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BLACK ART



BLACK CULTURE

ARTICLES

By
ASKIA MUHAMMAD ABU BAKR EL TOURE
ED SPRIGGS
MARVIN X & MILFORD GRAVES
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BLACK ART

BLACK CULTURE

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The Crisis in Black Culture

ASKIA MUHAMMAD ABU BAKR EL TOURE

INTRODUCTION

The title of this essay was derived from a number of observations and conversations that I've had with conscious Black people across the country for the last two years; and last but not least, from a very recent conversation with Bro. Joe Goncalves.

If one would speak with the seemingly endless number of young nationalist intellectuals anywhere in the country about Black culture, one would be reassured that we're "T.C.B." (takin' care of business) in that area, and that things are getting better and better, "'cause we're really showing whitey that we don't need his western thing." But frankly, are things really getting better? Or are we so focused upon "anti-whitism" (the first stages of nationalism) that we're neglecting the hard, serious business of building Black cultural/spiritual awareness -- the very core of a National Psyche or Consciousness?

And let's be realistic: when Black people talk about "Black Consciousness or Power," they are speaking indirectly of Nationalism -- whether cultural, political, or economic. (America, according to Bro. Harold Cruse and others, is a nation of nations: white Protestant Anglo-Saxon, Jewish, Catholic, what remains of the Indian, and on the bottom, the African-American. The problem with the Afro-American is, unlike other groups, his intellectuals and professionals have never recognized their innate nationalism and proceeded to create the proper cultural philosophy, organizations, and attitudes to gear their people for concrete survival in the West.) Anyone who denies this is either ignorant, blind, or dishonest. Because ultimate Black Power means self-determination, not "equality" (with mass murderers?), but self-determination. The main example of this is the Third World. The African, Asian, South and Central American Bros. are not asking for "equality" with racist colonialists and neo-colonialists, but are demanding self-determination: the right of nations and peoples to determine their own destinies; which means self-government or the setting up of a National State as an ultimate goal.

I am clarifying my position from the beginning in order to get to the basis of my perspective. We have among us a number of naive young Bros. today who are screaming "Black Power! Black Revolution!" etc., and when one naturally follows up the logical trend of their thought with Nationalism, they back off and reply: "No we're not Black

Nationalists! No not Nationalists -- Revolutionaries!" and who, may I ask, ever heard of a "revolutionary" who wasn't a Revolutionary Nation-alist? Lenin, Mao, Ho, Fidel, Nkrumah were Revolutionary Nationalists, first, then Revolutionary Internationalists. Those "revolutionaries" who want Black Power, but are not Black Nationalists, you'll find, are really integrationists (assimilationists) in green field jackets; for ultimate Black Power means Black Nationhood. They realize that the masses, being basically nationalistic, are not going to hear any of that old, March on Washington nonsense about "Black and white together" or "Love your enemies" or "nonviolence," so they are opportunistically out-revolutionizing and out-"Blacking" the true revolutionaries -- Revolutionary Nationalists -- in order to maintain their waning influence over the awakening masses.

Now these polemics might seem rather far-fetched or off the subject, but my position is that when we view Black Culture in White America, we must view it from a straight-up, no monkey-business Nationalist perspective if we wish to resurrect the lives of our people. We must see ourselves as a separate entity, an alien Nation/Race -- "alien" from white America -- and that this is really how the whites view us and treat us (Southern colonialism, Northern ghetto-colonialism) whether they tell us this or not. Now, from this perspective, everything that we as a separate entity produce is a product of our own special consciousness or world-view. So that our culture should be viewed as separate or belonging to Black People (our most important wealth, since we produce no raw resources) since it is the product of our spirit/awareness, consciousness, and reflects our Collective Psyche. Now if this culture is a product of Black Minds in motion in the world, Black consciousness, and is controlled politically and economically by whites (Jews, Italians, WASPS, etc.) then Black Culture is indeed in crisis.

I

Black people are world renown -- and have been since the Fisk Jubilee Singers of the nineteenth century -- for Black music, which in this day seems to capture the dynamism, alienation, flux and change that is the "modern era". Black music, especially Modern Afro-American Music ("jazz"), is the main music that has been played in most countries world-wide and serves as the root or core of African-American culture. This is true because Afro-Americans, during chattel slavery, became more musically inclined due to the fact that we were not allowed to read or write, and were only permitted to keep our music because it helped to get the work done and seemed to keep us quiet. When they stripped us of our obvious African culture (robes, drums, language, religion, etc.) the "abstract" non-artifact producing aspect of culture -- our music -- was the only thing, in altered form, permitted to remain. So, given this situation, Black people were forced to become more musically oriented than anything else; and the Black Man began to express his thoughts and feelings about Life, God, and the Universe musically. As time passed, the Black Musician became and remains the major philosopher, priest, myth-maker and cultural-hero of the Black Nation. What, again, we must be aware of is that Black Music is the core of our National Culture. Being the core or root, as it goes, so goes our spiritual/cultural life as a nation of people. (Permit me to savor this term, "nation". Anywhere upon this planet twenty to sixty

million souls, with a common history, language, and culture, constitute a good-sized nation.) We must remember that, with the exception of a few people of genius, Black People have only been producing literature in any large amount since the 'twenties of this current century. (Oh I know, Chestnutt, DuBois, Dunbar, Weldon Johnson, but I mean on a massive scale.) And yet, taking all of these facts into consideration, we see Black People today, possessing only a few literary journals. (As far as Black Literature is concerned, the New Black Writing has produced a number of brilliant poets -- Larry Neal, Jewel Latimore, Ronald Stone, LeRoi Jones, William Kgotsoitsile, Don Lee, Le Graham, Sonia Sanchez, S. E. Anderson, to mention a few. Some of these writers also deal in essays, Ed Bullins and Jones in playwriting, but we still have much to accomplish in terms of serious fiction. In Bro. C. H. "Charlie" Fuller of Philly, we have perhaps the best short story writer that New Black Writing has produced so far; but the major Black literary journals -- with the exception of Black Dialogue -- have refused to publish his work. Bro. S. E. Anderson shows much promise as a short story writer also.

What New Black Writers must remember is that if we represent a New Black world-view, then this must be reflected in our creative literature which must be well-rounded: plays, short stories, novels, essays as well as poetry. We must remember that there have been Black literary movements of the past that can offer comparison with us. The so-called "Talented Tenth" generation of the early 1900's -- DuBois, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson, etc. -- were poets also, but where is the fiction work of the new writing that can compare with DuBois' "Dark Princess", or Weldon Johnson's "Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man"? * What new fiction can compare to Claude McKay's "Home to Harlem"? The "Talented Tenth" generation of writers offers an accurate comparison with us, because they were political activists and leaders -- DuBois, Weldon Johnson, journalist Monroe Trotter, historian Carter G. Woodson -- as well as creative writers. If one seriously studies the writings of this "Talented Tenth" group -- whether one shares their politico-cultural views or not -- one can see that they had a philosophy, a clear-cut vision of themselves and of the world, and always projected this in their creative writing. Some of us write fairly good plays and essays; what we must remember is that many times a good short story will get across a new viewpoint or philosophy quicker and more effectively than a "hard-line", no monkey-business political essay -- which might tend to alienate new readers.

Also, we Black writers must produce more literary journals. It's a shame that our main journals -- Soulbook, Black Dialogue, Journal of Black Poetry -- are all located on the West Coast! There should be some kind of regular literary publication representing each area -- East Coast, Mid-west, South, and West Coast -- as well as publications geared for national and international circulation. The writers in each region should make it their responsibility to organize workshops to train young thinkers and writers in Black Consciousness and New Black writing. Presently we are organizing this for Black Dialogue. (More than likely, we'll become more organized and develop these things as our movement matures and as we gain more confidence in deciding just what we're really proposing to accomplish.) All magazines having to do with serious "jazz" criticism, or having to do with Rhythm and Blues, Country Blues, etc., are in white hands. With the notable exceptions of LeRoi Jones and A. B. Spellman, all serious critics of Afro-American

*What new book of essays can compare with the classic, "Souls of Black Folk?"

music are white men. WHY??? It will be agreed by both Blacks and whites, that "jazz" is the main musical contribution of people in this country to the modern world. It will be agreed that Black music -- Blues, Rhythm and Blues, Gospel, "jazz" -- is surely the most dynamic musical culture in this land. Then why don't Black intellectuals and Black people control Black Music and Black musical/cultural criticism???

We are cultural slaves! Dig it! Victims of what Bro. Harold Cruse calls "Cultural Imperialism". This means that since we didn't have any raw resources for whites to exploit, they were able to exploit our cheap labor and the products of our National Black Culture (mainly music). Broken down further, this means that the recording companies are white-owned.* Broken down even further, this means, baby, that James Brown and the late Otis Redding, not to mention Aretha, are sending a lot of Jewish and Italian boys and girls to college and making their parents rich with the products of their Black souls. And further, none, or very little, of this bread is going into the Black communities that inspire the music. Yes, Brothers and Sisters, "intellectuals", whether we dig it or not, we are supporting Zionist Israel and the Mafia (Italian nationalism with our Soul Music -- and further helping to impoverish the Black Nation.

What is to Be Done: The Role of an Authentic Black Intelligensia

First, we will say that the role of an authentic intelligensia is to organize Black people politically, culturally, spiritually, and economically. In other words, a true intelligensia of a people would seek to create the forms, the organizations, through which that particular people can, first survive, then prosper, and finally, rise to eminence or world power. The "negro" intellectuals (or "civil writers"), due to the ignorance of their roles, again as Bro. Harold Cruse points out, have failed to do this and thus the Black Nation/Race at the present time is defenseless.

