



Black Strategies for Change in America

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CHAPTER XIII
BLACK STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE IN AMERICA*

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Educational change is high on the priority list of Black America as well it should be. I have yet to speak with a youth who will not focus his criticism of the system on existing educational structures, educational strategies, educational objectives or, most often, a combination of the three. Education still bears little relevance to the lives and dreams of most Black Americans. Its failures can be counted in generations of wasted young lives.

Yet, despite the tragic waste, the educational system grinds on in most cities in seeming oblivion to the society whose needs it should be serving. Despite increased government support for programs and innovations designed to improve the quality of education in inner-city schools, very few inroads have actually been made.

Somehow, we must become effective catalytic agents for educational experimentation and change. Somehow, we must turn the system around. Somehow, we must make the system which is working *with* our kids work *for* them.

As we push to achieve change in our educational programs and policies, we must keep in mind that educational change does not take place in a vacuum. It is therefore important that our strategies for change be devised with the social, political and economic realities

which exist clearly in mind. Before we act, therefore, we must assess where we have been, where we are, and where we, as Black Americans, want to be; we must understand the nature of black violence and the effects it has had on us, on white America and on our prospects for change; we must consider the use of separatism as a technique and as a goal; and, against this background, we must determine the most efficacious and most realistic means of achieving change.

THE DEATH OF A MOVEMENT

The civil rights movement as such is dead. It is not just the singing and the marching that is over. The vast, organized, common effort to change the system, to erase the inequities, has died away too. Though we still sometimes join hands and sing "We Shall Overcome," it is more like an act of remembrance. Though we still knock at the doors of City Hall and Congress with programs for equal opportunities and equal results, there is no longer the surge and pressure of a mass movement behind us.

What is there instead? Certainly there is plenty of black action, more even than before. But it is not necessarily civil rights and it is not a movement.

In the ghettos Blacks have started day-care centers and cleanup projects, associations for black businessmen and programs for youth gangs, tutoring services and job counseling centers — a growing

* Adapted from Sterling Tucker, *For Blacks Only: Black Strategies for Change in America* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971).

range of laudable civic activity. That is just what much of it is: civic activity, not civil rights, not institutional change. Just as they do in the white community, civic services aim at improving the quality of life within the existing system.

The civil rights movement proved that the law could be challenged and that change was possible. But the change, historic enough on paper, proceeded at a snail's pace in practical life. A few brave black students moved into a white high school here, a few courageous black voters registered there, lunch counters desegregated, bus terminals opened. But at such a cost: it exhausted the spirit as much as it inspired. Progress was slow. The inertia of the system began to make itself felt, as did the deep roots of white racism. Peaceful demonstrations were met with fire hoses, cattle-prods, and police dogs. Local black citizens and civil rights workers were jailed, beaten, tortured; some were murdered. No one was safe from the awakened fury of the Southern white supremacist — not even four little girls in Sunday School.

Slowly the faith that supported the movement began to erode. The faith in nonviolence. The faith in the American system. For a while it was a private bitterness that one tried to swallow while keeping up the fight. But soon the frustration began to express itself publicly, both in violent rhetoric and violent action.

It became evident that racism was not just a localized malignancy, residing in archaic Southern law and custom, but a part of the American system itself. It did not just put us at the back of the bus; it closed off neighborhoods to live

in, banks to borrow from, adequate schools for our children, jobs and training and union membership. Blacks began to wonder if integration *was* the answer; they began to wonder if there was not another path to follow, even if it meant a separate system.

Blacks began to get off the integration bandwagon. If any occasion in history can be singled out as the turning point, it was the Meredith March in June 1966. Then the new spirit took hold and the crucial differences that were to split and ultimately fragment the movement became evident.

The cry of black power sounded on the march. It was not just a momentary fancy or the rhetoric of a fringe group. It grew out of all the frustration that had been building over the past years, catalyzed now by the unforeseen circumstances of the march itself. Black power at that point was not yet a rejection of nonviolence; it was rather a new awareness of the self, of pride and dignity: I want to stand on my own feet to get my rights. I don't want to plead for them on my knees. I will bow down no more. I will not wait for the sweet bye 'n' bye, or look only to the Lord for my comfort. I'm going to do something for myself and I'm not going to be afraid.

