

## Robert L Allen, "The Social Context of Black Power"

In the summer of 1966 two events occurred which were to have momentous impact on the black liberation movement. Superficially they appeared unrelated, but both were responses to the oppression of black people in the United States and, in the dialectic of history, they were to become deeply intertwined. The setting for the first event was a hot summer day in Mississippi. James Meredith, the first black man to graduate from the University of Mississippi, had been making his famous "march against fear" through his home state. Joining the march were FBI men, newspaper reporters and photographers, assorted well-wishers, and Stokely Carmichael. It was June.

Carmichael was then new to his post as chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, but he was no stranger to Mississippi. Mississippi was an especially hated symbol of black oppression. Carmichael was intimately acquainted with the economic deprivation and political disenfranchisement which still, despite so-called civil rights legislation, were the central facts of life for the black residents of that state. He knew of Mississippi violence—the violence which struck down Meredith just shortly after his bold journey began. He knew that demonstrations and marches had not, and could not, substantially alter these facts. He and other SNCC staff members had been searching for some other more efficacious and direct means for attacking a monolithic exploitative edifice which seemed impregnable and without moral compunction. They thought they had found a solution in the idea of black political power. Willie Ricks, another SNCC staffer on the Meredith march, reduced this concept to two words: black power. The two words were forcefully expressive and could be used to make a lively chant, as Carmichael and Ricks soon showed.

The news media pounced upon this new slogan. They treated it as a hot item and flashed the chant across the country, much to the consternation of a nervous American public. At that time nobody outside of a handful of people in SNCC could give a rational explanation of what black power meant. But many black people who heard the new expression grasped its essence easily. It related directly to their experience, their lack of power. On the other hand, the mass mind of white America was gripped with fear and horror at the thought that blackness and power could be conjoined.

The second event of concern to us in that summer was much less dramatic, although of equal importance, and its implications were not to become the subject of hysterical debates. In fact, except among insiders who knew better, it was almost a routine occasion. Certainly an address by McGeorge Bundy, president of the multi-million-dollar Ford Foundation, to the annual banquet of the National Urban League in Philadelphia could not be construed as headline-making news. Bundy told the Urban Leaguers that the Ford Foundation, the biggest foundation in the country, had decided to help in the task of achieving "full domestic equality for all American Negroes." This announcement came as no immediate surprise to Bundy's hearers. For some time the foundation had been

involved in efforts to upgrade black higher education, and it had given money to Urban League projects in the field of housing. It was, therefore, logical to think that in time the foundation might expand these efforts.

What the Urban League delegates and the American public did not know was that the gigantic Ford Foundation, which already had fashioned for itself a vanguard role in the neocolonial penetration of the Third World, was on the eve of attempting a similar penetration of the black militant movement. This was the hidden relationship between black power chants in Mississippi and the August meeting in the City of Brotherly Love. Both events represented responses, although with totally different objectives, to the crisis that trapped the black population and to the by then obvious fact that the formal gains won by the civil rights movement had not solved the problem of oppression of the black nation.

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The interrelation of the Ford Foundation and black power cannot be understood without first recalling the social context in which the black freedom movement found itself in the summer of 1966. The main ingredients of this context were: The civil rights phase of the black liberation struggle was drawing to a stalemated conclusion, and, in its wake, followed the urban revolts, sparked by stagnating conditions in the ghettos; new leaders, such as Robert Williams and Malcolm X, who were the cutting edge of an embryonic nationalist movement, had been destroyed before they could organize an effective and continuing cadre of followers; and, finally, the Vietnam war and other developments in the Third World were having an increasing impact on black militant thinking in the United States.

To begin, the traditional southern-based nonviolent civil rights movement had largely ground to a halt and was in its death throes. Innumerable demonstrations and marches in countless cities had drawn thousands upon thousands of black people into hopeful activity. They let themselves be brutalized, beaten, jailed, and killed, following the admonitions of moralizing leaders who told them to "love your enemy" and "turn the other cheek." All of this suffering must surely culminate in freedom some day, the leaders said.

By the summer of 1963, after years of intense struggle and many deaths, it seemed that some dramatic new step must be taken to bring the longed-for freedom a little closer. Grass-roots leaders talked about marching on Washington and shutting that city down until blacks were granted full equality. But this militant sentiment was quickly co-opted by the Kennedy Administration and the liberal labor coalition in the Democratic party, which has long claimed the black vote as its inalienable possession. Thus, the March on Washington, which drew over 250,000 participants, became a summer picnic held in the honor of John Kennedy and his civil rights bill, which blacks were led to believe was the answer to their prayers.

But not all was sweetness and light on that noteworthy day. There was dissent and

grumbling in the wings. John Lewis, then chairman of SNCC, had written a militant speech not in keeping with the harmonious feelings scheduled to be put on public display in the capital. The speech was censored by march organizers. The uncensored version read in part:

In good conscience, we cannot support the Administration's civil rights bill, for it is too little, and too late. There's not one thing in the bill that will protect our people from police brutality. . . . What is in the bill that will protect the homeless and starving people of this nation? What is there in this bill to insure the equality of a maid who cams \$5.00 a week in the home of a family whose income is \$100,000 a year?<sup>1</sup>

Lewis was asking pertinent questions, but these were "outside" the sphere of civil rights and, therefore, were not appropriate areas for federal intervention. The Civil Rights Law that was eventually passed in 1964 required, at least on paper, the ending of racial discrimination in voting procedures, certain areas of public accommodation and public facilities, and some places of employment. It also provided for public school desegregation. The catch, in this and in the 1965 Voting Rights Act, was in enforcement. Blacks who believed that their civil rights had been infringed upon were required to go through lengthy and elaborate procedures to secure redress. Even so, enforcement was slow, sporadic, and largely ineffective. Federal registrars were sent in, occasionally. Some of the worst areas they never reached. The net result of this procrastination was that black people and their leaders were educated to the fact that legislation means nothing without effective enforcement. And enforcement, particularly when legislation flies in the face of social convention or established interests, depends on power. The federal government had the power, but it needed the support of the southern reactionaries who chaired major committees in the Senate and House. Hence, civil rights laws became merely more testimony to the truism that American democracy is subservient to the economic and political interests of those who hold power.

The experience of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party in 1964 provided more confirmation of this fact. Voter registration drives were a central concern of SNCC from 1961 to 1965. At that time SNCC activists thought that voting strength could be used effectively to pressure the national Democratic party—a party that claimed to be the friend of black people. Thus SNCC decided that by creating a parallel political structure in the form of the MFDP, they could then challenge and defeat the racist Mississippi Democratic Party at the national convention in Atlantic City. By pledging their unwavering loyalty to the national slate, which the "regular" delegation did not, the MFDP dissidents believed they could secure the ouster of the racist state delegation and, thereby, record a victory for the democratic process. But the national party, seeking support in the South, decided to employ the vicious weapon of racism once again and

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<sup>1</sup> Joanne Grant (ed.), *Black Protest* (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1968), p. 375.

rebuffed the challengers.<sup>2</sup> This was another bitter but enlightening lesson for the black movement.

The civil rights movement failed not only because of these setbacks but also because even the small victories it won benefited mainly the black middle class, not the bulk of the black poor. Thus blacks who were "qualified" could get jobs. If there were no jobs in industry, there were frequently openings in the anti-poverty programs for those with suitable credentials. After desegregation laws were passed, more affluent blacks could dine at downtown restaurants or take in shows at previously segregated theaters. Those who had the money and the stomach for a fight could even buy homes in formerly all-white suburbs.

In its heyday the integrationist civil rights movement cast an aura which encompassed nearly the whole of the black population, but the black bourgeoisie was the primary beneficiary of that movement. Hence, in 1966, despite eleven years of intense civil rights activity and the new anti-poverty programs, the median income of a black family was only 58 percent of the income of an average white family, and black unemployment still ran twice as high as white unemployment, despite the war-induced prosperity which the country was enjoying. In some categories, conditions were considerably worse. Unemployment among black teen-agers ran at 26 percent. In the Hough area of Cleveland, which experienced a rebellion in 1966 and again in 1968, black unemployment in 1965 ran at 14 percent, only two percentage points below what it was in 1960. Another important indicator, the black subemployment rate, which reflects part-time work, discouraged workers and low-paid workers, was 33 percent in 1966 in the "worst" areas of nine major cities.

The quality of education, despite some gains in the number of years of formal schooling attained, remained low. Thus black students tested out at substantially lower levels than white youths: up to three years' difference in "level of achievement" among twelfth-graders. Residential segregation proved to be the toughest nut for the integrationist movement to crack. In 1966 a survey of twelve cities in which special censuses were taken revealed *increased* rates of segregation in eight of them.

