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A. P. MacDonald, Jr.


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Black Power

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The term "Black Power" reflects a psychological giant step forward for Blacks. Though technically freed from physical bondage, it has taken more than one hundred years to deal effectively with freedom from psychological enslavement.

In the past, Blacks themselves learned that "Negroes" are ugly, lazy, shiftless, rhythmic, and so on. There was always the implicit, if not explicit, notion that these were innate, genetically determined, characteristics that set apart the Negro race as inferior. Further, the white man taught the black man to believe in the validity of the stereotype. Things perceived as real have real consequences. Blacks learned and played the prescribed role. Whites responded accordingly. Black children were socialized early to conform to the stereotype via white dominated books, white dominated movies and T.V., white dominated schools, and ironically enough, by their own parents' white dominated thoughts, values, and self-images.

A significant change is reflected within the term "Black Power." "Black Power" refers to the black man's power of control over himself, not (as some believe) his control over the white man—especially not in the sense of physical force. The Black Power movement (teaching Blacks that they do have some control over their destinies) is one of the most important social events of recent history, and is crucial to the upgrading of black men everywhere.

The belief that one has control over his outcomes (i.e., that there is a contingency relationship between what one does and what happens to him) is called "internal locus of control."\textsuperscript{2} The belief that one's life is controlled by outside forces (e.g., fate, chance, powerful others) is referred to as an "external locus of control." There is literature that indicates that Blacks and other

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minority groups have greater external orientations than are found in the white middle-class majority.\(^3\)

Research literature shows that an external locus of control orientation is handicapping. If one believes that he is powerless to effect a change in his life it is extremely unlikely that he will try, motivation notwithstanding. For example, the celebrated "Coleman Report"\(^4\) found that locus of control was the better predictor of school achievement of black children than any of the many attitudinal and familial variables studied.\(^5\)

If we accept the findings that Blacks are external, and that Externals do not try to better themselves, we find ourselves confronted with a seeming contradiction. Recent movements (e.g., Black Power) in the black community show that a radical change has taken place. Blacks are action oriented, pressing for self-esteem, and are more controlling of their reinforcements than ever before. Yet, those who have spoken of locus of control in relation to Blacks have argued that social conditions afforded the black man little opportunity for his efforts to have pay off value. Consequently, it is argued, the perception that his reinforcements were externally controlled was entirely realistic.\(^6\) However, the black man is now behaving, more than ever, as if he had control over his destiny. The change might be understandable and consonant with locus of control theory, if society had ceased its discriminatory practices. There is little evidence of such societal change, however.

The change in the Blacks follows too closely on the heels of the violent protests of the early 1960s to be coincidental. Yet, if we interpret rioting behavior as an attempt to control one's reinforcements, we are hard pressed to explain how this internal behavior came to be manifested by the external Blacks. We might argue that Black rioters were a small group of Internals, or we could maintain that rioting is external-type behavior. The author rejects the former explanation and partially rejects the latter.

It is the author's impression that participants in the initial riots were Externals whose rioting was expressive behavior stemming from frustration brought about by increased awareness of relative deprivation. Further, it is believed that the responsive reaction of

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\(^5\)The evidence in support of the claim that minority groups are more external and that an external orientation is debilitating is too much to present here.

society, (a) caused internally oriented Blacks to reinterpret the expressive behavior as instrumental, and (b) shifted external Blacks to more internal orientations, as they were provided with a concrete example of a contingency relationship between their actions (rioting) and outcomes (gains).

To elucidate, it becomes necessary to review some of the locus of control literature, from the perspective of the following model:7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Discontent</td>
<td>Internals Instrumental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Discontent</td>
<td>Instrumental</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Internals are typified by instrumental (goal oriented) behavior. When confronted with personal or physical deficiencies, they reduce their anxiety through the use of denial—an instrumental defense mechanism.8 However, they are more willing than Externals to take advantage of remedial programs designed to correct the denied disabilities.9

On the other hand, Externals are characterized by expressive behavior. They manifest more anxiety, depression, hostility, and so on.10 They do not attempt to (instrumentally) correct their

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7Although independently derived, the model is very similar to that proposed by T. J. Crawford and M. Naditch, "Relative Deprivation, Powerlessness, and Militancy: The Psychology of Social Protest," *Psychiatry*, XXXIII (1970), 208-223.


problems, and frequently seek to deal with them via escapist activities.

As suggested by the model, the behaviors of Internals differ from those of Externals as level of discontent is increased. When something disruptive occurs Internals manifest instrumental behavior, aimed at restoration of contentment; Externals become moody, anxious, depressed, etc. (expressive).