That was the mood, and it made me, for one, feel good.

For all Blacks, the psychological impact of black power was profound. For too long, Black America had tried to be imitation — white. To face and accept one's Blackness, to take open pride in it at last, was deeply exhilarating. To affirm Black is beautiful was itself beautiful. The sudden access to self-respect

was a kind of rebirth. It untied knots, straightened backs, and lifted faces. We identified with each other in a new way; we were a brotherhood.

The danger, of course, was that getting one's self together could become an endless preoccupation, and black identity a goal in itself. Many succumbed to this danger.

The new pride and self-assertiveness should have produced a surge forward in the movement, but such momentum did not develop. Militancy imparts a sense of strength, cohesiveness, and courage. As with soldiers getting psyched up before an engagement, whipping up their nerve and determination until they are ready to meet all odds, militancy is important. But it is not enough. If troops are to stay psyched up enough to continue the fight, they must have at least a chance to win, they must have weapons and a strategy.

Girded with new pride and defiance, you can march out to war; but when the enemy starts shooting you down, you discover that you need more than fighting spirit. To feel that you are a man, that you have dignity, is not enough. You need tools, you need strategy, and you need to be able to see the enemy.

The target became less visible as the focus of the racial struggle moved to the North in the mid-1960s. The enemy in the North is in disguise and everywhere. He is the grocer who gives you credit, smiling in your face, and then overcharges you. He is the banker who takes your money, who even may hire black tellers and make speeches about racial equality, but then refuses to give you a mortgage on your house or business.

Bitterness blossomed in the second half of the 1960s because the enemy seemed so hard to engage. It was not because our direction had shifted toward separatism or black nationalism or revolution. The frustration that vented itself in words of hate and in burning city blocks was not the rage of the revolutionary who would destroy the system. It was the rage of essentially moderate Black America that still wanted a way in, but which had not worked out the strategies to get there. Attention, unfortunately, was diverted from that, not only by the heady search for black identity, but by growing internal criticism and divisiveness.

It is ironic that the cry of black power which united Black America in a sense of common destiny and common identity, as nothing had united it before, also divided Black America and produced cleavages deeper than had anything in its history. Basic differences relating to means and ends tore at the body of the movement. Real unity seemed illusory. The broad road along which a movement could march had ended, leaving only crisscrossing pathways as confusing as a network of jungle trails.

BLACK VIOLENCE

As the civil rights movement died, something came alive. A new energy was evident. Awareness grew, sensitive antennae picking up what was really going on in the schools and on the job, in City Hall and with the police. We began to perceive how the system gave us new opportunities with one hand and snatched them back with the other. Our heightened sensitivity bred anger, deep and strong. The black man's historic supply of tolerance and Job-like patience

suddenly neared its limits. And where the supply ran out, anger was made manifest.

But whatever violence surfaced was not a brand-new un-American phenomenon but rather a reflection of the white violence so long in practice. Black violence is the inevitable, largely individual response to white brutality. In virtually every situation where Blacks have advocated the carrying of arms, it has been for the purposes of self-defense against the violence of white America's cops.

Of all the difficulties assailing his life, it is the conduct of the police that most immediately and perhaps most deeply provokes the black man's rage. For it adds to his other degradations the corrosion of fear. It strikes at the core of his sense of self. A black man need not be roughed up or manhandled to feel degraded by the police. There is no "brutality" in many police actions which nevertheless are insulting and offensive like the practice of "stop and frisk", or "aggressive preventive patrol". But even in the absence of "brutality", you still feel threatened, degraded and humiliated, and within you a cold core of resentment grows along with the urge to strike back.

When, in that context of humiliation, physical violence is employed, as it often is, you feel a double measure of fury. For it is like kicking a man when he is down, and there is no rage like that of the powerless when subjected to unnecessary and arbitrary force.

Even aside from physical harassment, the police operate according to a double standard of law enforcement. Although the ghetto needs police protection more

than white neighborhoods, it receives less. The apparent indifference of police to ghetto safety is particularly galling in the area of organized crime. Society's contempt for the black community is spelled out in the permissiveness with which it deals with the pimps and prostitutes, the numbers racket and the dope rings, as long as they restrict their activities to black turf.