Perhaps the most significant indication of the middleclass nature of the civil rights movement was the fact that it did absolutely nothing to alleviate the grim plight of the poorest segments of the black population. As late as 1968, a group of six doctors found evidence of widespread and long-standing malnutrition and starvation in the rural South. The situation in the cities was little better. A joint 1967 report by the U. R. Bureau of

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<sup>2</sup> The fact that four years later the challengers were seated at the Chicago convention was more indicative of the growing militance of the Afro-American movement than suggestive of any change of heart on the part of national Democrats. In 1964 the MFDP was itself a militant movement, but by 1968, national Democrats viewed the seating of a then comparatively moderate MFDP as a means of discrediting black militants and of proffering to black people the frail hope that electoral politics-under the protective wing of the Democratic party was still a viable means for effecting social change.

Labor Statistics and the Bureau of the Census outlining the social and economic condition of blacks in this country concluded that "perhaps the most distressing evidence presented in this report indicates that conditions are stagnant or deteriorating in the poorest areas." In U.S. cities of one million population or more, the percentage of nonwhite families living in "poverty areas" between 1960 and 1966 remained constant at 34 percent. In New York and Chicago, however, the percentage increased. In Cleveland's Hough district, median family income declined over this same period. In the Watts district of Los Angeles also conditions did not improve.

It is in these figures that one sees clearly the genesis of urban rebellion. For poor blacks, North and South, the civil rights movement accomplished virtually nothing besides raising false hopes. The promised salvation was not forthcoming. An explosion was inevitable.

The explosion began in 1964 with the Harlem rebellion and fourteen other urban revolts. City after city was shaken as the conflagration spread across the country in subsequent "long hot summers." The rebellions were almost entirely spontaneous and unorganized eruptions, but they had an underlying drive, a basic logic: Most of the attacks and looting were directed against the property of white merchants who exploit the black community. This was the pattern in Harlem and a year later in the Los Angeles revolt. Black people were in a sense "reclaiming" the merchandise which had been stolen from them in the form of underpaid labor and exploitative prices.

By their actions the black "rioters"-who by no means were an insignificant minority-were vigorously repudiating the civil rights Negro leaders. They were calling for new leadership willing to confront head-on the problems arising from oppression and powerlessness, and who could speak to the needs of the majority of the black masses.

[cut section about Robert F. Williams]

Malcolm, the ideological father of the black power movement and one man to whom Harlem's angry masses looked for new leadership, was killed just fifty weeks after he officially broke with the Nation of Islam-the Black Muslims. During that last year of his life Malcolm made two trips to Africa and the Middle East which seriously influenced his thinking. He began carefully to re-evaluate the social and political ideas which he had accepted while in the Muslims. He set up the Organization of Afro-American Unity-patterned after the Organization of African Unity-which he hoped would implement his new ideas and launch a decisive attack on the problems confronting blacks in America. Assassins' bullets cut down this new beginning before it bore fruit.

Malcolm had become a follower of Elijah Muhammad, "Messenger of Allah," while serving a ten-year prison term for armed robbery. Before that he had lived in the underworlds of Harlem and Boston's Roxbury district. He was probably attracted to the Muslims by their open denunciation of the "white devils" as oppressors of the black race and Muslim campaigns for self-help and moral uplift among converts-factors which brought many ex-convicts into the Nation. Released from prison in 1952, Malcolm's keen

mind and penchant for oratory soon thrust him into the top Muslim leadership. In 1954, he was appointed minister of Temple No.7 in Harlem. He became the first "national minister" in 1963. Malcolm traveled over the country evangelizing, and establishing new temples, while adroitly sparring with critics. He was quick-witted, with a biting sense of humor, and he knew how to handle an audience-black, white, or mixed.

Malcolm was an activist, and this was at the root of his split with Muhammad. In the 1960s the Muslims were increasingly charged by black militants with talking tough but never doing anything. The freedom movement was gaining momentum, and it was no longer enough simply to denounce "white devils." The Muslims abstained from any form of political or social activism, and Malcolm was beginning to have his doubts about the wisdom of this policy.

In his autobiography, he admitted that, while still in the Nation, he began to think the Muslims could be a "greater force in the American black man's over-all struggle-if we engaged in more *action*."<sup>3</sup>

But such ideas clashed with the aims of Muhammad and his lieutenants. Malcolm was suspended from the Muslims in December 1963, allegedly for his highly publicized "chickens coming home to roost" remark about President Kennedy's assassination. It soon became clear, however, that the suspension was to be of indefinite duration and that he was no longer welcome among Muslims. The following March, Malcolm announced that he was breaking completely with Muhammad. He said that he was willing to plunge into the civil rights struggle around the country because every local campaign "can only heighten the political consciousness of the Negroes .... "<sup>4</sup>

Carefully reshaping his thinking, shifting Muslim dogma and dropping unacceptable tenets while incorporating new ideas picked up from his wide experiences with non-Muslims, Malcolm started constructing his political ideology.

He realized the need for unity among black people if they were effectively to attack racism and exploitation in America. He called himself a disciple of black nationalism, which he carefully defined as the effort of blacks to organize a movement of their own to fight for freedom, justice, and equality. The kernel of black nationalism, he said, was the idea that black people should control the economy, politics, and social institutions of their own communities. Thus he identified black nationalism with the general concept of self-determination.

After the split Malcolm no longer endorsed utopian separatism: the doctrine that blacks should return to Africa or devote their efforts to setting up a black state in the United States. He still rejected integrationism, as either phony tokenism or an attempt to

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<sup>3</sup> *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 293.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in George Breitman, *The Last Year of Malcolm X* (New York: Merit Publishers, 1967), p. 19.

assimilate blacks into a decadent white society. Unlike the Muslims, who attributed the cause of black oppression to the evil of the white race, Malcolm realized that it was in the structure of society to which one could trace, not only the roots of black people's misery, but also the genesis of white racism itself. In a speech in May 1964, Malcolm argued:

The system in this country cannot produce freedom for an Afro-American. It is impossible for this system, this economic system, this political system, this social system, this system, period. It's impossible for this system, as it stands, to produce freedom right now for the black man in this country.<sup>5</sup>

In answer to a question from the audience he said, "It's impossible for a white person to believe in capitalism and not believe in racism. You can't have capitalism without racism. And if you find someone and you happen to get that person into a conversation and they have a philosophy that makes you sure they don't have this racism in their outlook, usually they're socialists or their political philosophy is socialism." He thus carefully and consciously avoided falling into the defeatist trap of attributing racism to "human nature."

Although he advocated self-determination for blacks, Malcolm understood that this could never be achieved within the framework of an exploitative, capitalist system. Again, unlike other black nationalists, Malcolm realized that it was in the interests of militant blacks to work for change throughout American society. For it is only if the total society is changed, that the possibility of genuine self-determination for blacks can be realized. Black control of black communities will not mean freedom from oppression' so long as the black communities themselves are still part of or subservient to an outside society which is exploitative.

Malcolm did not live long enough to elaborate fully a program of action. He did advocate that blacks engage in bloc voting, although he noted that sometimes, as in 1964, there was not much choice between a Republican wolf and a Democratic fox. In its statement of aims, the Organization of Afro-American Unity stated that it would "organize the Afro-American community block by block to make the community aware of its power and potential; we will start immediately a voter-registration drive to make every unregistered voter in the Afro-American community an independent voter; we propose to support and/or organize political clubs, to run independent candidates for office, and to support any Afro-American already in office who answers to and is responsible to the Afro-American community."<sup>6</sup> In the economic sphere the OAAU merely pledged that it would "wage an unrelenting struggle" against economic exploitation of all forms.

Malcolm realized that the system he opposed was based ultimately upon force, and that the dynamic of radical social change in America was moving inexorably toward a violent confrontation. In a speech in New York on April 8, 1964, Malcolm described the process he saw unfolding:

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<sup>5</sup> Breitman, *The Last Year of Malcolm X*, p. 33.

<sup>6</sup> Breitman, *The Last Year of Malcolm X*, p. 109.

