

Neoliberal Assault on Public Education, Health Care...: Why “Black August” Should Be Celebrated Across the Americas

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“The spirit of Black August moves through centuries of Black, Indian and multi-cultural resistance. It is an emblem of the spirit of freedom.” — [Mumia Abu Jamal](#)

Neoliberal capitalism is carrying out a vicious assault on public education, health care, public transportation, social housing, regulation of corporations, trade union rights and other essential programmes that benefit the labouring classes in the Americas. In the same vein, there has been a corresponding expansion of the repressive policing, judicial and imprisonment capacity of the state. The criminal justice system across the region is being used to police and regulate the effects of social, economic and political inequalities along the lines of gender, race and class, especially for people of African descent.

It is in the above context that [Black August](#) should be embraced across the Americas as a commemorative month that focuses on the history and present-day resistance against the violence of the state and capital as well as the liberation agenda being pursued. Black August had its origin in the penal colonies of California in the early 1970s. It started in prison as a way to acknowledge the political and militant struggles of politicized [New Afrikan](#) or African American prisoners and those who were martyred in the process of fighting the prison system.

Black August was used to mark the death of revolutionaries such George Jackson, William Christmas, James McClain, Jonathon Jackson and Khatari Gauden who were killed in prison or during the armed attempt at liberating African prisoners at the Marin County courthouse. This commemorative month was used to politicize fellow prisoners and build their capacity to engage in the struggle for emancipation. These politically conscious prisoners represented the prison front of the [Black Liberation Movement](#) (BLM).

In 1979, the [BLM adopted and institutionalized Black August](#) as a fixture on the movement’s annual calendar of events. In this broader context, Black August serves as a month-long period to bring attention to significant or momentous [Black Radical Tradition](#) events that occurred in August. The month of August is linked to many [important and defining moments in the liberation struggle](#) of Africans in the United States and elsewhere in the Americas.

However, given the internationalist and Pan-Africanist character of the Black Radical Tradition, it is not surprising that the liberation forces in the BLM referenced the start of the Haitian Revolution and Marcus Garvey’s birthday as important moments within the Black August tradition. However, the radical forces in the United States need to actually centre,

highlight and celebrate August-related events such the [Haitian Revolution](#), [Emancipation Day](#) in the Anglophone Caribbean, and the [Martinique rebellion of 1789](#).

Black August is very important to the global African struggle for liberation. It is positively affirming the necessity of a politics that is all about ending oppressive relations in society and the use of all available means, including armed struggle, to create the just society. Black August is unapologetically committed to the emancipation of those who are marginalized in society and it could not be any other way. Black August was born in prison but it could have been below deck on a ship in [the Middle Passage](#) or in a shack during plantation slavery.

It is critically important to highlight the commonality of the African working-class experience with the repressive actions of the state's police, courts and prisons as well as the structural violence of poverty, inadequate education, homelessness, unemployment and limited access to healthcare. The violence of the state and capital is used to keep the African masses in their unequal and marginalized status. Black August provides a focal point for the sharing of strategy and tactics and the promotion of mutual aid through anti-imperialist, anti-racist and feminist transnational networks.

Given the heightened attention being given to violence by the state and its agents against Africans in the United States, Canada, [Brazil](#), [Jamaica](#), [Colombia](#) and elsewhere, it is the opportune time for radical and revolutionary forces to use the Pan-African commemorative month of Black August to bring a higher level of ideological consistency and clarity, coordination, self-criticism, unity and cooperation to the African Diasporic struggles in the Americas.

Now more than ever, the case for strategic and operational unity within the ranks of Africans and organizations that favour revolutionary transformation of society could not be more compelling. At this moment of rising opposition of Africans to their oppressive conditions across the region, it is troubling that capitalism's central role in this domination is not mentioned in the same breath as racism and patriarchy or sexism.

Black August is inseparably linked to the legacy and memory of the assassinated prison leader, revolutionary, Marxist and Black Panther Party Field Marshal [George Jackson](#).

In Jackson's celebrated book [Blood in My Eye](#), he states that "Revolution within a modern capitalist industrial society can only mean the overthrow of all existing property relations and the destruction of all institutions that directly or indirectly support existing property relations. It must include the total suppression of all classes and individuals who endorse the present state of property relations or who stand to gain from it. Anything less is reform." Black August is the perfect antidote to any African social movement resistance that is not overtly anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist.

The United Nations-declared [International Decade for People of African Descent](#) provides an ideal opportunity for radical and revolutionary Africans to promote and institutionalize Black August across the Americas. The promoters of the region-wide observance of Black August should use this UN decade to educate and organize the people around the revolutionary tradition and programme of African liberation that is personified by this commemorative month.

The institutionalizing of Black August across the Americas must come with an emphasis on

the organizing approach to African liberation. The [organizing approach](#) to movement-building elevates the following tendencies:

- mandate activists to join or create [mass organizations](#) or [cadre organizations](#) in order to consistently organize with and among the labouring classes;
- establishment of programmes, projects and institutions as the instruments through which the people wage struggle against the systems of oppression on a 24/7 basis;
- develop a self-emancipation or self-organization culture wherein the members of organizations are the source of decision-making power and leadership, and embody the ethos of the [International Workingmen's Association that asserts that](#) "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves"; and
- emphasize building the capacity of the people to self-organize by way of systematically equipping them with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitude to do so.

Mumia Abu Jamal is on point when he asserts that "Black August has many markers throughout the long history of resistance in the Americas." The significance of Mumia's assertion is connected to the expectation that oppressed peoples who are not Africans ought to embrace and promote Black August. This commemorative month is in alignment with the thrust of the Black Radical Tradition that is anti-racist, internationalist, feminist, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist.

Black August is a rising tide that lifts all boats. After all, the Haitian Revolution enabled South America's independence and signalled the death of slavery throughout the Americas and the rest of the world.

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