Black Reformists
or
Revolutionaries?

INTRODUCTION

Bourgeois revolutions, like those of the eighteenth century, stormed swiftly from success to success; their dramatic effects outdo each other; men and things seem set in sparkling brilliants; ecstasy is the everyday spirit; but they are short-lived; soon they have attained their zenith, and a long crapulent depression lays hold of society before it learns soberly to assimilate the results of its storm-and-stress period.

—Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte

From its inception, the education of the Negro was shaped by bourgeois ideals.

—E. Franklin Frazier, Black Bourgeoisie

The black freedom struggle in the United States has always been fraught with internal and external problems that are rooted in the unusual class and caste basis of American society.² Just

¹ The authors wish to thank John H. Bracey, Jr., without whose assistance and comments this paper could not have been written.

as an overseas colonial policy deals with its victims categorically, regardless of their relative position vis-à-vis the productive apparatus of the society, so a policy of internal or domestic colonialism functions generally in the same manner.\(^3\)

What are the implications, in terms of a method and a form of struggle, for a colonial people given these material conditions? Specifically, with AfroAmericans (at least in appearance) the form of the struggle against the oppression of the larger society

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\(^3\) Harold Cruse, “Roots of Revolutionary Nationalism,” *Black America*, Fall 1964, p. 10.
has taken on a "nonclass" character; in short, class collaboration and caste solidarity. This has not, however, negated the latent class contradictions that have underscored the underdevelopment and political retardation of the Black struggle.

Petty bourgeois leadership in formal organizations has placed a serious limitation on the political vision of civil rights organizations and their ability to formulate tactics that could be sanctioned unilaterally by the broad masses of Black people. In a sense, colonial oppression of Afro-Americans has engendered a pathological response to its brutality from the leadership strata of the Afroamerican colony. Preoccupation with personal power by many civil rights leaders and internecine cloak-and-dagger plots are a clear manifestation of this narrow-minded response to oppression.

The Black student movement has, for the most part, suffered from the same type of political sclerosis as the larger movement. Students, both Black and white, are by definition petty bourgeois. The university environment is merely a paradigm of the larger society and is, consequently, a hindrance to the students' ability to analyze political situations and to make political decisions based on something more than guilt and a rather quixotic view of society.\(^4\)

Presently, the Black student community, especially the smaller, isolated ones that have developed on predominantly white campuses, are in the throes of a crisis. The nationalist tendency among Black students is a reflection rather than a source of the present state of social consciousness among Black people. Because the Black student lives most of his life in a paradigm world (i.e., the university), this newly discovered Black consciousness has no objective referent. It acquires a rather superficial temper because its logic is ingrown. Instead of examining social reality, it blindly latches onto symbols. Instead of critically assaulting

\(^4\) The latent anti-intellectual strain of social movements in America has prevented them from grasping a rational theory in society. Subsequently, they have been at odds to solve practical problems, both of their organizations and of society at large. See Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1963).
social myths and seeking answers to vital political equations, it embarks upon the "politics of identity." In other words, the petty bourgeois Black student predictably seeks existential answers to hard-nosed political questions, and initiates Afroamerican studies programs and Black Student Congresses under the guise of the "politics of joy."

Black student politics in the late sixties may be summed up briefly as a kind of "stylistic politics"—politics with form, but largely without content. The demands made upon university administrations, except in very rare cases, are by no means radical and are within a range that the resources of American corporate capitalism can easily accommodate. Even if such things as Afroamerican studies programs are not implemented immediately, university administrations agree on their legitimacy, at least in principle.

Unlike the Black students of the early sixties who left college (in some instances permanently) to help with community organization in the South, the present-day Black student seems to be unaware of the limitations placed upon his political life by his relative class position and his more or less stationary status inside a college or university. Despite the political naiveté of the early Black student movement, they were at least aware of their role vis-à-vis the rest of the Black community. Black students were simply the catalyst of the new civil rights movement: the real leadership would come from the masses of Black people.

5 R. D. Laing, in The Politics of Experience (New York: Ballantine, 1967), gives an adequate discussion of the relationship between culture and structural psychic phenomena. The major flaw of Laing's analysis is his uncritical approach to the notion of "cultural revolution" in Western societies. In the case of AfroAmericans, the notion of a cultural revolution is relatively unimportant until oppression is erased. The massive cooptation of the "new Black culture" by social agencies of American corporate capitalism (Ford Foundation, etc.) is ample evidence of this.

6 The strike at San Francisco State College was the only situation in which a confrontation begun initially by students expanded into a community and labor issue as well. See the Guardian, February 15, 1969.


The social basis and the class position of Black students has not changed fundamentally since the early sixties. Even though the form of the struggle has changed generally, the social bases upon which each individual Black student becomes involved in the movement have not changed qualitatively. This is not to say that history is cyclical, but merely that the material conditions and the class antagonisms that have underscored participation in the Black human rights struggle still exist. By and large, the leadership and the rank-and-file members of formal human and civil rights organizations, including those called “radical” by the white news media, have had a very sophomoric vision of the “shape of things to come.” Black students are no exception to this. Like the white left in America, most of the programs and forms of struggle laid out by Black and civil rights organizations have been rooted in a petty bourgeois feeling of guilt and the paternalistic notion that the Black masses are in need of college-trained leadership.