Police misconduct and police inaction take their toll. But in no way have the police more clearly exemplified to the Black the violence of the white world than when the toll is a human life. No circumstances can excuse the fatal shooting of suspects in the ghetto. It is as if the bark of the patrolman's gun were the final, curt, authoritative statement of the white man's urge and the white man's intent.

While white violence was nothing new to the 1960s, awakening black defiance to it was. As the spirit of militancy spread, it was clear that Black America was no longer ready to accept beatings and hosings by the police. No longer would it tolerate the brutality it had accepted for so long.

Blacks could not win, of course. Bricks and molotov cocktails are not much help against the armed might of the police and the national guard. But the fury was real and it sounded the demise of nonviolence as a popular inspirational movement. Not because the Blacks had decided on a new strategy, not because they had chosen to make war on America, but because they had concluded that they could not fight white brutality by lying down. They could not win equality by singing and praying.

It was time for the black man to protect himself.

Because of her blindness to police behavior, white America could not understand the black call for self-defense. Still less could she surmise that this call was not so much a declaration of intent as an expression of defiance. Instead, she saw it as a signal for black violence and assumed that the violence was organized.

No black *movement* in the United States has gone violent. What violence has occurred has been the violence of individual acts of frustration, not the violence of collective policy. Its nature has been spontaneous, not programmed. It is an impassioned cry of rage, not a strategy.

And yet, there is something operative here that is deeply human and that in its effect on Black and white alike may be part of our salvation. When the violence of self-defense leads us beyond the fear that has shackled us, there is undeniably a measure of health in it — the full-blooded pride of expressing our anger, however impractical or impolitic it may be to do so. Given the chains that the centuries have hung on our minds and bodies, we need a degree of defiance, a journey beyond fear, if we are to gain new self-respect. Our contempt for our oppressors is too great for us to grovel any more. What we claim as our rights we claim not on bended knee, but standing tall in righteous anger.

Yet, in the end I cannot condone the violence of gunfire. I recognize the desperate need for black self-respect. Knowing my own anger, I can fully understand the impulse to lash back

at white brutality with a fist in the face of a cop or with a sniper shot. But the price is simply too high — too high in white reprisal and repression.

There *are* alternate routes to liberation. Some will find the way in local organizations and the fight for community control; some in the task of voter registration.

Incidents of violent black response to white racism may be as inevitable as they are dangerous. But no program of offensive violence has yet been put forward by Blacks. For what could naked exasperation achieve in the face of America's armed might? As a policy it would be suicidal.

Increasingly in the last few years we have seen the power of federal and state government at work dealing with disorders and threats of disorders. We have seen the phalanxes of police move in; we have seen the national guard converge, the armored trucks and helicopters. More effective yet is the power that we do not see or hear. More deadly to revolution than white America's occasional display of muscle is her quiet, constant hand on the throat and pulse of the ghetto.

The ghetto is so policed — not only by the cops, but by all the other public institutions that function there — it is so bugged and tapped and tracked and reported on, that Blacks cannot turn around without the whites knowing it. We like to think that the ghetto at least is ours; but the white man knows it better than we do. He knows it, not with any feel of identification or intimacy, but clinically, with detachment. And here the Black is holed up, without

room to maneuver, or to recruit, train, and equip his forces. For the whites the job of total counter-revolutionary repression is already half-done: the potential guerillas are completely encircled. The rest is as easy as shooting fish in a barrel.

As long as this is the case, talk of revolution is futile, and the black radicals who indulge in it are simply playing games. They are escaping from bitter realities into a world of fantasy, feeding on the empty stuff of dreams. Blacks in America are hard-pressed, discouraged, and increasingly desperate; but they are not a horde of lemmings ready to head blindly to self-destruction.

Even though offensive black violence is a myth, it has had an impact on the mind of white America. It has contributed to a climate of fear. One reaction is the cry for law and order.

THE FACE OF LAW AND ORDER

"Law and order" — America's answer to her fears and her distress. This is her solution to the human dislocations that are cracking our society apart. Reformers and social scientists may continue to preach, but America cannot listen because she feels threatened — threatened by the riots, by crime, by protest and dissent.

