

# Racism and oppressed nations

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In an open colonial relationship, it is easy to recognize an oppressed nation. The Irish people, for example, have been oppressed by England for centuries and during most of that time denied the rights of nationhood.

Generally, oppressed nations have consisted of people sharing a common language, territory and culture, and a common oppression. In Puerto Rico, for example, not only do the first three characteristics apply, but the Puerto Rican independence movement has waged a brave liberation struggle in Puerto Rico, and within the United States itself, against U.S. occupation of the island.

Imperialism, however, has complicated the definition of an oppressed nation by moving whole peoples from their original geographical locations and breaking down language and cultural differences.

In the U.S. there are still oppressed nations who are systematically singled out for oppression, regardless of where they live, because of their ethnic and historical backgrounds.

Thus we say that the U.S. today is multinational, with a dominant white nation alongside and intermingled with a number of oppressed national groupings, including the Black, Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Native nations.

The working class too is multinational. At the factories and in the shops, workers of different nations work side-by-side. But the entire working class is exploited by the same capitalist class — the bankers, the big farmers or agribusinesses, the industrialists, and the landlords — and this capitalist class belongs primarily to the upper strata of the dominant white nation.

How did it come to be this way? Why did people coming to the U.S. from different European nations in the early days become assimilated, while those who originally inhabited this continent, those forcibly brought from Africa, and others have remained oppressed?

The European immigrants to North America, while some were rich and some poor, were gradually assimilated, their national differences (though not necessarily their class differences) breaking down to where they now constitute a nation in themselves. The majority of them chose to come to the U.S. because of economic and political conditions in their own countries.

But as U.S. capitalism developed, the U.S. forcibly conquered other nations and nationalities and took them over through military expansionist wars. The Native nations, Puerto Rico, Hawaii and Aztlan (the southwest area of the U.S. that was stolen from Mexico) are a few examples. In addition, entire peoples were uprooted from their African homelands and kidnapped to the U.S. through the slave trade.

The U.S., as the world's biggest superpower, has also forced economic policies onto so-called "developing" countries that have had a devastating impact on the people of those countries. As a result, many workers migrate to the U.S. in search of job opportunities. These national groupings of immigrants are then forced into the lowest-paying, super-exploitative jobs in the U.S. and live in fear of workplace raids, detention and deportation.

All these different oppressed nations and nationalities have been retained within the boundaries of the U.S., their lands stolen and plundered of natural resources, their people used as a source of cheap labor. Because of slavery and imperialist intervention, they were prevented from developing as independent nations. Nor have they received the protection of the democratic rights supposedly granted by the U.S. Constitution.

In reality these oppressed people are internal colonies of the U.S. ruling class.

The capitalist ruling class has deliberately fostered divisions between white workers and oppressed peoples. This divide-and-conquer tactic means denying oppressed people their democratic rights; mis-educating white workers and attempting to indoctrinate them with racist ideas; blaming nonwhites for the evils of capitalism; giving white workers a few extra crumbs (while still exploiting their labor intensively); and creating a system of racism and national oppression based on super-exploitation, inequality and prejudice.

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#### Additional reading

- [Black August: 1619-2019](#) – compiled and edited by Gloria Verdieu
- [The unfinished revolution](#) – by Vincent Copeland

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- Return to [What is Marxism?](#)