The aware Black people who realize these dangerous weaknesses in our Nation must proceed to correct them: we must create a National Black Intelligensia in order to survive. What is this "intelligensia"? Again, it comes down to this, it is the living mind of the Black Nation/Race. Today we in Black America are like a tremendous giant with amnesia: we cannot remember who and what we are. However, our Memory is gradually returning -- piecemeal. We must set about to organize methods through which we can speed-up the process of "remembering who we are", or Self-Realization. First and foremost, we must create a Black Cultural Philosophy and Ideology: the projection of the Black Spirit/Awareness, or the Dynamic Black Psyche, into the realm of intellectual ideas. This Philosophy/Ideology is the most important thing at this time because it will provide the Basis for any future moves that we collectively make in the world. In other words, when we define and articulate our collective World-view, we will know how to move and act in the future. This philosophy/ideology should create a system of ethics which would show our people how to live life. Much of Afro-American thought is based upon a defense-reaction to White American racism. In other words, we are caught up in reacting to Ofays, in being "anti-white" rather than "pro-Black"; we have loosely defined what we're against, but not what we're for, what we really want.

*The booking agencies are white owned, the radio stations, the theatres, and the night clubs where the music is heard, are white (usually immigrant) owned.

Where will this Black Intelligensia come from? The New Black Intelligensia is emerging today from independent radicals, the campuses -- especially the new Black Student Unions that are in formation-- and from those youth from the streets who've been awakened and influenced by Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and the young Black Power advocates. Black Youth is reading and studying like never before in our history. Black Youth is the most dynamic element of the Black Nation -- as goes Black Youth, so goes Black America -- as well as being the majority of the population: according to reliable sources, the major portion of our people is under thirty-five (35) years of age and growing.

Concrete Tasks: Even at this time, with the Philosophy/Ideology still in formation, there are some things that Black intellectuals can be/should be doing. First, there should be concrete moves made to bring about a working unity among the Black creative artists. There is no reason in the world why James Brown and Aretha Franklin should not know LeRoi Jones, Larry Neal, or Abdul Karim. Some of the newer Black writers are familiar with the New Musicians -- and are even influenced by them -- but this does not, however, extend to Rhythm and Blues or Gospel. Of all of the Black creative artists, the Black writers are the most "conscious" in terms of Black political/cultural awareness, and should, therefore, take the lead in unifying the creative artists. Moves should be made to "collectize" Black culture: in other words, bring it all under one standard or banner. This can be initiated by many methods. Some older thinkers have suggested the formation of such organizations as Black writers, artists, and musicians' leagues and unions leading, finally, to a National Congress of Black Culture. Also, the institution of a National Journal of Black Music. Locally, in our communities, such institutions as Black Musical/Cultural Institutes, and Black Repertory Theaters (in formation in Harlem), as well as community liberation schools should be initiated. These are relatively simple undertakings: look at the progress of the Chicago artists -- the Wall of Respect plus the community workshops in the arts that they formed. (As far as I am concerned, every large Black community should have a Wall of Respect. We must learn from each other.) Yes, these moves are relatively simple, if the creative artists are consciously dedicated to preserving Black culture.

Again I would like to stress the important link-up of the New Black intelligensia with the Black popular artists. The Rhythm and Blues singers are the cultural heroes of the Black Masses (Black Youth), along with the popular disc jockeys. The Impressions are obviously Nationalistic Black Artists; who ever disagrees with this should listen to their latest release, "We're a Winner". (In 1965, I wrote, for Liberator Magazine, the first creative essay to center around Black Music, mainly Rhythm and Blues and New Music, for the New Black writing. At that time, my theme was the Impressions' "Keep on Pushin", which I had borrowed from David Henderson's epic poem based upon the famous Harlem uprising of '64. More of these things must be attempted by Black writers.) Also, Black Student Unions should strive to create on campus/off campus Black Studies and cultural programs which would involve the Black communities closest to their schools. Black students should see themselves as the political/cultural/intellectual extension of the Black community upon the local college campus. They should also participate in Black community forums and engage in tutorial programs in the community, thus solidifying mass intellectual unity.

The Crisis

Probably quite a few Black people who read this essay will judge me an impractical, utopian schemer, because they do not realize the seriousness of the current crisis in Black culture. Let me illustrate my point. White musicians and intellectuals have hung around Black musicians and entertainers since the 'twenties. Always they have attempted to imitate these musicians and produce a diluted "hip" white style of their own. In the twenties we had white "Dixieland", in the 'thirties and 'forties we had white "Swing" music and "jazz" with Harry James, Benny Goodman, Paul Whiteman and other white "Fathers of (ha!) 'jazz'." In the 'fifties we had whites pushing harder -- inventing the cold, sterile "Third Stream" music (a mixture of "jazz" with western "serious" music), and in the popular field, the Elvis Prestley-- Bobby Darren raucous, rowdy "Rock and Roll" that sought to challenge the smooth, lyrical Black Rhythm and Blues. Now, in the 'sixties, we have the final "successful" white imitation: so-called hippy or "Rock" music. This music was, at first, a carry-over from the Everly Brothers -- Elvis Prestley "Rock and Roll" school; but with the emergence of the British Beatles (who rode to glory by imitating the great Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters and others) and the Hippies, this white cultural-hybrid, "Rock", stands to replace both Rhythm & Blues and New Music or "jazz" as the popular music of this country. Now, due to their dependence upon the merchants of the white music industry for economic subsistence, the Black musicians, both "jazz" and R & B, are in trouble. In many Eastern cities -- and, indeed, on the West Coast -- the white musical establishment is beginning to replace Black musicians -- on the radio and in the clubs -- with hippie groups. Opportunistic white music "critics" such as Frank Kofsky, who writes for Jazz Magazine which has lately been changed to Jazz & Pop (Rock?), have recently pointed out that certain Black Music is too "ivy-league", too establishment, not "Revolutionary" enough, etc. That "Rock" is now the new music, the thing; and "jazz" should become more "soulful" by linking up with hippie rock music. Dig it!! Due to this latest example of opportunist, white cultural nationalism, many young "jazz" musicians are being thrown out of work and are, in some cases, starving-- rather than going and setting up their music in the Black community, for the interests of their own people. Now this does not mean that the merchants of the white music industry have finished draining Black music. no, on the contrary, the white music merchants continue to feed upon the top Black artists, James Brown, Aretha and others, while gradually beginning to cut the young "up-an-coming" musicians, who follow them, loose. As they see the growing popularity of hippie "Rock" music with white youth, they will begin to substitute it for Rhythm & Blues and "jazz". The young "jazz" musicians and vocal groups will find themselves unable to survive unless they return to the roots of "Home", the Black community. Efforts are now in progress to begin to link Black Music totally with the Black community. Jihad Productions (LeRoi Jones), Milford Graves and other musicians are beginning to cut their own sides. The controversial Don Warden pointed out on his San Francisco "talk" show that Bro. Otis Redding and his group were assassinated by the Mafia for daring to attempt to organize an independent, all-Black music corporation with some of the major Black recording artists. If this is true, we can see that the Italian nationalists (the Mafia) have robbed the Black Nation of a cultural giant. I don't know the truth of the matter, but Warden and others have stated that the white authorities refused to raise Bro. Otis' plane from the Minnesota lake in order to investigate the reasons behind the tragic crash. (And poor Jet magazine talking about the "eery" similarities of Otis' death with Bro. Sam

Cooke's death; but only "eery" in terms of similar dates, etc. God help us!)

If what Warden implied is even remotely true, we are indeed pitiful; and we must speed up the proposed contacts between the Black Intelligensia and the popular artists. If Bro. Otis Redding did, indeed, proceed upon this basically nationalistic music venture, he should have been aware of its consequences, and should have had protection until he completed the deal. This is another role that strong organized nationalists can play: protection of Black artists, writers, and political figures. Had Bro. Otis been conscious enough to have contacted a group like Bro. Karenga's "US" organization for protection, he might still be thrilling us today. (Also, Dammit, there was no, absolutely no, reason for 'Roi Jones and the brothers to be riding around Newark alone, without protection, or Huey Newton to be gunned down, again unprotected, in Oakland. If we don't protect our leading people, how do we expect to survive?)

So we must see that many risks will be involved in organizing Black people on even cultural levels; but we have no choice if we expect to continue to exist as a national/cultural entity. Only in this way -- the creation of a National Black Intelligensia; the development of a Black Cultural Philosophy/Ideology; the creation of a working unity of all Black artists; the development of National Black Cultural Institutions and Bodies -- can we overcome the current Crisis in Black Culture and move to fulfill our National and Racial Destiny. "MOVIN ON UP!"

1968

--ed spriggs ON THE "BOYCOTT"

*black writers/white publishers: an alliance that boycotts
black publishers**

I come in low--like a dust cropper pilot flying over the heads of fruit trees--because cats want to know about the "boycott". I come in this low because I know abt our own ugliness. I think you shld know about it too. dig the split making our eyes protrude from what rests whitely betwn them. because we can close the split is why the boycott.

