Radical Americas

RADICAL AMERICAS

UCLPRESS

Special issue: *Histories of socialism and Indigeneity*

Research article

'Real red reds': Indigenous Americans and the Communist Party of the USA, 1924–1939

Owen Walsh,[1,*] Kathryn Berry[1,*]

[1] School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History, University of Aberdeen, UK
* Correspondence: owen.walsh@abdn.ac.uk; kathrynberry.contact@gmail.com

Submission date: 20 September 2024; Acceptance date: 15 August 2025; Publication date: 15 October 2025

How to cite
Walsh, O. and Berry, K. '"Real red reds": Indigenous Americans and the Communist Party of the USA, 1924–1939'. *Radical Americas* 10, 1 (2025): 9.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2025.v10.1.009.

Peer review
This article has been peer-reviewed through the journal's standard double-blind peer-review process, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

Copyright
2025, Owen Walsh and Kathryn Berry. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (CC BY) 4.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited •
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2025.v10.1.009.

Open access
Radical Americas is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

Abstract

This article argues that Indigenous people were visible and agential participants in the American Left long before the explosion of Native activism in the 1970s. By situating Indigenous people in the interwar Communist Party, the article makes two major contributions to the histories of Indigeneity and socialism in twentieth-century USA. First, the article argues for a history of the Popular Front that is thoroughly attuned to the complex ways that settler-colonialism structures Left politics in the Americas. The interwar Left produced genuinely radical critiques of the USA as a colonial project and demonstrated a real appreciation of the US's origins in the genocidal violence of European capitalism. But it failed to undertake a Marxist theorisation of Native oppression, leading to programmatic absences, problematic representations and persistent theoretical ambiguities. This mixed legacy helped set the stage for extensive debates later in the century about the compatibility between Marxism and

Indigenous struggles for land sovereignty and cultural autonomy. Second, the article situates late-twentieth-century Native radicalism within a longer history of Indigenous affiliation with the organised Left, demonstrating how effective such alliances could be, even as non-Native communists betrayed their ignorance of Native culture and proved somewhat inconsistent in their ideas about Native sovereignty. The article invites more thoroughgoing assessments of the various and complex ways that the US's settler-colonial character has historically structured – and been challenged by – the militant Left.

Keywords communism; Popular Front; Native Americans; American socialism; settler-colonialism; Marxism

Introduction

If the Popular Front movement of the 1930s gave rise to a distinctly US radicalism, the question of how the interwar US Left contended with the settler-colonial structure of US society ought to be urgent and central. Scholarship on the interwar period has been slow to address the problem of what Kevin Bruyneel calls 'settler memory' and how it shaped US radicalism,[1] though Langston Hughes's iconic 1936 poem 'Let America Be America Again' provides a useful starting point. This celebrated artefact of Popular Front literary culture presents a radical-democratic challenge to dominant racist and capitalist definitions of Americanism.[2] But, among the different figures that Hughes deployed as symbols of the nation, the coexistence of 'the pioneer on the plain' and 'the red man driven from the land' is somewhat jarring.[3] Indigenous people were evidently imagined as part of this insurgent movement, though the poem also leaves intact the mythology of the heroic pioneer, whose settlement of unoccupied plains relied on the violent dispossession of 'the red man'. The poem concludes with a vision of a US-America in which multiple structures of racialised class domination are overcome by a radically re-envisioned 'people', which encompasses all those who were excluded at the foundation of the Republic. The poem seeks to call into being a revolutionary constituency that includes impoverished settlers, exploited arrivants and dispossessed Indigenous peoples.[4] As it does so, Hughes's poem reflects the condition of settler memory as a 'capacity to see and not see Indigenous people as contemporary subjects'.[5]

In this article, we interrogate how the interwar US Left was shaped by a settler-colonial reality in ways that are registered symptomatically in Hughes's poem, and how the Communist Party specifically sought to understand and challenge settler-colonialism in this period, which saw dynamic growth for the party and their extensive influence on antiracist struggles. We find in the party press evidence of an eagerness to incorporate Indigenous people into a class-struggle movement, but no detailed vision of how a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' might be combined with 'Indigenous self-governance'. A 'co-habitative' project of emancipation – combining socialist, abolitionist and decolonial concerns – was not altogether 'unthought', then, though it has remained archivally obscure and was never made central to the politics of US communism or the Popular Front.[6] This archive bears witness to richly potentiate convergences between the US Left and Native resistance, even as it also reveals an Indigenous lacuna in communist politics of the interwar period. By understanding its potentials and problematics, we can evaluate the Popular Front anew and engage in a necessary revision of the encounter between Marxism and Indigeneity in US-American history.

We develop our argument in three stages: first, by establishing the place that Indigenous Americans occupied in the historical and political imaginaries of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA); next, by detailing evidence of Indigenous support for the CPUSA, including through testimonies from Indigenous communists; finally, by evidencing Indigenous communities' engagement with the mass organisations of the party, using communist newspapers as records of Indigenous participation in the Popular Front as a social movement. Throughout, we treat anyone identified as Indigenous in the archive as such, though we recognise the possibility – and indeed likelihood – that some of those identifications might have been contested. Before moving into the argument proper, we contextualise the discussion by focusing on some key developments in Indian policy and Communist Party history.

The historical situation

The interwar years were turbulent ones for Indigenous people in the USA. Until the mid-1930s, the US's Indian policy was characterised by 'Americanization', which extended a long-established practice of forced assimilation. The 1924 Indian Citizenship Act granted citizenship to all Indigenous Americans. Citizenship had long been a central issue for many Native activists, who were divided between firm supporters (such as in the Society of American Indians) and sharp opponents (including the Onondaga Nation, who continue to regard the Act as forced naturalisation).[7] Activists such as Porfirio Mirabel of Taos echoed the petitions of several Pueblo peoples in 1920 as he resisted citizenship as a means of protecting sovereignty and maintaining control over Native land: 'I do not want to be wiped out. I want to be free, as I have always been. We do not want to be citizens.'[8]

Indian policy took a sharp turn with the election of Franklin Roosevelt's Democrats in 1932. Their Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (nicknamed the Indian New Deal and abbreviated to the IRA) ended allotment – which parcelled land out to Indigenous people as individual property – and established new structures for tribal self-government. The IRA not only deployed US governmental criteria for tribal membership and enforced unfamiliar governance structures – thereby overriding important aspects of Indigenous self-rule and creating a Native political elite embedded within the US state – but it also marked a pivot in favour of Indigenous sovereignty.[9]

Like the Citizenship Act, the IRA was resisted by sections of the Native population. Numerous nations rejected the Act. The Navajo, for instance, opposed the government's livestock reduction plan, which threatened their livelihoods and offended their valuation of livestock and land. Speaking at a congress held in Arizona in 1934, which was attended by delegates from the Navajo Nation, the head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) John Collier and other Indigenous groups, Fred Nelson from the Hopi jurisdiction argued:

> For the white people, the good old dollar is where they get their sustenance of life and the Navajos get their sustenance of life from the goats and the sheep, so it would not be fair to the Navajo to give up their goats and not the white people part of their dollar.[10]

Meanwhile, other Native critics of the IRA, such as George White Bull from the Standing Rock Reservation, were content with allotment and alleged that the IRA elevated 'educated mixed-bloods' into positions of 'fixed leadership'.[11] Opposition to the Act was therefore complex and reflected, at times, the partial success of assimilationist policies, as well as long-standing resistance to measures that further violated Indigenous sovereignty.[12] Sometimes, as in Fred Nelson's comments, the criticism came with a sharp repudiation of capitalist lifeways.