As E. Franklin Frazier maintains:

... the middle-class Negro pretends that he is proud of being a Negro while rejecting everything that identifies him with Negroes. He pretends that he is a leader of Negroes when he has no sense of responsibility to the Negro masses and exploits them whenever an opportunity offers itself. As a result, the middle-class Negro is often plagued by feelings of guilt.10

The major assumption of this paper is that students and other sectors of the petty bourgeoisie must take a back seat in the present struggle for Black freedom. Although the present form of struggle (nationalism) has been best articulated by the more radical wing of petty bourgeois intellectuals in the Black community, if one examines the pathways that this rhetoric has taken, one discovers a huge chasm of disparity between theory and practice, at least in terms of the petty bourgeoisie. The Black

masses, on the other hand, have proven consistently that they are more radical than the most radical student or petty bourgeois leader. Theirs is a radicalism that grows out of the dimensions of colonial oppression and the radical indigence in which they are forced to live. This is, of course, not to say that Black students have no role in the struggle for freedom, but merely that the role of Black students must be placed in the correct perspective.

Historically, student movements except on very rare occasions have been the reflectors rather than the detonators of social revolution. Just as the university is the paradigm, in part, of the larger society, student unrest and militancy are the reflections or secondary illustrations of heightened social contradictions in the society at large. For example, in 1905 Russian students were able to gain a modicum of what were basically reformist demands because the tensions in Russian society were at a boiling point. This was also the case with Chinese students in 1947, and with the Tunisian students (UCET) prior to 1954.12

Although the Black student movement has trapped itself in a familiar crisis, it is not an inextricable one. If we consider the historical origin of the present form of struggle among Afro-americans (nationalism) comparatively with other colonial situations, it is quite obvious that the Afroamerican struggle in the United States is merely a link in a world-wide chain of struggles for national liberation.

Applying the lessons of the Vietnamese War to the struggle of

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11 A sizable portion of the volunteers who joined Castro in the Sierra Maestra was composed of students. Many of them had a good deal of experience in political work but had never served jail sentences, primarily because most Cuban youth who could afford to go to college came from rich landed families. The students, after they had shed their class privileges and no longer functioned as students, were an important factor in the success of the Cuban Revolution. See Lee Lockwood, *Castro's Cuba, Cuba's Fidel* (New York: Vintage, 1969), pp. 10–15.
AfroAmericans, it is quite clear that Black people in the United States have attempted for the past few years to pull off a bourgeois-democratic revolution.

No radical political underpinnings occurred at the outset of the Vietnamese War. In fact it is doubtful that a majority of the guerrilla fighters in the National Liberation Front (NLF) had ever heard of Marx or Lenin. Despite the lack of radical theoretical under scorings, however, the Vietnamese struggle and all other struggles of colonial peoples, including those of Afroamerica, constitute, in fact rather than in theory, a blow against the neo-colonial aspirations of international capitalism. In short, the epoch of bourgeois-democratic revolution is a transitory one that, when pressed to its logical conclusion, dissolves itself in the face of a struggle in which the broad masses of people participate.13

I ORIGINS OF BOURGEOIS NATIONALISM

To understand better its origins, as well as to interpret the current student movement, we must take a probing look into the education of the freed Black slave following the Civil War.14 Initially, and even to the present day, Black education has been literally based on Northern and Southern philanthropy, beginning with the ambiguous reign of the Freedmen's Bureau during the tide of Reconstruction.

The greatest success of the Freedmen's Bureau lay in the planting of the free school among Negroes, and the idea of elementary education


among all classes in the South. It not only called the school-mistresses through the benevolent agencies and built them schoolhouses, but it helped discover and support such apostles as Edmund Ware, Samuel Armstrong, and Erastus Cravath . . . Fisk, Atlanta, Howard, and Hampton were founded in those days and six million dollars were expended for educational work, seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars of which the freedmen themselves gave of their poverty.\textsuperscript{15}

It was during the last decades of the fateful nineteenth century that a crucial figure in Afroamerican history arose—Booker T. Washington, perhaps the sharpest yet the most misunderstood leader in the history of Afroamerican social thought.

Washington, born and raised during slavery (he himself was a slave), struggled through work and the goodwill of a few whites for an education, the key to his success. Eventually, through brilliant speeches and accommodationist tactics, he became the self-chosen leader of the Black race. The solution to the race problem, which was announced at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895, called for thrift, property acquisition, and morality, all at the expense of civil and political rights.\textsuperscript{16} With this speech the origin of "bourgeois nationalism" occurs, and it is in this light that Washington was a product of his age. Implicit in his social philosophy was the "skillful manipulation of popular symbols and myths, like the gospel of wealth and the doctrines of Social Darwinism,"\textsuperscript{17} which made him popular with Northern capital-


\textsuperscript{16} "In all things that are purely social, we can be as separate as fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to natural progress" (E. David Washington [ed.], \textit{Selected Speeches of Booker T. Washington} [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1932], p. 34).