Cold-blooded. the dirt of whitey's hell beneath our fingernails. why? dead light bulb. zombie calisthenics. powerless to sanctify our hell. yesterday's ashes on today's ebony ambers. frosty faustian fraud. plain bad feet.

but what shld we smell as we stand in the world? our own body before the calla lily. burning in the sun. a different masturbation on our fingernails? historical tragedy. repeat. repeat. but not for me. as in the song. talk to me baby. whisper in my ear. like in that song too.

what I want understood is this boycott thing, and it is necessary to deal with this, is that this did not come about due to a personal clash with Clarence Major. I mean it is not about C. Major the man, the poet, but the ideological stance that is him, a lot of other Black writers and until recently, myself. and another thing that needs clarification is that it aint about International Publishers per se, yeah, we dig where they at. along with a lot of other publishers in that same direction and Praeger, say, in the opposite.

the ideological stance: where we at? writers. Black. seeking new dimensions of power. the orientation is BLACK POWER. generally, that's the stance. the image most of us present. the assumption. the writer that embraces Black Power uses that Power in a fashion that will directly (concretely) be of benifit to us all.

listen to us. theoretical raps. work and talk abt art *collectively benefiting black people*. we are artists working out of a still too nebulous ideology. something Black we have a feeling for. something Black we have to take responsibility for. something Black we say is art and then we let it go at that. why for?

broken paned window. kaleidoscopic beings. mishappenings in thot constructions. all of that, but I have another challenge to deal with here. the boycott. it implies, according to current acceptance, an active campaign against something. not exactly where I'm at. I did threaten that initially tho. but later a better notion was just to throw the idea out there. see where the brothers wld go with it without an immediate explanation, so i threw it out there. The Journal of Black Poetry picked up on it. the word came that a number of brothers across this arcadia had "joined" in. what their reasons are I cannot tell you. i know where a few went with it. seems some thot

*In the spring issue (1968) of the Journal of Black Poetry we announced that Ed Spriggs intended to "boycott" an anthology to be published by International Publishers and edited by bro. Clarence Major. We asked bro Ed for a statement. This is it.

it was abt International Publishers being CP apparatus. but no. the issue is heavier than that. it is about *us*. and that's heavy. it's abt *Black-Arts-Power*. and that's even heavier if we can get to it.

enough has been written about the all-encompassing notion of Black Power so there is a basis--a contemporary relevance--that is available to all the cats who be writers and claim our particular stance. cats that function in our social and political milieu shld be putting the theory to work. it's that simple. yeah, but, the absolute end, plotted as some wld have it, is a compromise. contemporary relevance? Black cats are writing great books. but many seem to deal in or out of their personal Black ideology. what they rake in is also their personal black ideology. dig it? low blow? naw, their take is peanut power and I don't mean the kind G.W. Carver was dealing with either. mickey mouse stuff. percentages designed to provide creature comforts to Black writers while the heavy percentages *fortify the status quo*.

iced reality we thot to be dead in the volcanism of our heads. back stabs in time. pus running down our faces like long winter snot. too long to suck back. bitter-sweet. taste it. then fatten up. busting out at the seams white publishers expand, become more and more entrenched in the imperialism of the west. the juices of our servitude. wld maggots squirm out of our village minds if the ice melted there? some minds keep turning up cameoed. still tricking for downtown merchants. not for uptown lovers of laugh. you dig. a clock losing time. and we say BLACK POWER. published history of the sixties is all you have to dig. white publishers and black writers. Black publishers ignored constantly by our favorite sons. yesterdays ashes on today's-ebony ambers. frosty faustian fraud. plain bad feet.

why? disunity? the age. irrelevant. EGO. baby, ego. individual power. you dig? IN DIVID(E) (YO)U AL(L). so yeah, disunity also. ham mercy Malcolm. what cld possibly be behind the hip brother artist's inability to see how his powers can function for the total community? for the power the community is flirting with? a pivoting soul out of vortex of soul. cold blooded.

Dig how much mileage has been gotten out of the Malcolm legacy by Merit, et al. whose fault it is is slightly off my point. but leRoi the terrible, baldwin the goodie gum drop, malcolm the irreplaceable, and all the rest of us git compromised just because we want to git our things out there. it's weird. black publishers and the would be ones stand in the shadows subsisting on broadsides, throwaways, rubberstamps and other trivia because black writers won't give them a decent play. but we scream "*Black Power.*"

the change up wld mean that desired monies would have to be sacrificed. but the chosen few could give the black publishers one of their manuscripts a year as a start. how in the hell are the black publishers ever going to get off into it if not by the assistance of the writers. how are distributorships ever going to mature with the publishers if the highly marketable works of a wm kelly, j. killens, ja wms, l neal, e bullins, leroi j, or the like never comes their way? does the concept of black power and black arts extend *that* far? i say yea. i say yea, yea. review the lit and you'll say yea, yea, too. what abt these writers? am i just shooting at them

because, maybe, i aint among their number? all you got to do, i say, is review the lit. these writers, with the possible exception of a ja wms have repeatedly stated the need for establishment of black of black institutions, e.g., black publishers, distributors, etc. and when you review the lit. see what definitions you come up with re what black art is. pull it together. put it out there some more. growth is still a potential. but sacrifices are still the order of the day. sacrifices. deferred gratifications is what sacrifices is. do you dig it?

I took a stand. boycott. it's time for that. it grew out of a telephone conversation with c major. while we talked the necessity to take the stand crystallized. repeat: black writers are being exploited even when they're talking abt black power thru the white press. i mean some cat's total economics and prestige depend upon the white publishers--not that they want it that way. we can break that up if we want to. our publishers will never be able to break out of this system if the boost doesn't come from the black writers. swamp our publishers with the level of material that we turn over to the white publishers and domestic and international distributorships will be a reality *before* the present system crumbles. there are many levels of power. let's move on up a little higher.

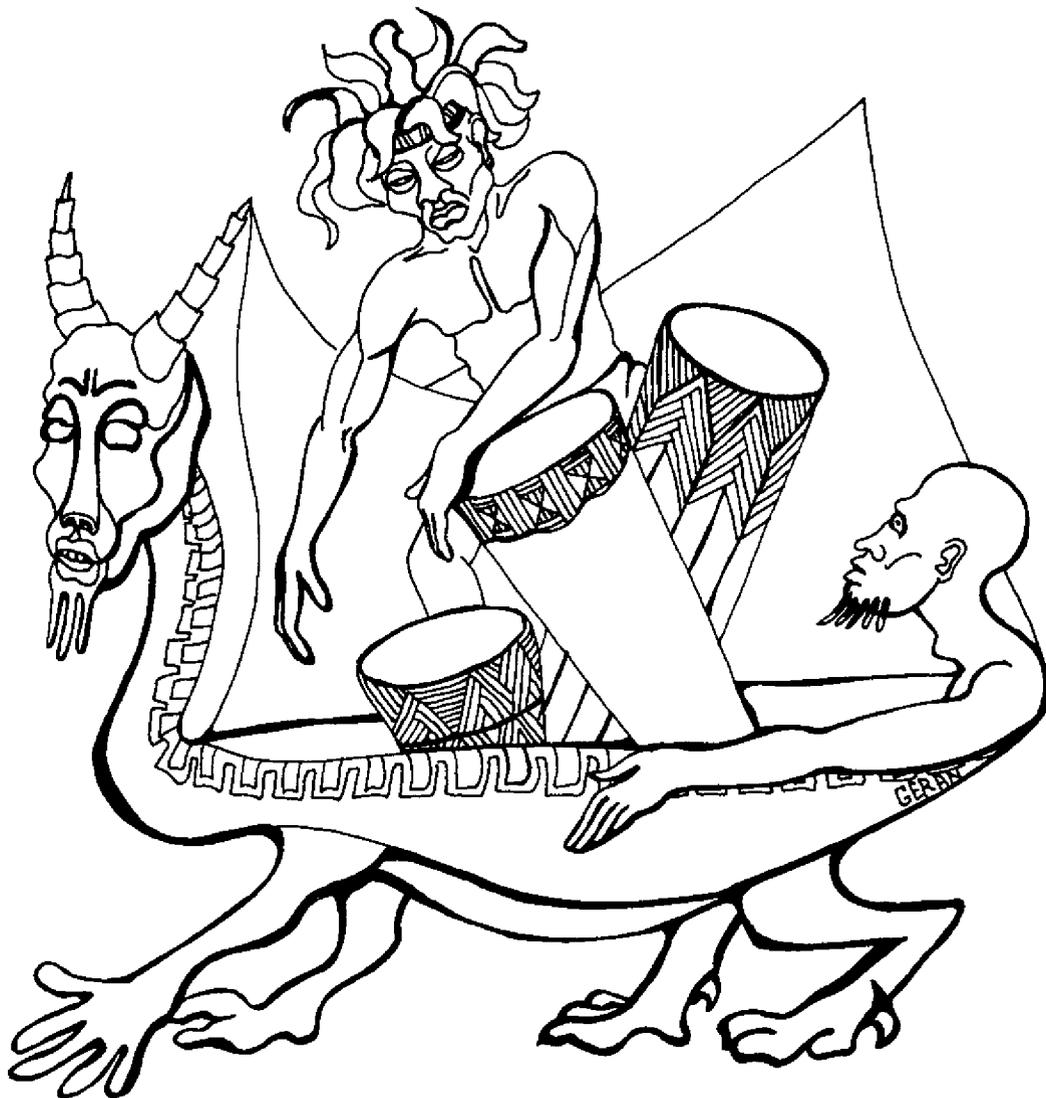
We already have black publishers (no matter how minor some are) who consistently work with us. are we ready for that? c major wasn't. even tho he had been published in dudley r's Broadside press anthology (*For Malcolm X*) and in the *Journal of Black Poetry*. *Journal of Black Poetry* is printed and published by black people entirely. Jamerson printing company does the job for the *Journal*. julian richardson, owner of Success Printing company does the job for *Black Dialogue*. Richardson and Associates are publishing a reprint of the *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* in paper and hard covers. san francisco could become the black publishing capital of afro-america if we had our souls where our mouths are. a lot more could be said abt the way we could support black publishers and what kind of changes we wld have to go thru to initiate that support. but we need to think, talk and act on this right away quick. we can take up the challenge now. we need to. unless some of us are already too revolutionary to entertain this kind of thing. it's still possible for us to get our cookies and help the black publishers get theirs too.

repeat. it's abt discontinuing the freeze we have dealt out to black publishers by ignoring their existence. me? i'm nuttin on every thing directed to the mother country's houses that shat shld and cld be published black. so i wont get a poem here or a piece there. my life could never depend on it anyway. of course there are a couple of things due to come out that i let go of before i saw the necessity for this stance. no matter. we've got to stop the contradiction at the point that we become aware of them. black publishers are laying in the cut waiting for the righteous black writers. black writers can bail them out.