Eventful though these years were for Native Americans, the CPUSA never established a firm national policy regarding Native claims to citizenship, sovereignty and land. They nevertheless established themselves as a dynamic political force at the centre of an interracial political and cultural movement focused on materially improving the lives – and culturally elevating the voices – of impoverished and labouring people, especially those from racial minorities. The efforts of the CPUSA in the Depression situated the party as a central actor in a wider Leftist reorientation of US society on multiple levels. While various political failures, and the twists and turns of communist policy in response to Soviet *realpolitik*, diminished support for the communists, their status as an influential current in a potent Left was only ended by the direct repressive impetus of the Second Red Scare most associated with Senator Joseph McCarthy.[13] Much CPUSA policy and strategy was informed by directives from the Communist International (Comintern), and much of the national leadership relied on the Comintern for instruction on issues of racial oppression. Recent decades of revisionist scholarship have nevertheless demonstrated that the CPUSA provided resources for autonomous modes of activism, especially among its Black and women members, and these groups shaped party activity and even Comintern policy in important ways.[14]

Two Comintern directives were especially important in determining the character of communist approaches to Indigenous people. First, beginning in the mid-1920s, the Comintern insisted that their sections embark on a process of Bolshevisation which, in the USA, took the form of a campaign conducted under the slogan 'Be American!'[15] The long-standing reliance of the official US Left on immigrant communities, especially from Europe, presented a problem to the Comintern, who were concerned about subordinating foreign-language federations to central Party structures and forcing their US-based comrades to grapple with US realities, including racism.[16] While Indigenous people did

https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2025.v10.1.009

not figure directly in this strategic reorientation, the increasing use of the language of Americanism brought with it some efforts to understand or represent the original inhabitants of US land. The project of Americanising the party was also not wholly a top-down effort and readers of party newspapers recognised that to 'nativise' required the production of material that applied a 'Marxist Leninist point of view' to authentically US subject matter, including 'Indians'.[17]

Second, the party was motivated to become an engine of antiracist activism by adopting the Black Belt thesis at the Comintern Congress of 1928. Here, Comintern specialists interpreted Black Nationalist movements such as Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association as evidence of African Americans' status as an oppressed *national* minority with equivalent political claims to those made by national groups in the former Russian Empire. African Americans were understood to possess full rights to self-determination, including the right to form a separate nation-state in the South, where most continued to live, usually in conditions of deep poverty, political unfreedom and hard agricultural, industrial and domestic labour. However inadequate as an effort to understand Black political aspirations, the thesis had an adrenalising effect, convincing the CPUSA to focus significant resources on the organisation of Black farmers, sharecroppers, workers and the unemployed into a range of unions and campaigning groups. In turn, a generation of Black activists and intellectuals sought to repurpose Marxism to the ends of Black liberation and anticolonialism.[18] More indirectly, the Black Belt thesis – and the work of the Comintern in cultivating socialist opposition to Empire across the colonised world – signalled to numerous racialised groups the promise of communism as an alternative to white supremacy and imperialism.

The Black Belt thesis stimulated expansive theoretical debates about the proper Marxist understanding of racial oppression in a US setting, framed both in positive and negative ways in major essays by figures such as C.L.R. James and Claudia Jones. In turn, it mandated an original effort to understand the place of Mexican Americans in the Southwest, authored by Homer Brooks and Emma Tenayuca, whose tenacious organising efforts helped to originate the Chicano movement.[19] Such innovative theoretical work by and about racial minorities is central to a now well-established scholarship that emphasises intergenerational continuities in the antiracist politics of the 'Old' and 'New' Lefts.[20] That distinction has nevertheless remained firmer when scholars discuss Native Americans' political struggles and their relationships with American socialists. Ward Churchill's assertion that it was mainstream news coverage of the American Indian Movement"s occupation of Wounded Knee in 1972 that finally drew the attention of the US Left to the situation of Indigenous Americans continues to exercise influence. More recent scholarship has complicated our understanding of Red Power-era Native protest in multiple ways and has radically expanded the chronology of the Red Power movement, but the so-called Old Left is still regarded as, at best, of peripheral relevance to the story of Indigenous resistance in twentieth-century USA.[21]

When we look beyond the USA, this claim becomes rather tenuous, though efforts are also being made to further examine the historical depth of Left-Indigenous relations in the USA.[22] Lorenzo Costaguta, writing on the late nineteenth-century Socialist Labor Party, has argued that 'while firsthand contact between socialists and American Indians was minimal', 'the western frontier shaped socialist thinking' in ways that forced white socialists to question the superiority of European genetic and cultural heritage.[23] Work by Benjamin Balthaser and Elizabeth Sine has focused on Indigenous affiliations with the Left in the interwar period, inviting a reassessment of the hitherto dominant assumption that the Popular Front had nothing to do with Indigenous struggles. Balthaser especially has argued for an affinity between intellectuals of the Popular Front and Indigenous thought on the environment and sovereignty.[24] This ongoing reassessment necessitates a critical examination of the encounter between the CPUSA and Indigenous Americans, a relationship that remains largely neglected, despite long-standing debates about the applicability of Marxist theoretical frameworks to Indigenous American struggles.

Drawing on material published in the CPUSA's national newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, and its West Coast regional organ, the *Western Worker*, which covered recently conquered areas of the country, including numerous large reservations, this article argues that the interwar period witnessed important, though insufficiently consistent, moments of Indigenous-communist coalition. These moments of convergence demonstrate that Indigenous people were participants in the interwar Left and that insofar as the Left remained distant from them, this was understood self-critically as a failure. In this regard, we are resistant to an account of twentieth-century US socialism as hopelessly ignorant of settler-colonial dynamics. Yet the archive does illustrate that US-American communists lacked the intellectual tenacity

to transcend visions of unilinear and Eurocentric development that animated, especially, Marx's early writing.[25] In this regard, the CPUSA's shortcomings were indicative of a wider trend shared, for instance, with the Trotskyist *Militant* newspaper, whose narratives of US historical development erased Indigenous people, and for whom even less evidence exists of political initiative during the 1930s to address settler-colonial structures.[26]

There is, at the same time, also a more local and specific story here about the CPUSA. As we argue below, the CPUSA's position in the history of Indigenous resistance ought to be understood as being determined, in complex ways, by its distinct organisational and political trajectory throughout these decades. The Americanisation initiative of the 1920s seems to have motivated the initial discussion of Indigenous populations. The 1928 adoption of the Black Belt thesis helped to reorient the party towards sympathetic engagement with antiracist struggles, including those waged within nationalist frameworks, and the Popular Front policy introduced new limits to the kinds of anticolonial critique that could achieve acceptance in a party committed to the unity of anti-fascist forces at the cost of all else. The history of the encounter between the so-called Old Left and Indigenous Americans, then, is not merely a generic story about white oversight, but is a potentiate and tragic moment in Marxism's political evolution, wherein the outline of a consistently anticolonial Marxism was etched, but ultimately lacked the resources to be sustained, and remained so faint as to be barely visible in the archival record. By tracing those lines that remain, we are nevertheless enabled to revise the periodisation of Indigenous resistance and to revisit the political legacy of the Popular Front movement vis-à-vis US settler-colonialism.

The Indigenous lacuna?

The marginal place of Indigeneity in histories of the US Left in these years emerges in part from the reality that the Left was dominated – numerically and in its leading cadre – by non-Native people who did not produce any major theoretical statement on US settler-colonialism equivalent to those made regarding the revolutionary agency of Black and Mexican populations. Indeed, major intellectuals of the American Left who were famously attentive to racial dynamics, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, tended to foreground 'racialized labor in ways that undercut Indigenous dispossession as an independent structure of imperial rule'.[27] The survival of settler perspectives on American history could also take the form of a rigid Marxist historicism that celebrated the development of American capitalism and treated its most capable political leaders (such as Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln) as heroic revolutionaries.[28] The extent to which this settler perspective was left unexamined was evident in the party's naming of its youth wing 'Young Pioneers'.[29] In a more subtle way, the focus on the necessity of building a united and interracial class struggle could produce sympathetic evaluations of assimilationist social science, as when the *Daily Worker* reprinted a Federated Press article anticipating the 'gradual absorption and amalgamation' of proletarianised New York Iroquois with 'the whites'.[30]

Yet the paucity of Native perspectives was an issue of which at least some Communist Party members were conscious and sought to address. An appeal to the *Daily Worker* in 1935 advocated for the production of a pamphlet on 'The Indian Question', suggesting that 'the revolutionary effect of a good analysis of the hardships and sufferings of the Indian minority would be of benefit to the workers and a credit to the Communist Party'.[31] Furthermore, an editor of the *Western Worker* placed an advert in the 20 May 1937 edition, expressing regret that the paper's staff lacked information 'on the rights and problems of the Indians of California'. The editor explained that this ignorance prevented the paper from producing 'an authoritative article on the subject', despite requests from readers for such a study. They nevertheless appealed to more knowledgeable readers for 'cooperation' in remedying this situation, declaring that 'any Indians who wish to write of their problems will find the columns of the *Western Worker* open to them'.[32]