Blacks should have no quarrel with "law and order" if we can take it on face value. If used in an effort to extend the rule of law in education, in housing, in employment, this call could weld us together. If it meant all the rights promised in the Constitution, then it could rally us and help us all up the long, rough road to the American promise. If the "disorder" it decries included the

violence our institutions visit upon the oppressed, then the slogan would not be a travesty. But "law" now means the status quo. And "order" is its blind defense.

The willingness to say "law and order by any means" is the greatest danger facing us. Across the nation citizens have asked that the police be "unleashed" to deal with demonstrators and rioters as they see fit. As police conduct in quelling disturbances would indicate, the public is increasingly saying, "First things first, we'll get around to justice and equality later." First things first, as if orderliness and decorum were more basic to society than the faith and acceptance of its citizenry.

As we seek new strategies for Black America, we must face the fact that large segments of the society are ready to employ "any means necessary" in the defense of law and order. This must have a bearing on the actions of those of us who are fighting for social change. New dangers, new risks arise. We need to know them. If America is stockpiling dynamite, we must watch where we play with matches. If she is laying minefields, we must chart the course of our strategies carefully, measuring the chances of each path we plot.

We need to know that we are watched. Dissent is now considered dangerous; dissenters are trouble-makers. Protest leaders, whether they are organizing a violent Weathermen's display or a peaceful anti-war moratorium or a rally for black solidarity, are watched and reported on. The FBI is apparently not considered adequate to handle this task. The CIA and Army intelligence units are employed, although their use

for domestic surveillance is illegal. One wonders whether America is more endangered by protesters and "revolutionaries" than by this panicked misuse of her institutions.

DANGERS AND USES OF SEPARATISM

In this land chilled by distrust, cracked by violence, polarizing between fear and rage, we cannot afford to wage war as if it were a game or a shouting match, fighting it without clear strategies and clear goals. We are in danger of waking up tomorrow and finding that we have been outwitted — the shouting over, our weapons gone, and a wall around us.

Blacks must understand the perils of law-and-order-by-any-means. Those dangers are so real that as we begin to sense them, we cease our yelling and ranting. We see that we must stop playing games. We perceive that our Constitutional rights are threatened, that some of our privacy and protection are lost, that the ground we have been walking on is no longer quite as solid as before. We see that now we must proceed with dead-earnest, calculating calm.

We must watch out for the pitfalls of futile rhetoric and inflammatory gesture. We must also guard against the lures of black separatism, for that too is a one-way street. Separatist tactics can be useful, but when separatism becomes an end in itself, it becomes an end to our hopes and demands for true freedom and equality. While we need to sense our separateness in order to survive the humiliations and degradations visited upon us, separatism can only be a way station.

Just as integration is not a goal in

itself, neither is separatism: both can come packaged in poverty and powerlessness. Forgetting that, we get sidetracked on issues that will not alter the status quo, expending our energies on symbolic struggles that will not bring jobs or skills, housing or schools or votes, but will only enhance our own sense of distinctiveness. As long as we preoccupy ourselves with assertions of our uniqueness, the ghettos that wall us in will stand. In such a way can the current fashionable focus on black identity serve white racism.

Donning a dashiki and growing a bush is fine if it energizes the wearer for real action; but "Black-is-beautiful" is dangerous if it amounts only to wrapping oneself up in one's own glory and magnificence.

No perspective on black separatism is complete unless we acknowledge that some of its attraction for Blacks spring from the urge to give up, to turn our backs on white America and the galling struggle we must daily face. While the strength of separatism springs from the fact that it answers this need for escape, therein also lies its weakness. For escape is not a strategy for change. There is such a thing as tactical retreat, for purposes of consolidation or planning or shifting of attack. But retreat for purposes of comfort or self-adulation cannot serve. We will not emerge stronger — just more self-adulatory. And as we emerge expecting to find the enemy gone or waiting politely, we will find that he is closer upon us and that the ground we had gained has been lost.