There are institutions to be built. we're young and strong enough to build but we've gotta have the vision. we have the power. if you don't believe it just ask dial, harpers, wm morrow, grove, merit, marzani and munsell or even international publishers. couldn't julian richardson, dudley randall and lafayette jamerson get into some very

heavy drama if they could get just a little play from our co-opted black writers? you know they could. holes in yr front because you choose not to. fatten up. writers. black. seeking new dimensions of power. talk to me baby. we been laying back too long.

1968



from AN INTERVIEW OF

Milford Graves

BY MARVIN X *

(Milford Graves): ...So when them brothers came downtown, a lot of the things they was doing on their horn went beyond what you call the western tempered scale, you see. When these brothers got downtown, the man sectioned them out, you see, and being surrounded by the slickest of slickers, you know, white intellectuals and white critics, you see, they have a way of isolating you, or making you isolate yourself in the black community; and by giving you money, and turning you on to different people and giving you gigs and things you haven't had before, you see. It's more or less, if you're not strong, it more or less makes you say well

wow, like I've got a whole lot of things happening here. But at the same time, like you gradually moving into their intellectual purpose. You see, a lot of brothers, like they couldn't analyze certain tones before, like they would stop playing their tone once they got downtown, if they couldn't converse with a white intellectual and say, well I'm playing this note and I'm playing that note, you see. Because this is what had to take place, and this is what killed them. For the sake of communicating with the white intellectuals, a lot of black creativeness had to be thrown away, you see, because a lot of that — that creation, you know, was like, you don't explain it. That comes after, that analytical period.

So, this is why a lot of brothers got wasted away. Because you can listen to Dizzy Gillespie today, and listen to him back in the forties, and you can tell the difference. You don't have to be a musician to tell that. You could see how — what the white system would say— they would say that he is more civilized now. But in the old days he was more primitive. He was wild. This primitive thing is what they can't understand. So, when they got downtown they got a little more "civilized", you understand, only civilized to become a student of western musical theory, you see, because a lot of brothers come on the scene, and after they get on the scene, and they are at the age, and they — say, like they are in the middle twenties, you know what I mean — they are told to go back, and some of them will go back and study with white private teachers just to learn how to play the tempered scale — or tempered music, you see. And I think if we checked out a lot of brothers today, you know, you see a lot of this happening.

But I don't want to get on the brothers as much as like I would get on black people in general for not having a strong economics establishment, to be able to give the black musicians opportunity to record, you see what I mean, within a black company, and we distribute that album.

*Taken from a soon-to-be-released interview
MUSIC AND BLACK LIBERATION (a pamphlet). Excerpts printed here with the courtesy
of Al Kitab Sudan Publications.

Contd.

And this is what SRP is doing, you know. It's to do a collective thing where we record ourselves, and we do all the distribution. Primarily now it's done in the black community, because the white establishment don't want to have anything to do with it, because they see it's young black musicians, that are not only musically educated, but also economically and politically educated. So, SRP is trying to preserve the black creativeness, by having a strong economic program, so — that will stop us from going downtown depending on RCA and Columbia and those companies. I think that we're getting off the ground. A lot of young brothers are interested in it now, and a lot of young brothers are willing to collectively produce these albums, now — produce our own concerts. This is not new, because a lot of brothers tried this before. But I think what stopped a lot of brothers before when they tried to do self-help, was that they were only musically inclined, and they were doing this out of emotional frustration, you see, and they didn't have any sort of political insight, and they didn't observe the fact that they was black men being oppressed, I mean from a political standpoint.

So, a lot of them didn't have that strong conviction inside. And this is why a lot of the companies folded. You see, when they didn't have the correct political-economic outlook, they depended on white distributors, you see; and when the white distributors turned them down, well, they just flopped, you see, because if they was oriented into a Black movement, they would be more in the black community. And this is what stopped a lot of them, because, see, the white establishment will not distribute. They'll only distribute you when they know that they can make millions and millions of dollars off you. So you have to be well-established to do this. I think John Coltrane was one of the brothers who observed this, you know, that after many years with Impulse, it was time to do his own thing. And this comes from conversations with John Coltrane, so I know this, that he definitely wanted to do his own thing.

Marvin X: Was he getting opposition from the devil?

Milford Graves: Yes, yes, because he was told to limit his groups, and don't use certain style groups, like at the Village Gate they wanted him to use a quartet, because it was a little bit — it was still more or less a musical area, see. But the newer groups (TAPE UNCLEAR) political overtones, and a lot of economic power — in other words, the new group was — a group of musicians was saying I'm Black, and this is what's coming out of my ax. And I think it was John's whole new insight and conviction that he wanted to become self-reliant with some of his music. And there was a lot from the devil's establishment, telling him that they wanted his quartet.

And he wanted to open up a club, which was going to probably serve a dual purpose of education and a place for performances. But I think Brother John Coltrane, I mean, black people got to know this: They can't only know that he made, like, Love Supreme, you know,

and he's a beautiful player. They've got to realize that his death really stopped him from telling black people where he was really at. But he dug it: he went all through the whole system, he knew what it was all about, and, like he was the brother that was in the position to, like, upset the whole thing, to turn it right around. See, the devil couldn't afford this, because he was too much for them, you know, he was getting — he was going to do something that none of them brothers was doing...

(Milford Graves): ... You see, the black musician has never been allowed to really get to his creative thing and, at the same time be accepted by the white establishment — economic establishment.

Marvin X: You mean, this will actually never happen?

Milford Graves: And this will never happen... the white man knows that we are a powerhouse when it comes to music — or any of the artistic fields — we are a powerhouse, you know what I mean, and like he knows that if that music got out, that we would challenge and smash white culture. You see, and that's where he's stuck. We'd be smashing the whole theory of Western music that's centuries — hundreds and hundreds of years old. We'd be smashing it, because people would readily take to us.

You see, because what he calls "noise element", a Black musician knows how to take his so-called noise element and make it into music, and this is what they don't want. He can't do that. So this is actually one of the reasons why he's stopping us, because he doesn't want to see a Black music come along, which would have to be the predominant thing that people would study about. Western music wouldn't be the actual standard musical education anymore. It would be your Black concept, written by the Black musician. It would be a different notation, a whole different concept of how to write it down on paper. And this is what's happening now. You see, this is what he can't — he won't have no more control on this...

Marvin X: Sun Ra was saying that the devil has spent millions of dollars trying to do what he's doing with no money.

Milford Graves: Sure — sure! Sure, what was the percussion thing he was trying to analyze? — Brother Sonny Morgan and myself did — a side out by the two of us, and the devil just wouldn't believe it was done by two people without electronic instruments — they don't believe it. They want to say I overdubbed on it. They say: "Come on, you overdubbed." and they was trying to compare it with the european drummer, a French percussionist over there, who uses like a whole classical orchestra of percussionists, and it sounds like — man, it sounds like one cat — that's all it sounds like.

But, I mean, we've got to realize how powerful we are — and what we can do. And I think after we do that, there's no stopping us. And I think this is going to be the time where black people will really see a lot of things happening that will really be, I would say, from a Black creative mind. As a musician, my whole thing is

to really show the Black creative thing in music, you know, that started a long — it happened way back— I mean, New Orleans was one of the great periods because this is when it was really coming about with the black people in America. The New Orleans period was a time when there was better communication, and so more people knew about each other.

But this was a time that people got to remember that a lot of these so-called better black musicians were educated by the french, and they were sent over to France to a lot of these french music conservatories. When they came back, again, from these conservatories — they came back well schooled in western theory, and these were some of the black people that turned the whole scene around, and forced some of the other brothers to come in with them, because they said: "Wow, don't play like that; play like we play. Because if you play like us, then you'll be able to go downtown — you'll be able to go down to the city and get a gig down there with the man" — you know. "We'll be able to get on the river boat" — you know what I mean. "We'll be able to do all of that" — you understand. "Then maybe we'll be able to take a trip to Europe and play for the European people" — you see?

So these black musicians were getting just brain-washed with that white intellectualism, you know, and then coming back and telling brothers (that jive). This is one of the things that stopped it (the New Orleans period), and this kept going on — kept going on — stopped us every single time — every single time.

You see, everybody says Bird is great, but I say people don't know how great Bird was, and don't know how great Bird could have been, you see, if Bird was given the opportunity or the surroundings to make that creative thing that he really had come out. Like, I mean, then you can really say Bird was great. But I don't want to say — I don't just want to say Bird was great and stop it there. I'd like to talk about how Bird was a victim — hung up into the idealized thing of a jazz musician's life — you know, life of dope, white females, you know what I mean. Bird was so busy trying to get money to just survive his narcotic habit that he had to come down and do certain things for the man, you see, and these are the things that, as a black people (TAPE UNCLEAR) must know and understand. Because sometimes I have seen some brother sit down and listen to a far side and tap their foot, and I say: If you knew the history behind that, you wouldn't tap your foot because you would think a little different. You see, we can't accept Bird just because he was a Black Man. We've got to study Bird. Especially musicians, we've really got to study Bird. We've got to find out what mistakes Bird made.

And I was talking to this sister — no, I got it through a brother, who was talking with this sister, who was very close to Charlie Parker, who said Charlie Parker was very drunk when

he had to go and record what they call "tonal music". In other words, Bird wanted to play what he called "atonal music", and atonal music is simply when you get away from the so-called temperate scale.

Bird wanted to play Black natural music, but Bird said: Man, I've got to do this — because he had to make money to support his habit. You see, people don't know this. Some things Bird did, he probably wouldn't even — he didn't even accept himself. So this is what we've got to know — what things didn't Bird want to accept? And Bird was probably actually saying: Well, black people, you ain't got to accept this. This is what them white folks want, who I'm trying to get the money from — that's all.