So today, when the black man starts reaching out for what America says are his rights, the black man feels that he is within his rights-when he becomes the victim of brutality by those who are depriving him of his rights to do whatever is necessary to protect himself. An example of this was taking place last night at this same time in Cleveland, where the police were putting water hoses on our people there and also throwing tear gas at them-and they met a hail of stones, a hail of rocks, a hail of bricks. A couple of weeks ago in Jacksonville, Florida, a young teen-age Negro was throwing Molotov cocktails. Well, Negroes didn't do this ten years ago. But what you should learn from this is that they are waking up. It was stones yesterday, Molotov cocktails today; it will be hand grenades tomorrow and whatever else is available the next day. . . There are 22 million African-Americans who are ready to fight for independence right here. . . I don't mean any nonviolent fight, or turn-the-other-cheek fight. Those days are over. Those days are gone.<sup>7</sup>

As though he wanted to be certain that his audience (which was mostly white) had not misunderstood, Malcolm added that the black revolt was being transformed into "a real black revolution. "Revolutions are never fought by turning the other cheek. Revolutions are never based upon love-your-enemy and pray-for-those-who-spitefully-use-you. And revolutions are never waged singing "We Shall Overcome." Revolutions are based upon bloodshed."<sup>8</sup>

Thus Malcolm saw the black revolt metamorphosing into a violent revolution. But strangely, at the end of this speech, he seemed to retreat from the position he had taken throughout his talk. "America," he said, "is the first country on this earth that can actually have a bloodless revolution." Why did he think this was so? "Because the Negro in this country holds the balance of power, and if the Negro in this country were given what the Constitution says he is supposed to have, the added power of the Negro in this country would sweep all of the racists and the segregationists out of office. It would change the entire political structure of the country."<sup>9</sup>

This was clearly inconsistent with the major thrust of his speech. Malcolm had no faith in the efficacy of political reform. Only a few moments earlier he had pointed out that the black man "can see where every maneuver that America has made, supposedly to solve [the race] problem, has been nothing but political trickery and treachery of the worst order." Malcolm apparently held ambivalent attitudes on the question of violence. He advocated self-defense; yet he knew that no revolution was made using the tactics of self-defense. He knew that the black revolt held the potential of turning into a revolution and that revolutions involve aggressive violence; yet he could conclude that America might be the first country to experience a bloodless revolution.

This ambivalence probably stemmed from misgivings Malcolm had about potential allies.

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<sup>7</sup> George Breitman (ed.), *Malcolm X Speaks* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965), p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> Breitman, p. 50.

<sup>9</sup> Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 57.

He knew that for the black revolution to succeed it needed revolutionary allies, and he saw two possible sources of such allies: militant whites in the United States and the people of the newly emerging nations—the former colonies of Africa and Asia, and the oppressed people of Latin America. But he had grave doubts about so-called white radicals. He thought that many of them could not seriously identify with a struggle the aim of which was to undermine and destroy the basic premises and institutions of their own society.

The remainder, he thought, would probably be co-opted: "You can cuss out colonialism, imperialism, and all other kinds of 'ism,' but it's hard for you to cuss that dollarism. When they drop those dollars on you, your soul goes."<sup>10</sup> As far as white workers were concerned, he had no faith at all that they could be anything but reactionary and racist.

With beliefs such as these, it would be natural for Malcolm to hesitate to advocate that blacks undertake anything more than self-defense. His major concern, wisely, was to prevent genocide, not encourage it. He knew that in a revolutionary situation only the presence of revolutionary forces outside the black communities could prevent mass slaughter of the black population. He saw no such forces in evidence, and therefore was forced to equivocate, torn between the seemingly conflicting needs of racial survival and social revolution.

In spite of his reservations about white radicals and militants, Malcolm still regarded them as potential allies. He believed that some whites were genuinely fed up with the system, and he thought that some type of alliance might occur if they could establish proper communication with black militants. "Proper communication," to Malcolm's mind, definitely was not the kind of black-white alliances that had existed in the past in which the black component was usually only an appendage to white-controlled organization.

In any case, such an alliance was for the moment only a secondary consideration; the first was the creation of black unity. Militant blacks, he said, had to consolidate their own forces, work out their own program and strategy, and build a strong movement before there could be any meaningful move toward an alliance with whites. The immediate goal of white militants, Malcolm thought, should be to build a viable movement within white communities. Any linkup that might then occur would be between equals.

It was in Africa in the last year of his life that he saw the best and most numerous allies of American blacks. He was implacably opposed to the thesis that since black people are only a minority in this country, they should accept the leadership of white liberals. Malcolm argued that black people should identify with the majority of the world's oppressed and downtrodden peoples and elevate the black freedom struggle to the level of an international struggle for human rights.

Malcolm believed that the people of Africa, Asia, and Latin America were victims of "the international power structure," that U.S. neocolonialism was the main weapon of this

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<sup>10</sup> Breitman, *The Last Year of Malcolm X*, p. 32.

power structure, but that the colonial revolt had shown the enemy to be invincible no longer. International capitalism, he believed, was slowly being beaten back and replaced with various kinds of socialisms. At an OAAU rally in Harlem on December 20, 1964, less than a month after his last return from Africa, Malcolm said:

Almost every one of the countries that has gotten independence has devised some kind of socialistic system, and this is no accident. This is another reason why I say that you and I here in America—who are looking for a job, who are looking for better housing, looking for a better education—before you start trying to be incorporated, or integrated, or disintegrated, into this capitalistic system, should look over there and find out what are the people who have gotten their freedom adopting to provide themselves with better housing and better education and better food and better clothing. None of them are adopting the capitalistic system because they realize they can't. You can't operate a capitalistic system unless you are vulturistic; you have to have someone else's blood to suck to be a capitalist. You show me a capitalist, I'll show you a bloodsucker...<sup>11</sup>

That capitalism, in its colonial quest, bred racism was self-evident to Malcolm. In his view this partly accounted for the presence of racism in a supposedly egalitarian America. That same America had profited greatly from the colonial slave trade and now she stood as the "last bulwark of capitalism." Urging that U.S. blacks "internationalize" their fight for freedom, Malcolm contended that black people, as victims of domestic colonialism, should view their struggle in terms of the worldwide anticolonial revolt; and he took concrete steps to make this more than mere rhetoric. He formulated a plan for linking the domestic freedom movement to the international anticolonial revolt. "The civil rights struggle," he reasoned in his April address in New York, "involves the black man taking his case to the white man's court. But when [the black man] fights it at the human-rights level, it is a different situation. It opens the door to take Uncle Sam to the world court. Uncle Sam should be taken to court and made to tell why the black man is not free in a so-called free society. Uncle Sam should be taken into the UN and charged with violating the UN charter of human rights."<sup>12</sup> At another point Malcolm drew an analogy to give clarity to his argument: "If South Africa is guilty of violating the human rights of Africans then America is guilty of worse violations of the rights of twenty-two million Africans on the American continent. And if South African racism is not a domestic issue, then American racism also is not a domestic issue."

On his last trip to Africa, in July 1964, Malcolm began marshaling support for his plan to bring the American racial problem before the United Nations under the human rights

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<sup>11</sup> Breitman, *The Last Year of Malcolm X*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>12</sup> This was not the first time blacks had sought to arraign the U.S. before the United Nations. Nearly two decades ago the Civil Rights Congress under the leadership of attorney William L. Patterson presented a petition to the UN charging the U.S. government with committing the crime of genocide against the black race. The petition contained 135 pages of damning evidence implicating the entire governmental structure of the U.S. in the systematic oppression, maiming and murder of black men, women and children.

provision of its Charter.<sup>13</sup> He was admitted as an observer to the Cairo conference of the OAU, where he made an impassioned plea for the African nations to arraign the United States before the UN. He also made personal visits to individual heads of African states. Malcolm's activities in Africa caused deep concern in Washington.

The New York *Times* reported that State Department officials said that if "Malcolm succeeded in convincing just one African government to bring up the charge at the United Nations, the United States government would be faced with a touchy problem." The newspaper report said the United States would find itself in the same category as South Africa in a debate before the world body.

Throughout his travels in Africa, Malcolm was followed. On July 23, 1964, the day before he was to address the OAU conference, his food was poisoned at his hotel in Cairo, and he was seriously ill. On his return to the United States, Malcolm became a familiar figure at the UN. By the fall of 1964 his plan to indict the U. S. Government was in high gear, and Malcolm was becoming an increasingly serious threat to U.S. overseas interests. It was reported that the State Department attributed to Malcolm's activities a good part of the strong stand taken by African states against U.S. intervention in the Congo. As long as Malcolm remained in Muhammad's Nation of Islam, he was of no concern to the power structure. Freed of Muslim restraints, Malcolm threatened to bring the impact of the world revolution right into this country.

He did not live to see his plan come to fruition. On the morning of February 13, 1965, his home was fire-bombed by professionals. He and his family barely escaped injury. Malcolm at first blamed the Muslims, but he soon suspected that other parties were at work. As he said, he knew intimately the Muslims' capabilities and limitations. The following Sunday the "other parties" were more successful. Malcolm was shot to death at a meeting in New York.<sup>14</sup>

The assassination threw Harlem into a panic. Many feared that a bloodbath would follow in which Malcolm's supporters and Muslims would gun each other down on the streets. As it turned out, the Muslim Temple in Harlem was fire-bombed but no one was killed. The more sophisticated were not afraid of such a mindless orgy of murder. They saw instead in Malcolm's death a continuation of a calculated pattern which began with the forced exile of Robert Williams, led to the jailing of Bill Epton, militant leader of the Harlem chapter of the Progressive Labor party, on "criminal anarchy" charges for his role in the Harlem rebellion, and now climaxed in the removal of yet another militant black leader: It was this continuing decimation of militant black leadership that posed the real danger, not a bloodbath triggered by warring blacks.