Withdrawal from engagement has become so plausible an attitude that voices

can call seriously for boycotting the ballot box or dodging the census. In actuality this amounts to nothing more than organizing yourself out of society. Such strategies are doomed, for American society is not going to seek us out. It has been forgetting us all along, hiding us behind the railroad tracks, letting us rot in the neglected core of its cities. It will be happy to continue to forget us, if we let it, and it would like statistics to show that there is no problem. It is in our interest and for our survival that we must keep the problem visible, blatant, spread across the record books.

We also have a lot of work to do in the ghetto. Since Black America lives to so large an extent in a separate world, we must deal with that world and strive to re-create it on its own terms. In so doing, we will not only recognize *de facto* separatism but use it as an agent of change. We will address our strategies to it, whether in upgrading the quality of black schools or in building political power through block voting, or economic power through black business and black labor union. We will use the separateness white America has forced upon us as a tactical tool to forge pressure groups and the unity and discipline that is necessary to make them effective. Always, however, we must do so pragmatically, out of interim necessity rather than ideology. We must never let such efforts dupe us into believing that we can build a separate society or settle for less than a full and free sharing in American life.

The crisis facing us in education is a case in point. Here conflict rages over the legal ambiguities of desegregation; it could immobilize us if we let it.

Here also we can see how limited is our effectiveness if the only battles we fight are on the integration front. We cheat our children and our future if all our efforts are focused on mixing. For no matter what we manage to achieve in housing and education in the next twenty years, there will still be neighborhoods that are predominantly black, and there will still be schools that are predominantly black. If we concentrate only on the politics of racial balance, we will neglect those schools, and a generation will be lost.

Most black children today are cruelly mistreated by the public school system. They are cooped in derelict buildings and crowded classrooms with overworked staff and inadequate, obsolete equipment. No longer victimized by law, by a dual school system, they are victimized now by geography, by the poverty of their neighborhoods. These are the golden doors to equal education that the Supreme Court opened to them in 1954. If this is "integration", it is not working.

In a setting that seems purposefully designed to discourage the child, it requires of him almost super-human determination to acquire the tools of learning. To the few who can muster such determination, school can be a doorway of sorts to the future, but to many it is an introduction to defeat and alienation, an initiation into self-contempt. This, of course, is mirrored in their performance, where, as shown in many district-wide reading tests, the ghetto schools score clearly lower.

Busing the children to more advantaged white schools is only a partial remedy. It is good because mixing in itself is good, because Americans cannot acquire a full and true education in iso-

lated pockets, be these pockets black or white. But the use of the school bus cannot be the whole solution to our problems of *de facto* segregation. In the first place, the segregation it attacks has far deeper causes, more tenacious roots, than the busing of schoolchildren has the power to affect. Shifting bodies to other classrooms can give the appearance of desegregation, but it does not counterbalance the deeply imbedded social and economic patterns that isolate the blacks in terms of where they can live and where they can work. We must make sure that white America does not mistake this appearance of desegregation for the realities of integration, nor that she uses busing as a salve to her conscience and an opportunity to neglect the millions of children still caught in the brutal hopelessness of slum schools.

The second reason why busing is not the full solution to *de facto* segregation relates to the disadvantages black children carry with them to school. Victims of the disruptive forces of ghetto life, deprived of pre-school training, and handicapped by inadequate elementary schooling, they enter the interracial situation at an appalling disadvantage. They are expected to compete, but society has already placed invisible shackles on their bodies and minds. As long as black children come burdened with cultural, psychological, and educational disadvantages, we will not attain truly integrated schooling. We will have moved bodies, but only obtained, often as not, two schools under one roof.

We must address ourselves to the challenge of providing quality education in the ghetto schools, not as a gesture of defeat, not as an admission that in-

tegration has failed, but rather in recognition that it can best be realized when the predominantly black schools are more comparable in quality.