This is what I'm saying. Brothers got to realize that when they go around playing tunes by Parker, they didn't (TAPE UNCLEAR) himself. And people got to understand we're not saying Parker wasn't great. I think Parker was the greatest and baddest cat out, you know, but at the same time I want to know what Charlie Parker was really trying to tell us.

So, I mean, this is all important, that we've got to know this area — that the black musician was really ripped off, and the black musician was the one that was really alienated from the black community.

And when I say black, I'm saying especially the jazz musicians were really alienated from the black community. The black musician's whole idea — all he knew was the white female, drugs, Europe — this is what he knew — this was his thing. And once he got away from the black community, and he got within the white entertainment world, or the jazz world, he was gone...

(Milford Graves): ... Talk about the unity among the black musicians, you know, and what's happening. First of all, the so-called black jazz musicians a sort of very individualistic way about him, you know. He's in a competitive thing, you know what I mean, because he's functioning in — he's surrounded by white capitalists. So therefore he gets the same outlook as the white capitalist, the very individualistic thing: I want to control this, and I want to control that — and later for this cat, you know what I mean? In other words, the jazz musician has lost the idea of a Black people, Black unity. He has lost himself as a Black Man. You know, has totally invested himself in the white world.

Now, by doing this, this will definitely, like come back and show itself when it comes to a unifying — himself — his fellow Black brothers, and the Black people.

First — I think I (already) said something about the narcotic movement?

Marvin X: Yeah.

Milford Graves: First of all, I think the main thing that we must understand is that he just — the only thing he knows himself, I mean, the only reason he recognizes himself as being a black man is from the physical aspect. He sees that physically he is a black man, you know. But, like, down deep inside he feels really he has "graduated" from the problems of the black man. He feels that he's a black artist, and he has not been accepted by the black man. You know, because the first thing they say is that — "Oh, the people in this country do not respect me. The black people, I mean, the white people in Europe love it. I'm going to Europe and live." That's why you have so many jazz musicians, black jazz musicians, living in Europe now.

You see, they only respect you in Europe as a black musician, they only respect you as long as you are willing to become a product of white culture, as long as you'll play white western music, then you are accepted. This is the main reason they accept you. You see, because the white people in Europe have a way of accepting you because they will be a little more at ease. You see, they are a little more slicker than the people here. They don't come right out and call you a nigger. They all sit back and say: Well, let this nice nigger go right on and just keep elevating white culture. Let him keep taking my music and just keep structuring it into something that will be much more positive than what — You see, they all work along with you. They be nice. They invite you into their homes — do all that, you know. That's the European way of doing things, you see.

But one brother — But all brothers must check themselves out. All he got to do is act like a Black Man, and he knows how to be a Black Man, because there's enough Black people out there today to tell you how to be a Black Man. You go act like a Black Man. See how they will accept you in Europe. Stop going over showing your teeth, and stop smiling, you understand. Stop accepting every drink they offer you. Stop using every kind of drug they offer you. Stop unzipping your pants to the white women, and see how they accept you. You go over there like a Black Man, you understand, and you'll see the difference in the way they accept you.

Now, you see there's a lot of division among the black men in music today, the jazz musician, simply because, like I say, he is being controlled by the white capitalist. He is being told by the white capitalist that he is the most important person on his instrument. Now, they have magazines that help this out, you understand. They have magazines like "Jazz & Pop" in this country — and "Downbeat", which has one poll, and they also run the reader's poll. Now these polls, what they want to say is who's the best man on each instrument. Now this poll is actually a popularity poll, you see, because the more people you know, the more people who know you, they'll vote for you. Now to get more people to know you, you have to have a record on a big major white company, because they have the distribution to do it, see.

So, anyway, this is what causes a lot of black musicians to fight each other. These are the tactics of the devil. One musician taking second, and one taking third, see, and the one who's taking third, who knows himself (TAPE UNCLEAR) that the one taking third may have a whole lot more on the ball musically than this man, but it so happens that this cat who's first has been so publicized by this devil, you understand, and at the same time this devil has, like, just made all people hate him (the '#1'), you understand, and this one who took third — too many people *are him*, you see — So the one who took third is getting ate up, you understand, because he's losing his self as a black man to know that this is one more of the devil's tricks to divide people, you see.*

Well, anyway, the one in third will begin to hate the one in first. The one in first will begin to say: Well, man, like I'm better than the cat in third; he digs me more than I dig him. And instead of the two brothers coming together and saying: Well, man this ain't nothing but a devil's tactic; we've got to overcome this thing. You see, so they start to fighting over this. All right —yeah— after the black musician gets more closer to the white establishment, you understand — Well, a white female could do this too because a white female would use her sex to tell you how great you are, you understand, and this is another thing of the body, because the white people are like that. At the same time they are a unified people oppressing the black man. But what's in the white structure? They are still individuals, a divided people, you understand. They'll kill each other within their own system. And they're making us become a part of their system.

So, anyway, once the black musician comes — once he gets more involved with the white economic capitalist system, he gets a sort of "business sense" about him, you know; that this black man, or this other black musician, is no more my brother. He's just another man out there that I will hire just to use his labor, you see. The white man shows him material values, I mean, material values, material goods that will be much greater than he has ever had, you know what I mean. And due to his desire to become an established musician, like he's beginning to lose himself way more away from what he originally was. Now he's really beginning to be a part of that white establishment. Now once he gets there, you see, the man tells him how to run his thing on a business basis, see, and once he gets into the capitalistic system, he is totally exploiting the black brothers. The black brothers mean nothing else to him again.

In other words, the black musician has come to be a product of this whole western system, and it comes back and it shows itself right on the brother, because he doesn't know what a brother means anymore. And he gets in with this class system, where he feels as though he has made it, and the black people got to look up for him, look up to him. And the white man does not

*For another example of this see NEWS FROM CLEVELAND (pg. 35).

bring you back into the black community. He makes sure that you stay out of it. He only brings you back into the black community when he thinks that strategically he has got to do it. It's got to be for some reason. When he's doing it, it ain't because he wants to bring them back and say: Well, black people, this is somebody that you should hear because he is a product of you. No, he comes back and says: I'm going to take this black musician to get these people, and I'm going to use him to plan once again how to get them.

And the majority of the times when they do come back in, the black people do not accept them because they're too far gone...

(Milford Graves): ... But the new black music is where you're getting away from that, and you're getting more into human feelings. Somebody who is counter-revolutionary cannot play with us, people whose feelings are going to contradict our feelings, you see. His whole thought is going to contradict — so that's something else that is different. See, the new black musicians are more atuned with each other, we're more communicative with each other. It's much more talk and a little bit more sincere with each other. You know, we know each other; not just the cat who's coming in who we have never seen. He comes in, don't talk with nobody in the group, and when the gig is over we're finished. See, that's abstract music that has no sort of positive relationship with people. You know, it's still telling people to follow the same laws that have been out as slave laws.

So the new music is that -- not the concept of the union: double for the leaders, and all that stuff. You know, where the leader gets double of everybody else. What we do believe — just the money now — is that the money left over is to be used in a way that would benefit all of us. It's a self help program. And we sit down and we discuss if somebody got a job, or maybe he' making some money — he may say: Well, look here, I only take half of what everybody else is going to take. Take my other part and put it into our fund. And this is a trust that we're developing with each other. This is not in the old way. The old way wasn't like that. The black musicians — or still, as I say, some of the young ones will say: No, man, this is what I want to do with my money. There's no sort of black unity, or there's no working together...

Marvin X: This is something that I know from the other areas of black art, especially in the theatre. I know that the —say, New Lafayette Theatre, their whole concept of giving, say, the actors— they are just sort of like a family. You know, someone can't just come into a group and really — he can't really do his thing, unless he has spent some time with the actors and actresses, and actually sees the type of freedom they are striving for. And this whole idea, I think, has to do with recognizing that we practice freedom now among ourselves. We have to practice justice and equality among ourselves. It's not something that you're waiting

on for after the revolution. Because if we don't do it now, there's not going to be any revolution.

Milford Graves: That's true — You know, another thing that a lot of black musicians are guilty of — there are some black musicians that are out there now that align themselves with the Black Revolutionary movement, and are doing things around Black revolutionaries who have a very powerful voice among black people. And these musicians are still established — are starting (now) to divorce themselves from these black musicians, simply because they're afraid. They don't have faith in black people. They don't have faith in themselves. They don't have faith in the Black Movement. So what they do — they're still going downtown, and they'll still, like, be with the man, and they do not want to be seen with black musicians. Like some black musicians right now will not hire me because they have orders not to hire me, see, because I'm too militant.

See, but these same musicians will be caught in the trick, I mean, someone who's tuned in today will know that the competition between black and white people in this country will get to a point that nobody is going to stop. And I think a lot of black musicians claim that they are the vanguard of the black people, and that we as black musicians, they say, have the insight further than any kind of artist. Well, they'd better use this insight to see what is true and real out there, you see, and that when it does happen it's only going to be harder for them to get back in. And this is something that they don't realize. And they'd better come to the truth with themselves, because they can realize — they can go on, and they can go ahead, and they can — I'm thinking of somebody but I just don't want to mention names.

You see they can go ahead on and go downtown and record with one of them big record companies, and they can start — and they can, like, fire or don't use a brother that's in his corner. They can do that all they want, and they can go ahead on at the same time and hire a rock and roll rhythm section, and destroy his music. Because at the same time, you see, these brothers are going to realize that they are being used to divide us to stop the creativity. And these same people who are doing this will not die for you like your other brothers will who are concerned with you, you understand, they won't be too concerned too long. And these brothers ought to know from past history that you just can't go out and separate yourself from your people, and sell yourself out, and sell your true brothers out, working in the enemy's corner, and then come back home after and ask to be accepted, because at this time, you see — because at this time all the brothers who are traitors to their people, they may not get off that easy when it comes down to the thing.

