience the changes in the world-system since the 1960s as a loss in their material standing of living and a loss of their privileges. They want to take back what they have lost. They are going to propose an aggressive nationalism in which the nation more aggressively protects its economic interests, and they are going to seek to restore lost privileges.

You cannot stop fascism and racism with anti-fascism or anti-racism; that approach leads only to endless conflict. Nor are you going to reverse rising fascism and racism with an appeal to the tenets of liberal democracy, which was the ideological guide of the world-system from the late eighteenth century to the 1970s. In turning to neoliberalism in 1980, liberalism demonstrated its incapacity to respond to the crisis of the world-system, and in the process, it lost legitimacy among the people.

To counter fascism and racism, you are going to have to point the way toward a possible next stage in the evolution of the world-system, one in which European and U.S. neocolonial domination of the world is overcome, and in which all citizens of the world have their social and economic rights protected. With such a projection for the future, you would attract citizens vulnerable to the false logic of fascism, in the context of their present anxiety and confusion.

The conditions of the time, therefore, call for a retaking of the project of Malcolm, Martin, and Jesse. But Jesse, we should understand, did not have it entirely right. A presidential candidacy is the road to political power only as a stimulus to a long-range project involving the development an alternative political structure that is dedicated to the organization and education of the people, with the intention of taking power in the long term.

Today, blacks have accused whites of racism, if not in practice, at least in toleration. But a more just society is not built through accusation. To the extent that the accusations are true, they are overcome through education. Not the formal misguided education of the universities nor the lame sensitivity training, but the learning that is forged in revolutionary practice, in which the people work together to construct a

more just society.

The first step is the taking of political power, with politically intelligent leaders discerning the necessary road. It could be through the creation of people's councils (as in Lenin's Russia); or through a guerrilla struggle (as in Fidel's Cuba); or through the electoral processes of representative democracy (as in Allende's Chile). In the case of the United States today, the correct strategy is likely to be primarily that of Allende, with theoretical support from Lenin; a project that would have the unwavering support of that Caribbean island people that Fidel taught to be revolutionary. We should be humble enough to learn from those who have accomplished the taking of political power.

Many white youth are in rebellion today, in solidarity with blacks, a phenomenon that has moved the entire world. But rebellion is not revolution. Rebellion, or what Frantz Fanon called "revolutionary spontaneity," is the raw material from which a revolution is forged, by a politically intelligent and committed leadership that knows how to formulate an alternative narrative in a manifesto; to develop a platform that proposes a comprehensive plan of concrete steps in defense of the needs of the people and the dignity of the nation; and to call the people to disciplined study and political work. A manifesto and a platform based on the teachings of the historic prophets of the African-American movement.

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