The appeal for more substantial material by and about Indigenous peoples was not fruitful, but articles scattered inconsistently throughout the communist press indicate that the party did recognise the historical and contemporary sufferings of Native Americans. In particular, the CPUSA acknowledged histories of conquest, settlement and dispossession, as well as the contemporary land struggles facing Indigenous Americans, as dispossession continued into the twentieth century. Printed across several March 1937 editions of the *Western Worker*, Ned Dahl's 'working class history of California' mostly dispensed with a progressivist interpretation of European conquest, instead drawing polemical comparisons between historical and contemporary enemies: the Spanish monarchy, he suggested, 'used

https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2025.v10.1.009

the Church in much the same way as Mussolini plans to use it in Ethiopia'.[33] Elsewhere, Dahl emphasised the connection between Christianisation and exploitation, not only concurring with Scottish explorer and author Alexander Forbes that Christianised Indians were equivalent to 'feudal serfs', but also going further to argue that their position was one of de facto enslavement that continued even after California's outlawing of slavery. Underpinning this narrative was a romantic view of Native people as falling from a 'peaceful' condition to one characterised by 'warlike' resistance and 'stiff discipline'. 'Freedom was a thing of the past.'[34]

Dahl's historical overview exploded triumphalist narratives of European conquest and resisted claims that Christianisation resulted in an education in 'the arts of peace and civilization', though it relied somewhat on a commonplace view of pre-conquest Americans as a population of romantic primitives.[35] Dahl was not alone in this regard. Popular Front literature such as Howard Fast's *The Last Frontier*, William Attaway's *Let Me Breathe Thunder* and *Boy of the Border*, a children's story co-written by Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, reproduced 'romantic' images of 'the Native', even as they launched trenchant criticisms of racial hierarchy and the doctrine of Manifest Destiny.[36]

The sharpest revisions of triumphalist American histories therefore came from outside the party. In 1935, the party reprinted a petition from the American Indian Federation (AIF) submitted to the BIA. Described by Laurence M. Hauptman as 'one of the earliest Native American militant efforts', the AIF was ideologically complex and diverse, notoriously encompassing Nazi sympathisers but principally driven by a broad effort to draw together numerous localised Native grievances in a national lobbying campaign against the BIA.[37] The document reflected a thoroughly anticolonial perspective on US history: it described the 'Pilgrim Fathers' as having 'first fell on their knees and then fell on the aborigines' and it detailed the elimination of Native peoples over centuries of white colonisation. The AIF argued that this long eliminationist process had culminated in the establishment of a 'segregated serfdom' under 'the dictatorship of a government bureau'.[38] The party's amplification of such Native perspectives illustrates their openness to a militant Indigenous politics.

Detailed historical narratives of a kind with Dahl's, or even as contained in the AIF document, were not common features in the party press, but similar concerns underpinned the party's sporadic coverage of the ongoing challenges faced, and resisted, by Indigenous people during the interwar period. The *Daily Worker* covered (albeit minimally) the Coolidge administration's withholding of Native land from allotment and highlighted how the government drove Oneida peoples from their land in Wisconsin, in violation of a treaty that had been made when the Oneida were dispossessed of their original land in New York.[39] In 1926, the CPUSA reported on the demands made by 35 Indigenous nations to the Department of Justice for the recovery of their stolen land. They criticised the 'crooked administrations of the federal government' and rooted the modern land struggle in the history of Indigenous dispossession by emphasising that Native people had been 'robbed and defrauded for generations'.[40] Later that same year, the CPUSA covered the story of a Native chief's appeal to Washington for federal relief for his 'starving and poverty stricken' people in Alabama, noting that 'the Alabama Indians originally inhabited wide stretches of land along the Gulf Coast, but have been gradually driven from their holdings by white railroad and oil companies'.[41]

The alignment of private and state interests in opposition to Native land rights was a theme of party reports. The story of the Miller brothers was illustrative of this point. A party correspondent described a legal case brought against the brothers, whose father leased land from the Ponca to establish the 101 Ranch, from where they began operating an oil company in 1909. Two of the three brothers, Zack and Joe Miller, were charged with conspiracy to defraud the government of Indigenous land after they deceived the Ponca into selling 10,000 acres. The brothers were found to have deceived indebted Ponca into signing papers that they believed were notes or mortgages, but which were in fact land deeds. The party criticised former Attorney General Daugherty who impeded the investigation and failed to instigate a civil suit to recover the land from the brothers, despite the fact that they pled guilty to the fraud and received only nominal fines on the basis that they would also have the land confiscated.[42] When the state sought justice against crooked businessmen, the party argued, it did so on behalf of the US government and not in defence of Indigenous land rights.

As the Depression wrought widespread financial ruin, the CPUSA's attentiveness to Indigenous struggles expanded beyond the issues of land dispossession. The *Daily Worker* escalated its coverage of insufficient relief for the jobless and reported on hunger among workers. As it did so, coverage of deteriorating conditions in Indigenous communities grew.[43] Indeed, reports on Indigenous deprivation suggested a recognition of the distinctiveness of their oppression. In 1930, for instance, the *Daily Worker*

https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2025.v10.1.009

reported that 'the economic crisis in Wisconsin which has affected the workers and poor farmers has also hit doubly hard the thousands of Indians in this state'.[44] The formulation here indicated that Indigenous people suffered some special deprivations and vulnerabilities within US capitalism, echoing a Leninist trope wherein non-class modes of domination were described as multipliers of oppression.[45]

This recognition that Indigenous Americans suffered a specific and severe form of oppression was not isolated. The *Daily Worker*'s most detailed article on the hunger experienced by Indigenous groups connected the plight of Indigenous peoples with the fact that, as unemployment rose and workers took wage cuts, Indigenous Americans and Filipino colonial subjects were being driven from agricultural employment by whites. Comparing infant mortality rates across 'races', the article observed that 'Indians' suffered higher death rates than even 'Mexicans' or 'Negroes'.[46] Elsewhere, the party reported on the starvation of Sioux children, noting that 'all the doctors attending Indian cases say that they are suffering from malnourishment due to lack of food'.[47] Such reports helped to situate Native people as constituting a specially oppressed racial minority. Party journals did not explicitly detail the historic resonances of such struggles with the genocidal violence of settler-colonialism: food insecurity was, after all, familiar to populations who could recall the mass slaughter of buffalo in the nineteenth century, which deprived bison-reliant Indigenous groups of the means of life, opened their land for settlement and permanently de-developed their nations.[48] However, the publication of a cartoon depicting Columbus standing over a malnourished person with the caption, 'me thinks the natives have gotten a little thinner than the last time I was here' indicates some recognition that contemporary Indigenous food and economic insecurity resulted not only from Depression-era conditions, but also from a longer history of settler-colonial violence and dispossession.[49]

Indigenous communists

In the interwar era, the CPUSA thus recognised two central goals of the settler-colonial project – land acquisition and the expropriation of resources – and had some understanding that the Native struggle for land sovereignty was both historic and ongoing. However, the party was less attentive to the structural operation of settler-colonialism through eliminatory policies of assimilation: they reported on cases of Native dispossession, but neglected to recognise the magnitude of the Indian Citizenship Act passed at the same time.[50] The CPUSA's failure to cover this legislative development in its publications, or acknowledge the activism of Native groups on the matter, demonstrates that despite its understanding of conquest, settlement and dispossession, the party's practical remoteness from Indigenous peoples and their struggles left significant ambiguities around the issue of Indigenous sovereignty. In particular, the party's programmatic commitments to Indigenous people remained unclear. The relative remoteness of the party from Indigenous communities did not, however, mean that Indigenous voices were absent from communist spaces. Indeed, the party celebrated Native participation, while their programmatic ambiguity may have been enhanced by the diversity of attitudes to issues such as citizenship among Indigenous people themselves.

