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# The Radical Evolution of the Communist Educator: Doxey A. Wilkerson

Shante` Lyons

*University of Missouri-St. Louis*

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**The Radical Evolution of The Communist Educator: Doxey A.**

**Wilkerson**

By  
Shante` Julian Lyons  
B.A, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2004  
M.A., Webster University, 2010

A dissertation  
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Advisory Committee

Matthew Davis, PhD, Chairperson

Vanessa Garry, PhD

Lynn Beckwith, EdD

June Christian, PhD

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## **Abstract**

This study illuminates the life, practice, and sociopolitical ideology of Communist Educator, Doxey A. Wilkerson. Wilkerson, a former member of the Communist Party of the United States of America, facilitated the development and execution of the Party's educational programs during the mid-twentieth century. Contextually, narratives grounded in Black liberation, educational equity, and the sociopolitical inclusion of African-Americans have been dominated by the most visible members within the Black intelligentsia, such as renowned historian and scholar, W.E.B Du Bois. The research and narrative constructed within this work provides a unique and sound contribution to liberatory themes within educational frameworks and awakens the muted voice of radical activism within a political guise. The research conducted will capture Wilkerson's evolving sociopolitical and sociocultural ideology to fully conceptualize the possibilities of radical educational, societal, and economic reform.

**Acknowledgements:**

I've come to understand that the Creator presents us with a divine support system that is entirely too great for us to fathom in our darkest moments. While this journey has not been solely dark in nature, it is with humility and amazement that I give thanks to the Creator above for the undying love and divine light that was shed on me every step towards the end. Just as I became bewildered with anxiety and overcome with iterations of doubt, the Creator comforted me with compassion and gifted me with clarity. For that, I am forever grateful.

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Of course, none of this would be possible without my incredible and wise mentor, Dr. Matthew Davis. You allowed me to further liberate myself during this journey. I am humbled and blessed to have crossed paths with such a wonderful and beautiful mind. You, my friend and brother, are a true “St. John”. I am indebted to you for a lifetime. Our paths will be connected for an eternity. Thank you.

To my family, the core of my “divine support network”, no academic terminology or heartfelt rhetoric can express my love or gratitude for your support. Momma Dunbar, thank you for your prayers. Your strength and fortitude is the most powerful that I have witnessed. They have kept our family grounded. Thank you for your love. Derrick and Naylon, how wonderful it is to have you in my life. Without a shade of doubt, this achievement would not be possible without your love, support, and willingness to bare the weight of my world during this journey. I truly admire you both.

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To my Queen, my wife, my essence, Korto, how I love you so. Before I took your hand in marriage, I promised your father that I would do everything in my power to allow you to bloom and love you as the Queen that you are. However, you have supported me with the strength and love that can only derive from the essence of God. Without you, my foundation is shaken, and my very existence is unfulfilled. To be your husband is to be blessed by the hands from above. I only hope to one day conquer life with the passion and unwavering knowledge of self that you possess. We accomplished this feat. AWGIU! I love you dearly. Thank you from the inner depths of my soul.

To my princesses, Brooke and Kaelyn, only God knows how much I love you. Every step of this journey was to create a legacy for you and your families. You are my motivation to breathe. It is my hope that the world that you exist in when you further our family legacy will be a world that will see you for the Queens that you are. Daddy lives so that you can be! Thank you for giving me life!

To the Ancestors, I am because you were. I walk every step in your footprints. I pray to the Creator that I am able to follow your footprints closely so that liberation can be realized. Thank you eternally.

### Definitions of Terms

1. **Black Intelligentsia:** The African American professional class. Often college or professionally trained (Kilson, 2014)
2. **Black:** Black – Individuals or groups in the African diaspora—inclusive of African Americans (Watkins, 2005)
3. **CPUSA:** Communist Party of the United States (Naison, 2005).
4. **Marxism/ Marxist Theory:** An economic system that asserts that capitalism is but a stage in history, a temporary economic system; and the propertyless will eventually seize the instruments of production and force the creation of a state organized around public property (Watkins, 2005).
5. **Black Radical Intelligentsia/Infrastructure:** The African-American professional class that specifically offers an African response to an oppression emergent from the immediate determinants of European development in the modern era and framed by the orders of human exploitation woven interstices of European social life from the inception of Western civilization (Robinson, 1983, pg. 73)
6. **Capitalism:** an economic system in which resources and means of production are privately owned and prices, production, and the distribution of goods are determined mainly by competition in a free market (Merriam-Webster, 1982, 106)



7. **Communism:** A system of government of which a single party controls state-owned means of production with the aim of establishing a stateless society (Merriam-Webster, 1982, 144)
8. **Hegemony:** influence or control over another country, a group of people, etc. (Merriam-Webster, accessed May, 29, 2015, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hegemony>).
9. **McCarthyism:** the practice of making accusations of disloyalty, especially of pro-Communist activity, in many instances unsupported by proof or based on slight, doubtful, or irrelevant evidence. (<http://www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/McCarthyism>)

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Overview:**

The death of Doxey Wilkerson in 1993 marked the conclusion of an era that contained a proliferation of change agents within the Black intelligentsia. Among the giants of these Social Reconstructionists, Wilkerson remained to advocate for Black infrastructures across the nation. His life is uniquely intertwined with the multitude of radical activity within the litany of social, political, and educational equity of African-Americans for nearly forty years. Historians and scholars have barely scratched the surface of Wilkerson's influence on the "giants" of the Black radical movements. While Wilkerson receives limited mention, his influence and leadership in Black and white radical circles is spectacular and illustrative. This study will illuminate Wilkerson's life and work is contextualized within the sociopolitical evolution of the black intelligentsia.

Wilkerson's career spans over 57 years in an assortment of roles in higher education institutions. His research left fingerprints, for example, on foundational studies such as Gunnar Myrdal's "American Dilemma", and federal research on the status of the Negro.<sup>1</sup> His political advocacy arose from his involvement on such projects and resulted in an unfamiliar voice within the liberty-denying harmony of the American Republic. Additionally, Wilkerson believed that communists always understood the need for Negro-white unity better than any other political group in

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<sup>1</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *The Negro People and the Communist* (New York Publishers Inc. 1944). Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, (Piscataway, NJ, Transaction Publishers: 1995 reprint)

society.<sup>2</sup> He insisted that only a top-down reinstatement of political and social ideologies would promote an inclusive democracy for all people within the U.S. confine.

Historian, Martin Kilson inquires, “ How do you challenge and eventually reverse the undemocratic and oppressive impact of America’s white supremacist system of Negro citizens?”<sup>3</sup> This present inquiry is foundational to understanding the leadership developed within the black intelligentsia from Emancipation to Cold War era timeframes. A small concentration of the Black intelligentsia considered the Communist Party of the United States as the political vehicle to reach unfettered social, political, and economic equity. Wilkerson, unshaken by the United States’ demonization of Communism, joined the party and led its educational programs. Most important, Wilkerson’s move was symbolic of the first step for all Blacks in America to wield the sword of liberation through a political guise.

Ultimately, the Communist Party of the United States of America failed to rally enough support from the Black masses to bolster their political presence, and challenge hegemonic systems witnessed within the nations border. Doxey Wilkerson unassumingly galvanized a strong infrastructure of intellectuals, educators, and political activist that worked in concert to strengthen liberatory constructs throughout America. Wilkerson’s political paradigm suggested that a truly democratic nation could not survive with the parasitic and oppressive activity that southern states practiced in America between the two World Wars. Wilkerson claims, “The people’s

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Martin Kilson, *Transformation of the African-American Intelligentsia: 1880-2012*(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014) 44

war against fascist enslavement has stimulated and strengthened democratic liberation movements throughout the world. In the onward march of mankind, the Negro people of the United States will rise to their full stature and dignity as citizens of the country they have done so much to build and defend.”<sup>4</sup> During the Great Wars, America propagandized its participation as a global partnership to liberate the oppressed regions of the world, and to employ democratic ideals in the face of fascism.<sup>5</sup> Wilkerson contended that this fight would be fruitless if the United States could not bolster the hope of the oppressed within the country to be recognized as “true” citizens, and more importantly, human beings.<sup>6</sup>

Why would an African-American educator find a dramatic appeal from within the precepts of Communist ideals? Contextually, the political disenfranchisement of citizens, perennial economic exploitation of laborers, and social terrorism experienced by African-Americans throughout the United States compelled the oppressed to seek a political voice and representation of the democratic promise proclaimed by the Constitution. The Communist appeal understood that the achievement of African-American rights was fundamental to the welfare of the American people as a whole. Moreover, The Communist Party utilized a variety of resources that officially prevented the “legal lynching” of the Scottsboro boys during the early 1930's".<sup>7</sup> In an effort to realize political involvement to the Black struggle, Communist leaders

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<sup>4</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *The Negro People and the Communist* (New York Publishers Inc. 1944) 3

<sup>5</sup> William Watkins, *Black Protest Thought and Education* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *The Negro People and the Communist* (New York Publishers Inc. 1944).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

effectively constructed political action to protect the lives of young black men wrongly convicted of raping a white woman. Never before had the Black community witnessed a political ploy to protect Black life in the South. The Communist Party represented not only an opportunity for Negroes to become enfranchised within the American democracy, but a governmental entity that would recognize the humanity of Blacks as active participants within the American experience.<sup>8</sup> Contextually, the terms, “Black” and “African-American” will be utilized interchangeably throughout this study. This interchange is reflective of the context of the historical period that will be the focus of the research conducted to illuminate Wilkerson’s life and practice.

The American institution of slavery presented African-American people with very limited educational opportunities. As a result, African-Americans emerged out of slavery with a strong desire to read and write.<sup>9</sup> Three decades before the Civil War, law forbade education of slaves.<sup>10</sup> Slaves would often be beaten, or even lose their lives in the attempt to embrace education. James Anderson asserts, “The former slaves’ fundamental belief in the value of a literate culture was expressed most clearly in their efforts to secure schooling for themselves and their children.”<sup>11</sup> Essentially, education was the gateway to social liberation and economic freedom for the formerly enslaved. African Americans made significant financial and political contributions to

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<sup>8</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *The Negro People and the Communist* (New York Publishers Inc. 1944).

<sup>9</sup> James Anderson. *The Education of Blacks in the South, 2860-1935* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988)

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 5

the development of universal schooling that would bolster the sociopolitical progression of African American communities within the South.<sup>12</sup>

Doxey Wilkerson's advocacy supported the deconstruction of segregated school systems and the establishment of equitable educational opportunity for African-Americans in the south. De Jure segregation and the Jim Crow System severely restricted the educational opportunities not only for African-American children, but white children in addition.<sup>13</sup> The socio-economic implications of school segregation in the Jim Crow South result in the mass disenfranchisement of poor people and the development of northern industry in low wage southern cities.<sup>14</sup> Wilkerson's educational advocacy spurred from a Marxian critique of the economic, political, and social practice of the Jim Crow South. Wilkerson's research unveiled the disparate effects of unequal education on political and economic progression within the country.<sup>15</sup> Wilkerson suggests, "Let the people's organization of our country now unite in an all out struggle to abolish segregated schools. In the process we will help weld together those democratic forces which can move our whole country along the path to jobs, democracy and peace."<sup>16</sup>

Wilkerson affirmed that the practice of Jim Crow, economically, socially, and politically was dealt a tremendous blow with the Supreme Court decision of Brown vs.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, "Russia's Proposed New World Order of Socialism" *Journal of Negro Education* 10, No. 3 (Fall 1955) 387-419

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 15

Topeka Board of Education.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, this federal policy would deem school desegregation illegal in public schooling across the United States. Conversely, this federal act did not fully grant equitable means of democratic practice, full educational inclusion for African American students, and equal pay for teachers<sup>18</sup>. Wilkerson claims, “Courts are not themselves primary agents of social change. They register, often longingly, the changes that move in the community”.<sup>19</sup> Wilkerson purports that full integration into public schools for African-Americans would result not only in equitable opportunity for students, but equal pay for teachers, equal bus transportation, and educational equipment and resources.<sup>20</sup> Until full educational equity for African-Americans could be attained, democracy within the nation would be further weakened through fascist like practice witnessed through the failure of the education systems of American society.<sup>21</sup>

Wilkerson asserts, “Their immediate struggles are for decent standards of living, for civil liberties for national liberation and independence, and for peace”.<sup>22</sup> These desires, specifically from the African-American community, are desires defined by their enslavement less than a century removed from the Great Wars of the world. The vestiges of the enslavement of African-Americans permeated unjust federal

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<sup>17</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, “The Negro School Movement in Virginia: from Equalization to Integration”, *The Journal of Negro Education*, 29, (1960)No. 1, 17

<sup>18</sup> Doxey Wilkerson

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 19

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 20

<sup>21</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *The Negro People and the Communist* (New York Publishers Inc. 1944).

<sup>22</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, “Compensatory Education and the Civil Rights Movement in the North”, *The Journal of Negro Education*, 34, No. 3 (Spring 1965), 300-309

policies and social treatment of the masses within the South.<sup>23</sup> Wilkerson believed in the “power of the people” as a means to rapidly realize a truly liberated democracy for all.<sup>24</sup>

**Rationale for Study:**

The purpose of this study is to examine a key section of the life, professional career, and socio-political ideology of Doxey A. Wilkerson. This study is grounded in literature that is related to Wilkerson’s educational advocacy and the globalization, deindustrialization, remilitarization and the new imperialism that has impacted educational institutions.<sup>25</sup> As a member of the Communist Party, Wilkerson galvanized leaders within the black intelligentsia during the mid twentieth century to seek a political platform that would support the social, political, and educational uplift of African American people. Historically, there has been limited illumination to Wilkerson’s contributions to the political and social advocacy of African- American progression within American society.<sup>26</sup>

This study will contribute to the epistemology of education by contributing the sociopolitical agency of African- Americans during the mid twentieth century. Wilkerson’s career is illustrative of an intellectual counter-narrative that bolsters

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<sup>23</sup> James Anderson. *The Education of Blacks in the South, 2860-1935* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988)

<sup>24</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *The Negro People and the Communist* (New York Publishers Inc. 1944). 419

<sup>25</sup> William Watkins, *Black Protest Thought and Education* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> Shante` J. Lyons and Matthew D. Davis, “The Sociopolitical Ideology of the Communist Educator: Doxey A. Wilkerson” *Journal of Philosophy and History of Education* 64, no. 1(May 2014): 39-46



working facets of the African -American struggle to receive civil rights within all levels of the promise of democracy.

**Research Questions:**

This study will explore the life and practice of Doxey Wilkerson's sociopolitical activism within the guise of the educational confine. His career was spent devising strategic methods of liberating, empowering, and educating people of color throughout the United States. The objective will be to answer three key questions.

1. Why did the Communist Party appeal to the African-American Struggle?
2. What did Doxey Wilkerson find within the political platform of the Communist that would bolster the uplift of oppressed people?
3. How did Communist ideals shape the political, social, and cultural development of African-Americans?

This study will be tied to a Marxist theoretical framework. William Watkins asserts, "Marxian critique is a valuable, if not dispensable, tool in exploring the dynamics of power, race, ideology, subservience, equity, gender discrimination, and hegemony."<sup>27</sup> All factors mentioned are derived from the sociopolitical advocacy that Wilkerson sought to reconcile through Communism as a political platform.<sup>28</sup> A Marxist theoretical framework agrees with Doxey's educational career and political activity throughout the duration of his lifetime.

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<sup>27</sup> William Watkins, *Black Protest Thought and Education* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005) 132

<sup>28</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *The Negro People and the Communist* (New York Publishers Inc. 1944).

The research conducted is designed as a historical interpretive analysis of Doxey Wilkerson's career and sociopolitical advocacy for African-Americans. This approach allows for an historical analysis of an educator that indirectly influenced the social and political outcomes of African-American people within a condensed time frame. Use of multiple sources of evidence will serve as bedrock for an inclusive analysis of Wilkerson's work, and the context of the social, political, educational, and economic issues impacting the progression of African-Americans.<sup>29</sup> This historical inquiry will be supported by a litany of available resources that will provide evidence that will bolster the validity of the initial research questions.

One challenge of this narrative will be the contamination of presentist subjectivity providing a bias within the analysis of historical record.<sup>30</sup> This study is littered with political and social rhetoric that is racially charged, but contextually accurate. It is the responsibility of the researcher in this study to disengage personal bias that will contaminate the findings within this study by utilizing a purely objective approach to the analysis of documents, newspaper articles, and federal policy that supports the context of the individual study of Doxey Wilkerson. The primary historical focus will be on the years between 1943 and 1957 this time frame of interest provides the educational career and political activism of Doxey Wilkerson, and is illustrative of his most prominent published research and political rhetoric.

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<sup>29</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, "A Determination of the Peculiar Problems of Negroes in Contemporary American Society." *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no.3 (July 1936): 324-350

<sup>30</sup> Derrick Aldridge, "The Dilemmas, Challenges, and Duality of an African-American Educational Historian." *Educational Researcher*, no. 9 (May 2003): 24-35

In order to ensure the soundness and rigor of this study on Wilkerson, criteria will be used to validate this analysis. Essentially, primary source documents, such as the myriad of Wilkerson's journal articles and published manuscripts, will be utilized as the foundation to develop the counter narrative that encompasses Wilkerson's sociopolitical advocacy. While there is a plethora of secondary sources to provide social, political, and economic context to Wilkerson's work, much of his academic work and political rhetoric is encompassed within his published writings. To ensure rigor, soundness, and applicability to the design of this study, primary and secondary sources used in this study will be subject to external and internal criticism necessary to eradicate historical bias.<sup>31</sup>

Consequently, several institutions were used for archival research to be completed as a result of Wilkerson's employment at these institutions. Howard University, and New York University all contain a host of research and manuscripts by Wilkerson that will bolster the context of this case study. Additionally, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, New York, contains Wilkerson's intellectual estate gifted by the Wilkerson family. The selection of these institutions, because of their direct relevance to Wilkerson's employment, institutional approach to progressive education, institutional connection to social issues surrounding social equality, and the critical roles they played in developing the black intelligentsia during post World War II.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, approximately seven weeks of archival research was conducted at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem,

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<sup>31</sup> Meredith Gall and Joyce Gall and Walter Borg, *Educational Research: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Pearson Education Inc, 2007)

<sup>32</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *The Negro People and the Communist* (New York Publishers Inc. 1944).

New York. This extended period of research allowed for the researcher to properly assess the wealth of primary source documentation for quality analysis of Wilkerson's life and practice.

It was essential to collect a substantial amount of primary sources to strengthen the research findings. Coupled with the primary sources, viable secondary sources that encompass the overarching views of Communism, political economy of race and education, and the permeating factors of substantial federal policy will increase the data set to be analyzed appropriately. .<sup>33</sup> An increase in data set is particularly concerning in consideration of potential threats to this study. While data set will be significant, it is essential when conducting a case study on a single individual to afford the opportunity to interpret multiple facets of historical perspective.<sup>34</sup> Gall, Gall & Borg assert, "A possible solution to this problem is to combine the chronological and thematic approaches".<sup>35</sup>

Historian David Levering Lewis chronicled the life of W.E.B. Du Bois in Pulitzer Prize winning biography that captured Du Bois' exposure to a litany of black intelligentsia during the mid twentieth century. In working with activists that embraced a socialist/communist ideology, Du Bois was introduced to Doxey Alphonso Wilkerson.<sup>36</sup> Wilkerson was widely recognized within the black academic circles as a rising star while participating in the Gunnar Myrdal's study of the Negro in America. More importantly, Wilkerson galvanized the communist philosophy within the black

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<sup>33</sup> Meredith Gall and Joyce Gall and Walter Borg, *Educational Research: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Pearson Education Inc, 2007)

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 548

<sup>36</sup> David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2009)

intelligentsia, and became pivotal in converting major players, such as Du Bois, to embrace communist ideologies as a means for social uplift for African American people within the Jim Crow south.<sup>37</sup>

Wilkerson is widely published within a myriad of academic journals. The initial search of his work was conducted utilizing JSTOR, an online database that encompasses a vast majority of academic journals. Several descriptors were used in order to capture the major amount of Wilkerson's published works. The terms "Communism", "Black communist", "Communist educator", and "Doxey Wilkerson" located Wilkerson's published works within the Journal of Negro Education that provided approximately 147 hits. Outside of archival records at the major universities that Wilkerson served, this initial database search was successful in locating the principle research and published work throughout Wilkerson's academic career.

