EDITORIAL

The Problem of the 21st Century
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At the turn of the last century, WEB DuBois wrote, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line,—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea." Today, we can write, "The problem of the twenty-first century remains the problem of race—racism, race relations, and racial exploitation—in virtually every corner of the globe."

The history of the West — of Europe and the Americas — is a history of racial and ethnic exploitation. It is a history of murder, rape, mutilation, enslavement and human and environmental degradation. The great accumulation of wealth in Europe and the Americas (especially in North America) was fueled by the unrestrained killing of indigenous peoples, the enslavement of Africans, the stealing of land and resources, and the subjugation of women.

It is a great paradox that, today, ethnic minority groups are urged to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps," when virtually the entirety of the world's resources has been eaten by the capitalist expansion of the West. Multi-national corporations, the product of 400 years of exploitation, have deeded the world to themselves. In a vain attempt at self-congratulation, the winners of the war for land and resources have created an ideology of "meritocracy"; the idea that "merit" is properly rewarded. But on closer inspection, we should recognize that the true definition of "merit" is best contained within the phrase, "might makes right."

For three hundred years, and continuing in the present, indigenous lands in Africa, the Americas, Asia and the South Pacific, were stolen at the point of the gun. The people were hunted, killed and/or enslaved. Their uncompensated labor — and their stolen land and the resources therein -- provided the vast accumulation of wealth that the West prides itself on.

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It takes a certain "economic amnesia" (to use a term of Manning Marable) to now assert that we live in a society characterized by a "level playing field," or that the status and class inequalities that are so manifestly evident in the world are due to individual differences in native intellectual capacities.

If we do not properly understand the nature of the problem, we can have no hope for solving it.

A proper view of history is one that recognizes the terrible peril that Native Peoples (in Africa, America, Asia and the Pacific) have faced. This historical view, then, provides an understanding of the current crisis confronting all societies that truly cherish human rights and humane relations among the peoples of the world.

We live in a world that is marked by extreme racial segregation. Fair Housing laws notwithstanding, the majority of African Americans live in homogeneous communities. Efforts to desegregate predominantly White communities continue to be met with violence. The majority of Latinos, similarly, live in communities that are homogeneous. In certain cities (such as Los Angeles), Latinos and African Americans share common spaces in an uneasy alliance of have-nots. Native Americans, today and into the foreseeable future, remain out-of-sight and out-of-mind on Indian "reservations."

"The wages of segregation and discrimination are death. Many hundreds of thousands of African Americans and Latinos die every year in this country for one reason: their ethnicity."