Malcolm X died, but not his ideas. One of the most important of these was how the

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<sup>13</sup> Malcolm's hopes for implementing this plan might also have played a part in his ambivalent feelings concerning the necessity for a violent revolution.

<sup>14</sup> Malcolm's fears that he might be assassinated for political reasons were not the result of paranoia. See, for example, Eric Norden's article in the February 1967 issue of *The Realist*.

struggle of blacks in this country was bound up with the outcome of revolutionary struggles in the Third World. This message was especially timely because it was at the end of 1964 and beginning of 1965 that the United States started its massive buildup in Vietnam, and Malcolm was one of the first black leaders to stand in opposition. He did so not because he was a pacifist or morally outraged. He opposed the war out of a sense of solidarity with the Vietnamese liberation fighters. Malcolm had great admiration for the courage of the Vietnamese guerrillas: "Little rice farmers, peasants, with a rifle-up against *all* the highly-mechanized weapons of warfare-jets, napalm, battleships, everything else, and they can't put those rice farmers back where they want them. Somebody's waking up." Implicit in Malcolm's admiration was his recognition of a principle which is fundamental to guerrilla struggles everywhere: namely, that the revolutionary spirit of the people is more effective than the enemy's technology.

[cut section about Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh]

The American escalation of the [Vietnam] war prompted protest activity in this country. In the spring of 1965, twenty-five thousand antiwar demonstrators marched in Washington. As opposition to the war mounted, Martin Luther King urged President Johnson to issue "unconditional and unambiguous" pleas for peace talks. King's statement raised the question of a possible alliance between the civil rights movement and the antiwar movement. Robert Browne, an Afro-American college professor and activist in the antiwar movement, summarized in late 1965 the reasons favoring such an alliance:

- (1) the recognition that the civil rights movement represents the moral conscience of America and therefore naturally belongs in the vanguard of the Vietnam protest, felt now to be the number one moral issue confronting American society.
- (2) the argument that the billions of dollars being diverted to the Vietnam war represents funds which might otherwise be available for giving substance to the programs necessary for raising the Negro to a level of real equality in American life.
- (3) the belief that the civil rights objectives are unachievable under the present organization of American society and therefore must necessarily be fought for as part of a large effort to remake American society, including its foreign policy.
- (4) the view that the Vietnam war is intimately involved in American racist attitudes generally, and therefore falls naturally within the range of American Negroes' direct sphere of interest.<sup>15</sup>

Within the context of the moderate civil rights movement which still existed at that time, these were advanced arguments. The latter two arguments particularly were soon to be sharpened and used by black militants in their attacks on government policy.

On January 6, 1966, SNCC issued a statement opposing the Vietnam war and in essence supporting draft resistance. According to SNCC staffer Fred Meely in an unpublished report, the origins of this statement can be traced to a SNCC Executive Committee meeting in April 1965, during which chairman John Lewis urged the Organization to take

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<sup>15</sup> 17 *Freedomways*, Vol. 5, No.4.

a formal stand against the war. The first big antiwar march-backed primarily by Students for a Democratic Society-was to take place on April 17, and the Executive Committee voted to support the SDS march. At a full staff meeting in November of that year, SNCC discussed at length the question of taking a public stand on the war, the draft, and the relation of the war to the plight of Afro-Americans. It was decided to have a statement drafted and circulated to the staff for approval and to hold workshops on these issues at SNCC's projects. The statement was prepared and submitted for staff comment in December.

On January 4, 1966, SNCC worker Sammy Younge, Jr., was murdered in Tuskegee, Alabama, when he sought to use the "White" restroom at a gas station. This incident precipitated the antiwar statement. "Samuel Younge was murdered because U.S. law is not being enforced. Vietnamese are being murdered because the United States is pursuing an aggressive policy in violation of international law. The U.S. is no respecter of persons or law when such persons or laws run counter to its needs and desires." The statement continued:

We are in sympathy with and support the men in this country who are unwilling to respond to the military draft which would compel them to contribute their lives to U.S. aggression in the name of the "freedom" we find so false in this country.

It suggested that the "building [of] democratic forms within the country" was a valid, if not legal, alternative to the draft. It would be a few months yet before SNCC took an all-out draft resistance stand and began to develop a national antidraft program.

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In summary, then, this is the social and political climate in which Stokely Carmichael found himself in the summer of 1966. Carmichael attempted to pick up the threads of Malcolm X's thought and apply them to this social context.

But he was uncertain as to how to move. He was torn between reformism and revolution. He could not decide at that time whether he was a black rebel or a black revolutionary. His ambivalences were indicative of the uncertainties which permeated the black militant movement, and they were a prophecy of the open split which was soon to develop between rebels-for-reform and revolutionaries.

Carmichael's class background was not unlike that of other SNCC members. Born in Trinidad, Carmichael came to this country at the age of eleven with his family and settled in New York City. After attending the elite Bronx High School of Science, Carmichael received a bachelor's degree from Howard University in 1964. While at Howard he was active in the student government as well as a local civil rights organization called the Nonviolent Action Group. Thus, before joining SNCC, the up-and-coming young man was being primed for the black middle class. This was true of most SNCC activists in 1966. Although they may have come from poor or working-class families, the young students themselves were headed for middle-class status. Their whole college experience

was designed to inculcate them with the values of the black bourgeoisie, including its terrible ambivalences and self-hatred. As E. Franklin Frazier and others have noted, the black bourgeoisie is divided between conflicting compulsions to identify with blacks or with the white middle class. Depending on circumstances, it vacillates between these two contradictory identities. The fact that most of SNCC's staff come out of such a background makes it easier to comprehend and account for the ideological twists and turns taken by the organization. These ideological waverings were reflective of the insecurity and equivocation of the black middle class, which SNCC in a sense represented.

In a widely read article published in the September 22, 1968 issue of the *New York Review of Books*, Carmichael struggled with the problem of power: how to attack and weaken oppressive white power and create in its stead the liberating force of black power. Most of what Carmichael wrote then was not new. It was based upon the nationalist tradition which extended from Martin R. Delaney through Malcolm X. Actually, it must be admitted that Carmichael's early statements did not go as far as the militant internationalism and anticapitalism of Malcolm X or the revolutionary violence then being advocated by Robert Williams from exile in China. But where Malcolm and Williams were stopped before they could organize a mass following, Carmichael was not. A young and charismatic leader, his ideas served as a catalyst for the intellectual development of black rebels and revolutionaries alike. Where Malcolm X had battered himself against a wall of hostility and indifference, the SNCC leader was successful in injecting the issue of self-determination into a black freedom movement which had appeared stalemated. The urban rebellions legitimized and gave prominence to this issue and made it a matter for serious discussion and planning among both black militants and the white power structure. Both were probing the strengths and weaknesses of the idea of black self-determination.

Starting with the "basic fact that black Americans have two problems: they are poor and they are black," Carmichael wrote that SNCC, "almost from its beginning," sought to develop a program aimed at winning political power for impoverished southern blacks. He did not foresee, however, that the growing militancy of the black middle class would lead that class also to demand political power. But political for the black bourgeoisie, the black elite, is not the same as political power for the black poor, the bulk of the black population. It is quite possible for this elite group to achieve a measure of political *and* economic power within the American capitalist system, but this does not necessarily imply any change for the black majority. Just as the civil rights movement made important gains for the middle class but left the poor largely untouched, there is no intrinsic reason to think a bourgeois black power movement will not follow a similar course. This is the central issue which later was to split the black power movement into moderate and militant factions, with the Congress of Racial Equality being a leading organization among the former while SNCC and the Black Panthers took the lead among the militants.

Furthermore, Carmichael almost certainly did not expect then that white corporate leaders would court and pander to the political and economic aspirations of the black bourgeoisie

as a way of countering the revolutionary thrust of the militants. Just as early opponents of the Vietnam war thought of that conflict as a mistake inadvertently made by the U. S. Government, so did black power advocates in 1966 view black oppression as a curable malady which was basically foreign to the American social system. Certainly the more sophisticated war opponents and black militants talked about things being wrong with the system, but what they had in mind were *deficiencies* in the social structure. They were not yet thinking, as Carmichael later would, that perhaps the system in its totality must be redesigned. Instead, the antiwar people thought that the deficiency could be remedied by electing peace candidates to Congress who would end the war. The black power militants identified the deficiency as general lack of black participation in the political process.