Caution should be exercised when classifying behavior as instrumental or expressive. For example, a child may cry when refused something merely as an expression of his frustration or a child may cry because past experience has shown that parents will give in to the child in order to terminate his irritating wailing. Most of us have known children who have used crying instrumentally—if we haven’t done so ourselves.

It is suggested here that rioting or violent protest, though traditionally thought of as expressive behavior, came to be seen as instrumental behavior—because it worked. The passage of time, a history of failure of the Blacks to work through the system, and effective communication (by mass media) of relative deprivation (i.e., relative to whites), collectively acted to trigger expressive-behavior of the black External. Internals also turned to violent protest as an instrumental act, when they observed the effectiveness of violent protest over working through the system.

Research shows that Internals were subjected to different upbringing than Externals. Internals came from warm, democratic homes, where love was combined with principled discipline, predictable standards, and instrumental companionship. Externals describe their parents as high in the use of physical punishment, affective punishment, deprivation of privileges, and overprotec-

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12 Phares et al., op. cit.; Seeman, op. cit.; Seeman and Evans, op. cit.
14 As can be seen from the model, the behavior of Internals is less variable than that of Externals. It is consistently instrumental—though there is little doubt that expressive behaviors become manifest during extreme stress. Externals are more variable; as discontent increases, they move from expressive-passive to expressive-explosive behavior.

"Expressive-passive" includes nondestructive primarily inner-directed behaviors (e.g., anxiety, depression, etc., as well as escape through novels, television, etc.). "Expressive-explosive" includes destructive inner- and outer-directed behaviors (e.g., aggression, rioting, etc., as well as escape through suicide). It should be borne in mind that people are not completely internals or externals, but fall somewhere along a continuum.
15 It should be made clear that any riot will consist of instrumental, expressive, and exploitive (looting, etc.) rioters. This paper focuses on relative proportions.
In other words, Internals were exposed to the kinds of parenting that foster the development of conformity to adult and societal sanctions, whereas Externals were exposed to parenting conducive to the development of dependency, hostility, aggression.

Internals did not turn to violent protest at first because they viewed it as noninstrumental behavior, and because it was behavior that they had been taught to view as destructive and immoral. "Good citizens" simply did not do that sort of thing. They worked through the system.

The question of empirical evidence for the claims made here presents itself. We have no direct evidence. The best supporting evidence would be in the form of rioters' locus of control scores over time. A finding that Internals were underrepresented among the participants of early riots and overrepresented among those of the later actions would provide some, but not complete, support.

There is indirect evidence. A few investigators have collected locus of control and willingness to use violence data from Blacks just after riots. Two of these (Ransford, 1968; Forward & Williams, 1970) are experiencing some difficulty reconciling conflicting findings. Ransford (1968) collected his data in 1965, shortly after the Watts riot. He found that discontent Blacks who felt powerless (i.e., had external control orientations) were the most willing to use violent protest. Forward and Williams (1970) collected their data after the 1967 Detroit riot. Blacks who had a


16Apart from the indirect evidence offered by the data on parental antecedents of locus of control, there is additional evidence that Internals are more concerned with morality than Externals. C. B. Keasey of Rutgers University (personal communication, January 13, 1971) found that Internals were higher on Kohlberg's stages of moral development. Also, in a series of unpublished studies, the author found that Internals were more inclined to believe that people are morally responsible for accident prevention and consequences, though Internals and Externals were not found to differ in the amount of actual responsibility assigned.

17There is direct and indirect evidence to show that Internals have been overrepresented among nonviolent activists. See, for example, D. Bell, The Radical Right (New York: Doubleday, 1964); A. Campbell, G. Gurin, & W. E. Miller, The Voter Decides (Evanston, Ill.: Row Peterson, 1954), pp. 187-188; W. Kornhauser, The Politics of Mass Society (New York: The Free Press, 1959); H. Levens, "Organizational Affiliation and Powerlessness: A Case Study of the Welfare Poor," Social Problems, XVI (1968), 18-32; S. M. Lipset, Political Man (New York: Ancor, 1960); L. W. Milbraith, Political Participation (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965); and, B. R. Strickland, "The Prediction of Social Action from a Dimension of Internal-External Control," Journal of Social Psychology, LXVI (1965), 353, 358. One exception is a study in which no locus of control differences were found between black college students who were members of civil rights groups (SNCC and NAACP) and those who were fraternity or sorority members (see, D. A. Evans and S. Alexander, "Some Psychological Correlates of Civil Rights Activity," Psychological Reports, XXVI [1970], 899-906).
high sense of personal efficacy (an internal control orientation) had the strongest positive attitudes toward rioting for Negro rights.\textsuperscript{18}