\textsuperscript{17} Meier, \textit{Negro Thought}, p. 117. Also see C. Vann Woodward, \textit{Origins of the New South 1877–1913} (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), p. 360. Vann Woodward states: "During the two decades from 1895 to Washington's death in 1915, Negro thought and policy in matters of race relations, labor, education and business enterprises conformed in large measure to the Tuskegee Philosophy. This was not due so much to the
ists and Southern conservatives alike. An orator and perceptive leader, Washington grasped and understood the Zeitgeist of the late nineteenth century—lynching, political disfranchisement, and the steady growth of Jim Crow were the forces he attempted to overcome. His social philosophy, moreover, centered on the "doctrine of Industrial Education," which was to be the earmark and foundation of a new Black middle class interested in property acquisition, improved education, and successful business ventures in marketing and banking. This would provide a suitable economic basis for subsequent political agitation in the area of civil rights and social equality:

One of the first and most important lessons then to be taught the Negro when he became free was the one that labor with the hands or with the head, so far from being something to be dreaded and shunned, was something that was dignified and something that should be sought, loved and appreciated. Here began the function of the industrial school for the education of the Negro.18

Words dressed in the spirit of his age made Booker T. Washington the leading ideologue of the period, with the exception of his social and political enemy, W. E. B. Du Bois.19 Washington urged thrift, self-help, and property acquisition in order to deal with the problems of his age:

For the Afro-American, "the epoch of rising capitalism" [1880–1915], was not the epoch of white bourgeois capitalism, whose need for genius and personal influence of Booker T. Washington as to the remarkable congeniality between his doctrines and the dominant forces of his age and society ..."


expression and political dominance smashed the slave system in the South, but the epoch of black bourgeois capitalistic emergence beginning around 1900 when Washington established the National Negro Business League. Thus Booker T. Washington was expressing the real, fundamental class aspirations of the epoch. He was the bourgeois leader-educator who was learning his bourgeois nationalism in the politics of the market place . . . but who played the capitalistic game according to the rules that prevailed (as all smart capitalists do).²⁰

It is with this view that the authors see the current Black student movement as the key in completing “the bourgeois democratic revolution,” or more simply enhancing the growth of a historically defunct, anti-intellectual, and naive Black middle class. The Black student movement still imports the social philosophy of Washington, though it suffers from a critical misunderstanding of history, especially its own. This philosophy insists upon the goodwill and philanthropy of white university trustees and administrations. The crucial Black studies program in a white university is to be financed by charitable foundations. As an example, Gerald McWorter, former professor at Fisk and now at Atlanta University, called for a “foundation-financed study of the Black experience”²¹ to propose Black studies curricula across the nation.


²¹ The New York Times, July 8, 1968. See Gerald McWorter, “The Nature and Needs of the Black University,” Negro Digest, March 1968. Here the “politics of identity” clearly defines the political function of the university, as McWorter clearly embraces the Washingtonian ethic: “Blackness does not categorically exclude all white people from the University; it merely redefines the standards for their participation and the possibility for their involvement . . . [T]he role of the white man must be redefined and carefully placed for the maximum good of all” (p. 8 [our italics]). Some white people will be necessary for the immediate future, if for no other reason than the Black community’s shortage of resources. Once again, there is a clear-cut analogy to Washington’s notion of “one as a hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” This logic attempts to conceal its contradictions and reveals a stunted and shallow historical perspective.
II EARLY YEARS OF THE BLACK STUDENT MOVEMENT, 1960–1964

From its inception in and proximity to the civil rights struggle, the Black student movement has clearly outlined goals paralleling those of established civil rights organizations. The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) verbally and tactically adopted the nonviolent philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.; this merely made Black people assume a new burden—that of love mixed with suffering:

We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of non-violence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our faith, and the manner of our action. Non-violence as it grows from Judaic-Christian tradition seeks a social order of justice permeated by love. Integration of human endeavor represents the crucial first step towards such a society.

Through non-violence, courage displaces fear; love transforms hate; acceptance dissipates prejudice; hope ends despair. Peace dominates war; faith reconciles doubt. Mutual regard cancels enmity. Justice for all overthrows injustice. The redemptive community supersedes systems of gross social immorality.22

The student demonstrators who poured into the South during the sixties attempted to raise the moral issue of segregation, not to deal with its stark political ramifications. The moral issue cloaked the economic and political forces that were the foundation of the white South’s dominance and racism. Confrontation or face-to-face action would supposedly force men to examine their sins against the Black people who suffered from this brand of racism, and ultimately to transform the earth into a heaven of human brotherhood. Many students, both Black and white, went to the South out of feelings of guilt and paternalism. They were children of Frazier’s Black Bourgeoisie but, more importantly, they were students attempting to deal with a set of problems

22 “Statement of Purpose,” adopted at the first general conference of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, April 17, 1960.
foreign to the methods they used. Fundamental social and economic problems were obscured by the emphasis on the moral issue.23

Nonviolence as a moral force was important, but its import as a method for economic and political change was alien to the experience of Black people in America. There was no love in the political arena.

Massive participation in agitation for full civil rights for Black people by Black students began in April 1960. The recruits for the nonviolent invasion of the South came from predominantly Black colleges. Most of them were gripped with an ambivalent feeling of dread and romance for what lay ahead of them in sleepy Southern hamlets and large industrial cities like Montgomery and Birmingham.

The overwhelming strain of thought running through the minds of the majority of these first Black students was apolitical. Most of them were vaguely aware that inequities and social contradictions did exist in American society, but their reasoning out of underlying causes or stimuli for these contradictions failed to focus on concrete causes of oppression. Instead, something vaguely described as "the system" was cited as the root of social evils rising out of an unevenly organized multiclass and multicastrate society. According to this type of reasoning, the federal government did not have a vested interest in indigence, racism, and ignorance; the government simply did not recognize them, even when all three were busy clubbing it over the head on election day.