As a result of this orientation, it was not surprising that black power emerged initially as an effort to reform the social system. At that time black militants were sophisticated enough to know that integration was not satisfactory because it did not change political relations and consequently could not affect the oppression suffered by most blacks. Hence it was logical to conclude that only the political integration of black people *as a group* into American society could offer any real hope. Therefore Carmichael defined black power as group integration into the political process. "In such areas as Lowndes [County, Alabama], where black men have a majority, they will attempt to use it to exercise control. This is what they seek: control. Where Negroes lack a majority, black power means proper representation and sharing of control. It means the creation of power bases from which black people can work to change statewide or nationwide patterns of oppression through pressure from strength-instead of weakness. Politically, black power means what it has always meant to SNCC: the coming together of black people to elect representatives and *to force those representatives to speak to their needs.*"

A year later Carmichael would use virtually the same definition of black power in the book which he co-authored on the subject. In it, however, he made it explicit that he thought of black power as only another form of traditional ethnic group politics. "The concept of Black Power rests on a fundamental premise: *Be/ore a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks.* By this we mean that group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society."<sup>16</sup>

This belief that black people are much like other ethnic groups in America lies at the heart of the reformist tendency in black nationalism. In his book, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, Harold Cruse argues that if America could only be forced to face the fact that competing ethnic groups are its basic social reality, then a kind of "democratic cultural pluralism" could be established resulting in genuine black equality. Nathan Wright, chairman of the 1967 Newark Black Power Conference, expressed a similar view in his book, *Black Power and Urban Unrest*. Wright urged black people to band together as a group to seek entry into the American mainstream. For example, he called for organized efforts by blacks "to seek executive positions in corporations, bishoprics, deanships of

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<sup>16</sup> Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hanrilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 44.

cathedrals, superintendencies of schools, and high-management positions in banks, stores, investment houses, legal firms, civic and government agencies and factories."<sup>17</sup>

Wright's version of black power is aimed at benefiting the black middle class. This bourgeois approach also characterized CORE's brand of black nationalism. What this approach overlooks is the fact that black people are *not* like other ethnic groups in American society. To begin with, blacks came to these shores, not as immigrants seeking a better life, but as slaves intended for use as forced laborers. The racist ideology erected to justify slavery served after the Civil War to keep blacks oppressed and subservient, even though it was in the economic interests of white industrialists to hire black workers. But these businessmen, infected by their own racist dogma, preferred to import foreign labor. With the advent of the civil rights movement, the monolithic structure of racism began to show cracks, but by then it was already too late. Black people were to enjoy the unfortunate distinction of being among the first surplus products of an advanced American technology and economic system. Thus accelerated technological innovation in a decreasingly competitive and increasingly monopolist economy combined with racism have acted in concert to phase black people out of American society.

It would have made sense at the close of the Civil War to plan for the assimilation of black people as a group into the American mainstream. Racism made this impossible. Now, as racism begins to crumble, the requirements of an advanced technological economy increasingly exclude black workers from the active labor force. Hence racism, the stepchild of slavery, prevented black people from following in the footsteps of other ethnic groups.

Today, even if racism were vanquished, blacks would find their situation basically unaltered because almost always they do not possess the skills valued by the economy. Even under ideal circumstances, this lack of skills would require a generation to correct.

Finally, as city governments are increasingly integrated with state and federal agencies, and municipal political machines are disbanded, an important mechanism for ethnic group advancement is shut off to blacks. For it is city hall which has been a traditional stepping-stone to economic security and political power for European ethnic groups. The current move to rationalize city government and integrate it into the larger national structure is one of the prime requirements for the smooth functioning of a complex and advanced society. A consequence of this process is that city politics can no longer be a free-for-all scramble responsive to the ethnic group (or groups) which can muster the most votes. Instead, the city government itself becomes a mechanism for the realization of national priorities-and this necessarily tends to eliminate a major channel for the anticipated advancement of black people as an ethnic group.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., *Black Power and Urban Unrest* (New York: Hawthorn, 1967), p. 43.

<sup>18</sup> There are vastly more blacks employed in government today than ever before, but this is not reflective of a net increase in political power for the group, since almost all of these positions are lower-level jobs which have no political weight.

Economically, Carmichael in his *New York Review* article called for a cooperative effort among black people. "When we urge that black money go into black pockets, we mean the communal pocket. We want to see money go back into the community and used to benefit it. We want to see the cooperative concept applied in business and banking." This concept was later incorporated into the CORE program.

Economic cooperatives, frequently advocated in the past, were to be the salvation of the black community. But this economic program assumes that the economy is still open to new enterprises, be they individual or collective. This assumption is unrealistic in an era when small businesses are failing at a high rate and large-scale commercial enterprises, because of the virtual monopoly of gigantic corporations, are extremely difficult to launch. The Small Business Administration reports that not more than 3 percent of all U.S. business concerns are owned by nonwhites. A flagrant example of this economic imbalance is seen in Washington, D.C., where about two thirds of the population is black, but only some two thousand out of twenty-eight thousand businesses are owned by blacks, and their volume is only an infinitesimal fraction of the whole. This situation is not likely to change to any significant degree. The failure rate on special small business loans, many of which are granted to black businessmen, is about double the rate of regular loans.

More importantly, even if a cooperative economic venture were successfully initiated, its managers, in order to keep it afloat, would have to be responsive to the demands and constraints imposed by the over-all competitive economic system rather than to the needs of the surrounding black community. For example, a retail food cooperative would find itself in direct competition with huge supermarket chains, which control not only retail outlets, but also farms and ranches, processing and packaging plants, advertising agencies, and transportation and distribution facilities. Without this kind of horizontal and vertical monopoly, a cooperative business would encounter insurmountable obstacles that would make large-volume, price-competitive and efficient operation virtually unachievable. On the other hand, the establishing of a large-scale cooperative monopoly would be extraordinarily difficult because of the heavy financing required and the adamant opposition of firms already solidly entrenched in the industry. Hence a black retail cooperative would very likely find itself forced to charge higher prices or to operate at a loss.

Even if the cooperative somehow managed to survive these difficulties, benefits to the community from such a marginal undertaking would be minimal at best. The major beneficiaries from the cooperative would be the administrators and managers hired to operate it. After all, their salaries must be met before there can be any price reductions or dividend payments. Consequently, black capitalism, even on a cooperative basis, would function primarily to the advantage of middle-class blacks who have management skills—the class least in need of such benefits because it is increasingly favored by American society at large.

The need for "psychological equality" and "black consciousness" was also stressed in

Carmichael's 1966 article. "Only black people can convey the revolutionary idea that black people are able to do things themselves. Only they can help create in the community an aroused and continuing black consciousness that will provide the basis for political strength." This thought would later be taken to its logical extreme by cultural nationalist Ron Karenga: "The revolution being fought now is a revolution to win the minds of our people." Karenga would argue that the black revolt could not proceed until the cultural revolution had been won. "We must free ourselves culturally before we succeed politically." The cultural nationalist would replace the hope of black revolution with a curious mystique encompassing black culture and art and reactionary African social forms. "To go back to tradition is the first step forward," wrote Karenga. In essence the cultural nationalists asked nothing more than that black people be accorded recognition as a distinct cultural group. If it meant pacifying rebellious ghettos, white America was only too happy to grant this minor concession.

The question of potential allies is perhaps one of the most difficult problems facing black militants. Carmichael struggled with the problem but without much success. He was looking for a numerically significant section of the white population which might become an ally of blacks. He thought that poor whites might play this role. "We hope to see, eventually, a coalition between poor blacks and poor whites." Yet, a few lines later, he stated: "Poor whites everywhere are becoming more hostile-not less-partly because they see the nation's attention focused on black poverty and nobody coming to them." Carmichael suggested that middle-class young whites assume the task of organizing poor whites, but he didn't seem to have much confidence in the successful outcome of this project. Perhaps he realized that poor whites were as much trapped by their own racism as blacks were trapped by white racism. He certainly recognized this fact in the case of white industrial workers-long the hope of the white left-who, seeing their own security threatened, can now be counted among the most vicious racists in the country.

When the young white activists failed to "civilize" the white community, they were roundly castigated and attacked by black militants for not being serious radicals. But this easy criticism missed the point. If black survival really is at stake, as black militants are fond of asserting, then black radicals must assume primary responsibility for seeing to it that hostile whites are neutralized and friendly whites are won over to an effective joint struggle. This is not to say that black organizers should begin flooding into white suburbs. Obviously not. It is to say, however, that it is ridiculous to contend that racism and exploitation are the white man's problems. For if racism and exploitation are allowed to continue, it will be the black community as a whole, not sympathetic middle-class white students, which will be the greatest loser. It is thus politically irresponsible to lament that no domestic allies are in sight. The black radical, if he is serious, must take it upon himself to search out, and if necessary create, allies for the black liberation struggle.

The original formulation of black power as expressed by Carmichael contained not only the seeds of militant black reformism but also the genesis of revolutionary black nationalism.