Party journals sought to give voice to discontented Indigenous readers, and when they did so, they did not always provide editorial commentaries that clarified the party's position. A letter from a Native person in Oroville, for instance, was printed alongside the request for more material on issues surrounding Native rights mentioned above. The letter writer asked that the *Western Worker* lend its resources to demand that the government finally make good on 'the money [it] promised' in its treaties with Indigenous peoples. The writer was specifically animated against the BIA, whose liberal head John Collier they suspected of being part of a conspiracy to financially leech off the Indians while 'trying to railroad the Indians to reservations'.[51] The correspondent's hostility to reservation life, and the Indian New Deal's version of Native sovereignty, may imply a partial acceptance of previous assimilationist policies, though might equally reflect a simple discontent with the impoverished conditions in the reservations and opposition to state coercion. Either way, the editors offered no elaboration on the party's attitude to the IRA and its structures for tribal governance.

The outline of a CPUSA policy on Indigenous sovereignty might be glimpsed in an article by non-Native Communist Party member Irvin Kreitzburg. Writing in 1932, Kreitzburg seemed to take for granted that Native Americans constituted a 'national minority' with associated rights to cultural autonomy, of a kind with French Canadians and – in a more original argument – Mexican Americans in the Southwest.[52] An appeal by a Native Party member shortly followed: Joe Manzanares, a Communist

Party activist in San Francisco who identified himself as an Indian, issued an appeal to fellow Indigenous readers of the *Western Worker*. The appeal characterised European settlement of Turtle Island as a crime committed by 'white bosses' who stole the land of the Indigenous people, refused them citizenship, 'locked [them] up in parks or reservations' and continued to steal their natural resources so that 'soon we will die of poverty'.[53] Manzanares's appeal made no specific programmatic commitment around Indigenous sovereignty, but insisted that the communists were the only party 'leading the fight of all races for freedom and equality' by bringing together 'Negroes, Mexicans and foreign-born workers' in a struggle for 'a workers' and farmers' government'.[54]

Manzanares's appeal echoed an earlier call for Native Americans to join the party, which centred around their dispossession at the hands of 'the white bosses', as well as a letter written to the *Daily Worker* by a Native worker whose land had been stolen and who had subsequently joined the Unemployed Council to 'fight with my fellow workers the bosses who stole the land from me and the rest of the workers of this country'.[55] These appeals track with the tendency in other reports on Indian affairs, in squaring a recognition of settler violence and dispossession with a framing of contemporary Indian affairs as a problem of racial discrimination and governmental neglect. Such an approach facilitated interracial solidarity around campaigns for expanded state welfare and racial equality, but skirted questions of cultural autonomy and political rights to sovereignty.

While the political status of Native Americans and their broad political advocacy and mobilisation was neglected in CPUSA coverage, the party celebrated Indigenous people who joined the party or built alliances with it. In 1931, William Z. Foster defined the success of attempts to 'Americanize' the CPUSA as 'winning the native born workers to its organisation and program of struggle'. He highlighted the influx of white Americans and emphasised that the party had begun to recruit African Americans and young people of Mexican heritage. Notably, he also detailed Indigenous participation:

> And speaking of Americans joining our movement – why in Oklahoma even many Indians are taking an active part in the local TUUL struggles and are distinguishing themselves for their militancy. Yes, and not long since, at one of my meetings, noticing a full-blooded Indian present, I asked him the name of his tribe. He said he was a Comanche and declared enthusiastically his support of the TUUL.[56]

The party's celebration of Native participation was therefore framed as a success of their 'Americanization' campaign, with Indigenous Americans designated as 'real fighting red[s]', 'real red red[s]', 'the most genuine of Americans', 'first Americans' and '100% Americans'.[57]

Such language took on a different resonance following the turn to Popular Frontism in 1935, after which the communists took an increasingly patriotic stance famously heralded by Earl Browder's slogan that 'Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism'. Even before 1935, though, the party press played host to discussions of 'true' Americanism.[58] One notable contributor was Vincent Spotted Eagle. Writing to the *Western Worker* in March 1934, Spotted Eagle offered a rejoinder to a speech made by Upton Sinclair in Pasadena as part of his gubernatorial campaign called 'End Poverty in California' (EPIC). In the speech, Sinclair had rejected 'Communism[,] because it is un-American'. Spotted Eagle's response was to observe that, as 'an American Indian' he was 'more American than [Sinclair] ever thought of being'. 'American Indians', Spotted Eagle wrote, 'are 100% Americans', whereas Sinclair and other whites were 'original products of Europe'. So, too, was the capitalist 'mode of production and distribution' a European invention with no autochthonous base in the Americas.[59]

Spotted Eagle imagined communism as a restoration of pre-Columbian social relations, arguing that 'before the white man came, our mode of production and distribution were on a cooperative basis, without any exploitation. 'This,' he said, in a remarkable anticipation of Browder's later slogan, 'is Communism, which is true Americanism.'[60] Spotted Eagle thereby identified Sinclair's reformist programme as a mode of settler socialism, founded on a denial of Indigenous realities. His appropriation of the term '100% American' fits into a pattern of Indigenous discursive practices in this era, but his repurposing of it as a way of championing communism marks Spotted Eagle's intervention as a rare and important one for the history of Indigenous radicalism. Whereas Popular Frontist Americanism often emphasised CPUSA loyalty to the US settler state, however, Spotted Eagle's communist Americanism is an anticolonial and revolutionary revelation that exposes the settler character of the US state and US capitalism. His reframing of Americanism facilitates an Indigenising communisation of land and other resources, even if it doesn't make any direct claim to Native sovereignty.

https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2025.v10.1.009

Vincent Spotted Eagle was not the only member of his family whose communist sympathies are evident in the archives of the party press. Another member of the Spotted Eagle family, who signed a letter to the *Western Worker* using his non-Native name Albert F. Gray, described a recent correspondence with his brother Raymond. Having expressed hostility to Albert's communism due to the party's apparent atheism, Raymond was convinced to join the party after Albert sent him a selection of communist pamphlets. Shortly afterwards, Albert reports that he read in the *Daily Worker* of Raymond F. Gray announcing his candidacy on behalf of the CPUSA in Montana for a seat in the US Senate.[61] Raymond F. Gray was a leader of the Landless Indians of Montana and went on to compile oral histories of the Cree nation for the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The story of this Chippewa family – landless in part due to the enforcement of a border between the US and Canada, and drawn for a time into the orbit of world communism – tells a rich story about Indigenous political radicalism in twentieth-century North America.[62] Dispossessed in the process of nation-state demarcation, and forced into a condition of impoverished transnational mobility, the Grays engaged with communism as an extension of their efforts to resist colonial injuries. As they did so, they imbued it with novel anticolonial meanings, drawn from their collective memory of a non-capitalist, and non-Western, social order.

Yet the Spotted Eagle brothers were not the most visible Indigenous members of the Communist Party. The CPUSA celebrated one Native member, Chief Thundervoice, more than any other. Little of the published information on Thundervoice appears reliable: certainly, he was a New Yorker and the *Daily Worker* reported that he was a member of the 'Iroquois Indian Tribe', though the Iroquois were not a tribal group.[63] This description of Thundervoice's national affiliation was nevertheless repeated across reports on his activity (which appeared regularly in 1930) and suggests naivety about Native American nations among the *Daily Worker* editors.[64] The party's ignorance was further evidenced when it referred to Thundervoice as the leader of the Iroquois Confederation: the Confederation (properly called Haudenosaunee) does not have a single leader, but each constitutive nation sends a leader to represent their interests at meetings.[65] Native governing structures were seemingly unfamiliar to the New York communists, while the reason for Thundervoice's deception is unclear. The ambiguity surrounding Thundervoice's identity, combined with the party's acceptance of his claim to Indigeneity amid its efforts to 'Americanize' may reflect the phenomenon of 'playing Indian', identified by Philip J. Deloria, whereby non-Native people appropriate aspects of Native American culture, or its imagined forms, including clothing, to construct various identities and promote political agendas.[66]

As May Day strikes and demonstrations approached in 1930, the CPUSA appealed to 'all races' to strike on 1 May, specifying that 'Negro and white workers stand side by side against discrimination and exploitation'.[67] Nevertheless, the party emphasised the participation of some Indigenous Americans as the demonstration neared, reporting that Chief Thundervoice would appear in 'full tribal costume'.[68] Photographed being held above the crowd at the demonstration, and wearing Native clothing, Thundervoice asserted cultural autonomy within Leftist political spaces and repudiated forced assimilation, which had historically mandated the removal of tribal clothing from Native children in boarding school systems.[69] Thundervoice does not appear, in this instance, to have spoken on specific Native struggles and the CPUSA reported that he 'called upon all workers to unite in the struggle against the exploiters and for the establishment of a workers' government'.[70] However, by wearing Native clothing, Thundervoice not only asserted a cultural pluralism which included Indigenous peoples within Leftist politics, but strategically asserted the right of Native peoples to continue their cultural practices even as they also exercised citizenship rights within the USA. His visibility brought key issues of cultural autonomy and Native citizenship to the metropolitan Leftist milieu.