The first phase, from sit-ins to the Freedom Rides, was a phase of groping and uncertainty. Seen whole, the sit-ins were a series of guerilla wars on local and widely separated battlefields. The problem of this period—and these problems were never solved—were problems of methodology and structure.24


24 "While direct action techniques have been enormously successful in integrating public accommodations and in securing jobs in retail stores, they
Despite the frenzied air with which the sit-ins of 1960 were carried out, they provided those Black students with their first bit of practical political education.

By 1961—the year in which SNCC mounted its first project independently of the internecine political struggles of SCLC—a hard core of predominantly Black students had been through enough sit-ins to realize that force and violence formed a very real aspect of the American body politic, especially in states like Alabama and Mississippi. After 1961 SNCC began to spread out and vary its activities: sit-ins were combined with Freedom Rides to the upper and middle South.25

After the many sit-ins and Freedom Rides, and the official and strategic (from the federal government’s point of view) capitulation of Robert Kennedy,26 SNCC as an organization began to see the futility of a program based on tactics rather than objectives. Black students began to realize from an implicit and intuitive review of past campaigns and world events (especially the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo27) that

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25 Actually the Freedom Rides were started in 1947 by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and were resumed under CORE’s sponsorship in 1961. The burning of one of the busses carrying Freedom Riders just outside of Anniston, Georgia, caused CORE to abandon the project, though later the Freedom Rides were resumed under the aegis of SNCC. Zinn, SNCC, pp. 41–43.

26 Ibid., p. 59.

27 Massive demonstrations were held in all the major cities of the North at the death of Lumumba. In New York, a large group of Black people trekked from Harlem and succeeded in disrupting the UN sessions for that day. Lorraine Hansberry and other Black writers drafted a letter to Lumumba’s widow apologizing for Ralph Bunche’s rather shady connections with the Congo crisis. Bennett, Confrontation, p. 211.
power for Black people involved more than the ability to make front page headlines in *The New York Times* or to wear out large amounts of shoe leather in demonstrations.

It was at this point that SNCC began to develop a homespun radical critique of American society based upon the inconclusive results of encounters with state and local governments in the Southern states. It was this independent and spontaneous character of SNCC's radicalism that would make it a pivotal organization of the New Left a few years later.²₈

The sit-ins had begun a new phase of the Negro upsurge in which students—matured overnight into social revolutionaries—started to play a leading role. These same students, in the brutal training ground of the Freedom Rides, became toughened, experienced. And in the course of it all, they somehow decided that the Deep, Deep South, out of which they had just barely escaped alive, was the place where they must go back to work.²⁹

SNCC's decision to go into the Deep South's rural communities to spark Black community organization and voter registration was the result of two years of work in the social laboratories of the South without tangible results. Lunch counters from Atlanta, Georgia, to Jackson, Mississippi, were now open to Black people, but the social foundations of power that gave rise to and maintained inequitable institutions in American society at large had not been moved.

Despite the relatively rapid development of political sophistication among Black students (at least in terms of strategies), the lack of a theoretical view of society and an unguarded anti-intellectualism dulled Black students' ability to criticize certain dominant strains of thought in the newly rejuvenated civil rights movement of the early sixties. Nonviolence, in spite of state and local governments' blind dependence on force and violence, was accepted uncritically as a matter of course and as a viable means to attain what was already granted theoretically by the laws of

²₈ Zinn, SNCC, p. 245.
²⁹ Ibid., p. 49.
the land. The euphoric, bourgeois notion that progress was inevitable, especially in the area of civil rights ("We Shall Overcome"), characterized and crippled the young Black student wing of the civil rights movement as well as the older, more established civil rights organizations.

The failure of Black students to develop more feasible theoretical approaches to problems that plagued the freedom struggle in the early sixties was a crucial blow to the developing character of the movement. Black students had demonstrated that taking the fight into the streets was a more effective strategy than previous ones, primarily because it enlarged the boundaries of the political arena and subsequently served as a means of political education for the masses of Black people in parts of the North as well as the South.

To what use were these valuable political lessons put to by the Black masses? The answer was given quite bluntly by Robert Williams:

We cannot rely on the law. We can get no justice under the present system. If we feel that injustice is done, we must right then and there, on the spot, be prepared to inflict punishment on those people.

Since the Federal Government will not bring a halt to lynching in the South, and since the so-called courts Lynch our people legally, if it's necessary to stop lynching with lynching, then we must be willing to resort to that method.30

Williams had simply reiterated what was then being said by working-class and unemployed AfroAmericans in the Northern cities and by Black tenant farmers in the South. In the North, especially, many working-class Blacks were attracted by the Nation of Islam and the organization's then newly appointed spokesman, Malcolm X.31

30 There was nothing radical per se in the position Robert Williams had taken. However, in the context of the early sixties, Williams had gone far beyond what other civil rights leaders would have suggested. Julian Mayfield, "The Challenge to Negro Leadership," Commentary, April 1961.