Any social order maintains itself through the exercise of power, whether directly or

indirectly. In particular, the groups or classes within a society which enjoy a privileged status as a result of the functioning of the social system seek to preserve that system in a stable equilibrium. They do this by accumulating and using power. Power is based ultimately on (1) the availability of force, and (2) the existence of pervasive social attitudes or social mythologies, accepted by all segments of the society, that justify the actual use of force against external or internal threats. Whether a threat exists and how it is defined is normally determined by those who hold power. In a theocracy, for example, force may be available in the form of a holy army, and the loyalty of the army is assured by a religious mythology which is accepted and internalized by soldiers and commanders alike.

In the United States force is available to the ruling structure in the form of police and army. These forces may be deployed in the name of "freedom," "law and order," or "the American way." This rhetoric is based partly on popular ideas about the nature of American society and partly on the social mythology of "private property rights." The defense of which is the most socially important ultimate-though not always immediate-justification for the use of force. Nearly all Americans believe, because they have been taught from childhood to believe, that those who are designated as "owners" have an inherent and inalienable right to use in any manner they alone see fit that which is termed "property."<sup>19</sup>

The social consequences of this belief are enormous. Thus the disposition of property, such as industrial plants, corporations, banks, retail and wholesale consumer enterprises, etc., which decisively affects the lives of millions of people and which derives its value and meaning from its social nature is left in the hands of private individuals or small groups whose overriding concern is the profits accruing from this property rather than its social utility. Profits in turn create wealthy owning and managerial classes, and an economic dictatorship of these classes is subtly imposed on the whole society. The result is the partial nullification of political democracy.

That political democracy in the U.S. has not been totally destroyed is evident in the passage of reform measures and laws aimed at curbing the power of various economic interests. But at the state and national levels particularly, the country's legislative machinery has allied itself-through the apparatus of the Democratic and Republican parties-with one wing or another of the economic establishment. As this establishment is not yet monolithic there is room within its ranks for considerable dissension. conflict and change. Consequently, it is open to some outside pressure for reform, but it is not open to an attack on its own position of power nor will it knowingly tolerate an effective challenge to the social fiction on which that power is predicated.

The socially shared belief in the sacrosanct qualities of private property is a fundamental

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<sup>19</sup> The term "property" as used here does not refer to personal or family belongings such as clothing, a house, or an automobile. Rather, it refers to *social* property; that is, property (e.g., a supermarket) the use of which *requires* the active economic involvement of larger social groupings (e.g., employees, customers).

premise of the ideology of capitalism. To the extent that the general American population accepts the mythology of private property—that is, the notion that private individuals should be the sole determinants of the disposition of what is in reality social property—it will continue to defend the privileges and prerogatives of those classes which benefit most from this mythology. The reason for this is that the educational system implants and reinforces the belief that this social myth can operate to the individual advantage of any given person if only he works hard enough or displays sufficient cunning. Hence many an American, even if sophisticated enough to recognize the injustices of the social system, will nevertheless vigorously defend it because of the insistent hope that some day he or his children will achieve a full measure of security and comfort within that system.

This discussion raises several questions. Is the capitalistic competitive game fixed? If so, why? Are there alternative methods of ordering social relations within a society? As far as black people are concerned, there can be little doubt that the game is fixed. Blacks for the last hundred years have been "free" to beat their way to the top. Many have tried, but in relative terms, black people today are just about exactly where they were at the close of the Civil War; namely, at the bottom of the heap. In 1966 Carmichael knew that the game was fixed, but he was not yet ready to deal with the question of whether it was the nature of the capitalist game to be fixed. That is, he was not at that point an anticapitalist. To take such a position would require more time and thought.

The American social mythology of private property and the government's monopoly on force were both implicitly challenged in the 1966 article. This challenge was made explicit by the urban rebellions which have occurred since 1964. Carmichael raised the question of whether a country "where property is valued above all" could be the setting for a humanistic society. He recognized that it was this ideology which justified the use of force against black people—be they called "uppity niggers," "rioters," or just plain "criminals." That being the case, one could only conclude, as Carmichael did, that the black man "may also need a gun and SNCC reaffirms the right of black men everywhere to defend themselves when threatened or attacked."

Carmichael couched these implicitly revolutionary thoughts in cautious language. Since 1966, however, it has become ever more clear that the black revolt will be accompanied by violence because those who propagate the mythology of property rights will not allow peaceful change. It is precisely this social fiction of property rights, and the system of force and exploitation which it justifies, which stand as the prime enemies of black people. It is in this sense that the looting which accompanied urban rebellions was a rudimentary revolutionary act. Looting constitutes a direct assault upon the edifice of private property. As sociologists Russell Dynes and E. L. Quarantelli have noted: "The looting that has occurred in recent racial outbreaks is a bid for the redistribution of property."<sup>20</sup> This statement expresses the objective social implication of an act whose immediate motive may be any number of personal or subjective factors. The question this poses for black militants is: Can such a redistribution be effected within the present social framework? Black rebels, advocates of bourgeois nationalism, think this is altogether

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<sup>20</sup> *Transaction*, May 1968.

possible. Black revolutionaries think not; they are increasingly anticapitalist.

Carmichael identified the black communities as exploited colonies of the United States. He added: "For a century, this nation has been like an octopus of exploitation, its tentacles stretching from Mississippi and Harlem to South America, the Middle East, southern Africa, and Vietnam; the form of exploitation varies from area to area, but the essential result has been the same—a powerful few have been maintained and enriched at the expense of the poor and voiceless colored masses."

This identification of the black struggle with anticolonial movements in the Third World had revolutionary implications. At the psychological level it shattered the sense of isolation felt by many black militants. They could view themselves as part of a worldwide revolution. "Black Power is not an isolated phenomenon," wrote Julius Lester, a former SNCC field secretary. "It is only another manifestation of what is transpiring in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. People are reclaiming their lives on those three continents and blacks in America are reclaiming theirs. These liberation movements are not saying give us a share; they are saying we want it all! The existence of the present system in the United States depends upon the United States taking all. This system is threatened more and more each day by the refusal of those in the Third World to be exploited. They ate colonial people outside the United States; blacks are a colonial people within. Thus, we have a common enemy. As the Black Power movement becomes more politically conscious, the spiritual coalition that exists between blacks in America and the Third World will become more evident."<sup>21</sup>

At the ideological level, Carmichael's thesis gave militant black intellectuals a powerful analytical tool. Black writer Lawrence P. Neal touched upon this when he pointed out that the colonial model "breaks down the ideological walls which have contained the struggle thus far. It supplies the black theorist and activist with a new set of political alternatives."<sup>22</sup>

If black people formed a dispersed semicolon within this country, superficially unlike other colonies, but sharing certain features with them, then a "new set of political alternatives" might exist in the form of a black national liberation struggle. National liberation stands in sharp contrast to the strategy of integration; and it represents a distinct advance over traditional black nationalism, which frequently drifts toward escapist solutions as a consequence of its unconscious defeatisms. In the years following World War II, national liberation movements flourished throughout the Third World. To the extent that the domestic colonial view of black America is valid, its theories and experiences can be of invaluable aid to the black liberation movement.

[cut section on Frantz Fanon]

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<sup>21</sup> Julius Lester, *Look Out, Whitey!* (New York: Dial Press, 1968). p. 138.

<sup>22</sup> Floyd B. Barbour (ed.) , *The Black Power Revolt* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1968), p. 141.

At its 1966 national convention meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, the Congress of Racial Equality endorsed black power. A unanimously adopted resolution said in part:

Black Power is effective control and self-determination by men of color in their own areas.

Power is total control of the economic, political, educational, and social life of our community from the top to the bottom.

The exercise of power at the local level is simply what all other groups in American society have done to acquire their share of total American life.

The summer of 1966 was an important turning point for CORE, as it was for SNCC. Until then, CORE had been an integrationist organization relying on the tactics of nonviolent, direct action to achieve its goals. Founded by James Farmer in 1942 as an offshoot of the Quaker-pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation, CORE immediately set out on an activist course. It organized the first sit-ins in Chicago in 1942, and it sent the first "freedom riders" through the South in April 1947.

