

BLACK POWER

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In 1945, the celebrated Negro writer Richard Wright asked:

Will the Negro, in the language of André Malraux, find meaning in his humiliation, make his slums and his sweat-shops his modern cathedrals out of which will be born a new consciousness that can guide him toward freedom? Or will he continue, as he does today, saying Job-like to the society that crushes him: Though it slays me, yet will I trust in it?

In the summer of 1967 some eighty American cities were convulsed by racial disorders, interpreted as senseless violence by White America, interpreted as the nascent stage of revolution by Black Power militants. In that summer, the House of Representatives slashed the Model Cities programme, eliminated rent subsidies for the city poor, reduced federal aid to education, and voted down a \$40 million rat extermination programme the same week as it approved \$10 million for an aquarium in the District of Columbia, and with little opposition, passed an anti-riot bill, specifically directed against SNCC leaders. In that summer a special police helicopter, armed with a Thompson sub-machine-gun and financed by private business groups, buzzed over Cleveland's black ghetto—counter-insurgency warfare, Southeast Asia or urban America?

From these contradictions emerging from within the womb of affluent America, Black Power leaders are confident that they can, for the first time, address the question posed by Richard Wright—the question so conscientiously avoided by traditional Negro leadership, yet so closely related to the social conditions which incubate ghetto consciousness: will the black man accept his historical role and assume the responsibility for his own liberation? Whose movement—responsible to whom, run by whom, for what? Integration—into what, on what terms, is it relevant to the ghetto masses?

When Black Power first emerged, *The New York Times* (7.10.66) exclaimed that it contradicted the whole history of the movement—without saying, of course, whose movement and what history. *The New York Times* (7.12.66) asked: if legitimate political strength were all they sought, why would speakers at the recent CORE convention have scornfully put the brand of "The Establishment" on exactly those Negro leaders who have achieved political power—deriding them

as "Uncle Toms"? This, of course, takes for granted what constitutes "legitimate" political power—defined in what terms, articulated by whom, for what ends? In the tradition of Malcolm X and Frantz Fanon, Black Power leaders ask: has established Negro leadership spoken for the needs of the black man in the ghetto, or has he served as the white man's political broker vis-a-vis the black community? Has such leadership bowed down before the "politics of the possible", thanking Mr. Charley for the few crumbs he has scattered in the ghetto with divine munificence, or has he practised the politics of self-assertion, telling Mr. Charley that the days of black exploitation are over?

The Boston Herald warned that there will be "more hatred, more dashed hopes and more misery if Black Power evolves into an anti-white campaign, or worse a class struggle".¹ Let *The Boston Herald* place the blame where it really lies—if Black Power has evolved into an anti-white campaign or a class struggle (how un-American!) it is because the black masses are bitter, hungry, and unemployed; further, they realize who has been responsible for their oppression. Under the existing system, no movement which truly represented the conscious needs of the black man could evolve in any other way—for him the premises from which Black Power emerge are true and real, for him "Burn, Baby, Burn!" has far more relevance than "The Great Society" which he knows will always remain at the periphery of the ghetto.

Black self-assertion has made for the development of a positive black consciousness, a phenomenon which never would have occurred in the previous white-oriented integrationist phase. The black man will never be able to operate on equal terms until he has purged from his mind all notions of white superiority and black inferiority—only he can confront this problem. The message of Malcolm X is clear: "Nobody can give you independence. Nobody can give you freedom. Nobody can give you equality or justice or anything. If you're a man you take it. If you can't take it, you don't deserve it."² None of this can happen until the black man seeks power, independent power—black power. Older notions of civil rights will not do for they are superstructural in nature, not touching the material problems of social structure which lie at the core of American racism; a Negro in full possession of his bourgeois rights will still face technological displacement, entrapment in urban slums, and de facto segregation in terms of employment, schools, health services, etc. The American Dream has been exploded, and the black man has come to realize that abstracted morality and social values have no life independent of the material context from which they emerge and to which they are applied. "Freedom and Democracy for ALL" be damned if the structural organiza-

tion of society precludes the possibility of such a phenomenon occurring.