This autonomy was further emphasised when Thundervoice spoke at the state nominating convention of the CPUSA at the end of May. In the lead up to the convention, the party anticipated the presence of Native delegates and took the opportunity to discuss Native issues, emphasising the government's failure to adhere to treaties and discussing a process of Native proletarianisation, as they were forced to abandon agricultural practices and move into waged industrial work at the bottom of the racially hierarchised labour market.[71] Thundervoice formed part of the delegation and was pictured wearing traditional clothing once again. In the photograph, he stood alongside a white party member, a Chinese party member and the party's leading Black member, James Ford (Figure 1). The photograph evidenced the communists' unique appeal as a multiracial party committed to an expansive politics of liberation.[72] The party's multiracialism was, according to Vincent Spotted Eagle, attractive to Native people's revolutionary universalism: 'American Indians,' he wrote, are 'lovers of all humanity, especially the Negroes, who are the most exploited race in this country.'[73]

https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2025.v10.1.009

Figure 1. Clipping from the *Daily Worker*, 3 June 1930, p. 3. Thundervoice is second from the right. On the far right is James W. Ford, communist candidate for Vice-president. On the left are Li, a Chinese communist, and Mills, a white organiser from Buffalo, New York. Mills is described as being 'not nearly so American' as Thundervoice

No Race Prejudice Among Communists

A group of Communists who attended the State Ratification Convention at Schenectady. From left to right: Comrade Li, Chinese; Comrade Mills, district organizer of the Communist Party at Buffalo, a white American but not nearly so American as the next, who is Comrade Thundervoice, chief of the Iroquois Indian tribe; and, on the right, a Negro comrade, J. W. Ford.

Thundervoice's visibility in the party press was therefore emblematic of its status as the vanguard of antiracist and anticolonial activism, though when Thundervoice addressed meetings, he was not reported to have discussed Indigenous rights to sovereignty. He was instead concerned with aligning the Indigenous experiences of hunger and land dispossession with the broader Depression-era struggles facing the working class:

> Didn't find any bombs or even a tomahawk! Wish I'd brought my tomahawk. Might have done a little scalping! Talk about a free country! We're free to starve. I've worked in factories. We Indians cannot live on the land we have. Now the Snell Bill is proposed to take away what little we have left. Capitalism is robbery. We are all workers and all workers are robbed.[74]

Thundervoice's reference to tomahawks and scalping seems to deliberately invoke romanticised and brutal imagery closely associated with Native Americans in non-Native imaginaries. Together with the misreporting of Thundervoice's national affiliation and his photogenic donning of Native dress, this suggests that the effort to make Native Americans visible in the party relied in part on their adherence to stereotypes that were familiar, romantic and perhaps comforting to non-Native members. The distinction between the exercise of Native cultural autonomy in a multiracial movement and redface spectacle designed to cater to non-Native audiences is blurry in Thundervoice's performances. Even so, he endured police harassment ('the only one searched') to participate in the conference and used his platform to avow that 'we're all proletarians, pale faces and Indians alike'.[75]

https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2025.v10.1.009

Indigenising the Popular Front

This spirit of unity did not manifest among a few Native individuals but across a range of local mass struggles that brought Native and non-Native people together to demand improvements in their living conditions, especially during the Depression. As unemployment rose dramatically in the early 1930s, a newly formed communist front group, the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL), played a key role in organising the jobless. The initial wave of laid-off workers faced job scarcity and inadequate government relief, leading the CPUSA to work via the TUUL to mobilise these workers in unemployed councils. These groups of unemployed workers marched and demonstrated across the USA, making demands for government action to provide adequate relief and to alleviate unemployment.[76] Some Native Americans participated in these protests; Native people were reported to have attended the National Hunger March alongside thousands of demonstrators and the Seattle delegation, comprising just four people, included a Native American.[77] One Native protestor sought to promote the party's national publication, advertising what they believed to be the *Daily Worker*, though it was in fact the party's Yiddish newspaper.[78]

Native participation in the broader protest culture of the Depression years was a response to deliberate efforts by the Left to engage with them. The United Front Hunger March Committee urged Indigenous Americans in Montana 'to hold meetings, tribe by tribe, and elect official representatives of their tribe' to send to a state-wide demonstration of the unemployed. In Wisconsin, a similar demonstration included a delegation of 25 Winnebago people, who joined over 1,200 workers and farmers to present demands for relief. Their participation may or may not have been a result of direct appeals, but the demonstration presented 'special demands' for the Winnebago. The potency of the solidarity between the Indigenous group and the other workers and farmers became evident when assemblymen initially denied the Winnebago relief because they 'were not citizens' and the other workers forced concessions to be made to the Native group.[79] Thus, Native Americans responded positively to invitations to join Leftist political spaces and the alliances they made with non-Native workers and farmers proved effective at extracting concessions from state institutions.

As well as inviting Native Americans to join their protests and encouraging non-Native workers and farmers to support Native demands, the communists facilitated exercises of Native political agency as part of their united front. More work remains to be done to establish just how deep and extensive Native participation in the Popular Front was, and to what extent such instances produced an Indigenisation of the Popular Front's structures, but there is ample evidence of CPUSA-affiliated relief drives and unemployement councils on Indigenous reservations through the Depression years. Benjamin Balthaser argues that the archives of the party's West Coast publications demonstrate 'greater participation and involvement between Native communities and the Far Left than is usually granted' and this picture is sustained elsewhere in the party press, which certainly testifies to similar patterns in the Midwest region.[80]

One of the starkest demonstrations of Native participation in Popular Front protest came from Minnesota in 1934, where a farmer correspondent reported that hundreds of Indigenous workers had organised into five workers' councils across the White Earth reservation.[81] The article detailed the specific demands the White Earth Band were organising to achieve: full annual payment from tribal funds, rather than the reduced amount; no discrimination in the awarding of National Recovery Administration jobs; more relief; the right to hunt, fish and trap without licence; and protection of Rice Lake.[82] A representative from the Bemidji Unemployement Council, as well as one from the United Farmers' League, spoke to the White Earth workers at various meetings as they organised their own councils across the reservation. The tenor of their interventions, focused on class-struggle interracialism, was summarised by this comment from the United Farmers' League representative: 'the poor farmers and workers, both black and white are with you in struggle against our common enemy, the capitalist class, the class that robs all workers'.[83] While the emphasis of this activist was evidently on class politics and united struggle, the fact that the councils were organised and run by White Earth people on their reservation evidences the exercise of Native political agency within CPUSA organisational frameworks and suggests the emergence of a more thoroughly Indigenised movement than is often accounted for.

The efforts of the Left to aid the organisation of Indigenous Americans were further evident in South Dakota, where Native people in Veblen organised 'to protect their interests as a national minority' by demanding an end to the maladministration of relief and the forced removal of Indigenous people from their allotted land. Chris Westerman, one of the Native leaders, insisted that 'Indians who become citizens' were being denied relief both by the Indian Office and 'regular relief agencies' and was

https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2025.v10.1.009

supported in his demands by a speaker from the United Farmers' League.[84] Similarly, in Washington, white workers supported Indigenous Americans from the Tulalip Reservation in organising their fight for better conditions. With the support of their 'white neighbours', the Tulalip people gained concessions from the Indian agent and organised 26 members under the name 'The Tulalip Indian Relief Workers'.[85] Across the country, the party supported Indigenous activism and sought to provide a bridge for Native self-organisation with their own interracial class-struggle movement.