Over the years the organization's membership grew from the initial handful of black and white activists. Like SNCC, CORE was a middle-class organization. It differed from SNCC in that SNCC members, being younger, were not yet committed to middle-class jobs or middle-class lifestyles. It was, therefore, easier for SNCC members to identify with the impoverished black majority. CORE differed from the NAACP in that the latter is wealthier, better established, and more solidly bourgeois. The NAACP aims at reforming certain aspects of a system whose assumptions it shares. It carries out these reformist efforts through the socially accepted channels of the ballot box, court cases, and legislative lobbying. CORE, on the other hand, while being a more militant and less affluent organization than the NAACP, still does not reject the basic ideological assumptions of American society, although it may question them. CORE employed less orthodox and more militant methods of reform. It used direct-action techniques in an effort to bring pressure on institutions it sought to change. As some observers have noted: "At a given point, after pressure from outside the system has been successful, it is possible for the less privileged reformist group to be allowed to work inside the system."<sup>23</sup>

CORE was eclipsed by William L. Patterson's Civil Rights Congress until 1951, then by Martin Luther King's campaigns in the middle 1950s and the student sit-ins which began in 1960. It was not until it organized the renowned "freedom rides" to Alabama and Mississippi in 1961 that CORE was catapulted into national prominence. As a result of these activities, the organization's membership began to change. In 1963, black members for the first time accounted for more than half of CORE's total membership. CORE was attracting to its ranks militant, middle-class blacks who were disillusioned with the NAACP. The following year, the Brooklyn chapter announced that it would organize a "stall-in" on the opening day of the New York World's Fair to protest discrimination in

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<sup>23</sup> Fitch and Oppenheimer, *Ghana*, p. 27.

hiring practices at the fairgrounds. This was indicative of the organization's new militancy and the shifting of its focus to the urban North. This announcement touched off a heated controversy both within and outside of CORE.

Another sign of CORE's shifting center of gravity occurred in November 1964. Clarence Funnye, then chairman of the Manhattan chapter, announced that his group would abandon demonstrations in favor of long-range economic and social programs in Harlem. The organization still had integration as its goal, but it was trying to address itself to the needs of northern blacks, for whom de facto segregation and the lack of adequate housing and jobs were more serious problems than the kind of de jure discrimination which had characterized the South. A further sign was the interest expressed by the downtown New York chapter in organizing an independent political party. The chapter chairman asserted that this was necessary because existing local political organizations were incapable of bringing about needed improvements. Meanwhile, Brooklyn CORE was then involved in organizing rent strikes.

At its 1965 convention-the theme of which was "Black Ghetto: The Awakening Giant"-CORE rescinded its constitutional ban on partisan political activity. The new emphasis within the organization was summarized and in effect given official sanction by National Director James Farmer:

The major war now confronting us is aimed at harnessing the awesome political potential of the black community in order to effect basic social and economic changes for all Americans, to alter meaningfully the lives of the Black Americans . . . and to bring about a real equality of free men.<sup>24</sup>

The government could not do this job, Farmer asserted, because of its built-in resistance to fundamental change. "We can rely upon none but ourselves as a catalyst in the development of the potential power of the black community in its own behalf and in behalf of the nation."

It is clear that the objectives we seek-in the wiping out of poverty and unemployment, elimination of bad housing, city planning for integration in housing and schools, quality education-are political objectives depending upon responses we can exact from political machinery. We can no longer rely on pressuring and cajoling political units toward desired actions. We must be in a position of power, a position to change those political units when they are not responsive.<sup>25</sup>

Farmer contended that what was needed was "independent political action through indigenous political organizations" modeled after the MFDP." Such ghetto-oriented political movements must avoid, at all costs," he said, "becoming an adjunct to, or a tool

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<sup>24</sup> Francis L. Broderick and August Meier (eds.), *Negro Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 422.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 425.

of, any political party, bloc, or machine. They must be controlled by the interests of the black ghetto alone."<sup>26</sup>

Another significant development at the 1965 convention was the introduction of a resolution opposing United States involvement in the Vietnam war. The resolution was tabled, however, on a plea from Farmer.

The man who chaired this convention was Floyd McKissick, then national chairman. The following year, in March, McKissick was named to replace Farmer as national director. McKissick was born in Asheville, North Carolina, in 1922. He graduated from Morehouse College in Atlanta, one of the great training institutions for the black bourgeoisie, and then went on to the University of North Carolina Law School where he took a law degree. McKissick mixed civil rights activity with his legal career, and, beginning in 1960, he became one of the leaders of the sit-in movement in North Carolina.

The black power resolution passed by CORE in 1966 seemingly eliminated racial integration as the group's goal and instead replaced it with the goal of "racial co-existence through black power." But what is this "racial coexistence" if it is not simply another form of group assimilation? CORE had substituted militant-sounding group integration for the now discredited goal of individual integration. The difference was in degree, not in kind.

The resolution also contained the sentence: "It is significant to note that historically the only times in the United States when great numbers of Black people have been mobilized has been around the concept of Nationalism, as in the case of Marcus Garvey and the Muslims." This is important to keep in mind, because at subsequent conventions, the organization would be racked by disputes between orthodox black nationalists and those who adhered to the new nationalist position advocated by Roy Innis. The traditional nationalists wanted CORE to come out in favor of a separate territory for black people, but Innis projected the idea of a black nation of city-states dispersed throughout the country. In 1968 this dispute would provoke a split in CORE's ranks.

On the question of violence, CORE tried to straddle the fence. The Baltimore meeting adopted a resolution urging "that CORE continue its adherence to the tactic of direct nonviolent action, that the concepts of nonviolence and self-defense are not contradictory, nonviolent meaning nonaggressive, but not precluding the natural, constitutional and inalienable right of self-defense."

CORE was reshaping itself. It was attempting to respond to and organize the new militancy which had infected certain parts of the black middle class, as a result of the

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<sup>26</sup> In 1968 Farmer himself ran unsuccessfully for Congress as the liberal Party and Republican Party candidate in the newly created Twelfth Congressional District in Brooklyn. This was hardly an exercise in the kind of "independent 'politics'" which he advocated in 1965. Rather it represented an alliance between him and the liberal wing of the power structure, and led him ultimately into the Nixon Administration.

rebellions initiated by the black masses. In so doing, CORE was to assume a role akin to that played by bourgeois nationalist political elites in an underdeveloped country undergoing a transformation from colonialism to neocolonialism.

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By the time SNCC and CORE raised the cry of black power, the sophisticated, white establishment already had begun to sketch the general outlines of its response to the new, black militancy. It was not so much the specific slogan of black power that motivated this response; rather it was prompted by the same domestic conditions that underlay the rise of black militancy: The failure of the civil rights movement to alleviate the continuing impoverishment of the black communities and the consequent urban outbreaks.

The rebellions especially forced white reactionaries and liberals alike to conclude that direct white administration of the black ghettos, at least in some instances, was no longer operating satisfactorily. Some new form of administration was clearly called for if the ghettos were to be pacified and "law and order" restored. Of course there were some, mostly at the state and local government levels, who thought brutal repression to be the best answer. Traditional liberals, though, still hoped to find a panacea in government-sponsored social welfare programs. But a drastically new situation necessarily calls forth a drastically new response. The black rebellions, which threatened to set the torch to every major American city and seriously disrupt the functioning of the economy, represented just such a drastically new situation.

The beginnings of the new response could be glimpsed in Ford Foundation president McGeorge Bundy's August 2, 1966 address to the National Urban League's annual banquet in Philadelphia. "We believe," said Bundy, "that full equality for all American Negroes is now the most urgent domestic concern of this country. We believe that the Ford Foundation must play its full part in this field because it is dedicated by its charter to human welfare." Bundy told the Urban League meeting that in addition to the familiar fields of jobs, education, and housing, the Foundation thought that the areas of leadership, research, communication, and justice were also important concerns for the black movement. He suggested that "stronger leadership" was needed because "it is easier to understand and work for the recognition of basic civil rights than it is to understand and work for the improvements in skills and schools, in real opportunity, and in the quality of life itself, which are the next business of us all." In other words, as the civil rights movement faded away a new breed of black and white leader was required to negotiate "the road from right to reality."

In the area of research, Bundy threw out several questions which he said needed answers: "What kinds of better schools will help most to turn the tide of hope upward in the ghettos? What patterns of cooperation-among whites and Negroes-business, labor, and government-can bring new levels of investment to both the city center and the southern rural slum? What really are the roots of prejudice and how can we speed its early and widespread death?" The first two questions are especially significant because Bundy was later to become deeply embroiled in New York City's school decentralization dispute, and

the Foundation would play a leading role in promoting private business investment in the ghetto. Anticipating this latter development, Bundy urged in his remarks that "strong-minded business leadership can put itself in the forefront of the effort to open doors for the Negro."

Significantly, Bundy also hinted that the political arena was to assume greater importance in the black struggle. "We know . . . that political influence brings political results," he told the group. He did not say, however, that the Foundation would soon play an indirect part in electing Carl Stokes as the first Negro mayor of Cleveland.

Communication is of utmost importance, Bundy stressed, because "the prospects for peaceful progress are best when men with different parts to play keep talking straight and clear, one to another. Nothing is more dangerous in such a time than for men to lose touch with each other."

In this Bundy' was absolutely right. He knew that the rebellions signaled a serious breakdown in communication between ghetto residents and municipal, state, and federal power structures. Thus communication, which in the lexicon of those who wield power is synonymous with control, had to be restored at any cost.

As for justice, Bundy simply said that it should be given top priority.