Briefly, Black Power seeks to encourage greater racial pride and cohesiveness among members of the black community—it attempts to develop the black ghetto into a unified and independent force via black organizations. It also seeks to develop a coalition at some future time with poor whites, organized as a parallel force, in order to bring about a total restructuring of America. As Stokely Carmichael says, we should begin with the basic fact that black Americans have two problems: they are poor and they are black. "All other problems arise from this two-sided reality: lack of education, the so-called apathy of the black man. Any programme to end racism must address itself to that double reality."¹ Black Power spokesmen make explicit the need to control the economic institutions of the ghetto; being poor, the black man living in the ghetto is subject to exploitation by non-ghetto businessmen; being black, he lacks the mobility to reside in other than black ghettos where he would not be such a captive customer for predatory business enterprises. The concept of Black Power is certainly not new (one would therefore wonder how it is a "Contradiction of the whole history of the movement"), though it is now invoked at a stage when it poses a greater threat to the *status quo* than ever before. What of the other periods of the "new Negro", when black self-assertion was unrestrained by the non-violent fetish which typified the later period? For example, consider the "new Negro" following the 1919 race riots which swept the country. Here the utility of self-defence increased racial pride and served as a warning to the white man that violence would be met with violence. Wrote the black poet Claude McKay:

If we must die—let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock of our accursed lot.

If we must die--oh, let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain: then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honour us though dead!

Oh, kinsmen! We must meet the common foe;
Though far outnumbered. let us still be brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack
Pressed to the wall, dying, but—fighting back!

The Depression found Chicago's black community mobilized against white businessmen who were drawing wealth from the ghetto but

providing no base for black employment. As Cayton and Drake relate in their *Black* Metropolis:

A group of ragged pickets walking in front of a Black Belt chain store in the fall of 1929 signaled the beginning of a movement which stirred Black Metropolis as nothing has done since the Race Riot. The attention of Negroes all over the country fastened on Chicago's "Spend Your Money Where You Can Work" campaign. A Negro newspaper, *The Whip*, risking reprisal from white advertisers, politicians, and mortgage holders, became the aggressive spokesman for applying a boycott against all white businesses in the Black Belt that would not employ Negroes!

Conscious of their economic oppression and of their strength since the successful boycott campaign, groups of unemployed Negroes formed flying squadrons to resist evictions caused by failure to pay rent.⁷ Was such community action any different from the concept of Black Power?

In 1941, A. Philip Randolph organized a march on Washington to protest against job discrimination in the defence plants; his position was that the march should be all-black, as an expression of independent black power:

As to the composition of our movement. Our policy is that it be all-Negro, and pro-Negro but not anti-white, or anti-semitic or anti-labor, or anti-Catholic. The reason for this policy is that all oppressed people must assume the responsibility and take the initiative to free themselves. . . . It develops a sense of self-reliance with Negroes depending on Negroes in vital matters. It helps break down the slave psychology and inferiority complex in Negroes which comes and is nourished with Negroes relying on white people for direction and support. This inevitably happens in organisations that are supposed to be in the interest of the Negro.⁸

How different were Randolph's words spoken in 1941 from those of the Black Power advocates of today? As Randolph said then, "these rights will not be given. They must be taken"? Malcolm X could repeat in 1964, and Stokely Carmichael in 1966.

If Black Power, in substance, is nothing new, then why is it perceived as such a tremendous threat to the status quo at this point in history? The answer is that previously Black Power operated within a fluid social context. Now the liquid has frozen, and the crystallized social matrix is perceived by the black masses with a revolutionary consciousness which demands structural change. Broadly, there are three factors which have accounted for this shift in mass attitudes:

(1) population trends—before, Negroes represented controllable minorities in the various major cities, now Negroes are approaching majorities as middle-class whites move to the suburbs and Negroes from the agricultural South continue to flock to the industrial North; (2) technological displacement—before, there was a relatively stable market for unskilled Negro labour, but at present technological dis-