Across the country black parents are rousing themselves to the daily disaster that is the "education" afforded their children in neighborhood schools. They are exasperated not only by the deplorable and dangerous physical conditions — the shattered windows and broken desks, the littered halls and crowded classrooms — but also by the tenor of the teaching. They no longer wish to accept for black children the crumbs of a white-oriented education. Organizing themselves into vocal groups, these parents are confronting school boards and teacher unions. They are not only calling attention to the intolerable conditions that prevail in the schools, but they are demanding a voice in their improvement. Since their children are relegated to black schools, then let them be truly *their* schools and let them be made better. This awakened involvement is a sign of health. The thrust for community control is not devoid of conflict, nor of rhetoric, ambiguities, or real problems. But it is essentially healthy because it is realistic, because it recognizes that if the black child of the inner-city is to be saved today, he must be saved where he is today. As long as our long-range goals remain equally realistic, as long as we stay committed to an ultimately integrated society, then such an immediate focus is fruitful and tactical separatism serves us.

The call for community control is healthy insofar as it stimulates the involvement of individuals and groups in the community. Its rhetoric can be ben-

eficial, fanning our determination to identify with community problems and to assume a responsible role. But we must always take care that we do not let it become a wall between us and the outside world, cutting us off from the resources we need.

We will not advance by doing the same thing to the white man that he did to us. Excluding him is depriving ourselves because he still holds the trump cards. Nor is that the kind of society we want to build. We want rather to build a solid society on the only firm foundation available to us — that of ultimate equality and integration.

ALLIANCES FOR CHANGE

Since the movement has been paced by an array of little movements, pragmatic and *ad hoc* actions centering around specific needs, we can count on no permanent alliance. Indeed, it is a diversion of our energies to try to forge one.

Tactical *ad hoc* alliances, geared to the specific issue at hand, must be formed. In each situation, we must sort out the forces and find that group or that person who can help us. Temporary alliances do not need to last forever nor do they need to include agreement on anything beyond the immediate issue. We can forego the luxury of ideological unity and address ourselves only to that particular point where our interests happen to meet.

On each issue the alliances we form will vary. The support we recruit as we campaign for more tax dollars for ghetto schools will be different from that which we enlist in a fight for a rapid transit route. The point is to

mobilize all resources possible, regardless of their political and biological coloration, and regardless of their motive. The more specific the issue, the stronger is the thrust we often can make. By narrowing the focus, we can intensify the impact.

Co-optation is generally a legitimate concern, but not when the coalitions formed are short-term. No such threat looms if our ultimate allegiances are our own and our efforts are clearly focused on the immediate problem.

So far, except for the poor, whom the Southern Christian Leadership Conference sought to include with us in a broad front, and, in some isolated cases, the students, we have not attempted to make common cause with other groups among the "powerless". But we need to become aware of the possibilities that are emerging — that can swell our numbers in a system where weight and numbers count.

Keeping the door open to a wide variety of possibilities for united action will not be easy. It will not be any love feast. But we do not need to love people in order to work with them. We can use their numbers in building pressure for change, in our confrontations with City Hall, with police departments, school boards, landlords, as we strive for equality in urban life.

If our goal is unswerving, we should be able to use any instrument, regardless of its color. The instrument as such *has* no color, if the goal is ours.

There are problems involved, however, in working with white folk. There is distrust borne of our knowledge that in the last analysis whites are and always

will be the establishment. Even when they are working at our side, even when their political stance veers all the way to the most radical revolutionary, they belong, when the chips are down, to that establishment that has oppressed our generations. We know we cannot count on them all the way. For all their good intentions and their moral conscience, they are nurtured by a system that is racist. Though willing in varying degrees to change, they can go only so far. Their attitude toward change cannot be the same as ours, for we do not stand on the same ground.

We may resent this, but we do not need to let ourselves be stalemated by this resentment. Whereas the separatist says that because the white man is ultimately part of the establishment we cannot and should not work with him, I say we can. We can, but we must be realistic about it. We must start with him where he is, using his power to attack issues on which our interests overlap and not expecting him to go all the way, to identify truly with us. Effective collaboration with someone does not depend on the degree of our approval. If he does not have "soul", that is his loss not ours. If he is hung up on certain material needs or emotional biases, that is his problem, not ours. We do not have to love the white man and we do not have to hate him. He who hates is as dependent on the object of his feelings as he who loves. It is in the maturity of emotional detachment that we can best use him and take what he has to offer; only when that detachment exists can true liberation and equality come.