So this is the time when they'd better use all their insight

that they say they have — this sort of insight of the black musician. They'd better start to use it. This is what they've got to realize.

1969

On Spiritualism and the REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT

by Ahmed Akinwale Ato Alhamisi

"The Editor, Joe Goncalves, recently turned down what looked like a 'grant' of \$1,300.00 to the Journal from a government supported organization, the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines. The Editor turned the grant down because he feels that the money offered to the Journal, as well as Soulbook and Black Dialogue, is part of a plan to control, influence, destroy, mislead small publications of all kinds, in particular Black publications."

REPORT TO THE EDITORS OF THE JOURNAL OF BLACK POETRY, SUMMER 1968

In these revolutionary times when extended steering committees are formed to create counter-revolutionary strategies against revolutionary cultural-political cadres, it becomes necessary for us to develop no less than a revolutionary spirit through creative spiritualism in our final move toward total liberation. According to my visions there is, among other obvious things, an absence of ethical principles reflected in our creations, a lack of spiritual cleanliness in our way of life. This is, indeed, a tragedy; therefore we must begin to purify ourselves of all possible negative influences or forces that are reflected in almost all of our creations. We are a spiritual people; consequently, we must understand that our purpose is to create to celebrate the Supreme Being who created us all, and our creative works, mere sacrificial offerings for spiritual and physical strength in performing our particular applied skills to the total liberation of our people. In the late sixties we hollered about ethics, values, aesthetics, a new black language and other such abstractions, but we still find ourselves in the seventies practicing the ways of foreigners in our creations: poetry, plays, stories, art, songs, and social criticisms; for instance the symbols, the images, and new forms are visible only in spoken words of conniving individualists reeking with the death-wish psyche. In short, most of what we scream we have failed to practice.

It is time we got serious in this arduous task of survival; serious concerning the survival for life as opposed to the survival for death of which so many of us find ourselves. We must be about spiritualism as a way of life. Everything is everything. As creators we will probably have to answer the following questions: What do we write? Where do we write? Will we continue to create to make Europeans rich? Who are the publishers, the editors? In essence, are they black revolutionary warriors in their own fields of endeavor. This, of course, includes both negro editors and negro publishers, whether they are of the so-called exclusive or slick magazine or of the highly fashionable four-page mimeographed and stapled type, they must be dealt with in like manner. Time and African children demand this of us. We must help them survive that we might survive. But whatever the reason there is absolutely no need for us as creators to continue submitting our creations to publications or periodicals like the New York Times, Look, Liberation, Saturday Review, Evergreen Review, Antioch Review, Beloit Poetry Journal, and little magazine radicals such as Angel Hair, Foxfire, Hollow, Orange, Kumquat, Mundus Artium, Per/Se, Vagabond, Trace, Dust, Nexus, Out of Sight, and numerous others.

Heretofore, negro writers and artists were so glad to get their materials published in white literary established magazines, it was unthinkable for them to question its evil effect on our people, let alone themselves. We had our own magazines too; nevertheless, we refused to seriously question their direction, a grave mistake of which we are still paying in blood and tears.

Even in the late sixties very few of us, if any, really or seriously questioned the images and directions of publications such as Ebony, Negro Digest, Freedomways, and other such outlets flooding our communities. And until recently, only a few widely-known writers have written critiques on these publications in the seventies, let alone refuse to submit their works to some of our supposedly most militant magazines in the Liberator, Umbra, and others. These publications don't support the western civilization of European Imperialists? Let us ask ourselves the following questions: Is Black World (formerly Negro Digest) still a carbon copy of the Reader's Digest? Is Ebony an imitation of both Life and Playboy magazines? Did Liberator receive financial support from American Jews? What about the images, the symbols, the total format of all our magazines? What effect does it have on our African children? Where are they to go for positive images and not an exploitation of images? Many of our magazines are highly profitable in these militant times of supposedly black rage. All villains are European now. Fine. But we need more than European villains. We need, among other things, to stop supporting the European system on all levels under which we as an African people suffer. Take Jet, a weekly publication, is it a substitute for Coronet? Well, take a look at the format and cover in the issue featuring The Liberated Look (Oct. 1, 1970, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 26). What's so liberating about European fashions designed for the Dead? What kind of negro is the producer or director who would dare mislead his own people? What kind of contribution is this in the seventies? We must begin to show the people something more than the latest exercises in finger-popping. We must be about a more beautiful way, a total liberated way. No more showcasing. No more jiving around. Time is running out. European nations, for example South Africa, Rhodesia, the United States, Germany, France, England, Italy, and Israel, to name a few, contribute daily to the West in an attempt to unite the European world against the non-European world; and we sit here asking and wishing for a change of heart from the very barbaric nation (the United States) leading this ruthless attack, and who is the most committed in a plan to exterminate us, our children, our relatives, and yes, even our ancestors. Come, my brothers and sisters, let us be about collective actions against all evil forces denying us complete liberation. This statement, of course, brings to mind another important question, one that we must answer now: Do we want complete liberation; do we desire life? And, yes, do we want Land and Power to make this Life possible? Very important questions; but questions we have refused to answer, to really consider at all. So we find ourselves entering a new decade with the same attitude--that is, if we want to build anything worthwhile, anything good, we need the support of all Europeans. The truth of the matter is that for the most part, we are still integrationists, revolutionary-afro-militant-dashiki-clad-talking integrationists; but still integrationists. The most dangerous kind; one who would kill his family for the system, and with "good intentions." This attitude has become, for many of us, an almost complete way of life. It has penetrated the very fibers of our souls and it leaves our souls, presenting itself in different forms; and our magazines tend to promote and support this unpleasant but realistic feeling.

Therefore, it isn't surprising that some of our new escapades, Essence, Black Scholar, Black Academy Review, along with other such outlets, Liberator, Black World, etc., still, even though much of the material is informative and enlighten-

ing, depend, in one way or another, on white support. Most of us depend, to an extent, upon this system; but the extremes can and should be eliminated. For example: Liberator magazine being one of nine little magazines receiving awards totaling some \$14,250 along with some of the aforementioned radical magazines; or in the case of Essence magazine (see On the 'Essence' Magazine Affair in The Journal of Black Poetry, Winter-Spring Issue, Vol. 1, No. 13, 1970), where Hattie Gossett, former editor at Redbook, a national women's magazine, "was fired by the management of a new magazine for 'inefficiency'." It is suggested that Hattie Gossett was fired because of her "uncompromising Black views." And although Black World, one of our most widely-read and distributed publications, is a step in the right direction, there is still much to be desired. Black Academy Review? Well, let us wait patiently and see, providing we haven't already.

I mentioned the above publications merely to point out the urgent need for us as emerging black writers and artists, editors, and publishers to critically analyze our concrete efforts in the way of magazines and other such publications as to what it is we want to do, the direction we intend to take; then submit our works to magazines moving in that direction, leaving the others for negro entertainment. We should do this in the name of brotherhood. It's time to take a stand. We must start with white publications first, white distributors; finally, and immediately, we must deal with black editors and white publishers, and anthologies under the headings of American Negro Poetry, New Negro Poets, Great Negro Musicians, Black Americans and the Arts, Afro-American Writers, Negro Playwrights, American Negro Short Stories, American Literature by Negro Authors, and others, unless we still consider ourselves as Europeans in the seventies.

But we are Africans, an African people born in the ruins of North America. The choice is ours: Whether we accept the fact that we are Africans; not whether we are Africans. Again, the choice is ours so I will not waste my time, or yours, trying to convince you otherwise. I mean, why use logic when arguing with a drunk. We have to make these decisions ourselves. Can you imagine someone editing an anthology and sending out something like, "I am putting together a book of poetry called, Young Negro American Poets, to be published by Anglo-Saxon Press. To qualify you must be under thirty, a Negro, and your work should be Universal." I refuse to have my spiritual name contaminated with all that literary filth. Again, I am talking about direction, a new beginning, about total liberation.

The challenge is ours and it is time we refuse to submit our creations to such publishers as Dial, Harpers and Row, William Morrow & Company, Bobb-Merrill Company, Grove Press, Inc., Merit Publishers, Marzani and Munsell, or International Publishers, to name a few. The reason here is not so much against but for, for us as an African people to begin developing the skills necessary in preparing for the black nation of which so many are talking and writing about. When do we start? When do we start transforming our words into social actions? I say the time is now. Why not begin building a publishing house of our own? We have all the technical skills and personnel services available if we were as serious as the Vietnamese people; in fact, we would have a number of publishing houses. And we would have at least one national publishing house if we were as serious as the freedom fighters in Africa, Asia, and Latin America; as serious as Sekou Toure' of Guinea, as serious as the Palestinian Commandos of Al-Fatah with Guerrilla Chief Yasser Arafat as their leader; and as serious as we pretend in our speeches and lectures. (And Leila Khaled didn't wear trousers for

style or fashion, my sisters. She was committed beyond mere words and style "The Liberated Look," transforming her energies into social actions for the liberation of her people. This is to say that neither trousers nor long African-print dresses will cover up an evil way of life, an uncommitted life. We must understand this, providing we are interested in strengthening the Black family.) We need to arm ourselves with the revolutionary spirit and move swiftly on every level of the struggle, and with a clear and honest direction as we wage a relentless battle throughout the Pan-African world. In fact, everything we do or say should be viewed within the total liberation struggle if we are really serious about a nation beyond rhetoric and scholarly-written white papers. Thus, we must create our own images; but we must be careful about what we create. We have the skills, but we lack the nerve, the vision to do so. Johnson Publishers is an example of what can be done in the way of necessary skills, whereas their nerve or vision is highly questionable. But many other publishers are attempting to move beyond this phase of literary struggle, but they will need our uncompromising help. No black publishers? What about Julian Richardson Associates, Dudley Randall and others, as possible developers of this idea? What about other small publishers doing special publications? But this is a decision each of us will have to make very soon. In the final analysis it is left up to the person himself to make the change. Negro writers and artists have a choice, loosely speaking. Revolutionary African writers and artists don't have this choice outside the liberation struggle. As for creative writers and artists (poets, dramatists, playwrights, artists, musicians, essayists, etc.), there is not even the slightest excuse for appearing in white publications unless we want to be known as *the* black creator or *the* black critic in the pulsating bowels of North America. As poets we have the Journal of Black Poetry, as a major force from the West Coast; Soulbook, the Revolutionary Voice of the Black World, with Mamadou Lumumba as Editor-In-Chief and Bobb Hamilton, East Coast Editor; and Black Dialogue, edited by Ed Spriggs as evidence of the growing force we have as creators in the winds of change. In fact, many, if not all, of our latest magazines were created to co-opt or to undermine the determined and innovative efforts of these publications. But thanks to a few committed people, the attempt has failed.