Consequently, Doxey Wilkerson's political advocacy heavily permeated his scholarly work. In analyzing his early advocacy, Wilkerson utilized a political rhetoric that was steeped with Communist/Socialist underpinnings. Wilkerson asserts that the Communist Party understands Black and white unity better than any other group.<sup>38</sup> Wilkerson's work provides a unique understanding of why Communism as a socio-political philosophy would appeal to the Black masses. Contextually, the African-American experience in the southern region of the United States was defined

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<sup>37</sup> David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2009)

<sup>38</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *The Negro People and the Communist* (New York Publishers Inc. 1944). 3

by political and educational castration (Dawson, 2009).<sup>39</sup> Leftist political thinking was imbued with inclusionary undertones and social protest ideology that defined the black radical intelligentsia that Wilkerson embraced as a professional ethos.

The realization of increased citizenship rights for the African-American during the mid twentieth century meant the destruction of the social and cultural hegemony inherently woven into the democratic practice of the American Republic. A complete “social reconstruction” of society would demand a total redistribution of wealth and resources that would ultimately link education with political ideology.<sup>40</sup> Wilkerson’s sociopolitical activism illuminates a social Reconstructionist paradigm that sought the attainment of a progressive society. Citizenship and the development of democratic ideology are initiated within the classrooms of burgeoning Americans. Citizenship assumes the recognition of humanity. The evolution of the African-American from an object of exploitation to the humane relied on a sociopolitical platform that blurred the lines predetermined by race and class. Wilkerson believed that utopian possibility would be ushered by a political vehicle that acknowledged the existence of citizenship within the very spirit of the African-American. His career, and life, would be spent seeking this possibility.

Moreover, utilizing the development of policy that adversely affected African-American people will be pertinent. Ira Katznelson asserts that Capitalism would act as a catalyst of economic exploitation that would bolster the oppressive state for African-

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<sup>39</sup> Michael Dawson, *Blacks in and out of the Left* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 2013)

<sup>40</sup> William Watkins, *Black Protest Thought and Education* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005)

Americans within the south.<sup>41</sup> Disenfranchised and politically handicapped, the Communist Party of the United States of America utilized social propaganda that would suggest the creation of an equitable society that would embrace socialist concepts to empower the oppressed.<sup>42</sup> A fully inclusive democracy and the destruction of caste systems would prove to have an uncharacteristic appeal to those untrusting to an underserving government.<sup>43</sup>

The resistance of sociopolitical hegemony and white supremacy was an age-old tradition throughout the African-American experience. Without the recognition of American citizenship and basic human rights, the enslaved embraced a multitude of strategies to display their social, economic and political agency. These strategies, communally indoctrinated within the black infrastructure, ranged from non-violent resistance, the less intrusive form of democratic indignations, to violent insurrection against tangible forms of sociopolitical hegemony.<sup>44</sup> Its resistance of European ideology to retain a sense of humanity and diasporic memory characterizes the Black radical tradition, in a dialectical sense. Cedric Robinson advances this dialectical stance:

Black radicalism is a negation of Western civilization, but not in the direct sense of a simple dialectical negation. It is certain that the tradition of Black radicalism owes its peculiar moment to the historical interdiction of African life by European agents. In this sense, the African experience of the past five centuries is simply one element in

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<sup>41</sup> Ira Katsnelson, *When Affirmative Action was White* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company Inc.: 2005)

<sup>42</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *The Negro People and the Communist* (New York Publishers Inc. 1944). 3

<sup>43</sup> David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2009)

<sup>44</sup> Nick Bromell, *The Time is Always Now: Black Thought and the Transformation of U.S. Democracy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013)

the mesh of European history: some of the objective requirements for Europe's industrial development were met by the physical and mental exploitation of Asian, African, and native American peoples".<sup>45</sup>

The enslavement of African people could not curtail the desire of an "expanding, educated and literate population to define itself as more than slaves or circumscribed citizens."<sup>46</sup> In essence, African enslavement throughout the diaspora bolstered the examination of liberation and all factors included within it. The "idea of progress" within the liberatory construct, involved a collective seeking of literacy, enlightened thinking, political liberation, and historical connectedness to radical progressive ideals.<sup>47</sup> The denial of Black humanity was more than just a socio-political denial; it was an attempt to remove the African-American collective away from the possibilities of reimagining themselves.<sup>48</sup> The emancipation of the formerly enslaved failed to reconstruct the socio-political ideology of the dominant culture. African-Americans were offered a false sense of liberation through constitutional doctrines that were not effectively enforced by federal entities within the Southern region of the United States. Michael Dawson offers, "Social democracy in the United States was (and is) doomed to be at best a secondary player in American politics if it

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<sup>45</sup> Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983)

<sup>46</sup> Stephen Hall, *A Faithful Account of the Race: African American Historical Writing in Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 18

<sup>47</sup> Stephen Hall, *A Faithful Account of the Race: African American Historical Writing in Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009),

<sup>48</sup> Nick Bromell, *The Time is Always Now: Black Thought and the Transformation of U.S. Democracy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013)



cannot incorporate opposition to racial oppression within its theoretical framework or practical program.”<sup>49</sup>

After enslavement, the African-American experience was infiltrated by domestic terrorism, a complete discord from quality public education, and an artificial sense of democratic inclusion amplified through the maintenance of white supremacy.<sup>50</sup> In accordance with the Black radical tradition, a radical intelligentsia, constitutionally bent, sought to transform democratic institutions through strategy and acculturation of the Black masses.<sup>51</sup> The Black radical intelligentsia was symbolic of historical efforts to embrace a means of sociopolitical self-determination, a central tenet of the black radical tradition, to uplift the systematically disadvantaged.<sup>52</sup> Because of the history of Black humanity being dismissed through a myriad of humanity denying reality, “Black organizational autonomy was required to fight white supremacy within America”.<sup>53</sup>

Michael Dawson contends, “The failure of American institutions to adequately address African-Americans was indicative of their failure to serve large majorities of all Americans.”<sup>54</sup> Civil rights, political enfranchisement, quality education, and fair

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Dawson, Blacks in and out of the Left (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 2013), 15

<sup>50</sup> Michael Dawson, Blacks in and out of the Left (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 2013)

<sup>51</sup> Martin Kilson, Transformation of the African-American Intelligentsia: 1880-2012(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014)

<sup>52</sup> Michael Dawson, Blacks in and out of the Left (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 2013), 15

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 40

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 13

labor practices were all facets enveloped within the Negro Question.<sup>55</sup> The abolishment of the enslavement of African-American people required a reconciliation of social and political rights that were legally denied. Through the paradigm of the formerly enslaved, the promise of the Reconstruction Era proved to be a promise that failed to come to fruition. The introduction of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the United States was stained with the remnants of a broken republic and strained cultural relations that fostered an ideological divide within society. Essentially, the “Negro Question” was a question of America as whole.<sup>56</sup> Failing to address the prevailing question of the time would be the failure of realizing a progressive democracy that called for full inclusion of the entire republic.

The Black radical intelligentsia, a collection of intellectuals, scholars, activist, and organizers, served the Black collective as a means to solidify the dream of liberation. Without organization and strategic focus, a resistance movement to attain the basic human rights defined by the tenets of democracy fail to be realized.<sup>57</sup> Although Wilkerson worked closely with multiracial (commonly lead by whites) groups to deconstruct the oppressive regimes of capitalism and debt peonage, the subversive nature of his work, inherent and necessary within the Black radical tradition, is in consistent alignment with the resistance narrative bolstered by the actors within the Black radical infrastructure. Focused on the constitutional possibility for African-American plight for inclusion, Wilkerson’s involvement with the CPUSA can

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<sup>55</sup> David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2009)

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>57</sup> Martin Kilson, *Transformation of the African-American Intelligentsia: 1880-2012*(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014)

be conceptualized as a pragmatic civil rights activism; completely removed from the revolutionary activism presented by the builders of the radical tradition.<sup>58</sup>

**Radical Beginnings:**

Born April 24, 1905 in Excelsior Springs, Missouri Doxey Alphonso Lewis Alexander Wilkerson was introduced into a world of uncertainty. Six months after Doxey's birth, his father died of unknown causes. His mother, Mattie, left alone to take care of her only son, moved from home to home, often living with friends and relatives in the Kansas City area during Doxey's youth. Noted as a bright child, Doxey attended the Kansas City public schools throughout his adolescent development. Doxey was noted for his "fancy for the clarinet" during his days at Sumner High School in Kansas City, MO. He hoped to play in the band during his college years. Unfortunately, upon his graduation from Sumner in 1921, he found that the litany of colleges in the Midwest region did not "offer such participation of Negroes" within their collegiate bands and orchestras.<sup>59</sup>

Upon his entrance to the University of Kansas in 1921, Wilkerson was encouraged by his peers and professors to take on English as a collegiate study. Wilkerson claims, "I was a good but not excellent student. Without the opportunity for negro participation within the university band, I was left to explore the study of English as my primary focus."<sup>60</sup> Wilkerson was a part of the few African-American high school graduates to gain access to predominantly white universities during the 1920's. The University of Kansas remained tolerant of the admission of exceptional

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid

<sup>59</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, Norwalk News, March 31, 1967

<sup>60</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, Norwalk News, March 31, 1967

African-American students, but with limited, or no participation in collegiate activities outside the realm of athletics. This limited access prompted the collegiate African-American collective to seek organizations such as black fraternities and sororities that employed communal leadership development opportunity, and a culture of kinship that acted as a support network for the nascent “talented tenth”.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, young Doxey joined Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., the first collegiate fraternity focused on the social development of African-American men.

Historian Martin Kilson asserts, “ What might be called the social leadership function is concerned with building up the institutional infrastructure of modern ethnic-group development by nurturing or cultivating agencies such as churches, mutual-aid societies, artisan organizations, agrarian associations, trade unions, and fraternal/sorority associations”.<sup>62</sup> The systemic institutional oppression of marginalized groups prompts the vital importance of growing black infrastructures. Wilkerson’s college experience was not far removed from his southern brethren who witnessed the permeating ideologies of racist stakeholders on university practice.<sup>63</sup> Wilkerson’s fraternal involvement was the first step in his understanding of social uplift and collective action for the African-American demographic. Additionally, he was introduced to a national social network that contains the like of W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson that utilized the fraternity’s ability to link like minded men that embraced common liberatory themes.

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<sup>61</sup> Martin Kilson, *Transformation of the African-American Intelligentsia: 1880-2012*(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014)

<sup>62</sup> Martin Kilson, *Transformation of the African-American Intelligentsia: 1880-2012*(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 51

<sup>63</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *Norwalk News*, March 31, 1967

Wilkerson obtained both Bachelors and Masters degrees from the University of Kansas. Wilkerson later became recognized by the black intelligentsia, mainly by intellectual stalwarts such as Du Bois, as a burgeoning member of the “talented tenth”.<sup>64</sup> Upon further examination, it can be theorized that Wilkerson’s exposure to the radical sect of the black intelligentsia while working at Howard University and the Works Progress Administration bolstered his sociopolitical paradigm towards the radical left. After being rejected re-enlistment by the United States Government to continue his work with the WPA, Wilkerson garnered the courage to publicly announce his full membership to the CPUSA (Wilkerson 1944). Wilkerson, unlike many of his intellectual and political activist predecessors, took a bold step that allowed him to become a political and social threat within the eyes of the enemies of radical social political change. As a result of his bold commitment to social and governmental restructuring, Wilkerson was dismissed from the PhD of Education program at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor in 1943, in fear that his political affiliation would threaten the credibility of the University as a whole.<sup>65</sup> Wilkerson would go on to lead the CPUSA’s educational programs, mainly the Director of the Jefferson School of Social Science in Harlem, New York.

### **Defining Communism/Socialism through the African American Perspective:**

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf,  
guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and  
oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another,

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<sup>64</sup> David Levering Lewis, W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2009)

<sup>65</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, Editorial, Jewish Currents, June 12, 1988

carried on interrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstruction of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.<sup>66</sup>

During the Great World Wars, America was entangled within a global power struggle. As one of the youngest countries involved in the war, America was a victim to the class struggle within its own confines. The economic system that America adopted fostered a class system that embraced an oppressive social system that alienated and eliminated minority cultures. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels outlined the philosophy of Communism by aligning the ideals of the oppressor and the oppressed with economic ideals that supported the dichotomy of classes within American society. Although the communist philosophy was built upon the ideals of economic establishment, the class system within American society perpetuated the racial oppression and economic exploitation of African-Americans. The enslavement of African people within America bolstered the American economy and fostered a capitalistic system that would result in a schism of classes both politically and socially. The economic and political struggle African-Americans faced for a multitude of generations after enslavement spawned a quest for a socio-political identity that would call for equality in all facets of society. The framers of Marxist theory, Karl Marx and Frederic Engels posit,

All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir,

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<sup>66</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Swenson&Kemp: 2013) Originally published in 1848, 9

cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.<sup>67</sup>

In framing the definition of “proletariat”, Marx and Engels referred to the lower or working class of society. Within the African-American paradigm, the proletariat class within American confine symbolized not only the poor or working class American; it represented a culture of people that had been purposely disconnected from the dream of prosperity and democracy, the African-American. Government policy had not yet answered the question of the “Negro”. In contemplating the quest for a global democracy and social liberation for those around the world, African-Americans had not yet been granted the ability to perceive the vision of societal or economic equity purely based on race.<sup>68</sup> While the communist theory was not centered on race, the ideals it sought after embraced the African-American realization of a litany of liberties that had been omitted from their existence. According to Marx and Engels, “The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: Formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.”<sup>69</sup> African-Americans struggle for social ` and civil rights echoed the socialistic ideals of Communism in a variety ways. The call to activism was not for the destruction of a

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<sup>67</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Swenson&Kemp: 2013) Originally published in 1848, 20

<sup>68</sup> William Watkins, *Black Protest Thought and Education* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005)

<sup>69</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Swenson&Kemp:2013) Originally published inn 1848, 22

people, but of the destruction of an oppressive social system that sought to alienate and oppress those in society who struggled to have socio-political equity.<sup>70</sup>

Wilkerson's advocacy bolstered the movement for the equality struggles within the leftist framework (Dawson, 2013)<sup>71</sup>. Black leftist theorized that the deconstruction of capitalism would systematically end the oppressive state of the Negro simultaneously. In "Souls of Black Folk", Du Bois offers an allusion to this radical theorization:

It is then, the strife of all honorable men of the twentieth century to see that in the future competition of races the survival of the fittest shall mean the triumph of the good, the beautiful, and the true; that we may be able to preserve for future civilization all that is really fine and noble and strong, and not to continue to put a premium on greed and impudence and cruelty.<sup>72</sup>

After much historical rumination, Du Bois understood that the vestiges of slavery live within the ideology of racism and the economic exploitation of the Black race. Only when there was a bridge to seize the gap of educational, economic, and social equality for Blacks there would be a feasible means for American society to progress. It was utterly impossible for society not to crumble from within without the abolishment of social and economic ideals that were predicated mainly by racial intolerance and the parasitic practice of capitalism.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Michael Dawson, Blacks in and out of the Left (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 2013)

<sup>71</sup> Michael Dawson, Blacks in and out of the Left (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 2013)

<sup>72</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, Souls of Black Folk (New York, NY, Cosimo Books: 1903), 100

<sup>73</sup> Mark Naison, Communists in Harlem During the Depression (Chicago, IL, University of Illinois Press: 2005)



Wilkerson, a staunch integrationist, assumed that Communism, the complete governmental overhaul, was the alteration needed to radically progress the socio-political transition that would inspire the social progression of African-Americans in spite of the inherent oppressive nature of the American social system.<sup>74</sup> While his views were perceived to be radical based on the sensationalized demonization of the CPUSA, he was able to illuminate the ugly nature of the country and its treatment of a “class” of people through his scholarly work and subversive political activism. African-Americans had multiple realities to deal within pre and post world war America.

Moreover, the struggle within society was to allow a place for the Negro as it struggled to solidify a global identity. Why would communist/socialist ideals inspire the scholarly work of a burgeoning Black intellectual? Wilkerson consistently alluded to the American society’s inability to confront the dark stain that the treatment of African-Americans left on the American flag. The abolishment of slavery called for an internal response to ensure that the “dominant” class within society maintained its’ economic and social superiority. Communist/Socialist ideals presented a philosophical opportunity for an equal playing ground for competing classes within American confine. “Work, culture, liberty-all these we need, not singly but together, not successively but together, each growing and aiding each, and all striving toward that vaster ideal that swims before the Negro people.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Martin Duberman, Paul Robeson: A Biography (New York, NY, New Press: 1989)

<sup>75</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, Souls of Black Folk (New York, NY, Cosimo Books: 1903), 7

There was no mystery to which African-Americans wanted from a society that they help to establish and maintain. Wilkerson, echoing the historical stance of the Black intelligentsia, spoke of the inherent rights that the Democracy of the Republic intended for its' citizens<sup>76</sup>. The tenants of race and class seemingly derailed this attempt to embrace these natural rights. The ideal of race became intertwined with class, and more importantly, basic human rights. The Great Wars did not provide an outline to racial and social equality. In most respects, the wars widened the gap between citizens of the same country.<sup>77</sup> The question of the "Negro" could not be solved with American Society's focus outward. Du Bois suggests, "a concrete test of the underlying principles of the great republic is the Negro Problem, and the spiritual striving of the freedmen's sons is the travail of souls whose burden is almost beyond the measure of strength."<sup>78</sup> Essentially, Wilkerson's posture within the CPUSA bolstered the burning question that could not be answered through the prevailing politics of that time. How can the Negro race progress in the name of "human opportunity" in a society that refuses to see them as such?

In accordance to the ideals that a socialist/communist society could remedy, Wilkerson's one major focus was "the legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro."<sup>79</sup> This civil inferiority permeated through every aspect of African-American culture. The disenfranchisement of African-Americans in the Southern states due to the existence of Jim Crow highlighted a system of class

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<sup>76</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *The Negro People and the Communist* (New York Publishers Inc. 1944).

<sup>77</sup> Ira Katsnelson, *When Affirmative Action was White* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton&Company Inc.: 2005)

<sup>78</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY, Cosimo Books: 1903), 7

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 31

oppression that American Society turned a blind eye towards.<sup>80</sup> More importantly, segregated and unequal educational resources and opportunity proved to be a catalyst in the social suppression of equitable opportunity for African-Americans.<sup>81</sup>

Systematically, black people in this country would be subjugated to a life without a viable economic or social standard that would provide to be on par with the rest of society. Marx and Engels assert, “Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labor of others by means of such appropriation.”<sup>82</sup> Without a viable opportunity to realize the inherent rights and opportunities afforded by the Constitution of the American Government, it became evident that African-Americans would not have the ability to appropriate any powers afforded by an opportunistic society.