31 Malcolm X became a spokesman for the Nation of Islam in 1961. Malcolm, more than any other proselytizer of the "new Black nationalism," helped sway the thinking of urban Blacks along nationalist lines.
The entrenched leadership of the civil rights movement (i.e., Wilkins, Young, and King) went on public record as being opposed to the methods of redress (self-defense committees) proposed by Williams almost immediately after Williams had released the statement to the news media. The irony of the situation was that the established civil rights leaders’ protest was made in the face of the fact that defense of one’s person and property is sanctioned by the United States Constitution and International Law.32

The majority of Black students in SNCC and the youth wing of SCLC fell into line behind Wilkins’ position, which implicitly argued for nonviolence. This, of course, was the organizational position of SNCC. A considerable number of Black students, however, some of whom were in leadership positions in SNCC, supported the Williams thesis. Months of community organization in the Black Belt counties of the South, voter registration programs, and a rash of “mysterious” deaths among SNCC organizers testified that self-defense was a necessary component for Black Freedom in the South.33

III TRANSITION AND CHANGE IN THE IDEOLOGICAL DIRECTION OF BLACK STUDENTS, 1964–1966

SNCC was tired of reporting the truth about Mississippi to the press and having it read by the inside of the wastebasket. If they were ever going to expose Mississippi racism to America it would only be through using whites. The Mississippi Summer Project was a calculated political act.

—Julius Lester 34

The Mississippi Summer Project of 1964 marked the end of an epoch and first phase of political action by Black students. The

32 Bennett, Confrontation, pp. 211–214.
34 Ibid., p. 21 (italics ours).
first phase had been characterized by the "politics of the body": sit-ins, Freedom Rides, etc. A personal code of bourgeois morality had been wrongly construed as a means of acquiring political power. Tactics and strategies were often emphasized over objectives. In the early sixties, the civil rights movement (especially the youth wing) generally approached the problem of racism in American society from an existential point of view, when the roots of the problem were grounded in the nature of political and economic institutions in American society. When the masses of Black people in America opted for programs that would fundamentally alter the material conditions of their life in the South and the North, the petty bourgeois leadership of both the old civil rights organizations and the more progressive Black student groups opted for selections from Albert Camus' *The Rebel*.35

In 1964, SNCC, recognizing the limitations placed upon it by the relative class status of students and their unfamiliarity with the folkways of rural Black communities in the South, decided that its job was not to organize Black Belt communities in the South, but rather to act as resource persons in the various communities. Of course, in many small Southern communities where the SNCC presence had preceded the Summer Project by several years and where SNCC workers had in fact become a part of the community, intensive organization took place without paternalistic overtones. Generally, however, SNCC had evolved into an organization of politically conscious, but still morally outraged provocateurs. SNCC was also shedding its student identity and subsequent class implications. Once SNCC workers were entrenched in a community, they entreated local people to join the organization. By the end of 1964, a SNCC worker could be anybody from an aging farm hand to a Howard coed majoring in Oriental mythology. As a result, SNCC gained a populist character that would become a dominant factor in its appeal in later years.

35 It was common knowledge in the late fifties and early sixties that existentialism had become a preoccupation of the avant-garde, especially among Afroamerican college students. Cruse, "Behind the Black Power Slogan," op. cit., p. 176.
Two major assumptions about America—more specifically Southern society—underscored the tactics used by Black students in the Summer Project: (1) Demonstrations had removed the obvious and symbolic manifestations of Jim Crow, but Black people were still disenfranchised and generally phased out of the economic and political life of the society. (2) Given the impossibility of running a Black candidate on either of the established party tickets, it would be necessary to form a new party, e.g., the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and the Black Panther Party of Lowndes County in Alabama.

While the Mississippi Summer Project of 1964 was getting under way, Blacks in Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and Chicago were conducting their own summer project to the tune of forty million dollars in property damage.

Faced with the Watts Rebellion of 1965 and the growing weakness of moderate Black leadership, nonviolence (Satyagraha, as Gandhi called it) was on its way out. The struggle took on a new dimension when Stokely Carmichael chanted “Black Power” and the contradictions of American society uncovered themselves. Malcolm X rhetorically exposed the callous and vicious nature of racism in America. Black students eliminated whites from their organizations because white people only served to perpetuate the myths of superiority.

Black students, especially those in SNCC, took a totally independent path. Self-reliance replaced liberal and so-called “white radical” support. Psychological liberation replaced the whole question of morality, and Black students became the revitalizing thrust for surmounting the cultural lag inherent in the movement. A vague notion of separation and nationalism was beginning to crystallize:

Lester, Look Out Whitey, p. 43.

See George Breitman (ed.), Malcolm X Speaks (New York: Grove Press, 1965), for a collection of the most penetrating analyses of American society ever composed. The key to Malcolm’s rise was his grass-roots origin, fiery style, and mass appeal. We need not elaborate on his important role in the Black movement.
If we are to proceed toward true liberation we must cut ourselves off from white people... The necessity of dealing with the question of identity is of prime importance in our own struggle. The systematic destruction of our links to Africa, the cultural cut-off of Blacks in this country from Blacks in Africa are not situations that conscious Black people in this country are willing to accept. Nor are conscious Black people in this country willing to accept an educational system that teaches all aspects of Western Civilization and dismisses our Afro-American contribution with one week of inadequate information (Negro History Week) and deals with Africa not at all. Black people are not willing to align themselves with a Western culture that daily emasculates our beauty, our pride and our manhood. It follows that white people, being a part of Western Civilization in a way that Black people could never be, are totally inadequate to deal with Black identity which is the key to our struggle for self-determination.38

Cultural nationalism begins, and the struggle takes on a new twist, a new set of ideas—the doctrine of Black Power, which rests on an ill-defined assumption: “Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks.”39 Black Power addresses itself to