The most recent attempt is to spotlight a few militant negroes, armed with the black language in all forms (one militant negro at a time), and make them a part of the editorial board of directors on some co-opted magazine as a means to confuse the African people. This is an obvious counter-revolutionary move to create a small literary group of so-called experts and authorities in an effort to control the images and thinking of the people. And most of our magazines, with few exceptions, are supporting this deliberate plan of killing the revolutionary spirit of African people and future young African warriors. Those of us who continue our personal support of these publications also support the oppressors; and, therefore, cannot be excused.

Now, I don't expect negro writers to adhere to this policy; for instance, they have always danced the death-dance of a dying America. But hopefully, it isn't too late to remind some of our best talent of our roots--between the mimeographed pages of the Journal of Black Poetry, Vol. 1, No. 1, June 1966. Even a direction was there, consciously or unconsciously: David Diop, born in Bordeaux; Aime Cesaire, born in Martinique, often referred to as the father of Negritude; and Jacques Roumain, a well-known Haitian poet, and, among other things, poet Marvin Jackmon to Marvin X, a Black Muslim and follower of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, Messenger of Allah. And all in a fourteen-page magazine. A direction was there; a message was also there in a beautiful poem, Defiance Against Force,

by David Diop, translated by Willy Brown. Listen to what it tells us African poets and other creators to do: "...You, my brother, your face grown full/With fear and suffering/Stand up and shout No!" And the roots don't stop here by all means with the Journal; but the fact that it has grown from a small mimeographed publication of fourteen pages to a non-establishment, non-commercial but significant creative literary force for black poets and writers throughout North America and the Black world at large, demands this attention. But there are other important questions as to how and why the magazine stayed alive and continued to grow, and why it still continues to grow in these chaotic times. Or who controls it? Does it accept literary grants? This, of course, was answered somewhat in a quote at the beginning of this essay from Report To The Editors, Summer, 1968 by the editor himself. Up to now, we have been unable to make sound and honest judgements concerning our direction by refusing to act on the basis of our total experiences in this country; hence, as an African people, we have suffered. Therefore, we must remind ourselves of past and present realities--historically, economically, politically, culturally, and scientifically--lest we forget the 450 years of lynchings in this country. Literary lynchings notwithstanding, where even our own so-called black publishers and publications refused to publish our works of angry insults which offended their European counterparts; and who now pose as curators of the new black writing.

Many of us who, in our own little way, helped create this fury on the part of both European and negro professionals and well-established historians; who got our first poem or first play or our first short story published in non-establishment and non-commercial publications, now suddenly find it perfectly allright and even revolutionary to include the New York Times as part of our credentials to create works of art for our people. The streets are filled with our writers selling their souls for the badge of approval from the European literary establishment; poets reading to all-white audiences, at all-white institutions for the poet-of-the-year award. We need to discontinue such awards if that's the attitude it's going to foster. And it is obvious as to the confusion it has caused thus far with egoistic maniacs putting on circus shows as they compete for literary careers in a nation-within-a-nation objective. We have been preoccupied with death for so long we seem to have taken up screaming as a pastime. Our ritual of death should have ended in the sixties; should have ended sooner, really. But for some of us the sixties are still here, will always remain with us. Nobody else wants them.

In the seventies we still have highly acclaimed poets, both male and female, who have gained a certain place in the hearts of many youth, having made a name for themselves with screams of hatred and cursing--total negativity--and who continue their masquerading under the guise of "revolutionary black poetry." At best it is "new negro poetry" having removed a few of the curse words. Then again, it's no accident that much of the work being done nowadays is full of death-stricken contradiction. Our lives are contradictions. Our entire way of life is a contradiction. Our creations reflect, good or bad, the innermost spirits of our life. If our life is empty, then our creations or the content of our creations is empty. But in these times forms tend to take the place of direction or content in our creations today. And our poems and other creations become as heavy as iron and concrete and as self-destructive as napalm. Therefore, assuming we want to survive in a positive way, we must understand this and place things in their proper perspective. Must understand that content is more important than form. We are more important than content. Content is about a way of life. A way of life is about us. If we are spiritual persons, then our content will be spiritual; and if our content is spiritual, our form, which is a natural form, will

complement whatever has come before. Otherwise the form is as empty as the minds who thought them up.

Many of our supposedly beautiful black poets, writers, artists, and critics who have taken and nourished European forms, slightly bending them for a better fit, are being, like their literary negro counterpart, bought off by foundations like The National Foundation for the Arts, The Black Academy of Arts and Letters, National Awards Council, and other such agencies, who are consciously attempting to once again control black people. To do this they make, using brick and mortar, static forms with which to forge ready-made poets and writers in their own (negro) image.

O poets and creators of newer spirits, you who have been blessed with new visions to reconstruct another image of the world to come, offer yourselves to the Supreme Being through sacrificial offerings of your creative powers to help regain the revolutionary spirit necessary for the liberation of our people. There is still time; and the time is now. Hurry, as you make a re-beginning within your own lives. We must be about transformations; and our transformations must, out of necessity, be swift like the East winds. All negative forces must find no panacea in our souls and bodies. Soul food must move onto a higher level of spiritual food; food that will preserve and affirm life, as we prepare ourselves for the arduous task of our mental and physical struggle in the new world, the Black world. It is time for us to become critics of ourselves, of our earlier creations, and to apply new visions of truth, understanding, and wisdom to our lives. Our change must be swift. It is time we eliminate the European negative images of christianity, whiskey, chitterlings, pimping, and whoring around as a way of life; and move onto the spiritual plane of life. It is time for less talk; therefore, we must transform our energies into social actions, reflecting a spiritual way of life. Talking and writing about ethics, aesthetics, and ethical things are fine at stage number one; but we have always been at stage number one, it is very comfortable there. That is to say that a person writing about positiveness is not necessarily a spiritual person. But a spiritual person will almost always write spiritual things. Negativeness will disappear in his or her creations; not out of necessity alone, but out of a more beautiful way, a natural way. It is a kind of refined simplicity, a re-beginning into what we were, what we are now. As our environment becomes more natural the more we will realize our most inner needs, our spiritual needs. Understanding this, we must move to reflect the fruit of our understanding and knowledge in a more positive way; must become a living example of all we say and write. We can hardly criticize young brothers and sisters sticking needles in their arms and bodies if we continue to send our manuscripts to European publishers and run to mailboxes to send a poem or a short story to our next door neighbor. All this is about positiveness; finally, about spiritualism, about life.

Positiveness is about actions: LeRoi Jones moving pass Nettie Jones and transforming into Imamu Amiri Baraka, that's positiveness; Gwendolyn Brooks refusing membership in the Black Academy of Arts and Letters, that's positiveness; Marvin X denouncing his so-called United States citizenship, that's positiveness; Joe Goncalves' 14-page mimeographed poetry journal to the 100-page Journal of Black Poetry, that's positiveness; Ed Spriggs and others boycotting, whatever their reasons, Clarence Major's anthology, The New Black Poetry and International Publishers, an act of positiveness; Rolland Snellings to Askia Muhammad Abu Bakr el Toure or Regina Micou (16 year old student) to Femi Funmi Ifetayo, are both acts of positiveness; Children of Africa, a children's book from Drum & Spear Press, and Black Arts from Black Arts Publications, are both positive actions;

and Carolyn Gerald who took the time to review a book by blacks, about blacks, distributed by blacks, is also a positive act, black critics. All this is about spiritualism. About a creative morality. Even creative criticism is positive, provided we have moved onto the spiritual plane. And we must if our criticism is to move beyond mere discussion of European forms.

In essence, we must begin to elevate our morals, lifting the spirits; making us understand our divine duty and, having realized this, move positively into a new way of life, making it our own. If it is good enough for the people it is good enough for us. It is time. It is time for critics to become self-critics. Time for poets to become priests, seers, prophets, and holymen. Understanding the need to move beyond tin cans, brick buildings broken beer bottles; beyond negro literary agents; beyond the boundaries of North America; beyond black studies yes, beyond Liberator, Essence, Ebony, Black Scholar, and other negative forces, as isolated entries in the bowels of a decaying America. We must understand that nothing really worthwhile can be grown here; fruit trees won't bear fruit anymore, grass is grown in laboratories. We must retain our long life, not retard death (that's solely western and European). That's what everything is about here. That's what science is about here, too. It is time we understand what is happening to us if we are to survive as we must to win. But we must be serious about everything we say, about everything we do or attempt to do.

Many of us have taken African names while others are making preparations for this change. A few of us, having made this transition some years ago, envisioned this as a beautiful act of positiveness. Today, in many instances, it has meant nothing beyond rhetoric; our attitudes remain somewhat the same: pork (chitterlings) still taste good; and we still "think" better under the influence of drugs and prostitution after hours. The people can be misled; but not fooled, at least not for long.

