

# THE BLACK ANTI-FASCIST TRADITION: A FORUM

## Introduction to The Black Anti-Fascist Tradition: A Forum

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The explosion in nativism, authoritarianism, and rightwing populism in recent years has unleashed a roiling debate over whether fascism presents or has ever presented a legitimate threat in the United States and what a uniquely American fascism might look like. Others are wary of analogies that spill into hyperbole and what they see as a hyper-fixation on Donald Trump, dismissing concerns about fascism as a preoccupation of liberal elites. Yet both perspectives fail to acknowledge, let alone take up the vast transnational archive of Black political thought on fascism, which has grappled with the “fascism question” and developed traditions of antifascist theory and praxis for nearly a century now.

This forum brings together leading and up-and-coming scholars engaged in a growing interdisciplinary intellectual community interested in broadening and our understanding of the Black Antifascist Tradition. “The Black Antifascist Tradition” refers to a robust and longstanding tradition of Pan-African, anticolonial, anti-imperial, and anti-racist antifascisms that, in the words of Black Studies scholar and political scientist Cedric Robinson, “spontaneously extended throughout the Black world.”

While more contemporary Black intellectual luminaires such as Angela Davis, Cedric Robinson, Gerald Horne, and Robin D.G. Kelley, among others, have engaged with this activist-intellectual tradition for several decades now, it is only in recent years that scholars have attended to the nuances and varieties of Black antifascism over time through sustained analysis. This shift is in large part an outgrowth of the abundance of excellent scholarship on twentieth-century Black nationalism, Black internationalism, and Black radical politics, especially research on the abolition of police and prisons, which is an important theme in Black antifascist thought, past and present.

It is also a response to developments in contemporary political discourse and organizing, in which Black activists explicitly draw on the Black Antifascist Tradition while locating themselves within it and calling for coalitions on antifascist terms. Recent works in this spirit include Dylan Rodríguez's *White Reconstruction: Domestic Warfare and the Logics of Genocide* (2020), Alberto Toscano's *Late Fascism: Race, Capitalism and the Politics of Crisis* (2023) and, most recently, Jeanelle K. Hope and Bill V. Mullen's *The Black Antifascist Tradition: Fighting Back From Anti-Lynching to Abolition* (2024).

Through this forum, we hope to build upon momentum gained through recent collaborations on panels, podcasts, and in monographs, essays, and edited volumes. What is the Black Antifascist Tradition and how have its ideas, interventions, and grassroots actions manifested and evolved over the past century? How can we situate Black antifascism as both a challenge to Euro-centric histories and paradigms and a rich activist-intellectual worldmaking tradition unto itself? How does the Black Antifascist Tradition relate fascism to other concepts, such as colonial fascism, racial capitalism, or specifically in the U.S. context, what Charise Burden-Stelly has recently and effectively named as "US Capitalist Racist Society"? And how can we situate Black antifascism in relation to other radical intellectual and organizing traditions, such as antiracism, anticolonialism and anti-imperialism, radical pacifism, anticapitalism, and Black left feminism?"

Here is the listing and brief description of the 6 contributions

### **Police Brutality, the Black Press, and (Anti) Native Fascism**

Luther Adams-Free Man of Color uses research from his current book project, which historicizes the origins and impact of police brutality on African American communities. The piece addresses the history of Black formulations and condemnations of U.S. fascism—often termed "Native Fascism"—that focused on the police and other iterations of law enforcement and carceral state violence. Luther Adams - Free Man of Color, Associate Professor of Ethnic, Gender and Labor Studies at the University of Washington in Tacoma

### **A Fighting Anti-Fascist Army**

Anna Duensing presents a small cohort of Black Americans who fought against fascism in the Spanish Civil War and World War II. These veterans arrived to World War II already radicalized, viewing fascism not as a foreign aberration but as a system with clear domestic parallels in Jim Crow segregation and white supremacy. Their postwar disillusionment proved equally sharp. Anna Duensing is Albert R. Lepage Endowed Professor in History at Villanova University

### **Bringing the truth of a world that is dawning: A Black Cuban educator in the Spanish Civil War**

Ariel Marie Lambe's essay brings the experience of Afro-Cuban educator Rosa Pastora Leclerc, a socialist and feminist who traveled to Spain during the Civil War to serve as principal of a residential school for child refugees established by the Cuban antifascist organization AANPE. This journey was rooted in a lifetime of radical activism, and her life places her firmly within a transnational antifascist tradition that saw the fight against fascism as inseparable from the struggle for a more just world. Ariel Mae Lambe is Associate Professor of History at the University of Connecticut.

### **Pedagogue Protest: Lessons of Black Antifascism and the Hands Off Ethiopia Protests of 1935**

Joseph Fronczak argues for Black diasporic antifascism as a praxis of liberation and solidarity through the life and ideas of the French Sudanese communist, political thinker, and labor organizer Tiémoko Garan Kouyaté. Joseph Fronczak is a historian who works as a research scholar in the Department of History at Princeton University.

### **"Recognizing Fascism for What it Really Is": The Black Freedom Struggle and the Fight Against U.S. Fascism**

Ousmane Power-Green's essay discusses Black Power antifascism and the debates, schisms, and other changes it underwent in response to the changing political landscape in the United States in the late 1970s and 1980s. They build on the earlier work of W.E.B. Du Bois and William Patterson to argue that the United States was already a fascist state, pointing to KKK infiltration of law enforcement, political assassinations, forced sterilization and the FBI's COINTELPRO as evidence. Ousmane Power-Green is E. Franklin Frazier Chair of Africana Studies and Professor of History at Clark University in Worcester, MA

**“I really believe that Spain is the turning point of my life”: Antifascism from Los Angeles to the World**

Javier Muñoz’s piece discusses six Black men from 1930s South Central LA who volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War, viewing their struggle against white upremacy at home as inseparable from the fight for democracy abroad. The essay connects this history to the 2024 crackdown on UCLA student protesters opposing the war in Gaza, framing their repression as a contemporary expression of the same fascist logic their political ancestors fought against. Javier Muñoz is a PhD Candidate at the UCLA Department of History writing his dissertation about the meaning of fascism and Black struggle in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).

## Authors



• [Luther Adams - Free Man of Color](#)

Luther Adams - Free Man of Color, PhD, is Associate Professor of Ethnic, Gender and Labor Studies at the University of Washington in Tacoma. He is author of *Way Up North in Louisville* (UNC Press, 2010) and is writing *NO JUSTICE NO PEACE*, a history of African Americans’ struggles with and against police brutality.



• [Anna Duensing](#)

Anna Duensing is an historian whose research and teaching focus on African American history, Black internationalism, Black radicalism, and transnational social movements. She is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Virginia’s Carter G. Woodson Institute for African-American and African Studies and the incoming Albert R. Lepage Endowed Professor in History at Villanova University (Fall 2024). She is currently working on her first monograph, tentatively titled *Fascism Is Already Here: Civil Rights and the*

Making of a Black Antifascist Tradition. Her writing has also appeared in *History & Theory* and the *Washington Post's* *Made By History*. In addition to her academic research, writing, and teaching, Duensing is an active public scholar with over a decade of experience in museums, documentary, oral history, 9-12 curriculum development, community radio, and podcasting.