BLACKS AND BROADER ISSUES

If we are serious about survival, therefore, we must cease appraising issues in terms of black and white. We have no monopoly on suffering; victims of injustice come in all colors. Our problems as Blacks cannot be resolved in a vacuum. They cannot be resolved unless we attack the root disease itself — human injustice — wherever we find it, be it in the peace movement, in the ecology fight, in efforts to control crime, or in any other area.

I have come to believe that Dr. King was right: the issue of war and the issue of race are not separate, nor can they, in the broad picture, be dealt with separately. We cannot solve the issue of race without dealing with the issue of justice. We cannot talk about defending human rights in Mississippi and remain silent about those we extinguish in Vietnam. We cannot fight for man's freedom in Georgia or Harlem or Watts and tacitly condone its destruction in Asia.

The issues of race and war are inseparable not merely because we suffer domestically from the diversion of national resources, but because they are manifestations of the same disease — America's belief that might makes right and that humanity is expendable.

It is encouraging that increasing numbers of Blacks today are beginning to recognize their own stake in the peace issue and their own imperative to act. I see no reason to stand idly by. For the peace we must win in Southeast Asia will also be the black man's peace. Our own survival demands that we make common cause with those who fight for

this peace. It demands that we fight the common madness that will victimize us all.

The environment issue has yet to enlist Blacks. To us this movement has had the smell of a con job. It has a suspiciously white, middle-class aura; it comes across as a plaything of the privileged. It does not move us — except to cynicism.

Yet it is up to us to stretch the minds of those on the ecology bandwagon. It is up to us to point out that urban environment is more than a question of soot, smoke and smog; that it is also a galloping physical deterioration in housing, streets, services. That it is also the way people feel about these decaying neighborhoods, the climate of hopelessness and alienation. We must insist that programs include both a visible attack on the physical environment and a campaign against apathy and despair.

If America wants to talk environment, let's talk environment. Let's hold some teach-ins of our own. Instead of boycotting meetings and rallies, let's get up and tell America what environment is. Her attention is awakened — let us now direct it toward our own needs. Let us with emphatic insistence bring into the dialogue on environment the plight of our brothers. Let us not allow the bleeding hearts to go off on their middle-class white protests, their academic exercises, without making them see the filth of our rotting ghettos and the climate of futility existing there.

We Blacks have also been silent on the subject of crime, so silent that one would think that only white society was affected. Yet we know how dark a

shadow crime casts over our lives. Each of us lives in this shadow; each is a victim. The victims are not those who cry loudest for law and order; they are not the ones buying the police dogs and the burglar alarms in their suburban fortresses. The main victims are, far and away, the poor and the black.

Blacks must speak out for our silence tends to foster the assumption that crime is *only* a function of poverty and injustice. And we must act to assure our own safety and survival. As long as our grievous economic and social needs go unmet, our actions will not enable us to stamp out crime. However, we can lessen its toll by pressing for penal reform, by joining with those who are calling for gun registration, by mobilizing allies in a crack-down on the organized crime that pushes drugs on our youth.

"Not a black man's issue," you say? "Let whitey do the work"? No, we Blacks are suffering too much from crime gone unchecked. This is our problem as much as the white man's, for if he is more to blame, it is we who suffer most.

GETTING IT TOGETHER

We need to put much more action on our agendas. So little has happened since the call for black power first rang out. For much of Black America life seems suspended. The anger that resounded in the call for black power now feeds a sense of no-power. This feeling of impotence is evident everywhere. Drug addiction rises as our youth barter their health and their futures for a brief sense of well-being. The incidence of arson in the ghetto has risen dramatically. Tools for change are being ripped away

as funds to organize and implement urban programs are being cut. Buildings are being constructed, factories erected, jobs provided — but only in the suburbs.

But it is not the end of the road. We are stronger than we think. In our numbers are potentials for leverage we can use. In our growing experience are reservoirs of strength we can tap. In both are genuine prospects for power, power to use the system and effect change.

Out of the impatience of the local community, and out of its internal conflicts as well, indigenous leadership is developing. Its determination is fed by the realization that the white man is not going to do the job that must be done. The effectiveness of this new leadership is enhanced by a capacity to negotiate as it learns that nonnegotiable demands lead to non-realizable gains. Where once noble principle and rhetoric stood in the way of practical change, the arts of collective bargaining are being practiced.