Historians can't fool the people. Even with all that history stacked up in the skies. We must understand that historians are not necessarily interested in total liberation merely because they write or list facts between the covers of books. Any historian of average and questionable intelligence will and can do this. But our historians must be honest. Our historians must be armed with the revolutionary spirit and must move beyond mere facts into what to do about these facts. The fact that Anglo-Saxons have total extermination planned for us is a fact. The murder of El Hajj Malik El Shabazz is a fact. The death of Patrice Lumumba is a fact. Napalm in Vietnam is a fact. Ho Chi Minh was a poet, a fact; Ho Chi Minh was a warrior. Another fact. The fact that he was and is a fact, is what we must move into soon. This means we must be about more than just stating or recording facts. We must be facts, extended facts, creating new facts. Facts like: African people were liberated in different parts of the world in 1980; and in the year 1990 all African people were liberated and began creating a spiritual world of African socialism unsurpassed throughout all universal history of humanity. This is a recording for we are the beginning and the end.

And in these beginnings we must decide these things ourselves. As for me I will continue to move onto the spiritual plane, offering my creations as sacrificial offerings for the revolutionary spirit so necessary for creative positive and social actions in our move for total liberation. I will also continue to drink non-alcoholic beverages, and eat only the spiritual foods of life; will move beyond my childhood distaste of cigarettes and tobacco to include other drugs such as heroin, as I prepare a spiritual way for my family, the extended family.

Concerning publications, my creations will be sent, without hesitation, to such quarterlies as the Journal of Black Poetry, Soulbook, and Black Dialogue. Got some creations for the Cricket, a music magazine out of New Ark, and other black periodicals controlled by black people. All these things I consider as a part of my divine duty.

Finally, we must serve as prophets, seers, architects opening up new horizons of understanding. We must show the people a new way of life by reflecting this new way ourselves and hopefully the material priorities, ransom and briberies will be foreign to our spiritual direction, our positive way of life.

1971

On The "Essence" Magazine Affair

Report

Recently, in New York, Sister Hattie Gossett, an outstanding Black editor, was fired by the management of a new magazine for "inefficiency". (Sister Hattie had worked "efficiently" for a year and a half at *Redbook*, a national women's magazine. she quit her job at *Redbook* to join *Essence* in order to work for Black people.) Hattie Gossett is well known for her uncompromising Black views. We suggest that this is the real reason for her firing. About two weeks later, the editor, Miss Ruth Ross, a Black professional sister quit *Essence* magazine over an alleged "breach of contract." So *Essence* magazine is now without the services of the two Black women editors who were to help launch it.

Essence was initiated by a group of negro businessmen (with reported white financial backing) in an effort to appeal to the needs of Black women throughout the country. These negro businessmen moved to appeal to those needs by naming the magazine *Sapphire ! How's that for love and respect of Blackwomen?!!* After a storm of protest, led by Hattie Gossett and Black women in New York, and across the country, the negro businessmen changed the name to *Essence*.

Well known photographer, director, writer, Gordon Parks, was named executive editor. Parks was alledged to be acting in an "advisory" capacity with the magazine. He soon emerged as the main power on the staff, making many major decisions. Recently a curious phenomenon developed: *Essence* hired a *white, German* art director, overlooking a considerable number of capable Blacks. In the first issue, an article written by a sister commenting on the conflict between Black men and women is illustrated by a *jewish, female artist!* Outstanding artist-illustrators, Tom Feelings and Cecil Elombe Brath raised another storm of protest. Mr Gordon Parks, who appears to make major decisions concerning magazine policy, began to view the portfolios of Black illustrators & photographers. Veteran Black photographers were heard to rumble that "Parks is harder on us than he is on whites." Mister Gordon Parks is alledged to have remarked that "Black people have no culture ... There is no 'Black' point of view ... There are no good Black illustrators or photographers ... We're not interested in 'color'; we're interested in quality ..." (Mr. Gordon Parks photographed, wrote and directed the white-applauded film, *The Learning Tree*. We're sure you remember the "quality" of that film.)

When word of Sister Hattie's dismissal passed along the grapevine, Black writers began to withdraw their work from the magazine. An early issue, due to Hattie's militant influence, contained essays by Ameer Baraka and Larry Neal on the Black Woman; book reviews by Sam Anderson; an article by Nikki Giovanni; and an interview with outstanding Sisters Abby Lincoln and Betty Shabazz by Sister Helen Hobbs. Since the firing of Hattie Gossett and the resigning of Ruth Ross, Black writers, artists, and photographers are moving to BOYCOTT ESSENCE MAGAZINE! after reading the interview in the N.Y. Post newspaper where Mr. Gordon Parks (author and director of the Uncle Tom movie, *The Learning Tree*. You remember that "quality" film) allegedly stated that although *Essence* magazine now appeals to Black women, eventually it will appeal to *all* women.

Blackhearts!! we urge you to BOYCOTT ESSENCE MAGAZINE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, AS ANOTHER "GAME" BEING RUN ON BLACK PEOPLE BY SLICK NIGGAS HUSTLING "BLACKNESS" FOR PROFIT; AIDED BY AN UNCLE TOM EDITOR WHO HATES AND DESPISES BLACK CREATIVE ARTISTS — AND POOR BLACKS (YOU DO REMEMBER THE "QUALITY" UNCLE TOM MOVIE, *THE LEARNING TREE*, DON'T YOU?!!)

ESSENCE (WHAT KIND OF NAME IS THAT ANYHOW?!!) MUST BE ABORTED BEFORE IT CAN ADD TO THE POISONOUS GARBAGE CURRENTLY POLLUTING THE MINDS OF BLACK PEOPLE IN AMERICA ... BLACK ARTISTS AND WRITERS ARE MOVING IN NEW YORK ... WE URGE THAT YOU DO SO IN YOUR COMMUNITIES NATIONALLY.

ASKIA MUHAMMAD ABU BAKR EL TOURE

1970

"After it had been posited that the woman constituted the pivot of Algerian society, all efforts were made to obtain control over her ... Converting the woman, winning her over to the foreign values, wrenching her free from her status, was at the same time achieving a real power over the man and attaining a practical, effective means of destructuring Algerian culture."

*Frantz Fanon
A Dying Colonialism, Grove Press
pgs. 38 - 39*

News from Cleveland

NORMAN JORDAN

March 6, 1969
6:00 PM

About an hour ago I stopped by a brother's art studio and picked up two checks; one was made out to poet Bill Russell, and the other to myself. The checks (\$31.25) represented our share from a *show* at Case Western Reserve University (one thousand dollars for 90 minutes). Also the checks represented the complete collapse of the UNITED BLACK ARTISTS, a group of the most talented Black brothers in Cleveland. It was the second (recent) attempt to organize Black artists here. The first brothers, the MUNTU POETS, had earlier bit the dust for twenty-four hundred dollars, via the Carl Stokes administration and their Cleveland Summer Arts Festival.

The MUNTU POETS lasted longer than the UNITED BLACK ARTISTS because the *poets* had somewhat organized before the "man" sent in his saboteurs.

We had been meeting about a year when, in the summer of nineteen sixty-eight, about nine of us began making plans to read on street corners and a few other places. We knew we could attract a Black audience. When the "man" heard this, he sent word that they would *pay* us to read in the park, plus give us a mobile stage with lights, a new P.A. system and publicity.

We ate the whole pile of shit, bones and all. It's really not funny!! The *poets* agreed to do four night performances in the Black community for twenty-four hundred dollars; however, the city picked the location. The poets worked overtime getting their presentation together, which lost most of its blackness from jump. The first night in the park, the man sent out his news media. The next day the newspaper quoted *their reporter* as saying who were the "BEST BLACK POETS--" The brothers' egos took it from there.

Brothers who had been working together beautifully lost contact with each other, brothers divided up into little cliques, and started calling each other "Uncle Toms". Then the root of the evil, money, became the final wedge. In the beginning we had agreed to do the reading under one (so-called) condition. That condition was: We would use the money to open a Black Theatre. Here's how the brothers copped out of this: one group of brothers called the other group "the police", and said they didn't want to open *nothing* with The Man. After it was agreed we could split the money, the shit really started to fly. Brothers took it into a competition thing. Brothers started negatively judging other brothers' works to decide who deserved the largest share of the money. Brothers took it into a pride-and-honor thing, carrying guns and talking about assassinating each other. That was the end of the MUNTU POETS. Since then, the police have been keeping a closer watch on the Black artists here in Cleveland.

As a matter of fact, about three months later when the UNITED BLACK ARTISTS held their first announced meeting, a policeman, disguised as a Black artist, was in attendance. So before we had a chance to really organize, The Man sent word for us to submit a proposal for six-hundred thousand dollars, assuring us that he would see to it that we would be granted the money. Shiiittt, I mean how can you tell forty or fifty brothers we don't need six-hundred thousand dollars. And to really put the coals on the fire, at the same time we were promised (out of a clear-blue-sky) one third of the net receipts from a benefit showing of the movie "UPFIGHT". This *slice of the blue-eyed pie* was supposed to bring us another twenty thousand dollars. Last, a thousand dollar job from Case Western Reserve came through. By this time the music department was negotiating for the musicians, the art department speaking for the artists only, and the drama department dealing for *that* department and some brothers also just speaking outright for themselves. Last week, to prevent a tragedy, the officers of the U.B.A. held an emergency meeting to *disband*.

I don't know about other places, but here in Cleveland things are looking slow. But we'll pull it together. It takes longer in some cases. We've got to create a way where we can *all* operate under *one* roof, because, cold as it may seem, that's the only way we can *create*. One is all, all is one.

The seeds have been planted and a nation projected. It's just a matter of time before a beautiful Black people and Black art rise out of Cleveland. Without The Man's money of course.