...the necessity to reclaim our history and our identity from the cultural terrorism and depredations of self-justifying white guilt... [T]o do this we shall have to struggle for the right to create our own terms through which to define ourselves and our relationship to the society and to have these terms recognized.40

Black Power calls for ethnic solidarity in order to enter the mainstream of American life. Its politics is the vote—not the gun, as so many people have misinterpreted it—as witnessed in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) and independent po-

Black Students

Political groups like those in Chicago, where A. A. Rayner won an alderman's seat. It is rhetorical, reformist, and middle class. Its goals are similar to those of all ethnic communities in America:

... American politics and American social life are still dominated by the existence of sharply defined ethnic groups. To be sure, these groups have been transformed by several generations of life in America... and yet the ethnic groups are not just a political anachronism; they are a reality. The Wasp (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant), the Irish-American, the Italian-American, the Jewish-American do differ from each other in essential ways. They vote differently, raise their children differently, have different ideas about sex, education, religion, death, etc. And so, if Negroes are to assimilate, if they are to integrate with white America, the question has to be asked: "with which white American? With the Wasp? Or with the Irishman? The Italian? The Slovak? The Jew?" 41

Carmichael thus assumed that Black people should follow the American way into the mainstream of ethnic politics, rooted in the cultural uniqueness of each group.

Thus, Black Power overturned the integrationist ethic. Now it merely assumes a typical base—a group base—for social integration. A peculiar synthesis of ideas led to its formulation—the quest for identity,42 a return to African culture, and good old American politics.

42 James Baldwin became America's leading wanderer in search of identity during the fifties. See especially "A Question of Identity," Notes of a Native Son (New York: Basic Books, 1964), and Nobody Knows My Name (New York: Dell, 1966), where the "identity crisis" of Black people emerges. Baldwin accepted the antagonisms of Black and American, Western and Non-Western. In these essays, Baldwin chose to become an American, thus succumbing to the psychological stereotypes America has ascribed to Black people. Black students, however, have become Afroamerican, a vague, bewildering choice that obscures the crucial status of Black people in America.

According to this line of thinking, cultural revolution has become the basis for social revolution, suggesting a contradiction between culture and society; culture, however, emerges from the material basis of society—from work. Self-determination, thus, is a political question, and for the masses
Black Power now dominates the American scene. What is its goal?—Ethnic pluralism—an ill-defined, invalid sociological construct that obfuscates the economic and cultural foundations of American race relations. For, as one writer has noted,

Perhaps the most serious confusion in the Black Power concept involves this contradiction between revolutionary extra-systemic rhetoric and reformist intra-systemic suggestions. . . We discover that the vague revolutionary cries for "new rules" and "new forms" are given content with self-help schemes which seem closer to the tradition of Booker T. Washington and the Protestant Ethic than to Mao Tsetung. 43

Black Power is totally reformist. Its revolutionary style is in no way consistent with its practical content; in short, it contains its own contradictions, as Harold Dratch makes clear:

Hamilton then continues to discuss examples of reformist programs which stress realistic self-help, puritanical hard work, and culture self-sufficiency. The programs which he cites, however (such as SCLC's Operation Breadbasket, CORE's Southern Cooperative, a New York medical group known as Negro, and [the] Association of Afro-American Educators), not only have a distinctively middle-class quality, but

there is no question of identity—just one of survival. It is this mystical "crisis" that assists in many ways the formation of class consciousness among Black people. Cf. E. Franklin Frazier, "La Bourgeoisie Noire," where he emphasizes the role of class consciousness: "Race consciousness to be sure has constantly effaced class feeling among Negroes. Therefore, we hear on every hand Negro capitalists supporting the right of Negro workers to organize against white capitalists, of course. Nevertheless class consciousness has never been absent" (Modern Quarterly, Vol. V [1929], quoted in John H. Bracey, Jr., "The Thought of E. Franklin Frazier: Nationalist Assumptions and Implications," unpublished paper read before the fifty-third annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, October 1968). It is this dialectic of class versus race that obscures the real issue—the caste position of Black people in America.

also depend upon a "crucial link" between Black middle-class professionals and the Black masses.\textsuperscript{44}

As Dratch concludes:

This psychological-therapeutic theme, which runs deep in much of Black Power thinking, shows the faults of the Fanon model of decolonization from which it is largely drawn. The emphasis of Black Power advocates upon the psycho-spiritual regeneration of the American Negro seems often to be coupled with a neglect of detailed socio-economic analysis, and with a fuzzy delineation of class relationships and other aspects of larger structural realities. With documents like Carmichael and Hamilton's book, there is the uncomfortable sense that these discussions of revolutionary "therapy," couched in a rhetoric of radical change, may conceal a genuine poverty of ideological strategy and radically new programs.\textsuperscript{45}

The Black Power concept ignores the structural realities of American life. For an example, one need merely look at the unusually inaccurate statistical figures of the United States Government.\textsuperscript{46}

**CONCLUSION: PROBLEMS OF THEORY AND PRACTICE IN THE BLACK STUDENT MOVEMENT**

The task of the revolutionary party is to prolong the period of abnormality; to preclude any return to normality.