placement is wiping out some 40,000 unskilled and semi-skilled jobs per week and since the black worker is disproportionately represented in such jobs, he is bearing the brunt of the consequences;" (3) positive black consciousness—before, there was widespread self-hatred among Negroes which approached the actual belief in white supremacy, now a positive value is ascribed to blackness, a new virility, a new sense of potency over the conditions affecting the black man's life (especially among the younger generation). From a Marxian perspective, these factors emerge as contradictions in the process of industrial capitalist development: the mechanization of agriculture forcing population concentrations into urban industrial areas, the irrationality of the labour market causing labour exclusionism along racial lines, resulting in the antipathy between the black man's race-structured relations to the productive process (which relegate him to the lowest strata of unskilled and semi-skilled labour) and the increasingly automated forces of production which obliterate those very categories of labour to which he has been ascribed. His revolutionary consciousness stems from the recognition of his relative deprivation, his perception of what he does not receive under the existing system—intensified, to be sure, by daily contact with the misery of his brothers, who, like him are unemployed, undernourished, living in squalid housing, and asking: "When do we start?"

I

The purpose of this section is an attempt to develop a theoretical schema which might provide a more incisive analytical description of the structural factors at work with respect to racism in the American urban setting. I shall try to focus on the objective situation of the black man through the use of the concepts of class, status, race, and "place".

Class, as commonly used in sociology, has come to be understood as a composite of such various components as economic situation, status, prestige, and relative subjective placement. As the late C. Wright Mills suggested, class has become a sponge word: "All the many colored beads are strung upon one vertical string; whereas the data and relevant questions indicate the need for several strings, each for one color of bead."¹¹ The Polish sociologist Stanislaw Ossowski further suggested that an objective interpretation of the social structure can only be made on the basis of one variable, since the mentioned components of the "sponge term" are not commensurable.¹² He asserted that if a system of stratification is advanced which combines these components, such a system must be wholly subjective: "This is the establishing of some kind of gradation on the basis of the intuitive comparison and intuitive summation of values that are incomparable in

terms of any other common measure but that resulting from the predilections of the evaluating individual."¹³

Class, as used in this discussion, is meant to be an exclusively economic concept, reflecting the material situation of a particular group of individuals in the same or similar economic situation. These individuals of the same or similar economic situation have identical or similar goods and services to offer in a system of production and distribution; they thus receive identical or similar monetary rewards in the market place. Since classes are unequal with respect to the production and distribution of goods and services, one might further expect that a basic antagonism exists (whether latent or manifest) between two classes whose objective class-interests can be shown to be at variance.

Following Max Weber, it is useful to recognize a distinction between class and status, though by no means am I advancing any idea that they are separate and distinct or mutually exclusive. The relationship between class and status is of a subtle dialectical nature which may be best viewed from the Marxian perspective of base and superstructure. As a superstructural phenomenon, status must accommodate itself to the class relationships emanating from the material base—in this sense status represents the effects on social interaction resulting from the existing class structure. Status serves to stabilize the existing class structure in the sense that it functions to legitimize class position. Thus, the relationship between class and status is one of interpenetration and reciprocity, class being the economic dimension and status being the social dimension. Groups which have attained high economic position attempt to reinforce this position by setting up devices to restrict the status-recognition of lower economic groups, by excluding others from access to the status position they attempt to monopolize.

I am not concerned here with a biological definition of race; instead, I would like to develop an operational social definition of race, concentrating on those circumstances where an awareness of racial difference has some relationship to the structure of the society in question. As Oliver Cox has said: "If, for example, two persons of different racial strains were to meet and deal with each other on their own devices—that is to say, without preoccupation with a social definition of each other's race—then it might be said that race here is of no sociological significance."¹⁴ If, however, racial distinction or racial identifiability serves as a means to exploit a group, then race is of crucial sociological importance.

It is no coincidence that wherever one finds racial distinction used in this way, it has followed the act of economic exploitation. For example, consider the following selections from *Capitalism and Slavery* by Eric Williams:

A racial twist has thereby been given to what is basically an economic phenomenon. Slavery was not born of racism; rather racism was the consequence."

Here, then, is the origin of Negro slavery. The reason was economic, not racial; it had to do not with the color of the laborer, but the cheapness of the labor. As compared with the Indian and white laborer, Negro slavery was eminently superior. . . . The features of the man, his hair, color and dentifrice, his "subhuman" characteristics so widely pleaded, were only the later rationalizations to justify a simple economic fact: that the colonies needed labor and resorted to Negro labor because it was cheapest and best. That was not a theory, it was a practical conclusion deduced from the personal experience of the planter. Africa was nearer than the moon, nearer too than the more populous countries of India and China. But their turn was to come."