Finally, Bundy came to the heart of what he wanted to say. He told the Urban League group that there are certain interlocking institutions which bind blacks and whites together. One of the most important of these is the city, and "the quality of our cities is inescapably the business of all of us. Many whites recognize that no one can run the American city by black power alone," the reason being, he suggested at a later point, that urban black majorities would still be faced with white majorities in state houses and the U. S. Congress. But if the blacks bum the cities, then, he stated, it would be the white man's fault and, importantly, "the white man's companies will have to take the losses." White America is not so stupid as not to comprehend this elemental fact, Bundy assured the Urban Leaguers. Something would be done about the urban problem. "Massive help" would be given to the ghettos, and the Ford Foundation would take the lead in organizing the campaign.

Thus the Ford Foundation was on its way to becoming the most important, though least publicized, organization manipulating the militant black movement. Housed in an ultramodern headquarters building on East Forty-third Street in New York, the Foundation is deeply involved in financing and influencing almost all major protest groups, including CORE, SCLC, the National Urban League, and the NAACP. Working directly or indirectly through these organizations, as well as other national and local groups, the Foundation hopes to channel and control the black liberation movement and forestall future urban revolts.

The Foundation catalogs its multitude of programs and grants under such headings as: public affairs, education, science and engineering, humanities and the arts, international

training and research, economic development and administration, population, international affairs, and overseas development. The list reads like a selection from the courses offered by a modern liberal arts college. Race problems are listed as a subclass of public affairs.

Under the leadership of Bundy, former Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs-and in this capacity one of the chief architects of this country's aggression in Vietnam-the Ford Foundation in 1966 made an important decision to expand its activities in the black movement. Prior to that time, the organization had limited its activities among black Americans to philanthropic efforts in education and research projects, all aimed at incorporating more blacks into the middle-class mainstream. "The 1966 decision, which was made in response to the black rebellions, was a logical extension of an earlier decision to vigorously enter the political arena.

Established in 1936 by Henry and Edsel Ford, the Foundation initially made grants largely to charitable and educational institutions in the state of Michigan. According to its charter, the purpose of the organization is "To receive and administer funds for scientific, educational and charitable purposes, all for the public welfare, and for no other purposes . . ." Most of the Foundation's income has derived from its principal asset: Class A nonvoting stock in the Ford Motor Company.

In 1950, serving as an outlet for war profits, the Foundation expanded into a national organization, and its activities quickly spread throughout the United States and to some eighty foreign countries. In a special Board of Trustees' report prepared at that time, the Foundation announced its intention of becoming active in public affairs by "support[ing] activities designed to secure greater allegiance to the basic principles of freedom and democracy in the solution of the insistent problems of an ever changing society." This vague mandate, which at first meant little else than underwriting efforts to upgrade public administration, was gradually brought into sharper focus as the Foundation experimented with new programs.

In 1962, Dyke Brown, then a vice president with responsibility for public affairs programs, could write that the Foundation's interest had "shifted from management and public administration to policy and the political process." He added that these programs "tended to become increasingly action- rather than research-orientated," which meant that the Foundation had to be prepared to take certain "political risks." How an officer of a supposedly nonpolitical, nonpartisan philanthropic institution could justify such a statement can be understood by examining how the Foundation views its relationship to the major political parties and the government. Simply stated, the Foundation sees itself as a mediator which enlightens Democrats and Republicans as to their common interests, and the reasons why they should cooperate.

For example, the Foundation has sponsored many "nonpartisan" conferences of state legislators and officials with the purpose of stressing "nonpolitical" consideration of common problems. Such bipartisan activities insure the smooth functioning of state and local political machinery by reducing superfluous tensions and other sources of political

conflict which might upset the national structure and operation of U.S. corporate society.

One specific role of the private foundations *vis-a-vis* the government was made explicit by Henry T. Heald, Bundy's predecessor as president of the Ford Foundation, in a speech given at Columbia University in 1965. "In this country, privately supported institutions may serve the public need as fully as publicly supported ones," Heald said. "More often than not they work side by side in serving the same need." What accounts for the growth of this "dual system of public and private decision in community and national affairs"? Heald continued,

For one thing, privately supported organizations enhance the public welfare by their relatively broad freedom to innovate. They can readily try out new ideas and practices. They can adopt improved techniques and standards that may become models for other institutions in their fields, both public and private.<sup>27</sup>

In short, Heald argued that, through their activities, private foundations could serve as a kind of advance guard, paving the way for later government activity, not only in the usual fields of education and scientific research, but also in the area of "social welfare." Hence, the private foundation can act as an instrument of social innovation and control in areas which the government has not yet penetrated, or in areas where direct government intervention would draw criticism.

An example of the former is the federal anti-poverty program. Well in advance of federal efforts in this field, the Foundation made grants for comprehensive anti-poverty projects in Boston, New Haven, Oakland, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and North Carolina.

Over the years, then, the Foundation's objectives shifted as it assumed a more aggressive role in American society and the American empire abroad. No longer simply a charitable organization in a strict sense, the Foundation has become a major social institution, dedicated to preserving social stability and encouraging economic development of neocolonial nature, both in the United States and in those parts of the world which the U. S. Government and business interests consider to be of strategic importance.

Stability and capitalist development are essential to the tranquil internal growth and external expansion of the American empire. Instability and underdevelopment, whether at home or abroad, breed violence and revolution. It is for this reason that by the end of 1966 the Foundation had committed seventy-two million dollars to research in population control in the United States, Britain, Europe, Israel, Australia, Asia, and Latin America. It is for this reason that it devotes approximately one-fifth of its annual budget to training personnel and building economic institutions in underdeveloped countries. It is for this reason that a year after Bundy's Philadelphia speech, the Foundation was to grant a substantial sum to CORE-the money to be used for "peaceful and constructive efforts" in

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<sup>27</sup> "American Foundations and the Common Welfare," by Henry T. Heald (Ford Foundation pamphlet *SR19*).

Cleveland's rebellious Hough district. And it is for this reason that in September 1968, it announced plans to invest an initial ten million dollars in the building of black capitalism.

To come to the point, the Ford Foundation had shaped itself into one of the most sophisticated instruments of American neocolonialism in "underdeveloped nations," whether abroad or within the borders of this country.

This is the general line of Foundation thinking which confronted Bundy as he stepped from his "little State Department" in the White House at the beginning of 1966. And he was ideally suited to further advancing these aims. From his years of working in the U.S. power structure, Bundy had nurtured a keen appreciation for the complexities involved in political manipulation and the seemingly contradictory policies which often must be pursued simultaneously in order to obtain a given end.

Bundy summarized his political outlook in an article entitled "The End of Either/Or," published in January 1967, in the magazine *Foreign Affairs*.<sup>28</sup> Bundy first asserted that foreign policy decisions are related to U.S. national interests, although he did not state who determines these interests or sets priorities. He then went on to criticize those who view foreign policy options in terms of simple extremes. "For twenty years, from 1940 to 1960, the standard pattern of discussion on foreign policy was that of either/or: Isolation or Intervention, Europe or Asia, Wallace or Byrnes, Marshall Plan or Bust, SEATO or Neutralism, the U.N. or Power Politics, and always, insistently, anti-communism or accommodation with the Communists."

The world is not so simple, Bundy wrote, and "with John F. Kennedy we enter a new age. Over and over he [Kennedy] insisted on the double assertion of policies which stood in surface contradiction with each other: resistance to tyranny and relentless pursuit of accommodation; reinforcement of defense and new leadership for disarmament; counter-insurgency and the Peace Corps; openings to the left, but no closed doors to the reasonable right; an Alliance for Progress and unremitting opposition to Castro; in sum, the olive branch and the arrows."<sup>29</sup>

Bundy learned that it is necessary to work both sides of the street in order to secure and expand the American empire. Hence he was a staunch supporter of Kennedy's and Johnson's war policies in Vietnam, while at the same time stressing the necessity of keeping channels open to the Soviet Union. Such a man was perfectly suited to work with black groups, including black power advocates, while at the same time local governments were arming and preparing to use force to suppress the black communities. The seeming contradiction here, to use Bundy's word, was only a "surface" manifestation.

[cut section about Black Panther Party and 10-point program]

Reforms are ends in themselves when implemented by the power structure, but when

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<sup>28</sup> Vol. 45, No.2.

<sup>29</sup> Bundy, p. 192

implemented by the ordinary working people of the black community, through an independent black political party, reforms can become one means to the creation of a revolutionary new society. The critical question is who, or more specifically, what class *controls* the making of reforms, and for what *purpose*? Both the Panthers and SNCC considered themselves to be revolutionary black nationalist organizations. Black nationalism is usually treated by the mass media as a sensational but peripheral phenomenon of no more than passing interest. Actually, nationalism is imbedded in the social fabric of black America, and this must be understood if the problems of the black liberation movement are to be fully appreciated.