—V. I. Lenin

Rebels of petit-bourgeois origin, the first groups of "Guevarist" insurgents aim to pose in dramatic moral fashion and national demands. But obviously they cannot remain at that level; to advance, they must find a social base for their revolt, win over the working class to revolutionary aims conceived outside it (italics ours).

—André Gorz

\textsuperscript{44} Dratch, "The Emergence of Black Power," op. cit., p. 341.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 351.

As long as imperialist finance capital is able to control the pulse of the society and subsequent levels of activity (economic, political, and cultural), it is within its power to build larger and more repressive paradigm institutions, even in the face of the destruction of older, more established ones. The failures of the present Black student movement (one might add those of the white student left also) clearly illustrate that corporate capitalism cannot be destroyed from within these paradigm institutions, primarily because the accumulation of large amounts of capital increases its cooptative powers. As C. Wright Mills pointed out,

... in The Overdeveloped Nation, the standard of living dominates the style of life; its inhabitants are possessed, as it were, by its industrial and commercial apparatus: collectively, by the maintenance of conspicuous production; individually, by the frenzied pursuit and maintenance of commodities. Around these fetishes, life, labor and leisure are increasingly organized. Focused upon these, the struggle for status supplements the struggle for survival ...

What we are illustrating is that the Black student movement reflects and maintains an ideological poverty. Students have been the major proponents of Black Power in the United States and yet are totally ignorant of the socioeconomic position of Black people in America. Their demands are a rhetorical parade and parroting of the propaganda techniques of many national liberation movements throughout the non-Western world. Since they refuse to transcend the worthless and defunct method of the unsuccessful civil rights movement, their demands fall easy prey to university cooptation. Harmony, not dissension and division, must reign in the university; it will yield to Black student demands in order to preserve a façade of order. Subsequently, in most cases, the demands are met. The "direct action" tactic reflects the ecstatic "politics of identity," thus leaving the Black student organization cooptable. Handouts are the university's most reliable weapons, as well as the exploitation of any observ-

48 C. Wright Mills, Power, Politics and People (New York: Ballantine, 1963), p. 240. (First italics his; second italics ours.)
able division that may occur in the internal functioning of the student organization. The quest for identity becomes the foundation of political action,\textsuperscript{49} thus obscuring any fundamental look at the nature of American society. Moreover, what Black students completely misunderstand is that they are the “neobourgeois,” who will cloak their petty politics and opportunism in such nationalist slogans as “we support the Black community,” “Black Power to Black People,” etc. Fear and guilt, and not Negritude and Africanisms, are the major psychological stumbling blocks. Mass confusion obfuscates radical and creative thought. The primary student-based human rights organization, SNCC, suffered a recent ominous death when Stokely Carmichael was expelled for “engaging in a power struggle both within and outside SNCC.”\textsuperscript{50}

The most frequent demands which the Black student groups are making on college administrations are not particularly radical and have for the most part been acquiesced to in principle by most schools. This is not to say that demands are being met, those involving personnel are generally not easily accommodated within the existing operating pattern of the colleges . . . . Although the more publicized confrontations between the universities and the Black students have taken the forms of demonstrations and seizures of buildings, in most cases the demands have been peacefully, if persistently, negotiated.\textsuperscript{51}

In meeting the demands of Black students, the university often reinforces the very dependency these students are trying to erase. The university is not the city, nor the rural South, but an ideological fortress that produces the theoreticians of American society. The student possesses a stationary role, which enables him to contemplate his future; but while this goes on, America contemplates it also. The university places the student in an existen-

\textsuperscript{49} At Columbia in 1968, “It was in the context of the idea of the University as an alien institution that the tactic the Black students introduced—the decision to occupy and barricade a building—must be understood” (Stephen Donadio, “Black Power at Columbia,” \textit{Commentary}, September 1968, p. 74).

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{The New York Times}, October 7, 1968.

tial role; like Camus' rebel, he must rebel in petty individual ways. But the university is also a reflection of American society—with the cultural fabric torn, the economic foundation crumbling, and society “rationalized” into an ignorant state. White students possess many of the same problems, yet they lack a history of struggle in America comparable to that of Black students. The university is not the place where social and economic transformation shall occur. The sooner students realize this blatant social fact, the sooner they can take a more objective role based on their own position in relation to American society.

We must view this movement, cloaked in its talk of abstract rights, business participation, and a “separate economy,” as another attempt in history to complete “the bourgeois democratic revolution.” As Harold Cruse, the master mind of the Black educational revolution, suggests:

... the failure of the Negro to establish an economic base in American society served to sever the Negro bourgeoisie, in its “slow and difficult occupational differentiation,” from any economic, and therefore cultural and organizational ties with the Negro working class. Since the Negro bourgeoisie does not, in the main, control the Negro “market” in the United States economy, and since it derives its income from whatever “integrated” occupational advantages it has achieved, it has neither developed a sense of association of its stature with that of the Negro working class, nor a “community” of economic, political, or cultural interests conducive to cultivating “nationalistic sentiments.”