In the words of Forward and Williams, “He [Ransford] reports that in his study those most willing to riot showed strong feelings of personal powerlessness (high external scores on first-person items). However, in our Detroit study we found the opposite result—riot supporters were significantly higher in personal control (high internal scores on first-person items) than those who did not support riot behavior.”\textsuperscript{19}

Theory of rioting behavior is central in the controversy between Forward and Williams and Ransford. The former maintain (though Ransford denies their claim\textsuperscript{20}) that Ransford’s data and theory support an “alienation-powerlessness theory,” and that their data support a “blocked opportunity” theory. According to Forward and Williams, “alienation-powerlessness theory” holds that rioting is more likely among those who are discontent, alienated from society, and who feel powerless. Therefore, they strike out in rage, or manifest expressive-explosive behavior.

The “blocked opportunity theory”\textsuperscript{21} holds that rioting is more likely among “those who have high aspirations [are motivated] for their own lives and believe in their ability to achieve those goals, but who also perceive that it is discrimination and not their own inadequacy which prevents them from effecting their goals [discontent Internals—those who manifest instrumental behavior].”\textsuperscript{22}

Both theories and results seem correct, when one considers the times of data collection. It has been proposed here that Externals would have been more likely to participate in the early riots than Internals, but that Internals would be overrepresented in the later riots. Comparison of the two studies show that this is the case. The 1965 Watts rioters were external and the 1967 Detroit rioters were internals. According to the theoretical explanations offered here, both findings make sense.

Additional supporting evidence has been furnished by Paige\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{18} These studies did not use the same measures. It, therefore, may be possible to reconcile the differences between them on the basis of methodological issues. The measures seem to have enough in common to justify this discussion, however.
who studied participants of the 1967 Newark riot: "Self-reported riot participants are more likely to be found among the dissident—those high on political efficacy but low on political trust, rather than among the alienated—those who are both distrustful and ignorant of government."24

In their rejoinder to Ransford, Forward and Williams25 express ideas entirely consistent with those expressed here: "We assumed that blocked-opportunity theory would predict that those most predisposed towards viewing rioting as instrumental [italics mine] to achieving valued societal goals would reveal strong feelings of personal control and a confidence in their ability to effect change within their personal sphere of activity. On the other hand, we assumed that if those who were most willing to riot expressed strong feelings of subjective personal powerlessness, then an alienation-powerlessness theory rather than the more instrumental blocked-opportunity theory would be the more appropriate context for explanation."

The authors seem to be saying that rioting may be viewed as either instrumental or expressive behavior. Believing that the Detroit rioters were manifesting instrumental behavior they expected them to have an internal locus of control, for in their own words, "It seemed to us that the concept of instrumental act presupposed that an actor felt capable of affecting some change through the act."26 By definition, that actor would have to be internal.

In discussing the relationship between their findings and those of Ransford, Forward and Williams conclude, "We see no way in which both results can be interpreted within the blocked-opportunity theory we presented."27 And, "We believe that there are real and interesting differences between the two studies that need to be understood rather than explained away."28 Data and discussion presented here indicate the possibility that "alienation-powerlessness" and "blocked-opportunity" theories can each be valid explanations of rioting, when one knows the locus of control of the participants and whether they perceived rioting as instrumental or expressive behavior. Conversely, one can predict the locus of control of riot participants when one knows how they perceived rioting on the instrumental-expressive dimension. However, caution should be exercised in a priori labeling of behavior on that dimension.

24Ibid., p. 810.
26Ibid., p. 234.
27Ibid.
28Ibid.
It might be tempting to conclude that rioting will continue, because our nation was responsive to the violence. However, Blacks, as do people generally, continue to view rioting as a negative act, and one to be used as a last resort. We have every reason to be optimistic concerning the future, if our nation continues and increases its responsiveness to the legitimate needs of Blacks.

It is to the credit of the United States that it generally (certainly there were local exceptions) reacted as it did. The alternative of total police action for suppression was replaced by impartial investigation and negotiation. It is to our discredit that violent protest had to serve as the impetus for these actions.

If the interpretations offered in this paper are correct it can be concluded that feelings of personal efficacy are growing in the Black community. The Black Power movement (emphasizing the contingency relationships between behavior and outcomes) is both cause and effect. Blacks are rapidly achieving the psychological characteristics that are necessary prerequisites for upgrading. It behooves society to be supportive.