Du Bois, a late convert to the possibilities of Communism, was able to provide a sharp and direct rhetoric to the status of African-Americans within the social framework of that time. While the institution of slavery had been long abolished, the vestiges of that institution existed on a litany of levels. Du Bois offers:

Through the pressure of money-makers, the Negro is in danger of being reduced to semi-slavery, especially in the country districts; the workingmen, and those of the educated who fear the Negro, have united to disenfranchise him, some have urged his deportation; while

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<sup>80</sup> James Holloway, *Jim Crow Wisdom: Memory and Identity in Black America Since 1940* (Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press: 2013)

<sup>81</sup> Kehinde Andrews, “Toward a Black Radical Independent Education: Black Radicalism, Independence and the Supplementary School Movement” *The Journal of Negro Education*, 83 No.1, (Spring, 2014) 5-14

<sup>82</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Swenson&Kemp:2013) Originally published in 1848, 25

the passions of the ignorant are easily aroused to lynch and abuse any black man.<sup>83</sup>

How can a democratic society sustain itself when a class society exists where those who participate in the sustainability of liberty and capitalism are systematically extinguished? The facets of the constitutionally framed rights of the American Government did not inherently embrace the question of the Negro. Facing the malcontent of those in society that wished to embrace a social and economic superiority, the proletariat (Negro) was forced to embrace a destiny supported by ideals of racial injustice and economic oppression.<sup>84</sup> Unfortunately, capitalism and economic oppression cannot exist through a means of sympathy and scholarly collaboration to answer the burning questions within American society during this period of tribulation. Conversely, philosophy of the communist ideal system became more intriguing as the country thrives on employing a democracy around the globe.<sup>85</sup>

Wilkerson's gainful rhetoric and political activism served as the voice for the voiceless within American Society. In several writings after the World Wars, that voice embraced the political confines of communist ideology. Still, Wilkerson's language bolstered the social and political position of African-Americans more than it was a political ploy to advocate communist ideals. The World Wars did much to establish a powerful global position for the United States. What it failed to do was

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<sup>83</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY, Cosimo Books: 1903), 34

<sup>84</sup> William Watkins, *Black Protest Thought and Education* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005)

<sup>85</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *The Negro People and the Communist* (New York Publishers Inc. 1944).

properly address the state of African-Americans that continued to suffer from the travesties of the American political and social system.<sup>86</sup>

### **Communist/Socialist Perspectives:**

The study of sociopolitical history within American society provides a unique perspective on the status of the African American. The majority of radical movements cannot progress without engaging the “question” of Blacks and the treatment that they have endured.<sup>87</sup> It is essential to discover the perspective that the Communist party itself had on the state of the “Negro”. Historian Wilson Record, argues that the “Socialist orientation have always had to consider the Negro question in formulating their analysis of capitalist society and advancing programs for its fundamental change.”<sup>88</sup> In examining the progression of a Communist regime, it was impossible not to embrace the struggle of African-Americans, as they were a major component of the working class in American Society. The major attraction to the “Negro” struggle for the Communist philosophy was that because of the societal struggles, African-Americans would be more likely to adhere to a society that would essentially negate class specific oppression and economic exploitation.<sup>89</sup> Record posits, “Negroes are numerically important and especially exploited, they are regarded as either an

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<sup>86</sup> Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Chicago, IL, University of Illinois Press: 2005)

<sup>87</sup> James Holloway, *Jim Crow Wisdom: Memory and Identity in Black America Since 1940* (Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press: 2013)

<sup>88</sup> Wilson Record, *The Negro and the Communist Party* (New York, NY, Anthenum: 1971), 16

<sup>89</sup> Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Chicago, IL, University of Illinois Press: 2005)

important resource of distinct liability for those would reconstitute American society along radical lines, depending on the particular program advanced.”<sup>90</sup>

This time period recognized the Socialist party as being a true advocate for change within the economy. This economic advocacy would spark interest from those that were economically exploited and under-represented in American society. While Communism called for initiatives that would seemingly aid African-Americans find a place in society, the true nature of these ideals would be more of a focus on the eradication of a capitalistic society that aided in the oppression of the “lower class.”<sup>91</sup> This would not deter African-Americans from the philosophical appeal of the ideals that this political system would present.<sup>92</sup>

The global implications around the Negro Question would spark a political movement within the United States that would ultimately work closely to assist in the development and the organization of Black leadership as means to progress the Communist agenda. In 1920, the Communist party organized by the Russian Federation made several declarations to address the “Negro Question”.<sup>93</sup> This declaration suggests that the racial expression of the Negro is simply the expression of his economic bondage and oppression, each intensifying the other. This complicates the problem, but does not alter its fundamental proletarian character. The Communist Party will carry on agitation among Negro workers to unite them with all class -

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<sup>90</sup> Wilson Record, *The Negro and the Communist Party* (New York, NY, Anthenum: 1971), 16

<sup>91</sup> William Watkins, *Black Protest Thought and Education* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005)

<sup>92</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, “Russia’s Proposed New World Order of Socialism”, *Journal of Negro Education*, 10 No. 3 (Fall 1955) 387-419

<sup>93</sup> Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Chicago, IL, University of Illinois Press: 2005)

conscious workers.<sup>94</sup> Essentially, the Communist party aligned itself with the struggles of African-Americans by declaring that their oppression was driven by the factors of economic oppression. This claim, of which in part was true, proved to be the flame that ignited the fire of engagement between the Communist Party and African-Americans.<sup>95</sup>

The Communist agenda was to attract and sustain as many allies as they could to secure a foothold in the battle to destroy capitalism and economic oppression. As a result of this desire, the African-American struggle, and more importantly, the industrialized Black laborer, would be a beneficial tool of consistent revolution within American confines. Record suggests, “The Communists saw Negroes as an exploited minority with distinctive characteristics, as a historical, cultural, and racial group whose support was to be secured on the basis of special appeals and propaganda.”<sup>96</sup> While this would be considered a political strategy to secure a support system from the oppressed classes, Communist believed that at this specific time, there could not be socially accepted radical change without the support of a class that had no other means to embrace any form of liberty within the country they lived. The focus for the Communist party within the African-American community was that of the lower class

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<sup>94</sup> Wilson Record, *The Negro and the Communist Party* (New York, NY, Anthenum: 1971), 16

<sup>95</sup> Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Chicago, IL, University of Illinois Press: 2005)

<sup>96</sup> Wilson Record, *The Negro and the Communist Party* (New York, NY, Anthenum: 1971), 24

working “negro”. Communist strategist felt that the common working Black man would adhere best to the philosophy of equality within industry.<sup>97</sup>

While the party identified and attempted to understand the African-American struggle in society, the party as a whole felt that the “Negro bourgeoisie”, or middle class, educated Blacks would be less willing to embrace Communist propaganda and organize against the American system.<sup>98</sup> “Prejudice against the Negro, the Party maintained, was a result of two factors- his background in slavery and the conscious efforts of the capitalist class to perpetuate racial antagonisms in or that the American working class could be permanently split on a racial basis.<sup>99</sup> The lower class “Negro” would be more exposed to the racial prejudice in every day practice. It was assumed that Black and white workers, oppressed by capitalist system, would gravitate to the theory of organizing against capitalism as means to strengthen the Communist party. In order to create a motivation to organize, the Communist party had to propagandize the question of the Negro and his importance to the sustainability of an equitable share of a pure American Dream.<sup>100</sup>

The battlefield for the Communist Movement was set to be fought on a stage that would prove to light the fire from within. The American Labor movement was a prime focus for Communist strategist as it played a major role leveling the social inequities from the perspective of African-Americans. Essentially, African-Americans

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<sup>97</sup> Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago, IL, Liberator Press: 1978)

<sup>98</sup> Martin Kilson, *Transformation of the African-American Intelligentsia: 1880-2012*(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014)

<sup>99</sup> Wilson Record, *The Negro and the Communist Party* (New York, NY, Anthenum: 1971), 27

<sup>100</sup> Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Chicago, IL, University of Illinois Press: 2005)



desired employment and the promise of citizenship outlined constitutionally. The American economic forecast had transitioned from a largely agrarian society to one that received its sustenance from the industrial explosion that was witnessed after the Civil War.<sup>101</sup> The vestiges of the enslavement of Africans existed within the racial segregation of Blacks from whites, and the economic exploitation of Blacks as means to ensure the economic survival of the whites.

The major premise for the strategy to target the Black laborer was to perpetuate a value system that was consistent with recognizing the black laborer as a prime member of the working class. This premise also concluded that within an oppressive capitalistic society, the white and the Black laborer were fighting on the same battlefield. This initiative was set apart by specific goals to, in part, attempt to answer the “negro question” in order to properly propagandize the effort.<sup>102</sup> Outside of the attempt to organize Black laborers, the Communist party set out to “link specific racial demands of Negroes to economic and political struggles of the working class, organize Negro workers under Communist leadership, penetrate all separate Negro trade unions, and to build the American Negro Labor Congress that would establish branches throughout the country.”<sup>103</sup>

**Limitations:**

Archival research of Wilkerson’s life dominated much of this study. The focus of his life, sociopolitical ideology, and actions within the CPUSA have received vary scant

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<sup>101</sup> <sup>101</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY, Cosimo Books: 1903)

<sup>102</sup> Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago, IL, Liberator Press: 1978)

<sup>103</sup> Wilson Record, *The Negro and the Communist Party* (New York, NY, Anthenum: 1971), 183

mention in the historiography of Black radicalism. Wilkerson's scholarly contributions, however, have been utilized in the study of education policy, and have provided some theoretical frameworks around compensatory education and segregation. In spite of his intellectual contribution, his life and ideology have received a very limited and missed narrative that has been missed by students of the liberation experience. This study was conducted with the intention to give his voice and ideology life, while prompting a more critical inquiry around intellectual, social, and political liberation from a historical vantage point. Most important, the paramount challenge was the inability to conduct interviews that provide an oral history to give his life more context. Additionally, the inability to conduct interviews as an oral history remained a paramount challenge to this research. This inability was the result of few, if any, living participants directly from this period in Wilkerson's participation within the CPUSA. Coupled with the narrow period of time to complete research, the oral history of this study was the constant, and thus paramount limitation to the research of and illumination of Wilkerson's life narrative.

Consequently, the remaining chapters will illuminate and Wilkerson's evolving sociopolitical ideology and participation within the CPUSA's and its programs.

Chapter Two will give voice to his initial radicalized ideology. It will explore his discovery of his own perceived radicalism and intellectual engagement with radical theoretical frameworks. Chapter Three will explore Wilkerson's institutional leadership within the controversial Jefferson School of Social Science and his facilitation of a liberatory curriculum. Chapter Four will explore the political purging

of the radical intelligentsia during the McCarthy Era. Finally, Chapter Five will provide discussion and analysis of Wilkerson's inevitable exit from the CPUSA.

## Chapter 2: Wilkerson Enters the CPUSA

**Introduction:**

With a world in peril, the second Great World War had major implications for the status of African-Americans within the American confine. On the surface, this war provided the African-American collective with opportunities to become gainfully employed within the military industry and have more sociopolitical mobility than ever before. Moreover, African-American men could again prove their age-old desire to be full participants within a society that has marginalized, emasculated, and vilified them for centuries through participation in military service. However, the desire for the full anointing of citizenship, polity, and humanity was far from the reality of the African-American collective experience. Michael Dawson asserts, “Not only did racial violence aimed at blacks lead blacks to form their own radical organizations, but it also influenced blacks such as Du Bois, Owen, and A. Phillip Randolph to affiliate with the Socialist Party and some such as Briggs and Haywood to join the Communist Party”.<sup>1</sup>

Invariably, African-Americans who came into contact with the CPUSA faced the important questions regarding the role of revolution, reform, nationalism, integration, protest, and legal action. These considerations were the essence of the Black radical tradition in resisting the tenets of white supremacy and sociocultural hegemony that defined the very existence of African-Americans for over two centuries. Although the actions and ideology of the CPUSA were fervently demonized by American propaganda, the methodological appeal for the

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<sup>1</sup> Dawson Michael, Blacks in and out of the Left (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2013) 24

generationally oppressed had been unquestionably strong for throughout the Great Depression. The question of the pragmatism and praxis of the ideals of Communism rang throughout radical, leftists, and intelligentsia circles nationwide. Historian, Mark Naison posits, “If the Soviet Party could overcome age-old divisions in the Russian Empire, might it not be possible for the American Party; ethnically fragmented though it was, to ultimately transcend American prejudices and fight aggressively for black concerns?”<sup>2</sup> The CPUSA offered the most politically pragmatic solution to the failed anointment of democracy for African-Americans. In essence, this sociopolitical platform, coupled with the tradition of hegemonic resistance, was the important ally needed if the revolutionary movements towards self-determination and self-declaration were to succeed.<sup>3</sup>

What the African-American experience dictates is a close look at how racial oppression plays a catalyst in the lack of change within the historical memory of American Society. It became the ethos of radical parties and a radical thought process to rectify a problem that has been historically imbedded in the very soul of society. No matter how strongly Blacks gravitated to the philosophy of Communism, the presence of racism boldly remained. The “question of the Negro” was not simply a matter of economics, politics, or suffrage. It was the question of how to indoctrinate

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2005) 11; see also. *Daily Worker*, Apr. 28, 1940

<sup>3</sup> Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, 18

an impassionate society to the essence of change. This change consisted of a societal overhaul that would reconstitute a country in its struggle to redefine itself.<sup>4</sup>

In reconstituting the sociopolitical and socioeconomic realities of the oppressed, a universal understanding of democracy must be attained. Real democracy, under the guise of liberation, “also demands state planning of production, the end of unemployment and poverty, and the abolition of women’s inequality, anti-Semitism, and racist violence”.<sup>5</sup> Essentially, the ideology of Communism in during the 1940’s was a systematic deconstructive approach to the social and economic ills that was the institutional cultivation of American Society. Roosevelt’s New Deal failed to be a catalytic agent in the dissipation of the institutional marginalization of the oppressed. For the African-American collective, the “progressive segment of the black intelligentsia was called upon to assist both modern social advancement of the Negro masses and their full fledged citizenship”.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the critique of the party’s most eloquent critics within the highly regarded circles of the Black intelligentsia and liberation movements, the CPUSA presented a pattern of “decision making, language, ideology, and above all, its interracialism” which prompted the attention of even the most militant and radical entities of the time.<sup>7</sup> Specifically within the epicenters of African-American collective, such as Harlem, D.C, and throughout the Black Belt, the party maintained

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<sup>4</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, interview by Martin Duberman, Norwalk, December 13, 1983, Courtesy of the Schomburg Center of African American Research, Harlem, NY, 22

<sup>5</sup> Manning Marable, W.E.B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat (Boulder, CO, Paradigm Publishers: 1986), 159

<sup>6</sup> Martin Kilson, Transformation of the African-American Intelligentsia 1880-2012(Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press: 2014), 89

<sup>7</sup> Naison, Communists in Harlem, xvi

a universal and radical approach to the unification of struggles between the oppressed laborer and the perennially oppressed and institutionally exploited African-American citizen. This practice was illustrative of “many Communists, both black and white, were heroes who suffered greatly for their deep commitment to racial equality” within the eyes and hearts of those who were beneficiaries of their sacrifices<sup>8</sup>. However, the prevailing question for the African-American collective was if the nascent reality of political, economic, and social self-determination would be the only solution for the true liberation of the oppressed.

In this chapter, I will examine the evolution of Doxey Wilkerson’s personal journey towards the CPUSA. Wilkerson, an esteemed scholar who was heavily respected in academic and radical circles, was the precursor to a dynamic paradigm shift of politically minded African-American scholars and educators to align themselves with a controversial political party and transformative sociopolitical ideology. Similar to many within the Black intelligentsia of the time, Doxey’s life experience and professional practice evolved into a life long struggle to find a truth in embracing a liberatory construct developed to destroy an institution of oppression for all marginalized groups in the United States. A dynamic archetype of a man, Wilkerson possessed an uncanny vision and courage to carry out a life as an unapologetic and self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist radical.

I will explore his ideological evolution within this radical economic theory and align his personal journey, ideology, and practice into his entry into the CPUSA in 1943. Finally, I will examine the meaning of Wilkerson’s transcendence of

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<sup>8</sup> Dawson, Blacks in and out of the Left, 42

thought and action. Wilkerson's influence on the African-American experience as a trailblazer within the radical circles of the United States has been vaguely illuminated. His life, emboldened by a obligatory sense of mission for the collective destinies of millions of African-American people, serves as an excellent point of departure for continued discourse around political inclusion, socio-educational development, and the continued inquiry into the liberation of thought and socio-historical realities of the African-American masses.<sup>9</sup>

**Evolution of Ideology:**

Wilkerson's path to Communism and liberatory ideals can be conceptualized in four critical and distinct phases of his life. While his professional and scholarly activity is the major impetus within this gaze into a short period of his life, his ideological transition into radical theorization is DuBoisian in nature. For Du Bois, his baptism of race and society materialized in his childhood with a schoolyard encounter with a young white student. It was then that Du Bois understood himself to be different from his peers, and his life was driven exploring the guise of race and its interconnectedness to the political, social, and economic experience of African-Americans nationwide.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, Wilkerson's childhood experience, the first stage of his ideological development, offered him a unique understanding of racial otherness, discriminatory practice, and the oppressive underpinnings of a system of oppression driven by the institution of capitalism. Wilkerson explains, "The experience of my childhood and

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<sup>9</sup> Watkins Bill, "Black Curriculum Orientations: A Preliminary Inquiry" *Harvard Educational Review* 63, No. 3 (Fall 1993): 325

<sup>10</sup> Lewis Levering David, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography 1868-1963* (New York, Henry Holt and Company, 2009)



adolescence did much to shape the attitudes of social protest which later became driving forces in my life”.<sup>11</sup> His mother, remarried after abandoned by his biological father, worked three jobs in order to sustain the household. A bright child, mired in a socio-cultural experience that matured him quickly, Wilkerson ruminated over why “certain people around him had to work so hard just to have so little”<sup>12</sup>.

To supplement the family income, Wilkerson used his maturity and intelligence to acquire odd jobs around the Kansas City area such as selling newspapers. As a result of his fair skin complexion, Doxey was mistaken as a young white male and was able to acquire a position as a caddy at an exclusive country club in the Kansas City, KS area. Doxey’s political and social geography prompted a unique understanding of race navigation that was often the first education for African-American children during the early twentieth century. This navigation, a required survival technique for the African-American collective, is an unspoken lesson bolstered by the collective social and economic experiences within the African-American community. Doxey explains, “these experiences as a child worker did much to sharpen my consciousness of race”.<sup>13</sup>

While working at the golf course, Doxey had an altercation with a white caddy as a result of being called a “nigger”. Upon becoming aware of the altercation, the club manager quickly fired Doxey when he ascertained that the young man was “in fact a Negro”.<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, Doxey further identified himself not only as an African-American, but also as a part of the working class, and developed “a hatred for

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<sup>11</sup> New Masses Newspaper, November, 1943

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

exploiters”.<sup>15</sup> Doxey’s new philosophical truth, at this stage in his ideological development, was that there were workers and employers. These employers do not have the same interest of the workers as the employers work to maintain the status quo of hegemony, and the workers struggle to maintain a subsistence level of existence through the consistent toils of surviving in a seemingly unbreakable system.<sup>16</sup>

Without prior knowledge or exposure to a Marxist theory, Doxey’s innate summation of class and economic exploitation is rather acute in this stage of his ideological development.<sup>17</sup> Like Du Bois in his adolescent years, an early consciousness of race permeated his socio-cultural reality. However, Doxey’s early experience dictates a unique understanding of the intersectionality of race and class. This specific childhood experience foreshadows his future vigilance within a Marxist-Leninist framework. However, Doxey’s understanding and experience with economic oppression is that the institution of capitalism does not specifically target just the African-American laborer. It is a system designed to subjugate the poor to the systemic results of institutionalized oppression and sustain the rich in their place as the oppressor.<sup>18</sup> Race, as Doxey understood it, was an added variable to further marginalize and quell the progression of a specific sector of the working class.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Reiland Rabaka, *Du Bois’s Dialectics: Black Radical Politics and the Reconstruction of Critical Social Theory* (Lanham, MD, Lexington Books: 2009)

<sup>18</sup> Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press: 1983)

<sup>19</sup> *New Masses*, 1943

Throughout his secondary experience at Sumner High School in Kansas City, Doxey developed a fancy for the arts; specifically a close relationship with mastering the intricacies of playing the clarinet. After graduation, he was admitted to the University of Kansas in 1922. In this second stage of his ideological development, Doxey gained invaluable insight to intercultural relations that his adolescent years found scarce in occasion. Educator Arthur Shropshire posits, “The problem of segregation and discrimination, though it s encountered between many racial and religious groups, is probably more pronounced between white and Negro relationships”.<sup>20</sup> Although Doxey was inexperienced with intercultural relationships within an educational setting, he initially found his undergraduate experience to demystify his previous notions about the prospect of forming meaningful relationships with white students and professors. Doxey concludes, “I developed warm friendships with a number of white fellow students and several professors, sincere democrats, all who were quite as bitter as I at the injustices accorded to the Negro on campus”.<sup>21</sup>

The University of Kansas was a “forward thinking” university that granted the admission of African-American students. However, full inclusion into all university programs and intercollegiate athletics was denied to students of color during Doxey’s time as an undergraduate student. Like many mid-western universities of the time, the

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<sup>20</sup> Arthur Shropshire, *Practices in Missouri Schools that Promote Interracial Understanding* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska, 1951) 1; Kridel Craig. *Progressive education in the Black High School: The General Education Board’s Black High School Study 1940-1948*. Manuscript(Charleston, South Carolina, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> *New Masses*, 1943

faculty and administration struggled with the embrace of full integration at the behest of the surrounding Lawrence, KS community, alumni, and the prevailing spirit of disintegrationist practice. Not bounded to any higher authority to police the inequitable environment for African-American students, the University allowed African-American students to be denied admission into certain athletic programs, the university swimming pool, and turned a blind eye to racial segregation during music events and prejudice in classrooms from university professors. After much prompting by this familiar experience, Doxey decided to become a “crusader” for the civil rights of African-American students while attending the university.<sup>22</sup>