In several instances, party reports highlighted the specific vulnerability of Native people to state harassment and extra-legal violence – phenomena whose entwinement with the enforcement of racial hierarchy has been examined in a rich historical and theoretical scholarship.[86] One especially stark and poetic note on this theme condensed much that was typical of Leftist engagements with Indigenous Americans in this period. An anonymous correspondent told of their imprisonment during a strike in Flint city jail, Michigan, where their cellmate was 'an Indian Chief, / His name John Thunder of the Ottawas'. Descended from dispossessed Natives, Thunder had recently lost a job at a Buick plant and had his children taken to 'the asylum'. Drowning his sorrows at a saloon, the Ottawa chief 'fought a Ku Kluxer / And beat up the 100 per cent American'. He spent the subsequent hours in jail mourning his people's lost past: 'the Buffalo days when food was shared by all / When no one was hungry and there were no rich'. Unable to write, the chief asked his communist cellmate to 'write and tell you his tale' so that more might 'remember the deep wrongs of the Indian'. As a parting gift, the writer gave the chief 'a pamphlet by Lenin'.[87] The sincere concern of the author to capture the voice, history and ongoing struggle of the Ottawa people is evident in the verse, though so too is their elegiac romanticisation of the Ottawa's ostensibly lost communal spirit. The closing line, however, proposes Leninism as a route to a Native modernity. If John Thunder sought that path, he would have been in a minority among his people – but he would have been far from alone.

Conclusion

The history of US communism continues to be debated in a scholarship marked, according to Alan Wald, by the routine smoothing of contradictions to help preserve entrenched commitments (anti-communist, feminist and so on).[88] The attempt made in this article has been to curate and comment on an archive of communist engagements with American Indigeneity in a way that lays bare contradictions that have been unremarked on in many valuable volumes on the history of communism in the USA. These contradictions are described using the concept of 'settler memory', which helps us to understand how the archive of the interwar CPUSA can simultaneously make visible Indigenous life and history, while also minimising and obscuring them at different moments. Through this lens, the party's legacy is certainly rendered problematic, though it is not equivalent to a simple erasure or forgetting.

The effort to enlist Indigenous people in the struggle for an American socialism has been a neglected facet of the CPUSA's campaigning through this period. Their successes were limited, but the presence of Chief Thundervoice and Vincent Spotted Eagle in the ranks of the party and the participation of Native communities in Popular Front actions from Minnesota to Washington should make it harder to sustain the argument that the Old Left was uninterested in, and irrelevant to, Native resistance. Long before the occupation of Wounded Knee, non-Native American Leftists not only wrote about Native Americans, but sought to forge solidarity with them and, in numerous locales, they succeeded in doing so.

Meanwhile, the party's materials testify to a persistent ignorance about essential aspects of Native life and politics and demonstrate the difficulty of preserving a progressivist view of history while attending to the human resilience and social realities of Indigenous life. Party members participated in the ahistorical romanticisation of Native people, even as they also provided space for expressions of cultural autonomy and yielded resources for Indigenous campaigning. These tensions in the party's relationship to US settler-colonial structures persisted, and they continued to be politically impactful, not only in the CPUSA's failure to build a durable Indigenous base over subsequent decades, but in its members' willingness to endorse a new settler-colonial enterprise (Israel) in 1947. The failure of the party's anticolonial vision following the Second World War only compounded a previously established subordination of anticolonial struggles to maintain a cross-class and inter-imperial anti-fascist crusade through much of the 1930s and 1940s. This aspect of Popular Front policy operated as a quiet barrier to more thoroughgoing efforts atdecolonialisation.

https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2025.v10.1.009

As the contemporary US-American Left is itself preoccupied with resisting a far-right government that increasingly resembles classical fascism, while confronting a new era of colonial violence globally, this history will necessarily be revisited. What it offers is not a simple template to be copied, nor a terrible demon to be expunged, but a halting effort to forge an unlikely unity from disparate struggles. Viewed in this way, the party's inadequacies can be perceived clearly, while the scope of its initiative becomes more impressive. Engaging with this history amid a new forward march of revanchist nationalism, it is incumbent upon us to make explicit the question that underlay the debates about Americanism outlined above: what would it mean – and what might it take – to let America be Turtle Island again?

Notes

1 Bruyneel, 'Creolizing collective memory'.

2 On Popular Front culture, see Denning, *The Cultural Front*.

3 Hughes, *Collected Poems*, 189–90.

4 On these terms, see Byrd, 'Weather with you'.

5 Bruyneel, 'Creolizing collective memory', 38.

6 Bruyneel, 'Creolizing collective memory', 42–3.

7 Cahill, 'Our democracy and the American Indian', 42; Heath, 'The Citizenship Act of 1924'.

8 Mirabel, '"I want to be free" (1920)', 67.

9 Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, 160–1. Byrd characterises the Indian New Deal as creating a sovereignty that operated like a colonial state of exception (p. 194). On criteria for Indianness, see Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell*, ch. 4.

10 Nelson, '"If we have the land, we have everything" (1934)', 99. On Indigenous opposition to the IRA, see Deloria Jr. and Lytle, *The Nations Within*, ch. 10.

11 Hämäläinen, *Lakota America*, 384.

12 On Native efforts to overturn the IRA, see Philp, *Termination Revisited*.

13 Barrett, 'Rethinking the Popular Front'.

14 Barrett, 'Rethinking the Popular Front'; Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*; Naison, *Communists in Harlem*; Weigand, *Red Feminism*; McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*; Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*; Stevens, *Red International and Black Caribbean*.

15 Pepper, 'Problems of the Party IV: Be American!', *The Worker*, 26 May 1923, 5.

16 Zumoff, 'Americanization'.

17 '"Personality" in writing', *Daily Worker*, 2 August 1933, 6.

18 An overview of this transnational process is found in Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*. See also Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*; Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*; Stevens, *Red International and Black Caribbean*; McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*; Naison, *Communists in Harlem*.

19 James, 'The revolutionary answer to the Negro problem'; Jones, 'An end to the neglect of the problems of the Negro woman'; Tenayuca and Brooks, 'The Mexican question in the Southwest'.

20 Hunt, 'How new was the New Left?'.

21 Churchill, 'Introduction', 4. Cobb, *Native Activism*, has situated the American Indian Movement 'within a larger context of Native political action' that decentres conventional militant protest tactics such as direct action (p. 2). He addresses only the post-Second World War era, however. Smith, *Hippies, Indians*, has insisted on the importance of the 1960s as a decade in which Native activists won new allies and references occasional convergences between Black, Mexican and Native campaigns before then, but minimises the significance of this longer history of alliance-building (pp. 4, 9–10). More recently, Hitchmough and Mays, *Rethinking the Red Power Movement*, have presented a continuous chronology of Indigenous resistance in the twentieth century, though they insist that the mid-1940s marked a new convergence of forces that produced Red Power (ch. 1). The excellent history of Native activism by Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future*, offers no account of Indigenous encounters with the wider US Left until the classic Red Power era. The picture is similar in histories of the US Left: Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States*, makes only one reference to Native Americans as activists, doing so in a chapter on the New Left and treating them as partially excepted from the era's multiple revolutionary nationalisms (p. 255).

22 Mariategui's significance is discussed at length in Peter Morgan, 'Navigating the twilight of cosmopolitan Marxism', in this special issue. On Vancouver syndicalism, see Shantz, 'Bows and arrows'. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for drawing our attention to this piece.

23 Costaguta, *Workers of All Colors Unite*, 147–50.

https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2025.v10.1.009

24 Balthaser, *Anti-imperialist Modernisms*, ch. 2; Balthaser, 'New Deal settler colonialism'; Sine, *Rebel Imaginaries*, ch. 6.