The new breed of leader is ready to concentrate his efforts. He is willing to be a big fish in a little pond. "The Negro Leader" of the community, the ceremonial spokesman, is replaced by a proliferation of local grassroots leaders focused on separate causes and supported by genuine followerships. Where before there would not have been a chance for a neighborhood-level organization to get much attention or exert much influence, such organizations can now affect City Hall. Something is at work that could be called democracy, and it is forcing relevance, responsiveness, and a greater measure of integrity on higher-level black leadership.

Here is our strength — in an emerging leadership that is of the people. Schooled in the grassroots problems of the community, it is receptive and responsive to people's needs. It is authentic. No longer puppets of the establishment or creations of the white media, these men and women enter the political arena with the wind at their back.

With our numbers and our emerging leadership we can still avail ourselves of the political machinery of the system. We can put our hands to the levers of power if we can attain a measure of unity among ourselves and employ flexibility in our political strategies.

The political avenue to social change is not an easy one for Blacks. But if it is access to power we want, we have no viable alternative. The voting booth is still there, elections are still held on schedule, and the ballot is still private. We must organize ourselves to use them, and we are showing that we can.

Through the political system we can move massively into the mainstream of America — not just to be part of the mainstream, for much of it is polluted and often flows in the wrong direction, but to clean it up and make it answer our needs. Movement into that mainstream is the fastest, most efficient way, the only acceptable and workable way, of changing its course.

To use with effectiveness the political machinery available to us we must make a cool appraisal of our strength. We need to study the relative power of our numbers so that we do not court defeat and frustrate ourselves with unrealistic expectations, so that we can devise appropriate political strategies.

Coloring all of our political action is the fact that we are a minority. Our distribution, however, is lopsided — over half of us are concentrated in the inner-cities. Recent evidence shows a startling increase in Blacks moving to the inner-suburbs. Blacks are crossing electoral boundaries and weakening their political clout in the cities. Therefore, if we are to control the cities, coalitions with sections of the white majority within them are essential. Black unity in campaign organizations and in voting is also needed, but black unity alone will not win elections, nor can a candidate run on his blackness alone. His appeal must be broader, involving issues of key importance to the white majority.

We must learn how to woo white votes, how to allay white fears and make common cause for better, more representative government. This is tricky because, while we need black solidarity and black discipline behind our candidates, the spectacle of "block voting" is scary to whites. Although it is firmly within the democratic tradition, it seems suspect to many, especially when the "block" in question is black.

This fear must be dealt with and minimized. While we must act as a block, we must do so as a matter of course without undue publicity and speechifying about it. Our public statements should underplay, where possible, appeals to our black brothers on the basis of color or our own credentials as soul brothers, and focus rather on larger issues of broader appeal. Our brothers know we are black. Militant black power rhetoric is expendable. Our strategies must be tailored to reduce the psychological threats that whites feel in

the face of a black campaign. It is essential that we seek out and stress issues which are important to whites.

The biggest challenge that faces us in the political arena is building bonds with white ethnics who share the same cities and congressional districts. They are numerous; many are poor. If we are ever to escape the poverty that grinds us down, we must ally with whites who are victimized too. No matter if they suffer less than we because their skin is not black. They still are oppressed, and together we must make common cause against the tax laws that pamper the rich and impoverish the poor and a common front in our fight for a guaranteed annual income.

The white ethnics today are displaying a new militancy which to date has been largely directed against us. But calling "racist" will not help. We must break through the barriers of distrust and begin to communicate. It will not be easy, given the daily frictions that feed the hostility between us. But it is a political imperative, and our determination to make common cause will be fed by the knowledge that there is more to unite us than there is to divide us. The causes of white ethnic unrest are not racial but economic. Realizing this we can seek to enlist this new white militancy to help bring about a redirection of priorities. Its pressure, added to our own and raised to a national scale, could turn the nation around.

Our struggle involves more than just taking aim at the white man. It involves focusing on ourselves and on the use of our own resources, taking advantage of the dynamics of our new self

and of its energy, using our angers constructively, and getting ourselves together. Our struggle is more than getting together to talk or to protest; it is doing with and for ourselves what only we can do.