Consequently, Doxey sought out social and political platforms within the guise of the university to give organizational reinforcement to his expanding ideals and distaste for the institutional inequity he witnessed daily. In 1923, Doxey was initiated into the University of Kansas chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Inc. As the first African-American fraternity on college campuses nationwide, Alpha Phi Alpha was esteemed for providing a social network for African-American male students on white college campuses, training and developing “negro leadership” amongst the college ranks, and supporting the university and surrounding African-American communities with organizationally developed communal empowerment programs.<sup>23</sup>

As the President of the chapter within this fraternal order, Doxey’s own ideological frame becomes more in tuned with a comprehensive leadership model that theoretically reflects the DuBoisian “talented tenth” model. This DuBoisian model

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<sup>22</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *New Masses*, November, 1943

<sup>23</sup> Charles Wesley. *The History of Alpha Phi Alpha: a development in college life* (New York, Vanguard Press, 1975); *Lawrence Journal-World*, May 8, 1924

necessitates the holistic development of race leaders who have been trained in the classical sciences, arts, philosophy, math, law and science to become the saviors of the collective through social and economic uplift.<sup>24</sup> While conscious in his activism as a fraternity and school leader, the nascent reality for Doxey not only involved the notion of addressing the pressing issues for African-American students, but addressing the legacy of slavery, racism, discrimination and poverty. If the issues of oppression are systemic and cultivated by a larger institution that sustains hegemonic realities, a sociopolitical pragmatism was the rational response to the iterations that the system offered consistently.<sup>25</sup>

Wilkerson's ideological development during this stage is more than just a theoretical positioning. After the discovery of "a little book in the library called *The Socialist Cure for a Sick Society*", Doxey, now armed with tangible leadership ability, begins to envision his evolving ideology married to an egalitarian practice.<sup>26</sup> What would the world look like with legislated reform enforced by the spirit of men and women to embrace Universalist ideals? To Doxey, this "sickness" was embedded in the spirit that guides the laws and had poisoned the very souls of the aimless citizenry of America. These ills were relegated to the spaces that Doxey understood at this point of burgeoning radicalism. However, Doxey now had a foundation for his theoretical framework that gave him an ideological grounding to

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<sup>24</sup> Derrick Aldridge. "Guiding Philosophical Principles for a DuBoisian-Based African American Educational Model" *Journal of Negro Education*, 68, No. 2 (Spring, 1999)

<sup>25</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein. "Marxisms as Utopias: Evolving Ideologies" *American Journal of Sociology*. 91 No. 6 (May, 1986) pp. 1295-1308

<sup>26</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, interview by Martin Duberman, Norwalk, December 13, 1983, Courtesy of the Schomburg Center of African American Research, Harlem, NY, 36

bolster his practical application of activist stances against injustice. His college and fraternal experience was the convergence of his childhood recollection. Now, as the exception to the rule of the African-American being relegated to a life of experience, Doxey became grounded in an intellectual undertaking of the existence of the oppressed. No longer defined as by a body exposed to a wealth of experiences, his life experience coupled with his newly articulated intellectualism catapulted his desire for a professional life dedicated to unveiling the humanity denied by institutional practices embedded within the pageantry of American citizenship.<sup>27</sup>

Doxey's third phase of ideological development is grounded in his professional appointments Virginia State and Howard University. Upon completing his M.A. in Education at the University of Kansas in 1927, Doxey immediately accepted his first teaching position at Virginia State College.<sup>28</sup> Galvanized with a new -found zeal and motivation to "do something about injustice", Doxey espoused his new sense of radicalism which materialized in his pedagogy and practice. Wilkerson explains, "The dominant interests in my professional career, covering sixteen years at Virginia State and Howard University, has been the adequacy, or rather inadequacy of public provisions for the education of Negro children".<sup>29</sup> During his service at Virginia State, Doxey travelled on a consistent basis throughout the state of Virginia conducting surveys and writing scholarly articles on the state of public education and its treatment of African-American students. Appalled by the conditions that he witnessed as an observer of the practice, Doxey was fueled to write and publish

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<sup>27</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *New Masses*, November 16, 1943

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*

scathing articles on the state of Virginia education to gain the attention of political pundits and community.<sup>30</sup> However, to Doxey's dismay, he soon realized that "crusading" for humanity with the pen would not prompt any radical change for the ill-fated education system that failed to provide "public provision" for African-American students.<sup>31</sup>

A radical theorization without materialized outcomes is fruitless. The central tenet to radical resistance to hegemonic structures is strategic organization within specific geographical spaces. In accordance with the black radical tradition, collective education, empowerment, planning, and action are needed to combat oppressive functions.<sup>32</sup> Illustrative of this radical theorization, Doxey concluded that "agitation and organized pressure" were necessary to create progressive spaces for children to succeed.<sup>33</sup> The utilization of political pressure, not revolutionary resistance, became a favorite weapon for Doxey in fighting for quality resources for African-American children. His role as a "political agitator" rang throughout the state of Virginia. Doxey was able to organize the will of the African-American Virginia communities to actually use their limited citizenship rights to gain access to what was constitutionally guaranteed by birthright. Juxtaposed their Black Belt brethren, African-Americans in Virginia, when prompted to pay their poll taxes and vote, could actually wield their political powers to alter political outcomes in their favor<sup>34</sup>. Noted as a "bad Negro" by the State Department of Education, Doxey was

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

accused of trying to “lead the Negro masses to rebellion”.<sup>35</sup> Exhausted with the lack of intellectual freedom and political pressures to be relieved of his duties because of his radical activities, Doxey moved on to Howard University; a sociopolitical geography that embraced a subversive and overt radical ideology amongst its faculty and staff.<sup>36</sup> In contrast to his activist role at Virginia State, Howard offered Doxey a well- spring of intellectual and ideological stimulation and challenges to his own radical theorization.<sup>37</sup>

In 1935, Doxey joined an esteemed staff at Howard University in Washington D.C. Doxey taught classes within the School of Education, and was introduced to an intellectualism and universal liberatory ideology that further ignited the burning embers of his life that shaped his evolving stance as a self proclaimed radical. Along with his pedagogical roles at Howard, he became fanatical about the intersection of education and economics and the tortuous state of public education for African-American children. After conducting more nationwide studies, Doxey furthered his understanding around the interconnectedness between the denial of educational opportunity, political freedom, and the persistence in economic exploitation. In his exploration of these three variables that prompted oppressive states institutionally, Doxey encountered a paradigm shift. Doxey asserts,

I began to view the problems of the Negro education in terms of a larger and more significant frame of reference; the universal struggle of the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, interview by Martin Duberman, Norwalk, December 13, 1983, Courtesy of the Schomburg Center of African American Research, Harlem, NY, 32

<sup>37</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, interview by Martin Duberman, Norwalk, December 13, 1983, Courtesy of the Schomburg Center of African American Research, Harlem, NY, 32



masses of underprivileged people, both White and Negro, for liberation from the hands of their exploiters. I began to sense how the whole oppressive plantation society was caught in the grip of an inherently exploitative economy of which lay by schools were but a superficial expression.<sup>38</sup>

This Universalist paradigm shift was deeply rooted in his research within the Black Belt, and his ever-evolving theorization around notions of perennial economic exploitation of the poor through government institutions. The unavoidable state sponsored institution is the public education system.<sup>39</sup> In geographies where the labor force sustains the existence of the American caste system, such as the Black Belt, poor children are systematically molded into tools of labor to ensure production levels are met<sup>40</sup>. Ultimately, at this ideological juncture, Doxey maintains that this system targets the masses. In a public school in South Carolina, Doxey inquired about a white child who was disengaged and falling asleep throughout the course of the lesson. The administrator reminded Doxey “the children were tired because they leave school early to go work in the mills, where they remained all night”.<sup>41</sup> After this eye-opening experience, it was apparent for Doxey that this was a society built upon economic foundations and it could not tolerate real democracy. In consideration of

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<sup>38</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, interview by Martin Duberman, Norwalk, December 13, 1983, Courtesy of the Schomburg Center of African American Research, Harlem, NY, 38

<sup>39</sup> Richard King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals: 1940-1970* (Maryland, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004)

<sup>40</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *New Masses*, November 16, 1943

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*

real democracy, the liberty-denying hegemony could not withstand the rehabilitation of the liberatory imagination of the oppressed.<sup>42</sup>

Further, to reinstitute political, social, educational, and employment realities for citizens, a “substantial extension of democracy” must be the praxis of state functions. Coupled with his newfound understanding of Socialism and Marxism, Doxey was capable of conceptualizing facets of tangible sociopolitical utopia while imagining the how fascism comes into being.<sup>43</sup> While at Howard, Doxey became deeply immersed in the revolutionary theory of Marxism. Reflective of his own ideological development, Doxey was challenged to conceptualize Marxist theory and the reconciliation of his own life experience.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Doxey became recognized as one the rising stars within academic circles. In the service of President Franklin Roosevelt’s Advisory Committee on Education, Doxey researched and published Special Problems in Negro Education, a critical work that examined the comparative experiences of African-American and White children from elementary school to college.<sup>45</sup> This study provided groundbreaking empirical data that supported his claims of the dire straits of Southern public schools, the lack of quality resources,

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<sup>42</sup> Richard King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals: 1940-1970* (Maryland, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004)

<sup>43</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, interview by Martin Duberman, Norwalk, December 13, 1983, Courtesy of the Schomburg Center of African American Research, Harlem, NY, 38

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, Interview with *Jewish Currents*, November, 1988, Courtesy of the Schomburg Center of African American Research, Harlem, NY

instruction, and overall experiences that African-American children had in comparison to white children.<sup>46</sup>

Doxey explains, “The development of a democratic program of Negro education represents, therefore, something more than a means towards justice for the Negro people; it is an essential condition for national and social security”.<sup>47</sup> Public education, the womb of the democratic experience, is the fundamental factor in shaping the face and inner workings of functional society. Doxey’s analysis implicates a desire for holistic inclusion of African-American citizens from the genesis of their democratic development. Failure to embrace an inclusionary ideal warrants a danger to true democratic realization. This threat to democracy is projected by the institutionally oppressed by responding with revolutionary resistance. Bill Watkins asserts, “While resistance is inevitable, the dominant ideas of any society are the ideas of its ruling class. Institutions reflect and reproduce dominant, that is capitalist ideas. Schools would fall into this category as reproductionist institutions”.<sup>48</sup>

Consequently, Doxey further aligned his ideological development with his scholarly practice by concluding that the federal government played a role in sustaining the system for segregation, lack of quality schools, quality teachers, and the universal disenfranchisement as a result of institutional oppression.<sup>49</sup> He also

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<sup>46</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *Special Problems of Negro Education* (Westport, CT, Negro Universities Press, 1939), 151

<sup>47</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *Special Problems of Negro Education*

<sup>48</sup> William Watkins, “A Marxian and Radical Reconstructionist Critique of American Education” (in *Black Protest Thought and Education*, New York, NY, Peter Lang Publishing: 2005), 111

<sup>49</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *Special Problems of Negro Education*

surmised that because the system is aided and supplemented by the government, that government entities could reverse the system by bolstering the education system and rectifying the inequities within society.<sup>50</sup> In light of his freshly attained scholarly recognition, he was invited to participate in a foundational study on the African-American educational experience in the South led by Swedish sociologist, Gunnar Myrdal. While conducting this study, Doxey became one of the ranking intellectuals within a small cohort of social scientists and skilled researchers. However, philosophical and idealistic disagreements between both Myrdal and Doxey hindered the magnification of the work and perspective Doxey provided to the study.<sup>51</sup>

Doxey argued that the project was staged. He accused Myrdal of choosing participants to take part in the study that aligned with his preconceived notions of the problem within American Society. Doxey disagreed with the methodology, claiming validity and reliability issues. Also, he felt this was an opportunity for the wide range of African-Americans within the Black Belt to give full testimonies to their social, economic, and political realities. Furthermore, illustrative of his Marxist theorization, Doxey insisted that the oppressive state existed as a result of the need for cheap labor, as it was vital to the economic structure. Myrdal concluded that race was the major issue within a hegemonic domination by whites. According to Myrdal, the only solution to fixing the ills in the United States, specifically the Southern region, was if white citizens would change their distasteful attitudes towards African-Americans

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, Interview with Maceo Daily, November 23, 1985. Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research, Harlem NY

and invest themselves in the true spirit of American Democracy and citizenship.<sup>52</sup> This summation by Myrdal was indicative of the racial paternalism deeply entrenched within the American framework. This framework suggests the notion of true power to change systems laid specifically in the hands of white citizens.

Indeed, the variables of race and white supremacy are manifested through the societal experiences for the African-American. However, Doxey's ideological development witnessed a deep commitment to the theories of dialectical and historical materialism.<sup>53</sup> Bill Watkins asserts, "Dialectics allows one to observe phenomena in their oppositionist aspects. It sees both universality and particularly of contradiction in phenomena. It also examines the processes whereby quantitative changes become qualitative changes Dialectics posits that the objective contradictions within capitalism, thesis and antithesis, will lead to its negation and lead to a new social order, Socialism."<sup>54</sup> Doxey's ideological stance, illustrative through his controversial disagreement with Myrdal, was consistent with socialist ideals. His advocacy for a critical examination of capitalism and the sociopolitical context of the African-American existence aligned with theory of socialist tenets. Plainly, Doxey's ideological framework suggested that it is not the consciousness, as Myrdal

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<sup>52</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, Interview with Maceo Daily, November 23, 1985. Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research, Harlem NY

<sup>53</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, interview by Martin Duberman, Norwalk, December 13, 1983, Courtesy of the Schomburg Center of African American Research, Harlem, NY, 32

<sup>54</sup> William Watkins, "A Marxian and Radical Reconstructionist Critique of American Education" (in *Black Protest Thought and Education*, New York, NY, Peter Lang Publishing:2005), 110

purported, that determines the social being, it is the social being that determines the consciousness.<sup>55</sup>

The fourth and final stage illuminates Doxey's formal entry in the CPUSA. Doxey took a sabbatical from his teaching duties at Howard to work for the Office of the Price Administration in 1942. In the midst of World War II, multiple government programs were created to prompt citizens to aid the United States' participation within the war. The OPA was the government's wartime economic program that was designed to enlist American societies participation in making effective price control, rent control, and rationing measures to curb wartime inflation. Within this organization, Doxey was an education specialist that traveled throughout the South to aid in the development and execution of programs within African-American schools that focused on wartime consumer education.<sup>56</sup> In this position, Doxey was considered a government employee under the auspices of the United States Army. As such, his employment was considered military service. In 1943, Doxey appealed for permanent employment with this organization to further his works in education within the Black Belt. At thirty-eight years old, his age surpassed the military age limit for service and he was denied permanent employment with the OPA. However, he was prompted to continue with his duties for the remainder of the year.<sup>57</sup> Doxey was the focus of increased and intense scrutiny. The government was highly sensitive

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<sup>55</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, interview by Martin Duberman, Norwalk, December 13, 1983, Courtesy of the Schomburg Center of African American Research, Harlem, NY, 32

<sup>56</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *Why Negroes are Joining the Communist Party* (New York, NY, CPUSA: 1946)

<sup>57</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *What I Found in the Communist Party*, *Daily Worker*, February 8, 1944

to radical activity on the home front, and Doxey no longer hid his radical ideologies behind the stroke of the pen. A fully converted Marxist, Doxey was avowedly a radical in his pedagogy and practice. He made his ideology known in his classes, conversations, and professional relationships. Under investigation by the FBI, Doxey recounted his Marxism with their agents. The final assessment from the investigation was that he was just a “college professor that had some ideas that every body doesn’t agree with”.<sup>58</sup>

On June 19, 1943, Doxey Wilkerson announced his official membership within the CPUSA. Upon this announcement, he resigned from the OPA and his teaching duties at Howard University. Doxey was responsible for leading the party’s education programs in the Washington D.C. His move to become a member of the CPUSA was unprecedented for Black academics of the time. He was the most visible African-American intellectual to make this shift in ideology and political affiliation. The CPUSA was a known entity within the African-American community. They actively recruited in African-American communities, organized protest against the fallacy of democratic participation, and brazen about their alliance with the African-American collective. For Doxey, his entry to the party was prompted by his “powerful urge to render maximum service for winning the war”.<sup>59</sup>

Doxey’s supposition of the “war” was not that of the military participation of the United States within World War II, but the war for democratic existence that the

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<sup>58</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, interview by Martin Duberman, Norwalk, December 13, 1983, Courtesy of the Schomburg Center of African American Research, Harlem, NY, 34

<sup>59</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, What I Found in the Communist Party, Daily Worker, February 8, 1944

oppressed fought with an imperialistic government.<sup>60</sup> As evidence in his now politically charged rhetoric in a myriad of his scholarly publications, Wilkerson made it clear that his stance was reflective of the CPUSA's position of liberation for the working class. All of the marginalized groups within society were threatened by the government's failure to contain the elusive democracy promised by the Constitution. Doxey asserts, "One cannot reconcile himself even temporarily to the Jim Crow system, to the poll tax, to anti-Semitism, and the principle of exceptionalism directed against Communist, without thereby surrounding the basic strongholds of democracy to the fascists enemy within and without".<sup>61</sup> In alignment with the initiatives of the party, Doxey understood the ultimate goal for a new world order would be to convince and organize the working class on the notion that the true solution of the basic problems in America was a full transition to socialism.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, Doxey instantly became the center of attention in a multitude of circles throughout America. His formal announcement to enter the CPUSA was widely chronicled in local and national papers as the topic of interest throughout the entire year of 1943. The burning question for Doxey was to understand why he would join such a controversial entity. However, Doxey was generally celebrated within the Black intelligentsia and throughout political and academic circles for his courage to be unveiled as a true radical to the country. Doxey kept a meticulous organization of personal correspondence with colleagues throughout the country. The messages he received from his friends, former colleagues, and mere supporters reflected this

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *The Negro People and the Communists*, (Teheran and America New York, NY, Workers Library Publishers, 1944), 36

<sup>62</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *The Negro People and the Communists*



admiration for his radical move to the CPUSA. The zenith of his ideological development and sociopolitical activism prompted an inquiry of group affiliation for Doxey.<sup>63</sup> While cohorts of Marxist-Leninist theorist challenged and grew his dialectical and ideological stance, he desired a platform that provided praxis in agreement with his own ideals. For many years, while working in the epicenters of black oppression, Doxey witnessed the effective works of Communists in fighting for African-American rights and helping to organize strong labor movements.<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, the CPUSA was extremely organized and strategic about their recruitment of African-Americans to the party. While at Howard, Doxey recalled witnessing the highly visible demonstrations, political positioning, and organization within black epicenters. Doxey asserts, “We saw Communist fighting on issues that we were concerned with. We saw a big party in Baltimore where white and black got together and danced together. We saw an outfit that is showing more concern for our concerns than anybody else we’ve seen around”. In essence, it was the party’s strategic visibility that attracted him to the party. The ideological agreement existed between Doxey and the party. However, the CPUSA took advantage of the social positioning to create displays of solidarity and commitment to the African-American cause for democracy. Solidifying the membership of Doxey would give the CPUSA more access than before within intelligentsia circles. Doxey’s credibility and influence amongst his peers allowed for the party to become a more trusted entity in the progression of liberation for African-Americans. Through this platform, Doxey

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<sup>63</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, interview by Martin Duberman, Norwalk, December 13, 1983, Courtesy of the Schomburg Center of African American Research, Harlem, NY, 38

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

would continue to address the ideas of the reality of quality education for the oppressed and the vocational training of the poor within the South. He became the spokesman for the CPUSA's educational programs and he was prompted utilize his scholarship and access to propagandize party ideals within the social, political, and intellectual geographies of the African-American collective. Galvanized with a fully developed sociopolitical ideology, Doxey A. Wilkerson was no longer subversive in his activism for the holistic liberation of oppressed peoples.

**Conclusion:**

Doxey Wilkerson's life, practice, and ideological evolution gives us further insight and a more unique perspective to the African-American experience during the mid-twentieth century. However, he has been missed in the discourse of Black Marxist, Communist, and educational circles for decades. Certainly his accomplishments, scholarship, and courageous actions have given him limited mention within a niche rhetorical space. Upon reflection, it is necessary not only to understand his voice and intellectual contribution to a collective democratic experience; we must also add his voice to the narrative of reimagination. His evolution is indicative of a human being who did not lose faith in the possibilities of liberation. The human condition is innately indisposed to change. We fear the possibilities of losing our comfort. With a critical examination of Doxey's life, he gives us the occasion to seek within ourselves the courage to embrace the discomfort that will allow ourselves to evolve into something greater.