25 On the evolution of Marx's thought on colonialism, see Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*.

26 See, for instance, Hugo Oehler, 'The Negro and the class struggle', *The Militant*, April–May 1932.

27 Getachew, 'Democracy and empire: An introduction', xxxiv.

28 'These men, in their own time, faced the issues of the day, cut through the red tape of legalism and constitutionalism with a sword, made revolutions, killed off a dying and outworn system and opened a new chapter in world history': Earl Browder, 'What is communism?: Americanism – who are the Americans?', *New Masses*, 25 June 1935, 13–15.

29 See Mishler, *Raising Reds*. The organisation nevertheless proudly boasted about its Native members (p. 48).

30 'Redskins leaving reservation to live like wage slaves', *Daily Worker*, 29 May 1924, 1.

31 'Suggests pamphlet on Indian question', *Daily Worker*, 6 February 1935, 6.

32 'Seek article on problems of Indians', *Western Worker*, 20 May 1937, 5.

33 Ned Dahl, 'Working class history of California', *Western Worker*, 8 March 1937, 2.

34 Ned Dahl, 'California: A working class history', *Western Worker*, 11 March 1937, 7.

35 Ned Dahl, 'Working class history of California', *Western Worker*, 8 March 1937, 2.

36 See Balthaser, *Anti-imperialist Modernisms*, 94; and Walsh, *Frontiers of Black Freedom*.

37 Hauptman, 'The American Indian Federation and the Indian New Deal', 379.

38 'Indians send sharp protest to Congress', *Daily Worker*, 12 January 1935, 5.

39 'Government allows Indian timber sale', *Daily Worker*, 8 May 1924, 1; 'Government breaks treaty not to tax Indians: Takes land', *Daily Worker*, 22 December 1932, 1.

40 'Indian tribes demand stolen reservations be returned to them', *Daily Worker*, 6 August 1926, 5.

41 'Indians destitute', *Daily Worker*, 22 February 1928, p. 2.

42 Fields, 'The Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch Real Wild West', 443; 'Daugherty shielded Miller brothers in $500,000 land fraud', *Daily Worker*, 2 April 1924, 1; 'Daugherty "studied" case of land robbers; fired investigators', *Daily Worker*, 4 April 1924, 2.

43 See, for instance, 'Five cents a day relief to reservation Indians', *Daily Worker*, 19 February 1934, 3. *The Daily Worker* published limited coverage of conditions in Indigenous communities from 1924–9. There is an intense concentration of sources from 1930–5, with reports of conditions often accompanying reports of Indigenous participation in wider protest politics. Few sources exist from the latter half of the 1930s, as *The Daily Worker* archive is limited for this period, though coverage is continuous in the *Western Worker*.

44 'Wisconsin Indians hard hit by crisis', *Daily Worker*, 7 November 1930, 2.

45 Lenin uses this formulation, for instance, to describe 'the double or triple exploitation of small nations': Lenin, *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, 180.

46 Anne Alden, 'California Indians are starving, hundreds dying of disease', *Daily Worker*, 14 November 1931, 4.

47 'Indian children starve to death in Santee, Neb', *Daily Worker*, 26 December 1931, 3.

48 Hubbard, 'Buffalo genocide in nineteenth-century North America'; Feir, Gillezeau and Jones, 'The slaughter of the bison and reversal of fortunes on the Great Plains'.

49 Burck, 'Columbus rediscovers America', *Daily Worker*, 12 October 1932, 4.

50 Patrick Wolfe defines settler-colonialism as a land-centred project that deploys assimilation as a tool of elimination. Wolfe, 'Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native'.

51 'Denied money promised by US treaties', *Western Worker*, 20 May 1937, 5; 'Indians fight removal to poor location', *Western Worker*, 20 May 1937, 5.

52 Irvin Kreitzberg, 'For a decisive turn in our Mexican work and the creation of a Mexican department to concentrate on the South-West', *Western Worker*, 1 July 1932, 6.

53 Joe Manzanares, 'Indian calls on all minority races to join Communist Party', *Western Worker*, 15 July 1932, 4.

54 Joe Manzanares, 'Indian calls on all minority races to join Communist Party', *Western Worker*, 15 July 1932, 4.

55 'Calls upon Indians to join communists', *Western Worker*, 15 June 1932, 4; Indian worker, 'Indian is cheated of land', *Daily Worker*, 14 February 1931, 3.

56 William Z. Foster, 'The Americanization of the party', *Daily Worker*, 18 February 1931, 4.

57 '"From out of the West"', *Daily Worker*, 24 May 1930, 1; Jorge, 'Red sparks', *Daily Worker*, 30 December 1931, 4; 'Communist campaign in election to fight for release of prisoners', *Daily Worker,* 27 May 1930, 1; 'Indian tribe takes part', *Daily Worker*, 1 May 1930, 1; Vincent Spotted Eagle, 'Indian tells Upton Sinclair one [*sic*], and why he joined C.P.', *Western Worker*, 19 March 1934, 6.

58 Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States*, ch. 5.

https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2025.v10.1.009

59 Vincent Spotted Eagle, 'Indian tells Upton Sinclair one [*sic*], and why he joined the C.P.', *Western Worker*, 19 March 1934, 6.

60 Vincent Spotted Eagle, 'Indian tells Upton Sinclair one [*sic*], and why he joined the C.P.', *Western Worker*, 19 March 1934, 6.

61 Albert F. Gray, 'American Indians in the Communist Party', *Western Worker*, 18 November 1934, 3.

62 Much of this information is collected in a document by Lawrence Barkwell ('Raymond Francis Gray: Métis rights advocate'), coordinator of Métis Heritage and History Research at the Louis Riel Institute. Additional clarifications on Gray's biography were provided by Heather Mulliner from Montana State University Archives in private correspondence with Owen Walsh on 20 February 2024.

63 'Indian tribe takes part', *Daily Worker*, 1 May 1930, 1.

64 Wallace, 'The Iroquois', 15.

65 'Schenectady meet Sunday to nominate', *Daily Worker*, 22 May 1930, 1.

66 Deloria, *Playing Indian*.

67 'All races strike May 1', *Daily Worker*, 21 April 1930, 5.

68 'Indian tribe takes part', *Daily Worker*, 1 May 1930, 1.

69 'On with the fight of March 6 and May 1!', *Daily Worker*, 7 May 1930, 1; Nichols, *American Indians in US History*, 154.

70 'On with the fight of March 6 and May 1!', *Daily Worker*, 7 May 1930, 1.

71 'Schenectady meet Sunday to nominate', *Daily Worker*, 22 May 1930, 1.

72 'No race prejudice among communists', *Daily Worker*, 3 June 1930, 3.

73 'Schenectady meet Sunday to nominate', *Daily Worker*, 22 May 1930, 1.

74 'Communist campaign in election to fight for release of prisoners', *Daily Worker*, 27 May 1930, 1.

75 'Communist campaign in election to fight for release of prisoners', *Daily Worker*, 27 May 1930, 1. Interestingly, Thundervoice regarded the shared experience of military service in the First World War as the crucible of proletarianisation: 'we shed our blood and gave our lives on the fields of France'. On Native attitudes to the First World War, see Rozier, *Serving Their Country*, ch. 2.

76 Leab, '"United we eat"', 301–2, 305.

77 'Washington to Washington', *Daily Worker*, 23 November 1931, 3.

78 Jorge, 'Red sparks', *Daily Worker*, 30 December 1931, 4.

79 'Indian tribes to send delegates with jobless in Montana state march', *Daily Worker*, 29 December 1932, 1; 'Get concessions for jobless in Wisconsin march', *Daily Worker*, 22 June 1933, 2.

80 Balthaser, *Anti-imperialist Modernisms*, 96.

81 'Indian workers organize fight on gov't robbery', *Daily Worker*, 11 January 1934, 4.

82 'Indian workers organize fight on gov't robbery', *Daily Worker*, 11 January 1934, 4.

83 'Indian workers organize fight on gov't robbery', *Daily Worker*, 11 January 1934, 4.

84 'Dakota Indians fight against discrimination', *Daily Worker*, 18 August 1934, 3.