In addition, Cruse maintains:

When one discusses Negro-white relations in the United States, from a Marxist or any other point of view, very little sense is made unless the question is discussed in terms of two parallel bourgeois developments. One—the dominant white bourgeois development—has long reached its apex, while the other—the minor Negro bourgeois development—is distorted and stunted. The Negro bourgeoisie never

52 Harold Cruse, “Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American,” Rebellion or Revolution?, p. 90.
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completed its own economic, political and administrative revolution within the social structure of American society. In this sense, it is a backward bourgeoisie and it follows that the Negro as a people is condemned to backward economic, political and cultural conditions: to social underdevelopment pure and simple.53

One must view Black students in a parallel role with other groups attempting to complete this revolution. Their demands are centered on such ill-defined phenomena as racism on campus.54 There are loud cries for separate housing, yet Black students themselves will not live together because of "common university frustrations." They ask for increased aid and scholarships and even pay raises for Black university employees.55 And in some cases, there has been labor support of student demonstrations.56 Basically, these demands are nonrevolutionary, calling for structural reforms that are still based on "having what the white man got"—the integrationist ethic. "Philanthropy and goodwill" have financed these endeavors in the university, as well as in the social realm of Black people.57 The leadership of Black Power groups and its student counterparts shows they "are dependent primarily upon the white propertied classes."58 We are witnessing a mere "cultural rebirth" by the student sector, a phenomenon supersed-

54 This was the opening statement of Northwestern University's Black students in May 1968. In the subsequent agreement of May 4, 1968 between the University and the Black students, the University admitted to its "whiteness." Nevertheless, it has remained structurally unchanged.
55 This was the case at the University of Illinois, where Black students compiled 33 demands, including wage increases for the University's Black employees.
56 San Francisco State College's Third World Liberation Front received minimal support from oil workers during the latter stages of their strike. See the Guardian, February 15, 1969.
57 This is especially true of the overt efforts of the U.S. Government. See the Chicago Sun-Times, May 8, 1968, report on the meeting of "CORE and other rational Black Power advocates" with Richard Nixon to reach an accord on a program of "Black Capitalism." The Wall Street Journal, June 14, 1968, revealed the intention of Big Business to mete out loans to Black banks, as well as to supply jobs for angry "slum youngsters" and other ghetto residents.
58 Frazier, Black Bourgeoisie, p. 91.
ing the fundamental role of students—understanding and clarifying social reality.59

Black students fall in a curious position: Upon graduation, what will occur? They will enter the labor market, receiving high salaries in all fields from teaching to engineering.60 White students will lose a number of these jobs—the issue being an ethic of containment and pacification, rather than competition. A new Black professional class will emerge, encased in bourgeois opportunism and hoping to create a firm economic base to provide the links with the Black working class. The Black student movement is the crucial, and perhaps necessary, link in the bourgeois revolution. The movement must realize its essentially bourgeois character and critically and objectively view its unique and im-

59 See Cruse, The Crisis: “No literary or cultural movement today can be truly and effectively radical unless it presents a definitive critique of the entire cultural apparatus of America. More, it must analyze the functions of art and artists, creators and audiences, sellers and consumers, critics and group standards—or better yet—the politics of culture as expressed within the context of American intergroup status and relations in the cultural arts . . . For American society, the most crucial requirement at this point is a complete democratization of the national cultural ethos. This requires a thorough, democratic overhauling of the social functions of the entire American cultural apparatus” (pp. 466, 457). Cruse’s entire argument rests on the “politics of culture,” which is borrowed directly from Mills, Power, Politics and People: “The Decline of the Left” (pp. 221–235), “Culture and Politics” (pp. 236–246), “The New Left” (pp. 247–262), and “The Cultural Apparatus” (pp. 425–432). For example, see p. 256 where Mills views “the intellectuals—as a possible, immediate, radical agency of change. . . .” Mills saw the failure of mass culture for the white classes, especially the middle class. Cruse sees its failure for the Black caste. Yet the cultural upsurge by Black and white youth (African dress and mod clothing, soul and rock music, and a new ethos engendering an unusual sociosexual freedom) has suffered the usual commodity absorption peculiar to American social reality. In other words, there is a market for the “new cultural apparatus.” With the coming of the cultural revolution of the last five years, there has been little political work. Consequently, the current fads will generate their own contradictions, hopefully enabling political analysis and work to emerge. But we as students must realize that the revolutionary process will continue unabated by the mystical proponents of the new culture.

60 The Wall Street Journal, July 23, 1969, reports that “Negroes in the business world have found the demand for their services gives them the bargaining power for jobs and salaries they regarded as out of the question four or five years ago . . .”
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Important position vis-à-vis the Black masses. Until then, it remains an American political movement suffering from ideological poverty, purposelessness, and opportunism. It, too, may suffer the same misfortunes of the older bourgeoisie, whose opportunism stifled economic foundation.\textsuperscript{61}

Two current wings in the Black movement are arguing for the "correct" position: Cultural Nationalist and Revolutionary Nationalist. Neither has been totally sanctioned by the Black masses, whose only ideology is the action witnessed in Northern and Southern cities alike. Both claim the other is retarding the "revolution," though neither engages in practical solutions to the structural problems—economic and political—of Black people. Consequently, an ideological war—a war of words—has broken out between, most notably, the Black Panther Party and various cultural nationalist groups (\textit{viz.}, LeRoi Jones' Spirit House Movers and Ron Karenga's "US"). The result has been more political confusion, ideological bankruptcy, organizational exploitation by the "man," and petty opportunism of the Old and New Left. Students fall in the middle of the conflict and fuel its flame by participating in the make-believe world of campus politics.

\textsuperscript{61} Abram L. Harris, \textit{The Negro As Capitalist} (Philadelphia: The American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, 1936), pp. 117–184, on "The Plight of the Negro Middle Class."