### **Chapter 3: The Radical and the Curriculum: Doxey Wilkerson and the Jefferson School of Social Science.**

#### **Introduction:**

Doxey Wilkerson possessed a niche skillset and knowledge that the Communist Party of the United States of America utilized to assist with a cultural and intellectual revolution within the working class citizenry they sought out to bolster membership for the party. The Jefferson School of Social Science was the education platform used to acculturate adult learners with a Marxist centric curriculum that was grounded within the theory of social, economic, political, and historical rehabilitation of the working class.<sup>1</sup> As the education specialist and one of the many committee leaders within the Party, Doxey guided curriculum and instruction within the school along with his multifaceted duties as editor for the Daily Worker and several other tangential roles for the national organization.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, Doxey's role within the Jefferson School calls for a critical attention as the Jefferson School for Social Science was foundational to the CPUSA's presence to many as a national threat to American democratic practice. Categorized as the most subversive function of the CPUSA during the Cold War era, the curriculum and praxis of the school allowed for a training ground for burgeoning Marxist-Leninist radicals.<sup>3</sup> Along with a cohort of Marxist-Leninist experts from around the country, Doxey was able to concoct a revolutionary curriculum that

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<sup>1</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *Why Does Our Government Want To Close This School* (New York, NY, Jefferson School of Social Science: 1953)

<sup>2</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *What I Found in the Communist Party*, Daily Worker, February 8, 1944

<sup>3</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *Why Does Our Government Want To Close This School* (New York, NY, Jefferson School of Social Science: 1953)

bolstered themes of anti-Semitism, democratic liberation, and intercultural understanding that was unparalleled in the study of curriculum history.<sup>4</sup> Contextually, the “Jeff School”, as it was referred to by party members, garnered controversial acclaim through the antagonism that was created by the Cold War’s ideological and educational campaign to villainize any challenge to an Americanized paradigm of democratic practice.<sup>5</sup> Plainly, the essence of the public school system, during this era, was to indoctrinate learners with a specific sense of nationalism catered to American vigilance for freedom and patriotic practice. Billions of dollars were spent to “halt the spread of Communism and to intellectually discredit Marxian-Socialist thought”.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, the primary objectives of the Jefferson School were to supplement the organizational growth of the party through the pipeline created through the Jefferson School enrollment.<sup>7</sup> Also, a major focus was maintained on the breadth and depth of the content represented within the curriculum.<sup>8</sup> This educational platform was developed specifically for the training of the working class to have an expert understanding of Marxist ideals in every facet of the educational experience. Most important, the curriculum was fully aligned with the overarching goals of the CPUSA. In essence, the school offered a training ground of a socio-politically

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, interview by Martin Duberman, Norwalk, December 13, 1983, Courtesy of the Schomburg Center of African American Research, Harlem, NY, 42

<sup>6</sup> William Watkins, “A Marxian and Radical Reconstructionist Critique of American Education” (in *Black Protest Thought and Education*, New York, NY, Peter Lang Publishing: 2005), 112

<sup>7</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, “Jefferson School Meeting Minutes”(Meeting Minutes 1950-1956), Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research.

<sup>8</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, “Jefferson School Meeting Minutes”

empowered front line, if you will, to magnify the party's influence on the working class masses.<sup>9</sup> The curriculum was essential in vying for a political foothold in the fight for the creation of a New World Order. Doxey was a key piece in reassuring the party's success with the wildly popular school amongst the leftist minded working class men and women of greater New York.

The essence of Marxist theory resides in the fundamental understanding of economics, capitalism, and how these factors directly influence the class systems developed as a result of capitalist functionality. Bill Watkins posits, "It asserts that capitalism is but a stage of history, not humankind's permanent economic system; and that the propertyless will eventually seize the instruments of production and force the creation of a state organized around public property".<sup>10</sup> The Jefferson School Curriculum, a central focus and key responsibility for Wilkerson within the institution, allowed for novice practitioners of Marxist-Leninist theory to conceptualize a Marxist framework in all facets of the educational experience.<sup>11</sup> In essence, the school was designed to reformulate and reinstitute the public education standard that is proliferated with capitalist ideals and to serve as an entry point into the CPUSA.<sup>12</sup>

Wilkerson's work as Director of Educational programs in Washington D.C. was short lived. While he was a key component to mid-level leadership within the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> William Watkins A Marxian and Radical Reconstructionist Critique of American Education" (in Black Protest Thought and Education, New York, NY, Peter Lang Publishing: 2005), 110

<sup>11</sup> Marvin Gettleman, "No Varsity Teams: New York's Jefferson School of Social Science 1943-1956." Science and Society (Fall, 2002): 336-359

<sup>12</sup> Marvin Gettleman, "No Varsity Teams"

party, Doxey was quickly moved to the heart of the party's operation, New York. In this highly charged sociopolitical geography, Wilkerson was given carte blanche access to the inner workings of the party's organizational development and sociopolitical infrastructure. This was evidenced by his ongoing leadership roles as an esteemed member of the CPUSA's National Committee.<sup>13</sup> In this leadership function, he was called upon as the expert on the national educational programs for the party with a specific focus on the newly developed Jefferson School of Social Science, erected in 1944. In addition to his role as the national education expert within the party, Doxey served as the General Manager of the People's Voice, a radical media outlet, along side with renowned activist and Harlemiter, Adam Clayton Powell.<sup>14</sup>

This chapter will illuminate Doxey Wilkerson's participation in developing and sustaining a diverse and culturally rich educational space during the 1940's and 1950's. During this time as the Jefferson's School Director of Curriculum and Staff, Doxey creatively crafted a culturally rich curriculum that was in complete alignment with the overarching political objectives of the CPUSA. While operating under the guise of the party's focus of targeting and unifying those within the labor movements of the time, the Jeff School curriculum creatively and specifically addressed the needs of the oppressed while utilizing Marxist theoretical concepts that were interwoven in pedagogical practice. Hence, Doxey dually addressed the needs of African-American citizens and other marginalized groups while reinstating democratic, political economy, and social history themes within a Marxist theoretical framework. Also,

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<sup>13</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, What I Found in the Communist Party, Daily Worker, February 8, 1944

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

this chapter will further theorize the Jefferson School Curriculum as a metanarrative and catalytic agent of social reconstructionist themes and practice that provides further insight of the party's attempt to solidify a progressive democratic educational geography.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, Wilkerson's leadership within a predominantly white institution is groundbreaking within the study of the history of curriculum. Wilkerson's institutional leadership appointment is unprecedented within the context of African-American institutional leadership in white dominant intellectual spaces.

**1944: Wilkerson Joins Staff:**

In the wide array of his duties within the party, Doxey embraced a familiar position within the Jefferson School of Social Science. In the fall of 1944, Doxey joined the school as an adjunct professor who taught courses in Political Economy, United States History, Jewish History, and Black History.<sup>16</sup> In his personal notes, Doxey spent copious amounts of time planning the courses that he was sought out to instruct.<sup>17</sup> His initial challenge was to ensure that the content and daily instruction was closely aligned to the goals of the party. The themes of organizational growth and curriculum content were constantly reinforced and reiterated as the governing body of the Jefferson School made it clear to all functioning committees that the

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<sup>15</sup>William Watkins A Marxian and Radical Reconstructionist Critique of American Education" (in Black Protest Thought and Education, New York, NY, Peter Lang Publishing: 2005),

<sup>16</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, "Jefferson School Meeting Minutes"(Meeting Minutes 1950-1956), Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research.

<sup>17</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, "Personal Notes in Curriculum Planning"(Personal Notes, 1944). Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research

growth of the party and the focus on the Labor Progressive movement were “essential to the survival of themes of democracy” within a Marxist framework.<sup>18</sup>

Doxey came to the school with much acclaim. As the most visible African-American scholar to join the party, Doxey’s reputation as a scholar and Marxist radical preceded his brilliant abilities within curriculum development. As a part of the CPUSA’s National Committee, Doxey entered the school with a vast amount of political power and support to do what he thought was best for the Party’s internal development through the guise of the institution. Reflective of his personal mission to align the African-American experience with that of the issues confronting the working class, Doxey designed his initial courses in “Negro History” with themes grounded in the development of capitalism through the enslavement of African people in America.<sup>19</sup> For example, he designed his first learning unit around the themes of the Negro Question, Negro Liberation, and the Negro & the Democratic front.<sup>20</sup> All selected readings for these specific themes were drawn from members within the black intelligentsia that have written works specific to those themes. Notable to these writings were authors such as W.E.B Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson.<sup>21</sup> This illumination of the black experience was more than just an acculturation of sorts for the Jeff School student. Doxey, a member of party leadership, was strategically placed in his position to ensure that party objectives

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<sup>18</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, “Jefferson School Meeting Minutes”(Meeting Minutes 1950-1956), Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research.

<sup>19</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, “Jefferson School Curriculum”, (Jefferson School Negro History, 1944), Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid



permeated every facet of the learning experience within the institution. The African-American experience, tarnished with the cruel reality of enslavement for capital gain, allowed for students to become further indoctrinated with a Marxist paradigm that also gave a sociopolitical context the struggle for universal democratic practice.<sup>22</sup>

In 1944, the CPUSA gave specific impetus into further insight on the “question of the negro”. In strategic planning to bolster the party membership and further align itself with the burgeoning labor movements, the party gave impetus to the plight of working class African-American citizens.<sup>23</sup> However, the party faced the paradigmatic disagreement between party ideals and the essence of Black Nationalism that increasingly characterized the personal ideologies of many of the “black comrades” that participated within the party.<sup>24</sup> The right to self-determination, a foundational ideal within the black radical tradition, is not addressed ideologically with a Marxist framework. In his theorization about the CPUSA strategy, Cedric Robinson asserts, “Finally, it was believed it was the most effective means of approaching one of the oldest American Peoples, the “Negro”, first through its radical nationalist intelligentsia, and then its masses”.<sup>25</sup>

The genesis of the CPUSA’s political development was a tactical and theoretical stance to the state of the economic and political existence of the oppressed African-American Laborer.<sup>26</sup> Doxey, long considered a valued representative of the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago, IL, Liberator Press: 1978)

<sup>25</sup> Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, (Chapel Hill, NC, The University of North Carolina Press, 1983)

<sup>26</sup> Wilson Record “The Negro and the Communist Party (Chapel Hill, 1951).

radicalized intelligentsia, offered a reflective model for an intellectual and material resistance to standardized hegemonic narratives for the working class. Reflective of the Communist agenda to embrace the right to self-determination of African-Americans within the Black Belt and beyond, the specific curricular focus for questions around the African-American experience was to employ a deconstructive metanarrative that illuminates the historical exploitation of “Negro Labor” and exposes the oppressive nature of capitalistic practices in America.<sup>27</sup> Doxey’s initial courses were grounded with deviations of the national concepts of enslavement and illustrative of a Marxist analysis that supported the party’s tactical and theoretical programs for African-American involvement with the Party.

Provided that party objectives were to support the tenets of African-American socioeconomic and socio-cultural liberation, Doxey’s course on “Negro History” explored these themes with a framework that extended the Marxist liberatory orientation. In the course, the initial discussions around “Negro Liberation” were focused on the “Negro People as an Oppressed Nation”.<sup>28</sup> The sociocultural and sociopolitical problems in America breaks up the “Negro Nation” into two divisions characterized as the “Southern Negro”, the oppressed Negro Nation in the Black Belt, and the “Northern Negro”, a national minority that suffers from the “problems of Southern Negro oppression” and is an material extension of their “brethren” in the South.<sup>29</sup> Further focus in discussion espoused the notion of the division of the

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<sup>27</sup> Wilson Record, “The Negro and the Communist Party (Chapel Hill, 1951).

<sup>28</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, “Jefferson School Curriculum”, (Jefferson School Negro History, 1944), Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

“Negro Nation” as whole was the existence of a “Negro Bourgeoisie” in the North that have made for the rise of a “bourgeois nationalism” that employs the ruling class in quelling revolutionary resistance to a “fascist imperialism”.<sup>30</sup>

For the purpose positioning a Marxist liberatory orientation of self-determination of the sociocultural schism that is inherent to capitalist structures, Doxey’s critical pedagogy supplanted the Marxists active role in supporting the right to self-determination in absence of any formal “national movement among the oppressed people” under the directives initiated by the governing body of the CPUSA.<sup>31</sup> Doxey gave further focus to the “previous errors” in framing the self-determination ideology in his undertaking of instruction throughout the duration of his Negro History course. In Doxey’s summation, and a centralized focus in his pedagogical engagement with students, the ideological errors of self-determination for “Negros” were grounded in 5 distinct factors. First, in Doxey’s summation, self-determination tended to emphasize the idea of separation; an ideal that negates the over arching theme of the goal to integrate the ideals white and African-American working class citizens through the science of Marxism. Next, the theory did not “sufficiently point out the joint interest of white landless farmers in the South in the self-determination for the Black Belt”.<sup>32</sup>

It was theorized by a small faction within the CPUSA that African-American citizens simply wanted “full integration as equal citizens into the American Social

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

Structure.”<sup>33</sup> This argument was also purported by several social scientists such as Gunnar Myrdal, a former intellectual foe of Wilkerson. Doxey’s third instructional objective regarding self-determination was that this idea was fallacious and it simply overlooks the fact that African-Americans had no opportunity to exercise their will freely. True self-determination allows for a nation of people a sociocultural and socioeconomic mobility that is uninhibited by a fascist superstructure.<sup>34</sup> The fourth factor embraces the idea that “separation is a question to be decided by the oppressed nation when they have won their freedom”.<sup>35</sup> The notion of integration suggests a fully inclusionary democratic existence for the oppressed. However, Doxey’s instruction demystifies the notion of integration being suggestive of liberation. Liberation, in its totality, is recognized with the complete access to the economic, social, and political realities that have been quelled by structural oppression.<sup>36</sup> Lastly, Doxey surmised that the fifth error in framing self-determination is that “equal rights have different meaning in the North and the South”.<sup>37</sup> Doxey posits, “ Equal rights includes rights to nationhood as well as political and economic reality. Also, Equal rights, especially in the South, are possible on the basis or right to self-determination”.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Earl Browder, “On the Negro and the Right of Self-Determination” *Communist*, XXIII (1944), 84-85.

<sup>34</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, “Jefferson School Curriculum”, (*Jefferson School Negro History*, 1944), Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*

By and large, Doxey's approach to self-determination was, in theory, an acknowledgement to the political directives of the party. However, his personal ideology permeated his pedagogical approach when engaging his students with theory that prompted a critical examination of standard historical narratives. These standard historical narratives, grounded within a capitalist framework, constructs knowledge around the sustainability of power by the oppressors represented by the elite classes within the superstructure. Historian Sethard Fisher maintains, "Black equality is not the basic aim of revolutionary change; rather, its primary aim is deconstruction of the system that gave rise to racism, namely, capitalism, the assumption being that racism too will disappear with this change."<sup>39</sup> Reinstating cultural memory with a radicalized theorization of the historical essence of the African-American experience was key for Doxey in his first year at the Jefferson School. It was his belief, as displayed by his pedagogical practice, that the history of African-Americans within the American confine was rooted in labor exploitation and was the rationale behind the institutional oppression afforded by the system of capitalism.<sup>40</sup> Doxey understood, as evidenced by his pedagogy, that the African-American presence and participation within an intellectual and material revolution was pertinent if a total liberation from institutional oppressive forces were to occur.

On January 22, 1947, Dr. Howard Selsam, Director of the Jefferson School, introduced Doxey Wilkerson as the Director of Curriculum and Faculty and a

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<sup>39</sup> Sethard Fisher. "Marxist Prescriptions for Black American Equality". Phylon 45, No.1 1984, pg. 56

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

member of the Board of Trustees of the institution.<sup>41</sup> While still a member of the CPUSA National Committee, Doxey was entrusted with full institutional control of curriculum development, instructional leadership, and faculty evaluations within the institution. Doxey posits, “The term curriculum is used to designate not the course offerings of the school, but rather, the total of the student’s experiences, which are directed by the institution, both within and without the classroom”.<sup>42</sup> Plainly, it was Doxey’s personal stance to orchestrate an educational environment inclusive of the holistic development of Jefferson School students that was “predicated on a concept of collective leadership which harbors an openness to coalitions and alliances with other culture groups.” Collective leadership development and the historical understanding of the multiplicity of cultures imbedded in the working classes of American society became the working focus and intellectual ethos of the guiding principles of the institution.

Consequently, the organizational strategy, pedagogy, and student focus of the institution shifted to align with a new mission and vision. Still under the direction of the CPUSA objectives of organizational growth and specific curricular focus on course content, the institution was met with a variety of challenges and obstacles to maintain the momentum it had gained with the working class since the inception of the institution. The rapidity in growth of enrollment provided a unique challenge for the school. In the 1946-1947 school year, the school had its peak of total enrollment

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<sup>41</sup> Howard Selsam introduced Doxey within a press release to faculty, staff, and stakeholders of the institution. Courtesy of the Doxey Wilkerson Papers within The Schomburg Center of African-American Research. Harlem, NY

<sup>42</sup> Doxey Wilkerson. “Why Negroes are joining the Communist Party”. CPUSA. New York NY March 1946 1

of 14,406 students.<sup>43</sup> This rapidity in growth led to gaps within the curriculum. The institution was hard pressed to find enough instructors with specific content knowledge and expertise in Marxist Science to support the growing numbers in enrolment.<sup>44</sup> Doxey proclaimed that the greatest weakness institutionally was the school's failure to adhere to the overarching initiative of attracting basic industrial workers and women.<sup>45</sup> More than forty percent of the total enrolment of the school consisted of white-collar workers. Eighteen percent were full time students. Twenty-two percent were from the industrial sector. Twenty two percent were from unknown professional fields. Only fourteen percent of the total student population was from the industrial working class. To the dismay of Doxey, this insubordination of the party objectives needed to be rectified with a more aggressive recruitment of citizens from the industrial field reflective of course offerings and curricular content that supported the personal ideologies of their intended audiences.<sup>46</sup>

Surprisingly, the school's African-American population floated just over five percent at the zenith of the enrollment growth. Contextually, it was asserted that the demonization of Communist affiliation led to few African-American working class people to enroll in the school. While the curriculum was geared towards the Labor Progressive Movement, Doxey insisted that a specific focus on African-American enrollment be a primary objective as a means to fully carry out party objectives in support for African-American liberation and the party's support of self-determination

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<sup>43</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, "Jefferson School Meeting Minutes" (Meeting Minutes 1950-1956), Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research.

<sup>44</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, "Jefferson School Meeting Minutes" (Meeting Minutes 1950-1956), Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

ideologies within the Southern Black Belt.<sup>47</sup> This initiative was evidenced by the school's persistence in recruiting African-American faculty that were loyal to the practice of Marxism, active or pseudo active within the CPUSA, and had a devotion to the intellectual revolution of the African-American psyche. One notable figure to adjunct frequently at the school was Harry Haywood, a renowned activist for "black liberation" within the party.<sup>48</sup> Bill Watkins asserts, "If education was going to significantly contribute to social change, schools must necessarily adopt a curriculum sufficiently critical of the old social order, while becoming supportive of new collectivism. The Social Reconstructionists called on the curriculum community to support wholesale change in curriculum materials, activities, and outlooks."<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Doxey was challenged with the complexities of engaging a curriculum that served the purpose of embracing CPUSA objectives. However, the overarching themes of the content presented within the curriculum were of service to empowering the oppressed, marginalized, and privileged learners with an intellectual narrative that corrected the mis-education of the American public school system. This was evidenced by Doxey's insistence that the curriculum be reflective of a universal democratic practice that guided learners to collectively participate in working towards a new social order.<sup>50</sup> The utilization of a Marxist framework prompted an institutional embrace of a universal ideal to ameliorate the social, political, and

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago, IL, Liberator Press: 1978)

<sup>49</sup> William Watkins, "A Marxian and Radical Reconstructionist Critique of American Education" (in *Black Protest Thought and Education*, New York, NY, Peter Lang Publishing: 2005), 121

<sup>50</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, "Jefferson School Meeting Minutes" (Meeting Minutes 1950-1956), Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research.



economic dysfunction mechanized by “fascist and capitalist evils” inherent to American society.<sup>51</sup>

In theory, Doxey and his allies constructed an educational platform that consisted of an anti-oppressive approach to engaging novice learners of Marxist theory to critically approach the interest and issues harming the progression of the oppressed. The emerging theory of anti-oppressive education was foundational in the utilization of a Marxist theoretical framework to engage learners from a critical pedagogical practice. Kevin Kumashiro asserts, “The strength of this approach is that it calls educators to bring visibility to enrich their students’ understandings of different ways of being, In fact, by trying to treat other ways of being, this approach attempts to normalize differences and Other-ness. Working against incomplete and biased forms of knowledge that students have about the Other, and working against the harm that often results from partial knowledge, this approach aims not merely to increase the students’ knowledge but to develop the student’s empathy for the Other.”