85 A worker correspondent, 'Indians welcome unity with white workers in fight', *Daily Worker*, 18 June 1934, 4.

86 'Communist campaign in election to fight for release of prisoners', *Daily Worker*, 27 May 1930, 1; 'Buffalo police make arrest of communists', *Daily Worker*, 7 July 1930, 2; 'Original American receives sample of white civilization', *Daily Worker*, 22 October 1926, 5; 'Prison for Indians', *Daily Worker*, 12 May 1930, 1; 'Police try to break meeting near breadline', *Daily Worker*, 21 April 1932, 2; 'Indian jobless leader clubbed', *Daily Worker*, 27 June 1932, 2. On connections between anti-communism and racism, see Burden-Stelly, *Black Scare/Red Scare*; Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare*; Jung, *Menace to Empire*.

87 'Flint city jail, Mich.', *Daily Worker*, 20 January 1934, 9.

88 Wald, 'New histories of the old Left', 116.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

Owen Walsh is co-editor of the special issue *Histories of socialism and Indigeneity* for this journal. All efforts to sufficiently blind the authors during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

References

Anderson, Kevin. *Marx at the Margins: On nationalism, ethnicity, and non-Western societies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Balthaser, Benjamin. *Anti-imperialist Modernisms: Race and transnational radical culture from the Great Depression to the Great War*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015.

Balthaser, Benjamin. 'New Deal settler colonialism, Indigeneity, and the 1930s literary Left', *PMLA* 136, no. 1 (2021): 118–24. [CrossRef]

Barkwell, Lawrence. 'Raymond Francis Gray (1900–1961): Métis rights advocate'. Accessed 10 July 2024. https://www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/11209.Raymond%20Francis%20Gray.pdf.

Barrett, R. James. 'Rethinking the Popular Front', *Rethinking Marxism* 21, no. 4 (2009–10): 531–50. [CrossRef]

Bruyneel, Kevin. 'Creolizing collective memory: Refusing the settler memory of the Reconstruction era', *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (2017): 36–44. [CrossRef]

Buhle, Paul. *Marxism in the United States: A history of the American Left*. London: Verso, 2013.

Burden-Stelly, Charisse. *Black Scare/Red Scare: Theorizing capitalist racism in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023.

Byrd, Jodi. *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous critiques of colonialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Byrd, Jodi. 'Weather with you: Settler colonialism, antiblackness, and the grounded relationalities of existence', *Critical Ethnic Studies* 5, no. 1–2 (2019): 207–14. [CrossRef]

Cahill, Cathleen D. 'Our democracy and the American Indian: Citizenship, sovereignty, and the Native vote in the 1920s', *Journal of Women's History* 32, no. 1 (2020): 41–51. [CrossRef]

Churchill, Ward, 'Introduction'. In *Marxism and Native Americans*, edited by Ward Churchill, 1–16. Boston: South End Press, 1983.

Cobb, Daniel M. *Native Activism in Cold War America: The struggle for sovereignty*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008.

Costaguta, Lorenzo. *Workers of All Colors Unite: Race and the origins of American socialism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2023.

Deloria, Philip J. *Playing Indian*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Deloria, Vine Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle. *The Nations Within: The past and future of American Indian sovereignty*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front: The laboring of American culture in the twentieth century*. London: Verso, 1997.

Ellinghaus, Katherine. *Blood Will Tell: Native Americans and assimilation policy*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017.

Estes, Nick. *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota access pipeline, and the long traditions of Indigenous resistance*. London: Verso, 2019.

Feir, Donn L., Rob Gillezeau and Maggie E.C. Jones. 'The slaughter of the bison and reversal of fortunes on the Great Plains', *Review of Economic Studies* 91 (2024): 1634–70. [CrossRef]

Fields, Alison. 'The Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch Real Wild West', *American Indian Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2012): 443–64. [CrossRef]

Getachew, Adom. 'Democracy and empire: An introduction'. In *W.E.B Du Bois: International Thought*, edited by Adom Getachew and Jennifer Pitts, xv–lvii. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

Hämäläinen, Pekka. *Lakota America: A new history of Indigenous power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019.

Hauptman, Laurence M. 'The American Indian Federation and the Indian New Deal: A reinterpretation', *Pacific Historical Review* 52, no. 4 (1983): 378–402. [CrossRef]

Heath, Joseph. 'The Citizenship Act of 1924: An integral pillar of the colonization and forced assimilation policies of the United States in violation of its treaties', OnondagaNation.org, 7 June 2018. Accessed 11 July 2024. https://www.onondaganation.org/news/2018/the-citizenship-act-of-1924/.

Hitchmough, Sam and Kyle T. Mays. *Rethinking the Red Power Movement*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2024.
Hubbard, Tasha. 'Buffalo genocide in nineteenth-century North America: "Kill, skin, and sell"'. In *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, edited by Andrew Woolford, Jeff Benvenuto and Alexander Laban Hinton, 292–305. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.
Hughes, Langston. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, edited by Arnold Rampersad. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
Hunt, Andrew. 'How new was the New Left?'. In *New Left Revisited*, edited by John Campbell McMillian and Paul Buhle, 139–55. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008.
James, C.L.R. 'The revolutionary answer to the Negro problem', *Fourth International* (December 1948): 242–51.
Jones, Claudia. 'An end to the neglect of the problems of the Negro woman', *Political Affairs* (June 1949).
Jung, Moon-ho. *Menace to Empire: Anticolonial solidarities and the Transpacific origins of the US Security State*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023.
Kelley, Robin D.G. *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama communists during the Great Depression*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.
Leab, Daniel J. '"United we eat": The creation and organization of the unemployed councils in 1930', *Labour History* 8, no. 3 (1967): 300–15. [CrossRef]
Lenin, V.I. *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*. Paris: Foreign Languages Press, 2022.
Makalani, Minkah. *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917–1939*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.
McDuffie, Erik S. *Sojourning for Freedom: Black women, American communism, and the making of Black Left feminism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.
Mirabel, Porfirio. '"I want to be free" (1920)'. In *Say We Are Nations: Documents of politics and protest in Indigenous America since 1887*, edited by Daniel M. Cobb, 39–44. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
Mishler, Paul C. *Raising Reds: The Young Pioneers, the radical summer camps, and communist political culture in the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
Naison, Mark. *Communists in Harlem during the Depression*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005.
Nelson, Fred, '"If we have the land, we have everything" (1934)'. In *Say We Are Nations: Documents of politics and protest in Indigenous America since 1887*, edited by Daniel M. Cobb, 70–74. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
Nichols, Roger L. *American Indians in US History*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003.
Ottanelli, Fraser M. *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991.
Philp, Kenneth R. *Termination Revisited: American Indians on the trail to self-determination, 1933–1953*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008.
Rozier, Paul, *Serving Their Country: American Indian politics and patriotism in the twentieth century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.
Shantz, Jeff. 'Indigenous workers, IWW Local 526, and syndicalism on the Vancouver docks', LibCom (2021). Accessed 22 April 2025. https://libcom.org/article/bows-and-arrows-indigenous-workers-iww-local-526-and-syndicalism-vancouver-docks.
Sine, Elizabeth. *Rebel Imaginaries: Labor, culture and politics in Depression-era California*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021.
Smith, Sherry L. *Hippies, Indians and the Fight for Red Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
Solomon, Mark A. *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917–1936*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998.
Stevens, Margaret. *Red International and Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico and the West Indies, 1919–1939*. London: Pluto Press, 2017.
Tenayuca, Emma and Homer Brooks. 'The Mexican question in the Southwest', *The Communist* (March 1939): 257–68.
Wald, Alan M. 'New histories of the Old Left', *Journal of Labor and Society* 28 (2025): 105–22. [CrossRef]
Wallace, Paul A. W. 'The Iroquois: A brief outline of their story', *Pennsylvania: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 23, no. 1 (January 1956): 15–28.
Walsh, Owen. *Frontiers of Black Freedom: Mapping anti-racist solidarity during the 1930s*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, forthcoming.
Weigand, Kate. *Red Feminism: American communism and the making of women's liberation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

Wolfe, Patrick. 'Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native', *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409. [CrossRef]
Woods, Jeff. *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and anti-communism in the South, 1948–1968*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004.
Zumoff, J.A. 'The Americanization of the American Communist Party in the early 1920s', *Cercles* 19 (2009): 183–95.