<sup>52</sup> For example, all students were required to take courses not only in Negro History, but courses in Jewish History, Historical Materialism, Political Economy of the Marginalized, and a foundational course on the “Women’s Question”.<sup>53</sup> Not only did Doxey conclude that Jeff School learners needed “theoretical understanding for effective carrying forward of the main political tasks confronting the working class”, but a holistic learning experiences that employs a greater “cultural understanding

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Kevin Kumashiro, “Toward a Theory of Anti-Oppressive Education” American Educational Research Association 70, No.1 (Spring 2000): 25-53

<sup>53</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, “Jefferson School Curriculum”,(Jefferson School Negro History, 1944), Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research

amongst varying representations of people throughout the struggle for peace and democracy”.<sup>54</sup>

Illustrative of an intellectual liberation and deconstruction of the oppressive narratives, Doxey co-designed and taught specific courses to illuminate a critical examination and exploration of critical engagement for Jeff School learners. In the course on “The Woman’s Question”, students were prompted to engage themes focused on full participation of women in the labor movement and equitable practices in hiring and equal pay within the work force. Doxey writes, “The whole pattern of special discriminations suffered by women in societies dominated by exploited classes-such as exclusion from many areas of social production, less pay for equal work on the job, domestic enslavement, sexual exploitation, and exploitation, and relegation to a subordinate role in the economic, political, social and cultural life of the community. These special disabilities are experienced in greatest measure by women of the working class, and in our community, especially by Negro and Puerto Rican women.”<sup>55</sup> Upon critical reflection, seminars, lectures, conferences, and public forums, the exploitation of women, especially those within the marginalized minority, were explored as an inclusionary narrative for student’s rumination. Throughout this course, students were assessed on their understanding of the history of the oppressive forces created by capitalism on women within the workforce and tasked to work collectively to ascertain solutions within a Marxist theoretical frame.<sup>56</sup> In this sense, it

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<sup>54</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, “Jefferson School Curriculum”,(Jefferson School Woman’s Question, 1953), Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research

<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

was essential for students to understand the social and economic reproduction, and oppression on the basis of gender of which required an examination of structural factors and the dialectical positioning of capitalism.<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, the Jewish History courses presented a unique curricular positioning much like the required course in “Negro History”. The course was designed to traverse the history of Jewish accomplishments and the oppressions that the Jewish people have endured for centuries. However, Jewish and African-American oppression histories were paralleled as content to be critically analyzed and discussed as an integrated experience. For example, as a pre-assessment to measure prior knowledge amongst students, the assessment combined the most notable figures from both Jewish and African-American cultures and asked to match these figures with their most notable successes that have contributed to the wealth of human achievement.<sup>58</sup> In addition to the historical parallel this specific course offered, Students were required to note and critically analyze Jewish and African-American resistance to hegemonic structures and oppressive entities in an attempt to quell collective progress towards liberation for both communities. Finally, students were required to analyze and derive meaning from both Jewish and African Proverbs and apply those traditional theories within a Marxist framework.<sup>59</sup> This specific curricular design was indicative of the development of cultural appreciation and a form of building a universal solidarity amongst an integrated class of Marxist novice learners. The curricular rationale, for Doxey, was to intertwine theory with practice and afford

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<sup>57</sup> Michael Apple. *Education and Power*. (New York, NY, Rutledge: 1950)

<sup>58</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, “Jefferson School Curriculum”, (Jefferson School Jewish History, 1948), Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for Black Culture

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

a cross-cultural leadership development for liberation. Only with reconstructing truth and deconstructing the popular narratives of the oppressed could a collective understanding and vigilance for liberation be attained.<sup>60</sup> Doxey asserts,

“In the present period, it is clear that the supreme political task confronting the working class and the nation is quickly to build a broad united front to check the drive of U.S. Imperialism toward war and fascism, a powerful peoples front to win the struggle for peace and democracy. Such a united front must be based upon firm alliance between the labor movement and the Negro people and must embrace all democratic and anti-fascist forces of America.”<sup>61</sup>

Plainly, It was Doxey’s supposition, in concert with CPUSA’s objective, that the necessity of acculturating Jefferson School student’s with a holistic understanding of historical experience of all oppressed groups within the party’s guise was essential to building a revolutionary alliance that had not been witnessed before in American society. In essence, geography of resistance and intellectual freedom would liberate students from their own internalized hegemony and oppression to fully conceptualize the systemic oppression all of the working class experience at the hands of a seemingly unbreakable oppressive system. Coupled with a curricular focus that complicated existing hegemonic narratives, a Marxist education exemplar should have theoretical formulations that are correct and precise, a theory connected with

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<sup>60</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, “Jefferson School Meeting Minutes”(Meeting Minutes 1950-1956), Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

practice, instruction that is geared to the American scene, a polemical focus, and all instruction should be geared toward the problems of the working class.<sup>62</sup> As it stood, under Doxey's direction, the curriculum presented a students with an opportunity to explore, learn, and discern with self-reflexivity around the hegemonic experiences prior to their enrollment, and become galvanized with an intellectual acuity focused on the evolving problems presented within their collective communities.<sup>63</sup>

The 1950's presented a culmination of fears presented with the Cold War. The political assault on any Communists or Communist affiliated people or institutions was in full throttle driven by the vehicle of McCarthyism. Marxism as an ideology had always been envisioned as radical ideology and a threat to capitalism, and therefore American society as a whole. As a result, The Jefferson School was a primary target as it harbored some of the most popular and visible Marxist-Leninist radical thinkers, and was long assumed to be Communist Party front by lawmakers and pro-McCarthyism pundits. In light of this propagandized assault, of which, Marxists believed to be the "castration of intellectual and academic freedoms" institutionally, Doxey remained steadfast in continuing to meet the institutional goals of the Party, and furthering the pragmatic ideological discourse within the classrooms through theoretically aligned curriculum.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the 1950's signaled a strenuous time frame for a host of the Black intelligentsia, as some of the most renowned scholars, activist, and educators became known targets of the McCarthy regime.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Marvin Gettleman, "No Varsity Teams"

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

For this reason, one of the most celebrated and targeted scholars within the black intelligentsia, W.E.B. Du Bois, befell a host of professional and personal losses that culminated in his evolving ideology closer to that of what the CPUSA presented intellectually. In 1948, Du Bois was dismissed from the NAACP, and joined the Council on African-Affairs as a vice-chairman.<sup>65</sup> Both Doxey and Paul Robeson were members of this council, and were both very close to Du Bois and highly aware of Du Bois' wealth of struggles during this timeframe. Doxey, a long time admirer of Du Bois since his college days, always maintained an indirect relationship with the elder scholar by frequently sending him letters of admiration of his work with *The Crisis* newspaper and giving him consistent updates of the pervasive struggles of African-American students on campus.<sup>66</sup>

Upon his forced resignation from Atlanta University and exodus out of the NAACP, Du Bois virtually had no funds for his own food, clothing, travel, and research.<sup>67</sup> Despite his prideful nature, he was funded through the kindness of his friends and colleagues throughout the entire country to survive the trying times that he encountered. Unfortunately, the untimely passing of his beloved wife, Nina, in 1950 after a series of strokes, Du Bois found himself dislocated and disjointed from all that he knew and cherished.<sup>68</sup> In 1951, Du Bois was "indicted by federal grand jury as an unregistered foreign agent, arrested, tried, and acquitted" for suspicion of

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<sup>65</sup> Manning Marable, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat* (Boulder, CO, Paradigm Publishers: 1986)

<sup>66</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, Letter to W.E.B. Du Bois "University of Kansas Black Graduates" November 22, 1922

<sup>67</sup> Manning Marable, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat* (Boulder, CO, Paradigm Publishers: 1986)

<sup>68</sup> Manning Marable, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat* (Boulder, CO, Paradigm Publishers: 1986)

his participation and collusion with subversives.<sup>69</sup> Although acquitted of all charges, Du Bois' passport was denied and he was unable to travel about to conduct his life's work for the total liberation of people of color around the world. The trial cost Du Bois and other defendants over thirty-five thousand dollars, which further complicated his financial struggles.<sup>70</sup>

Consequently, "A defense committee was established, headed by Paul Robeson and former Minnesota governor Elmer Henson", and Doxey Wilkerson "carried out many of the committee's tasks".<sup>71</sup> Presumably, the CPUSA governing body approved party financial support for Du Bois as a means to gain favor among one of the most popular scholars within the black intelligentsia. Through personal correspondence, Doxey and Du Bois had numerous exchanges regarding financial matters concerning the rent for office space, personal secretary, and resources for research all paid for by Doxey during this time frame.<sup>72</sup> As a result, Du Bois agreed, "with delight", to offer his services to conduct a seminar on the "Background of African Liberation Struggles" at the Jefferson School in the fall of 1953.<sup>73</sup> Doxey writes, "How wonderful it is that working class students at the Jefferson School may now study under the guidance of this great scholar, teacher and people's leader! Dr. Du Bois' seminar on the "Background of African Liberation Struggles" during the winter term of the Jefferson School does, indeed, mark an historic event in the

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<sup>69</sup> Manning Marable, W.E.B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat, 184

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 185

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, Doxey Wilkerson, "Jefferson School Meeting Minutes"(Meeting Minutes 1950-1956), Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

development of Marxist education in the United States.”<sup>74</sup> The announcement and subsequent addition of the preeminent African-American scholar of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a phenomenal statement to the institution in itself. However, the variation within the curriculum spoke volumes about the pedagogical and instructional direction the institution took to offer a course on the diasporic liberation for people of African descent. Students would be further prompted to conceptualize the historic implications of the institutional and material oppression of African people from a geopolitical perspective. This is suggestive of the interconnectedness of the imperial functionality of “capitalist regimes” and the institutional hegemony that inherently demeans the working class globally.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, students were required to research the histories of every country on the continent of Africa, understand the development of ancient civilizations, tribal influences, intercontinental diasporic movement, and colonialization by imperialist factions. It was Du Bois’ expectation, a further illustration of his own ideological transition to a Marxist framework, which class exploitation has existed since the genesis of African humanity. Also, the hidden curriculum was implicative of resistance to the hegemony presented by these imperialist countries. For Du Bois and Doxey both, this was a pedagogical pronouncement of not only an evolving Marxist

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<sup>74</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, “Dr. Du Bois’ Jefferson School Seminar on African Struggles”, *Daily Worker*, January 2, 1953

<sup>75</sup> Joseph De Marco, *The Social Thought of W.E.B. Du Bois* (Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 1983)



position, but also a theoretical evolution tied closely with the radical traditions that preceded their scholarship.<sup>76</sup> Reiland Rabaka posits,

Education, liberation, and leadership are not the exclusive domain of the ruling race, gender, and/or class; they are vial human needs just as food, clothing, and shelter are human necessities. But, without critical education and liberation thought that speaks to the specificities of Africana and other subjugated souls' life worlds of experiences, ongoing hardships and unspeakable hurts, long-held utopian hopes, and deep-seated radical democratic desires, then all oppressed and colonized people have are abstract and empty inquiries into Eurocentric notions of justice, freedom, democracy, liberation, peace, and perhaps most importantly, what it means to be human.<sup>77</sup>

Doxey's ability to integrate Africana history and struggles against imperialistic structures is illustrative of his own evolving ideology towards the tradition of hegemonic resistance to geopolitical and sociocultural narratives that shaped the American identity. Indeed, Marxism was the insisted and trusted theoretical framework of which the curricula were extracted from. However, the insistence and occasion to have a historical prompting of a global liberatory conceptualization of the continental African and the diasporic African is illustrative of discourse explored within the black radical tradition. Assumingly, Doxey may not have been aware of this ideological evolution within the curriculum, as the Africana liberatory theme aligned with CPUSA party objectives to embrace "Negro struggle". But this inclusion of not only a conceptual liberation, but curricular resistance and complication of hegemonic narrative allows for a better understanding of how the Jefferson School curriculum has been missed in the discourse of social reconstruction

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<sup>76</sup> Reiland Rabaka, *Du Bois' Dialectics: Black Radical Politics and the Reconstruction of Critical Social Theory* (Lanham, MD, Lexington Books: 2008)

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 66

and geographies that have created a metanarrative that conceptualizes institutional contexts and empowers curriculum practice and cultural empowerment.<sup>78</sup>

**Conclusion:**

The Jefferson School was more than just a “communist front” institution. It was an educational geography that prompted a radical democratic imagination and focus on revolutionary politics that would materialize radical social change for the oppressed. Doxey Wilkerson, in his foundational role as the catalytic agent for the institution, too, with the dynamic curriculum, has been missed in historical discourse around social reconstructionist theory. Seemingly, this omission of curricular contribution could be the result of his prolific affiliation with the vilified Communist milieu. Communism and Marxism notwithstanding, the Jefferson School and Doxey’s work in concert with leading Marxists intellectuals is in fact one of the only physical geographies of intellectual liberation that has existed. For students of the radical tradition and evolving radical imaginations, this monument warrants a critical exploration.

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<sup>78</sup> James Henderson. “Curriculum Discourse and the Question of Empowerment” *Theory into Practice*, 31 No. 3 (1992) p. 206

**Chapter 4: The Purging of Radical Souls: Doxey, Ideology, and the Radical Intelligentsia**

**Introduction:**

The Du Boisian exploration of the “soul” gave students of the human experience a unique insight to the very existence of African-American resilience in the face of oppression and faithful journey towards an acknowledged visibility within a democratic society. Too often has the concept of the soul been omitted from the intellectual traversing of the African-American journey towards a holistic liberation from globalized white dominance. DuBois asserts, “He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face”<sup>1</sup>.

To simplify the Du Boisian assertion of the essence of the soul, the African-American, while in the face of oppression and the guise of a social and political exclusion, simply wants to exist how have they have been created. Exclusion from this democratic existence is essentially a denial of the soul; the ultimate denial of the lived experience that makes a man or woman who they have been created to be. Granted, this espousal by Du Bois is decades prior to his total embrace of Marxist/Communist ideals, it was a universal ethos that permeated the collective ideology of radical resistance to cultural, social, and political hegemony. The deconstruction of the radical soul proved to be most pervasive for the liberty seeking intelligentsia during the advent of the Cold War Era. Wilkerson and all within the

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<sup>1</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY, Cosimo Books: 1903), 9

radical infrastructure suffered from the full out assault on the spirit of radical liberation to weaken the imagination of vigilance for a democratic transformation.

Undoubtedly, socio-political radicalism within the United States was hyper-magnified as the country transitioned into a post-war society. The ideological war grounds between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the heightened antagonism for any Communist-like activity, redefined the societal definition of the essence of radicalism in every facet of its functionality. Most important, for the practitioners of intellectual liberation, the ability to exercise intellectual freedom as a “democratic practice” was utterly destroyed by the demonizing propagandized initiatives that were conceptualized by factions within the American government. This intellectual, political, and social disconnectedness prompted many within radical circles to confine themselves from radical practice, or depart from their own personal ideologies all together. Also, the public crucifixion of alleged Communist subversives provided a psychological warfare that succeeded in quelling the radical spirit.

Indeed, Wilkerson existed in a very dangerous position, as he remained loyal to his personal ideological embrace of a holistic liberation from systemic hegemony. However, this period of purging the radicals provided a paradigmatic shift not only within the aims of the CPUSA as a political platform for liberatory ideals, but a point of departure to evaluate the pragmatism that the party provided in light of the possibilities of losing livelihood, and quite possibly one’s life. His sociopolitical positioning, in concert with a host of the most visible within the Black Intelligentsia,

were altered as a consequence of surviving the “terrorism” ignited by the propagandized fear of Communist revolution.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, I will explore the impact of McCarthyism and the fear of “rebellion” from the oppressed within the guise of the radical intelligentsia. Wilkerson, among others, were politically vilified for their alleged participation in activities that were deemed subversive and aligned with treason against the American government. The most visible of the intellectual liberationist were made into sociopolitical martyrs for their quest and vigilance for liberation. Much like W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, Eslanda Robeson, and Black Communist leader Ben Davis, Wilkerson’s scholarly work and commitment to the intellectual empowerment for the working class prompted national attention and propagandized fear of the academic milieu’s acquiescence to Communist infiltration. Doxey remained to be the one of the few academics to be investigated and tried for his alleged treason and participation within the CPUSA.

Thus, an influence of the demonization of intellectual, social, and political radicalism drastically impacted the sociocultural ideology of the radical intelligentsia and altered the landscape of the geographies of resistance to hegemonic realities. Moreover, this chapter will provide an evolving theoretical frame around the relationships, activism, and the transitioning sociopolitical and sociocultural ideology of Doxey during this dramatic period. The possibilities of liberation, in Doxey’s understanding, are to be cultivated through consistent interaction with transformational experiences provided by the very geographies of hegemonic

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<sup>2</sup> Jodi Melamed, “W.E.B. Du Bois’s UnAmerican End”, *African American Review* 40, no 3 (Fall 2006) 533-550

resistance that were destroyed by the fears of social, political, and intellectual revolution.<sup>3</sup> To contain the resistance from the ideological hegemony of the oppressive powers of the time, the purging of the radical liberators had to be the most visible and provocative campaign to deconstruct the will of the oppressed masses.<sup>4</sup>

**Radicalism Redefined:**

Doxey's membership within the Communist party did not solidify his radical beliefs toward an equitable democratic practice for the oppressed. His endorsement and membership within the party was nothing more than a public stamp to his unabashed radicalism. However, the societal paradigm of citizenry is often defined by the context of the times. While his move into the party was nothing more than a quick jolt to his collegial and political relationships, Doxey's "radicalism" was viewed as nothing more than a man taking a bold step to magnify a collective voice for a humane and equitable existence within society. Assuredly, Doxey's Marxist advocacy prior to his announcement of membership within CPUSA would be understood as nothing more than an academic with grandiose ideas of egalitarian practice. However, Doxey's radical evolution found him in a unique position to be targeted and publicly vilified along with some of the most outstanding leaders within the African-American progressive movements. While the investigation of his radical activity was not as humiliating and exploitative as Paul Robeson and W.E.B. Du Bois, Doxey's targeting served as public statement to academic "subversives" that

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Perlstein. "Minds Stayed on Freedom"

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Gramsci. *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*. (New York, NY, New York International:1967)

any form of perceived radicalism within the academic confine would be treated as treason against the United States.

In fact, prior to the formal political movements to bolster anti-communist rhetoric, Doxey was no novice to political targeting of subversive activity. While teaching at Howard, his evolving embrace of Marxism permeated his pedagogical and professional practice. He made no qualms in being a Marxist radical that consistently professed his ideological stance with students and colleagues. Coupled with his rising stardom within academia as a result of his intellectual contributions within the academy and his politically charged scholarship, he became well known to the FBI as a “Marxist radical” working within the heart of Washington D.C.<sup>5</sup> The FBI created extensive files that maintained every professional involvement that Doxey had throughout the course of his professional life. However, he was never found to be guilty of any subversive activity within any of his professional appointments.

The political context of defining radicalism increasingly changed as the country embraced the formation of a Cold War consciousness.<sup>6</sup> With the passing of the Smith Act in 1940, the government took a formal stance of identifying and prosecuting any alleged communist, Anarchists, and fascists that were colluding against American democracy. Under the Smith Act, convicted subversives could face fines and imprisonment up to twenty years and denied all employment by the federal

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<sup>5</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, interview by Martin Duberman, Norwalk, December 13, 1983, Courtesy of the Schomburg Center of African American Research, Harlem, NY, 34

<sup>6</sup> Molly Hite. “A Parody of Martyrdom: The Rosenbergs, Cold War Theology, and Robert Coover’s “The Public Burning”. Duke University Press, 86

government for five years following their convictions.<sup>7</sup> Title 1 of the Smith Act defines one aspect of subversive activity as “ whoever, with intent to cause the overthrow or destruction of any such government, prints, publishes, edits, issues, circulates, sells, distributes, or publicly displays any written or printed matter advocating, advising, or teaching the duty, necessity, desirability, or propriety or destroying any government in the United States by force or violence”.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, a wide array of leftist, communist, socialist, and Marxist radicals were targeted as a result of the scathing critique of American practices in all facets of society. This legal purging of radicalism found Doxey to be one of the purported contributors to a subversive rebellion against American practice.

The cost of radical imagination for democracy was an extremely severe cost to pay. The Smith Act, coupled with the extreme vigilance of Senator Joseph McCarthy, provided the anti-communist movement lethal weaponry that proved to be vastly effective in leaving the CPUSA and other progressive movements in disarray. The initial assault on top- level leadership within the party proved to be successful with when the Supreme Court upheld the Smith Act convictions in 1951. Martin Duberman asserts, “Four of the eleven CPUSA leaders immediately went underground, and without delay, the government inaugurated a drive against second echelon Party officials. On June 20, a federal grand jury in New York returned Smith Act indictments against an additional twenty-one CP leaders, seventeen of whom

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<sup>7</sup> Smith Act, 18 US Code 2385, Advocating overthrow of Government, June 25, 1948 Ch. 645

<sup>8</sup> Ibid



were arrested.”<sup>9</sup> Wilkerson remained to be one of the four party members to be indicted while still maintaining his freedom. His deep commitment within the party and his active participation in the leadership function in the Jefferson School was well documented by federal authorities. Additionally, Doxey’s federal employment with the Office of the Price Administration raised more concerns of his alleged subversive activity. Federal officials maintained that subversives that had intimate knowledge of government practice would pose the most significant threat to national security. As a result of plea deals made with federal prosecution, several indicted party members identified Doxey as a key figure within Party leadership and the key contributor to the party’s education programs. In November of 1952, Doxey was called to stand trial for his alleged subversive activities in Trumbull, Connecticut.<sup>10</sup>

During Doxey’s testimony, the questioning from the prosecution focused mainly on his involvement with the Jefferson School and his relationships with CPUSA leadership. Additionally, the prosecution aligned their questioning to reveal the subversive nature on the party in an attempt to reveal the secret practices and radical framework of the CPUSA. Doxey never refrained from declaring his membership within the party, or his Marxist theoretical framework during his testimony. While it was not illegal to be a communist or radical, the language under the Smith Act condemned any practice or rhetoric around a violent revolutionary stance against the United States government. Doxey remained firm in his theoretical positioning, critical pedagogy, and scathing indictment of the treatment of the

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Duberman. Paul Robeson: A Biography (New York, NY, The New Press: 1988) 397.

<sup>10</sup> Hearing of Fundraising Affair, Smith Act of 1948, November, 1952

oppressed peoples within the country. However, Doxey remained in a unique position in his radical declarations. He understood that not only was he considered a dangerous radical subversive within the eyes of the government, he was an African-American who was under fire within a legal system that was innately designed to criminalize African-American people. When asked why the radical infrastructure contends to operate in secrecy, Doxey replied,

The extent to which I as a Communist could not be free to interpret my views to those whom I would like to explain my views, perhaps because I would lose my job becomes a limitation for me. For example, teachers taking loyalty oaths can be fired from their jobs for being members of the NAACP. It is not at all strange that the NAACP adopts practices to protect its members. This is true of many groups in history whom dissent from the established principles of people in power. The slaves were fighting for their freedom, but they were very careful to avoid detection and were forced to resort to secret and security means to that end. The abolitionists were so persecuted that they too had to adopt security measures from the slave forces that were out to do them violence.<sup>11</sup>

Wilkerson's espousal in this instance is in alignment with a major facet of the Black radical tradition. This illumination of "secrecy", as Doxey explains, is not a central tenet of a radical political platform. It is foundational to hegemonic resistance and survival to employ secrecy within radical infrastructures. Distinct communities, labeled Maroon Communities, were secret communities developed during the enslavement to methodically resist the system of slavery by slowly helping people to escape their torture and live free amongst their own.<sup>12</sup> The enslaved created their own means of communication without being detected by oppressors and facing the threat

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<sup>11</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, Hearing of Fundraising Affair, Smith Act of 1948, November, 1952

<sup>12</sup> Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC, The University of North Carolina Press: 1983)

of being hanged or publicly castrated to send a message to those who secretly desired liberation from their eternal oppression.<sup>13</sup> Contemporary forms of hegemonic resistance, as Doxey describes, existed within the black radical infrastructure as means of survival and navigation around a world not too far removed from plantation models of thought. While the discovery committee prompted these questions to incriminate subversives under the Smith Act, the art of secrecy remained to be more than just collusion against the system of white dominance; it was a tool of survival that was necessitated by the desire to exist. Doxey maintained this position throughout his entire testimony. He insisted that his Marxist framework suggests that revolutionary change was simply the ideological revolution of the oppressed.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, Wilkerson continued his active participation with the Jefferson School, as the institution now became a focus of Senator Joseph McCarthy and his desire to publicly expose all subversive individuals and “front organizations”.<sup>15</sup> A public smearing of the institution by federal media outlets made national headlines. At this juncture, Doxey became the main focus of federal investigation not only because of his admitted leadership within the party, but for his foundational research of educational inequity for African-American learners within the Southern Black Belt of the United States. Throughout his employment with the federal government prior to his turn to Communism, Doxey became widely regarded for his research and book Special Problems of Negro Education. The aforementioned work provided

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> David Livingstone, “Searching for Missing Links: Neo-Marxist Theories of Education” *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, No.1 (1995), 53-73

<sup>15</sup> Marvin Gettleman, “No Varsity Teams: New York’s Jefferson School of Social Science 1943-1956.” *Science and Society* (Fall, 2002): 336-359

groundbreaking empirical data that illuminated the vast inequities that Wilkerson found to be the systemic affects of racism, segregations, and overall deficit of quality in every facet of public schooling. While the data proved the stark differences in schooling between African-American and White learners in these schools, Doxey espoused that the lack of educational opportunity for African-American learners had severe and pervasive political implications for the nation as a whole. Doxey writes, “Equality of educational opportunity has long been cherished as an ideal of American Democracy. The development of a democratic program of Negro education represents, therefore, something more than a means toward justice for the Negro people; it is an essential condition for national and social security.”<sup>16</sup> This linkage of education being a democratic practice prompted swift attention from HUAC subcommittee investigation of academic rebellion against the government.<sup>17</sup>

The findings within Wilkerson’s research prompted a critical exploration from scholars, policy makers, and state education departments throughout the nation. This groundbreaking work further debunked the myths of intellectual inferiority within African-American learners and was suggestive that federal aid equalizes the perennially insufficient educational experiences of children within the Black Belt. While this work garnered Wilkerson great scholarly acclaim, it would prove to be what HUAC needed to further their investigation of Wilkerson’s subversive activity.

<sup>18</sup> Again, Doxey was issued a subpoena to appear before the Internal Security Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee for the U.S. Senate on March 16, 1953.

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<sup>16</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, *Special Problems in Negro Education* (Washington, DC, U.S. Government Printing Office: 1939), 151

<sup>17</sup> *Daily Mirror*, July 5, 1953

<sup>18</sup> Paul Healy, “McCarthy Digs Another Red Quiz Claim”, *Daily News*, July 3, 1953

The subpoena was issued by the Chairman of the subcommittee, Senator William E. Jenner, who worked closely with McCarthy in purging the infiltration of “subversive radicals”.<sup>19</sup> The key focus of Doxey’s subpoena was the content of his widely acclaimed book, his membership within the party, and his knowledge of communist infiltration and teachings within the Jefferson School.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout Doxey’s investigation and testimony, he remained highly aware of the danger that was posed to his career and possibly his life if he were to be charged with crimes outlined under the Smith Act. This awareness prompted Doxey to plead the Fifth Amendment during all of his testimony with the Jenner Commission. He refused to answer any questions regarding his Communist affiliation or admitting to attending any secret Communist Meetings.<sup>21</sup> However, Doxey did ask for permission to read a written response to the committee’s subpoena and allowed to do so. In his response to the committee’s accusation of his involvement with Communist activity, Doxey “attacked the committees inquiry into Communists in education as a subversion of academic freedom in the schools and colleges of the country.”<sup>22</sup> Wilkerson posits, “Is it because much of my professional career was devoted to investigating and exposing the abominable school conditions to which Negro children are subjected in much of our country, setting forth my findings and conclusions in scores of articles and several books-including one Special Problems in Negro Education which was published by the Government printing

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Healy, “McCarthy Digs Another Red Quiz Claim”

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> “Quiz Doxie Wilkerson on Red Affiliations” Chicago Defender, 1953

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

office? Is this why I am commanded to appear before this subcommittee?”<sup>23</sup> By and large, there were no responses to Wilkerson’s questions. The subcommittee continued with their own inquiry. After his testimony, Wilkerson asserted that his “running through this inquisitorial mill would thereby help intimidate other Negro leaders, other educators, and other students into silence.”<sup>24</sup>

Doxey’s testimony made national headlines. Many friends, students, and supporters of the party wrote to him during this trying time to give their support, as Doxey became painted as a key subversive within the field of education through the vantage point of the United States government. Many questioned why Doxey was not forthcoming with his Communist affiliation and leadership roles within the party. Wilkerson claimed that he was afraid that his answers might be used to “frame him” and that “he knows of no Communist who ever was properly convicted of any crime”.<sup>25</sup> Also, that he knew of others that were framed such as “ the 11 top Communists convicted of conspiracy against the government, and Willie McGee, an African-American man who was wrongly convicted of rape and executed in Mississippi.”<sup>26</sup> Joseph McCarthy cited Doxey as another “typical author” whose books appear in libraries with content that went right along with the “Communist Party Line”.<sup>27</sup> Additionally McCarthy believed that “Wilkerson’s work exaggerated

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<sup>23</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, Statement for Presentation to Internal Security Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee of the United States Senate (March 24, 1953)

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Daily Mirror, “McCarthy Witness tilt over Rosenberg Case”, July 3, 1953

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> New York Times, “ McCarthy Clarifies Book Stand”, July 3, 1953

whatever discrimination there might be against Negroes in American schools.”<sup>28</sup> As a result of the Doxey’s testimony, McCarthy further asserted that “he didn’t care what they did with the book after it was discarded from libraries, whether they burn it or not.”<sup>29</sup>

McCarthyism proved to be a successful psychological warfare against many within the Black radical infrastructure. This symbolic political lynching of the most visible and renowned radicals within the country prompted established fear within many African-American leaders resulting in many closet radicals resenting their relationships with popular radicals such as Doxey.<sup>30</sup> Characteristic of public lynching within the Jim Crow South, the McCarthy period and the public crucifixions of beloved radical leaders quelled the spirit of ideological revolution within the African-American masses. In essence, if the head is removed from the body, the body has no capacity to function. A decentralized and demobilized leadership function within the radical infrastructure furthered the schism between subsistence level existence and the liberation that was the focus of radical aims.

Indeed, Wilkerson suffered a traumatic blow as he was publicly vilified for his scholarship and participation within the CPUSA. However, his participation in furthering the aims of Marxist education remained strong. W.E.B Du Bois suffered even more harmful blows to his professional and personal life. In fact, the octogenarian scholar and liberator suffered worse than both Robeson and Wilkerson. While Robeson had his passport revoked by the government, he celebrity allowed

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Paul Robeson, interview by Martin Duberman, Norwalk, December 13, 1983, Courtesy of the Schomburg Center of African American Research, Harlem, NY, 38

him increased public mobility within the country.<sup>31</sup> Although Wilkerson escaped the clutches of McCarthyism personally, he was caught within the battle to close the Jefferson School and constantly hounded by potential subpoenas to testify before government subcommittees under the Smith Act. Du Bois was literally stripped of his membership of the NAACP and rendered almost penniless with the cost of his trial to prove he was not a subversive working to overturn the United States government.<sup>32</sup> However, Wilkerson and Du Bois had a long-standing and close professional relationship. Wilkerson avidly followed Du Bois rhetoric during his days writing for the *Crisis*, and often corresponded with him while he was an undergraduate. As Doxey evolved as a scholar and Marxist radical, he became one of Du Bois' "closest young friends".<sup>33</sup> This close relationship coupled with the political trauma they both experienced allowed for unique occasion for the CPUSA to utilize Wilkerson and Dr. Herbert Aptheker to propose a financial arrangement to aid Du Bois with his current financial struggles.<sup>34</sup>

The CPUSA found Du Bois' struggles to be a unique opportunity to align the party with the foremost influential African-American scholar of the time. While Doxey's relationship with Du Bois was paramount in forging this alliance, party leaders envisioned the party gaining a phenomenal credibility amongst fearful intellectuals and African-American leaders if Du Bois would assert his alliance to his wide array for professional and personal connections within the radical infrastructure.

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<sup>31</sup> Martin Duberman. *Paul Robeson: A Biography* (New York, NY, The New Press: 1988) 397

<sup>32</sup> David Leavering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography* (New York, NY, Henry Holt and Company: 2009), 671

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*



Indeed, this arrangement led to Du Bois staying extended amounts of time in New York in a furnished office, a competent office aid, and funds to continue research with his own personal evolving sociopolitical ideology.<sup>35</sup> Of course, Du Bois, under the direction of Wilkerson at the Jefferson School, developed and instructed a seminar in *Africana Struggles* in the fall of 1953. Doxey continued a deep rumination of bolstering a curricular alignment with Party objectives, but also creating a deeper and rich curriculum focused on cultural and political struggles of the labor class.<sup>36</sup>

Still, the Jefferson School struggled with the impending legal battles to keep the institution open and functioning. As it stood, the institution was maintained through CPUSA funding and private donations, no staff members received any payment, and the defense bills were mounting. Public fears of alleged alliance with subversion led to a decline in enrollment. Doxey maintained that “academic and intellectual freedom” to teach and learn Marxism was a democratic right protected under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.<sup>37</sup> Doxey led staff members in an anti-McCarthyism campaign that embraced a rallying cry of “defending one’s right to learn”.<sup>38</sup> Doxey writes, “It is not relevant to argue here whether the Marxist interpretation of social phenomena is true. The question at issue is whether Americans have the right to teach and learn Marxism if they wish to; whether a school devoted to the presentation and interpretation of Marxist ideas is to

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<sup>35</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois to Doxey Wilkerson, letter, September 19, 1950, Doxey Wilkerson Papers, Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research

<sup>36</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, Memo to staff, Jefferson School of Social Science. December 29, 1954, Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 2

be permitted to operate as a free, open, public institution, or whether it is to be closed down by governmental decree.”<sup>39</sup>

Certainly, the political pressure mounted on the institutional leadership to close the school and all of its activities. Wilkerson, among a small host of other Marxist intellectuals hopelessly planned an auxiliary Marxist institute of learning in response to the government urging to close the Jefferson School. Unable to secure funding, Wilkerson had no choice other than to depart from planning the auxiliary school altogether.<sup>40</sup> On November 27, 1956, under unbearable financial struggle, the board of trustees had no choice but to shut down operations of the Jefferson School. The battle for “intellectual freedom” to teach and learn without “government persecution” was lost. The Board was instructed by CPUSA leadership to dissolve all of the financial interests of the school and Wilkerson was appointed trustee of all property, contracts, and rights of action for the institution.<sup>41</sup>

The tides of radicalism shifted in phenomenal ways for the party and for the Black radical infrastructure. The Brown vs. Board decision illuminated a political shift in the struggle for integrationist policy; a lofty political aim for most radicalized activists within the infrastructure. However, Wilkerson started to become disillusioned with the changing tide of CPUSA ideology. Again, the initial stance of the party regarding aiding the plight of the oppressed was to directly advocate for and the holistic liberation of the working class African-American to attain true democracy. With party leadership in disarray and ideological shifts from the Soviet

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<sup>39</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, “Jefferson School Meeting Minutes”(Meeting Minutes 1950-1956), Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

Union, Wilkerson found himself as the disenchanting Black radical no longer galvanized through a revolutionary political platform for change. The political assault on the radical soul proved successful as more radicalized intelligentsia transitioned their own stances to embrace the more moderate goals arising out of the contemporary civil rights movement.

**Conclusion:**

This period of Wilkerson's participation within the CPUSA is indicative of several major themes that prompt a critical inquiry into the political and social contexts of African-American liberation. First, I utilized the metaphor of the soul to describe the spirit of liberation and the imagination of a radical possibility to attain a holistic liberation for the African-American masses. Du Bois was masterful in describing the soul of the man as the lived experience of struggle for liberation throughout his scholarly career. The Black Radical Tradition, too, emphasizes a theology of sorts to spiritualize the struggle for this holistic liberation that is seemingly unattainable provided that this "soul" is not broken. Wilkerson's experience during this period is indicative of the age old purging of leadership for liberation since the advent of the African Diaspora. To quell any hope for revolution within the masses, the strongest and most leadership oriented individuals needed to be publicly dismantled to inspire fear among those who had any inkling of hope for liberation. This method sustains hegemonic structures on all levels.<sup>42</sup> The splintering of the radical infrastructure allowed for the essence of disillusionment with radical

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<sup>42</sup> George Frederickson. *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa*, (New York, NY, Oxford University Press: 1995)

leadership. Again, the fears of the time were not relegated to simply the purported evils of Communism and social revolution; these fears were a magnification of the fears of old for the African-American masses. To challenge ideological, political, and social hegemonic structures is to realize the threat of losing one's soul to resist. Kwame Nkrumah suggests, "There is such a thing as peaceful coexistence between states with different social systems; but as long as oppressive classes exist, there can be no such thing as peaceful coexistence between opposing ideologies."<sup>43</sup> Black radical thought is not only the resistance to dominant ideology, but also the creation of a uniform belief system that acknowledges the existence, beliefs, and culture of the oppressed.

Next, I espoused that McCarthyism was the strategic and systematic destruction of radical leadership. Again, the symbolic lynching of Du Bois and Robeson called to question a political pragmatism that radical alignment offered for the African-American masses. Although Wilkerson is missed in the historical, curricular, and radical discourse around African-American liberation, his public demonization of alleged subversion implies a similar symbolic lynching of leadership for more radicalized intelligentsia of the time. Moreover, this radical purge proved to shell- shock the burgeoning African-American leadership to resist oppressive systems with methods that were the least threatening to the ruling classes. Lastly, the closing of the Jefferson School further recounts the final call in structuring educational geographies of ideological and academic resistance. Without true political and

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<sup>43</sup> Kwame Nkrumah. *Consciencism: A Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonization and Development with particular reference to the African Revolution*, (New York, NY, Monthly Review Press: 1964), 57

economic access, oppressed classes, specifically the African-American community, are rendered powerless in determining their own intellectual, ideological, and sociopolitical destinies. The Jefferson School, another symbol of liberation, was destroyed as it served as a center of the radical imagination, and the bridge between cultures that have been dislocated and disenfranchised historically. Without intellectual geographies to build and train young men and women to embrace radical possibilities, the soul, or lived experience of the oppressed, becomes weakened.

The essence of the Black radical soul is to “look upon position, self-assertion, and determination to go forward at all odds”,<sup>44</sup> as Du Bois asserts. This period in redefining the radical spirit called for a re-assessment of those radical ideals. Was “full” integration means to justify the holistic liberation that the radical soul sought after? Does constitutional acknowledgement provide societal equity and visibility of the radical soul? These questions, as evidenced in the radical intelligentsia’s symbolic lynching are still burning within contemporary discourse. Indeed, the radical spirit still lives. For Wilkerson, it was more than just educational equity and polity that would liberate the souls of Black folk; it was liberation that would be the deliverance of the radical soul.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois: *Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY, Cosimo Books: 1903), 10

<sup>45</sup> Doxey Wilkerson to Student, Letter, March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1972. Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for African-American Research.

## **Chapter 5: The Radical Exodus**

### **Introduction:**

For most of his adult life, Doxey Wilkerson was immersed in the radical possibility of a new world that vowed to acknowledge the collective existence of the African-American masses. Fourteen years of his professional and personal experience was ensconced within a revolutionary political platform that challenged the superstructure of oppression that imposed its will on the oppressed. Doxey embraced the radical leap that would propel the utopian possibility of an egalitarian practice that echoed the will of his enslaved ancestry. A beaten and battered spirit, Doxey encountered a crossroads that would invite a theoretical inquiry to his unprecedented involvement with the CPUSA. Wilkerson beat the odds in emerging from his staged crucifixion with brilliance, but he now had to face an unfamiliar foe with the divergent ideologies within an organization he once embraced with blind faith.

As the political tide shifted, the political ideology of the party altered into a practice that was less challenging to the more mundane status quo. Communist from all backgrounds were tried, executed, and imprisoned. Most importantly, the splintering of party leadership gave way to a political platform that witnessed a trajectory towards dissolution. This dichotomy of ideology furthered the absence of focusing on the liberation of the labor class, of which, mostly consisted of an African-

American community disjointed from the creed of American Democracy.<sup>1</sup> Once more, the possibilities of liberation became a living shadow of the realities that made for the everyday existence of the hopeful. The advent of “interracial liberalism” counteracted the original and most powerful aims for American Communist in their quest to mobilize the African-American community during the 1940’s and 1950’s.<sup>2</sup> While the party advocated for similar aims of interracialism within a Marxist context, the contemporary progressive movements provided a greater appeal to African-Americans without the consequential demonization that Communist affiliation presented.

The political assault on “Marxist education”, as captured by the governmental focus on the Jefferson School, weakened the educational functionality of the CPUSA to acculturate the working classes towards a liberatory stance against hegemonic systems. For Doxey, the spearhead of this intellectual liberation, this assault called to question whether a revolutionary stance could indeed provide for a tangible reality for liberatory ideals. CPUSA African-American leadership, of the likes of Ben Davis, now sang a different tune with regard to “Black liberation”, prompted the more deeply committed Marxist radicals to redefine their own positioning within the party.<sup>3</sup> At this juncture, Doxey, the solitary radical educator, realized his own political mortality. Doxey, among others, begged the question of one plausible truth. Does a

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Hanchard, “Cultural Politics and Black Public Intellectuals” *Social Text*, No. 48(Fall, 1996) 95-108

<sup>2</sup> George Frederickson. *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa*, (New York, NY, Oxford University Press: 1995), 22

<sup>3</sup> Mark Peffley and Lee Sigelman, “Intolerance of Communists during the McCarthy Era: A General Model.” *The Western Political Quarterly*, 43 No.1 (March 1990) 99-111

political entity, platform, or philosophical framework exist for true liberation for the oppressed? The inevitable dissolution of the party and forced closing of the Jefferson School would give Doxey the answers to his newfound inquiry of radical resistance within a political platform.

This chapter will discuss and analyze Wilkerson's exit out of the CPUSA. After surviving the McCarthy period seemingly unscathed, Wilkerson suffered the traumatic closing of the Jefferson School and ideological shifts of the general leadership within the party. Wilkerson still remained a firm presence and the instructional leader of the Jefferson School, but the infighting and the creation of two ideological factions within the party left Wilkerson disillusioned with the manifestation of true ideological and material revolution for the oppressed. Wilkerson was left with unanswered questions regarding this revolution that was essential to his ideological being. Finally, I will conceptualize the meaning of Wilkerson's radical life to the contemporary struggle for the holistic liberation of the oppressed. Wilkerson's voice has been often missed in liberation discourse. His political ideology notwithstanding, his contribution to the radical imagination is critical within the discussion of then often studied academic, political, and social liberators throughout the human experience.

### **Transition of the Communist Position:**

The CPUSA's position on the "Negro Question" remained the one thread that influenced Wilkerson to embrace the party as a political platform worthy of African-American participation for sociopolitical liberation. Taking cues from the Kremlin, the governing body of the CPUSA within the Soviet Union, the CPUSA remained



firmly grounded in the recognition of self-determination within the Black Belt region of the United States. However, the abandonment of this political theory and the creation of political factions within the party led to an ideological splinter that further weakened the party's presence on the American political front. In the midst of this political repositioning, Wilkerson was torn between party advocacy and his own evolving sociopolitical ideology.<sup>4</sup> Coupled with party leader Earl Browder's push for American Exceptionalism, the theory that "American Capitalism need not be overthrown but could evolve through the gradual process into a socialistic political order; the CPUSA would eventually dissolve and become reorganized as the Communist Political Association with a set of new ideals and political objectives bolstered by a new focus facilitated by the Soviet Union."<sup>5</sup> Wilkerson was among the party leadership to reformulate the political position on African-American liberation in concert with the overarching party objectives.<sup>6</sup> Wilkerson asserts, "The perspective for the Negro people in the United States is neither toward disintegration as a people nor toward statehood as a nation; it is probably toward further development as a national minority, as a distinct and increasingly self-conscious community of Negro Americans."<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, this supposition of integration and minority status for the African-American masses is in total theoretical disagreement with the notion of self-

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<sup>4</sup> Shante` J. Lyons and Matthew D. Davis, "The Sociopolitical Ideology of the Communist Educator: Doxey A. Wilkerson" *Journal of Philosophy and History of Education* 64, no. 1(May 2014): 39-46

<sup>5</sup> *Wilson Record*, The Negro and the Communist Party

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, "The Negro and the American Nation." *Political Affairs* (July 1946) 657

determination. This deviation from prior objectives of the party to embrace self-determination for African-Americans, specifically within the Black Belt, fostered the ideological split between the radical and conservative factions within the party. Wilkerson, among others, received this ideological prompting from the Kremlin, the governing leadership function of the CPUSA, as a means to further a universal inclusion for recruitment efforts while giving limited attention to the burning questions around race and cultural empowerment.<sup>8</sup> Among party members on the far left of the party, such as the like of Harry Haywood, the ideological transitions from assisting Black self-determination to American accommodation purported the element of doom for Black liberation within Communist political platform. Haywood, a dedicated member of the party and chosen spokesperson for the survival of Black self-determination, envisioned Browder's "treachery" and the party's defection from Black liberation as a collusion with the hegemonic structures that bolstered the position of the ruling class. In Haywood's summation, this ideological shift of the party would ultimately mean an "ideological and physical liquidation of the party" as the party had been altered qualitatively during the Red Scare and during the McCarthy purging.<sup>9</sup> Haywood asserts,

It should be clear that without the recognition of the Negro's right to self-government, the slogan of social equality, or full citizenship rights, in the South and the Black Belt is but a misleading signboard, divested of all revolutionary content, behind which bourgeois humanitarians and pacifist, as well as the Social-Democrats and Trotskyites, can hide

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Mouledous, "From Browderism to Peaceful Co-Existence: An Analysis of Developments in the Communist Position on the American Negro", *Phylon*, 25, No.1 (1964)

their sabotage of any genuine struggle for Negro rights and democracy.<sup>10</sup>

Thereafter, at the end of 1951, the party relinquished its prior ideological agreement with Wilkerson's assessment of the "Negro Question".<sup>11</sup> As a result, Wilkerson recanted his prior assessment on the state of African-Americans within the Black Belt. Wilkerson posits, "I, together with others, developed a deviation on the question of race and nation, which had done considerable harm to the struggle for a theoretically sound understanding of the Negro Question as a national question, and thus has served to weaken the struggle against white chauvinism."<sup>12</sup>

White chauvinism, the Communist definition of racist activity and ideology by white party members, had long been constant battle for party leadership in retaining African-American membership within the party. Although party objectives and focused strategic activity by the party was to embrace the African-American masses in their struggle for democratic liberation, the essence of racism and internalized hegemony still permeated the spirit of the party. Coupled with the changing tides of the party's ideological focus, it became clear to the more radical sects of the party that full political inclusion and cultural empowerment advocacy by the party was diminishing. In 1956, Ben Davis, former lawyer and member of the upper echelon of party leadership, issued several major statements on the party's

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<sup>10</sup> Harry Haywood, "Agrarian Reforms for the Black Belt", Political Affairs XXV (1946), 932.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Mouldous, "From Browderism to Peaceful Co-Existence: An Analysis of Developments in the Communist Position on the American Negro", Phylon, 25, No.1 (1964) 84.

<sup>12</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, "Race, Nation, and the Concept Negro", Political Affairs, XXXXI (1952), 13-26

behalf that furthered illuminated the changing ideology of the CPUSA. Davis asserts, “The slogan of self determination should be abandoned and the Party’s position otherwise modified and brought up to date. For today the Negro people in the South are fighting for integration and are moving in the directions of democratic representative government, not towards the separate state.”<sup>13</sup> This ideological reflection by the party’s most visible Black leader illustrates the party’s relenting to address the essence of the issues of racism, classism, and hegemony within the capitalistic democracy the radical party once fought. With the advent of the burgeoning Civil Rights movement and the splintering of the party’s ideological stance for Black Liberation, the motivating factors for radicals like Wilkerson to remain loyal to a revolutionary political platform had been amazingly altered in very short window of time.

Consequently, after deep rumination, Doxey Wilkerson formally resigned from the party on November 25, 1957.<sup>14</sup> In his letter to Benjamin Davis and George Charney, Doxey emphasized that he would “cherish and continue to work for the social goals which had long guided his adult life”, however, he “reluctantly and irrevocably” came to the conclusion that the “Communist Party no longer provided a framework within which he could make a constructive contribution to those ends”.<sup>15</sup> The forced closing of the Jefferson School, the mass assault of political subversive during the McCarthy era, and the splintering of ideology within the party rooted

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<sup>13</sup> Benjamin J. Davis, “The Negro People on the March”. New York (1956) 31

<sup>14</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, Letter to Benjamin Davis and George Charney, Courtesy of the Doxey Wilkerson Papers, Schomburg Center of Black Culture, Harlem NY

<sup>15</sup> Pittsburgh Currier, “Wilkerson Quits the Communist Party”, December, 21, 1957

deeply within the decision that Wilkerson had to make. No longer did the pragmatism the party once offered a cause worth sacrificing everything for. Wilkerson's resignation made national headlines. Wilkerson's demonization by the McCarthy subcommittees through print now garnered him even more attention through his resignation from the party. In several news outlets, Doxey made his political ideology clear, he "still cherished the ideal of an America where men of all races and creeds can walk together in dignity and equality, where thought and speech are truly free, where the political processes are genuinely democratic and where the vast material resources of our nation are geared to the peoples needs."<sup>16</sup> Clearly, Wilkerson never departs from his radical idealism. His sociopolitical ideology was reflective of the radical universalism that prompted his move within to the CPUSA. However, the still pervasive antagonism against radical ideologies within the societal framework of the country employed a sense of retreat and survival for Wilkerson to continue his mission without a threat to his own livelihood.

Nevertheless, Wilkerson still remained a very powerful and respected member within the Black intelligentsia. In announcing his resignation from the Communist Party, Wilkerson was strategic in formally announcing his resignation through a host of personal letters to academics, former colleagues, and college presidents throughout the nation. Wilkerson understood that his departure from the party would make him one of the most viable candidates for a teaching or leadership position within any major university in the country. Also, Wilkerson understood that most of his radical colleagues took refuge within university settings as a result of the assault on radical

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<sup>16</sup> Pittsburgh Courier, "Wilkerson Quits Communist Party", December, 21, 1957

instruction and revolutionary pedagogy.<sup>17</sup> Wilkerson was welcomed back with open arms from a wide array of academics that quietly admired his work within the party and in the Jefferson School. Charles Wesley, former President of Central State College writes, “I have long felt that this (academia) was the area in which you could render the greatest service while at the same time continuing your interest in the struggles which Negro people face in the United States for first class citizenship. I congratulate your decision and at the same time have some regret that the decision did not come at an earlier period.”<sup>18</sup>

While the Communist press and party members vilified his resignation, Doxey promptly moved forward to complete his doctoral degree at New York University in 1957. After his formal announcement to join the CPUSA, he was denied the ability to finish his PhD at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor in 1943. This denial was the result of the fear of “radical affiliation” by the University.<sup>19</sup> Upon his enrollment at NYU, his former coursework was allowed for credit towards the completion of the degree. In that same year, Doxey was able to complete his studies and continue his career in higher education as a professor in the college of education at Yeshiva University.<sup>20</sup>

### **Discussion:**

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<sup>17</sup> Wilson Record, “Negro Intellectuals and Negro Movements; Some Methodological Notes”, *The Journal of Negro Education*, 24 No.2 (Spring, 1955) 106-112

<sup>18</sup> Charles H. Wesley, Letter to Doxey Wilkerson, December 27, 1957, Courtesy of the Doxey Wilkerson Papers, Schomburg Center of Black Culture, Harlem, NY.

<sup>19</sup> Doxey Wilkerson, Personal Notes, Courtesy of the Doxey Wilkerson Papers, Schomburg Center of Black Culture, Harlem, NY

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

Doxey's departure from the party is indicative of his, at this juncture in his life, a still evolving radical ideology. It should not be mistaken that his departure from the party implies a more conservative view on radical liberation for the oppressed. This transition does, however, display his hopes to affect change within through an intellectual liberation that academic spaces afford. His affiliation with the politically demonized party that was the CPUSA disallowed Doxey opportunities to work and study within major universities and academic circles for their own fears of radical affiliation. Wilkerson would continue on to lead a prolific career in producing scholarship that is commonly used in the contemporary study of societal and educational liberation.

Moreover, Wilkerson's fourteen year of political and educational involvement with the CPUSA gives scant illumination to the influence of his wife, Yolanda, whom was avowed Marxist radical in her own right. While the major impetus of this study gives focus to Wilkerson's involvement within the CPUSA, Yolanda Wilkerson, too was heavily connected to the Black radical infrastructure and renowned for her own acts of radicalism for the time. The former Yolanda Barnett was the child of two educators in Louisville, Kentucky. A graduate of Ohio State University, Yolanda taught math at the local high school in Louisville and was the local secretary for the American Federation of Teachers. Coupled with her roles as educator and within the AFT, Yolanda was responsible for spearheading the fight for equal pay for Black teachers in Louisville, of which, resulted in the first integrated chapter of the AFT in the South.<sup>21</sup> Yolanda received her Master's degree from Ohio State University, and

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<sup>21</sup> Norwalk News, Norwalk, CT, November, 1989

was a doctoral candidate at New York University in 1957. While a New York resident, she also served as the “interracial secretary of the National Student Council of the YWCA.”<sup>22</sup>

It is plausible that Yolanda has been missed, like Doxey, as the result of her own radicalized ideology. Of course, political arenas are heavily gendered, but the impact of women throughout the liberation movements of the time cannot be ignored. During the height of Doxey’s party membership, Yolanda became a key contributor to the Jefferson School by teaching several courses in political economy and Marxist theory from 1955-1957.<sup>23</sup> While Yolanda was a self-proclaimed Marxist in her own right, she was not a member of the CPUSA. She remained hidden from Doxey’s political damnation during the McCarthy era, and was assumed to be a subversive by any legal authority. However, her personal relationship with Doxey seems to have been a complicated one. While married to Doxey for over 40 years, she once revealed the disconnectedness that she felt prior to his split from the party. Yolanda writes,

Somehow I had hoped our eight-year anniversary celebration would be happy one marked with progress along the road toward successful adjustment. Unfortunately, I find myself instead in a state of despair, utter futility, and of no real hope for the future. Perhaps we would both do well to reassess this relationship on this occasion and decide whether it is worth saving.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Daily Worker, “Wed On Thanksgiving”, New York, NY, November, 1944

<sup>23</sup> Yolanda Wilkerson, Letter to Doxey Wilkerson, December 1952. Courtesy of the Doxey Wilkerson Papers, Schomburg Center of Black Culture, Harlem, NY

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 2



In her letter to Doxey in 1952, it is apparent that their relationship had been strained for some time. Again, Doxey was unwaveringly loyal and committed to the mission of the party. Perhaps Yolanda's dissatisfaction with his disconnectedness was one major factor in his decision to resign. However, based on this scant illumination of her own personal thoughts, she suffered in silence while still bearing the burden of a "good Marxist wife". Akin to Betty Shabazz, Yolanda's own personal and political ideology gave deference to the work of men in politics and social revolutionary activity. While the historiography of liberation mutes the powerful actions of women, Yolanda, without fail, is a symbol of the marginalized within the liberation movements of the time. Indeed, while she remained married to Doxey and active within the radical infrastructures, she, too, needs much more illumination while we responsibly traverse the journey to liberation of the oppressed. A Marxist theoretical framework purports a "race neutral" and "gender dominant" stance on revolutionary ideals.<sup>25</sup> This supposition suggests the very reason why women, such as Yolanda, have been missed in revolutionary discourse that embraces the Marxist framework.

**Conclusion:**

After his resignation from the CPUSA, Doxey continued a prolific activity as a scholar and educator throughout the duration of his career. In a more conservative form, his radicalism was evidenced in his harsh critique of programs that were created to socialize and acculturate oppressed learners within the newly integrated public school systems. In his later years, Doxey continued his career as educational consultant and was frequently called to speak to pre-service teachers in training

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<sup>25</sup> Reiland Rabaka, *W.E.B. Du Bois and the Problems of the Twenty-First Century: An Essay on Africana Critical Theory*, (Lanham, MD, Lexington Books: 2008)

around themes of egalitarian practice within the field of education. After concluding the analysis of Wilkerson's life and practice while a member of the CPUSA, the findings of the initial research questions have provided a substantial amount of historiographical information that provides an original contribution to the field of the history of education.

Why did the Communist Party appeal to the African-American struggle? As Wilkerson experienced, the interracialism and the dramatic inclusionary appeal that the Party presented offered a new sociopolitical space for the Black intelligentsia to operate. It was central to the CPUSA's party objectives to strategically identify and recruit visible members within the Black professional class to become full-fledged members of the Party. Doxey remained to be one of the most visible academics within the Party's strategic realm of active recruitment. Additionally, the initial political objectives of the CPUSA promoted the support of Black Self-Determination, and the legal representation of the marginalized and criminalized within the southern Black Belt.<sup>26</sup> This strategic sociopolitical positioning, again, was rarely witnessed by the Black masses from a predominantly white political entity during this specific time in the history of the United States.

What did Wilkerson find within the political platform of the Communist that would bolster the uplift of the oppressed? Wilkerson's sociopolitical ideology was heavily rooted in Marxist ideology. Of which, this ideology prompted a serious inquiry of a revolutionary political platform that, in theory, would bolster the sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociocultural status of all of the oppressed masses

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<sup>26</sup> Harry Haywood, "Agrarian Reforms for the Black Belt", Political Affairs XXV (1946),

in the United States. As a theoretical framework, the CPUSA embraced revolutionary Marxism as a means to uplift the labor class. Consistently, the Black presence within the working class remained to be dominant. Wilkerson understood the problems that quelled the progression of a universal democratic practice were systematic and inherently woven into the practices of United States government, economic practice, and laws. Within the political platform of the CPUSA, Wilkerson would find himself as an educational leader and possessing the power of equitable participation to develop and execute policies that prompted universal uplift of the oppressed. Indeed, this political platform empowered Black leadership, as evidenced with Doxey's participation within the Jefferson School that remains to be a historical rarity in the exploration of the history of Black inclusion in education and politics.

How did the Communist ideals shape the political, social, and cultural development of African-Americans? The research conducted finds that the Jefferson School of Social Science was the catalytic agent that prompted a collective inquiry into the history, struggle, and progress of the Black masses by utilizing Marxism to acculturate its students. Wilkerson's influence on the Jefferson School curriculum was central to learners developing a critical understanding of the Black experience in concert with the struggles of the working class of the United States. Indeed, Wilkerson's leadership within a white dominated space was illustrative of the alignment of party objectives to actively embrace the Black struggle as a political ethos. However, as a political target during the McCarthy Era, its efforts to unify the Black struggle with that of the labor class were contained and ultimately ended as the

pressures and the antagonism of Marxism and Communism became too powerful to sustain the efforts of intellectual liberation that the school symbolized.

Moreover, Doxey's life and practice has a significant impact and meaning on the field of education. Much of the educational discourse around Black radicalism within the field of education has been dominated by the most celebrated members of the Black intelligentsia such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, and Paul Robeson. Doxey Wilkerson's life and practice offers a unique addition and contribution to the narratives of resistance to white domination, educational equity, and radical change within the themes of liberation and social justice discourse. Additionally, his story offers yet an alternative understanding and point of departure to framing the narrative around the political and social contexts of education. Why has Wilkerson's narrative been missed? Comparative to the lives of women and men who were active within the most revolutionary forms of radical change, Doxey's membership within the CPUSA gives a historical justification to the muting of his extraordinary voice. As Communism has been demonized within the American historical narrative, Wilkerson's voice has been lost as a result of that demonization. It is vital, as educational practitioners, administrators, and advocates for the holistic liberation of the oppressed to embrace the stories and lives of those who worked for similar aims but have been lost. These stories can provide more depth to the radical imagination for liberation and give more insight to the possibilities of liberatory action within any political, social, and educational space.

Within the radical imagination of the possibilities of utopian existence, Doxey A. Wilkerson is yet another inspiration and ideological point of departure for continued

rumination around holistic liberation. It is my hope that his journey resonates within the hearts of those that possess the radical soul for the liberation of the oppressed. As Doxey has passed on, his spirit now has a voice to speak truth to the radical consciousness that resides in us all.

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