In certain social situations race has served first to identify a particular group, and, second, more systematically to exploit them since they could be readily identified. Under capitalism, which is based upon the exploitation of labour, race has served to oppress more systematically those who could be easily identified, treated as a distinct group, and given a social "place" vis-a-vis the predominant group.

Race, used in this way, is similar to a bastardized form of status in that it serves to legitimize a subordinate economic position. Just as groups who have attained a high economic position attempt to reinforce this position by setting up devices to restrict the status recognition of lower groups, by excluding others from access to the status position they attempt to monopolize; so race serves by setting up devices to restrict the status recognition of subordinate identifiable groups, by excluding these groups from access to the status position the predominant group attempts to monopolize. Race, in such a situation, helps to stabilize the existing class system, since it acts as a barrier to class mobility, keeping the exploited racial group in a socially ascribed "place". This restriction of status recognition, which dialectically interacts with economic restriction, is so inflexible that sociologists have often mistaken it for a caste situation—marriage is rarely condoned outside the racial group and mobility across the colour line is structurally limited. Yet racism has its roots in economic relations just as was the case with status. One might say that racism is the social justification for the act of economic exploitation, that it consists of those status restrictions and attitudes which serve to legitimize such exploitation. In this respect, it is somewhat similar to a social definition of Hinduism—shorn of mysticism, Hinduism, as a religious philosophy, is a system of thought developed to explain and legitimize the functioning of the caste system of India.¹⁷ Like Plato's allegory of the metals in *The Republic*, it is a form of social mythology which serves to justify and maintain an existing socio-economic order.

John Stuart Mill once wrote: "Of all the vulgar modes of escaping

from the consideration of the effect of social and moral influences on the human mind, the most vulgar is that of attributing the diversities of conduct and character to inherent natural differences."¹⁸ Racism did not have its initial roots in any mystical, "natural" antipathy between racially identifiable groups, but rather in a practical exploitive relationship subsequently rationalized in terms of the "natural" superiority or inferiority of racially distinct groups—one must distinguish between cause and apology. Apology, in this case, is nothing less than the exploiting groups' rationalization for maintaining the existing social system. Apology, in turn, guarantees that the superior-inferior racial relationship will be inevitable and immutable, since it institutionalizes an intricate system of status restrictions which effectively prevent either economic or social mobility of the oppressed racial group.

This system of status restrictions resulting from the employment of race to justify an exploitive relationship may be clearly seen by examining the notion of "place" in race relations. "Place" is an ascribed social position applied to the exploited group by the dominant group and it consists of all those bars to primary and secondary relationships which, if unrestricted, would lead to the eventual degeneration of the superior-inferior socio-economic relationship. Since the exploitation in question is applied on the basis of racial distinguishability, any form of social interaction which might place such distinguishability in jeopardy must be prohibited to maintain the system. Thus, "place" functions to prevent the possibility of extensive amalgamation; sexual relations between members of different races must be made impossible. It is only when one considers this concept of "place" that one can appreciate and comprehend the sexual mystique which hovers over race relations. Though Negro males never had the white male's opportunity to select women from either race, one must bear in mind that such relations between white men and Negro women were never looked upon with favour by whites. On this score, Ray Stannard Baker cites the following: "Our people," says a district attorney in Mississippi, "our white men with their black concubines, are destroying the integrity of the Negro race, raising up a menace to the white race, lowering the standard of both races, and preparing the way for riot, mob, criminal assaults, and finally, a death struggle for racial supremacy."¹⁹ In this light we must view the development of the "purity of white womanhood" and the practice of castration and lynching which was applied to black men who allegedly transgressed the sexual code; these have no meaning in and of themselves, they only become meaningful when one comprehends the consequences of significant violation of the sexual code with respect to the maintenance of the system. Thus, lynching became intimately related to the fear of amalgamation of the races, even if a violation of the sexual code had

little to do with the reason why a particular Negro was lynched. As Arthur Raper said in his *The Tragedy of Lynching*:

Regardless of the cause of the particular lynching there were always those who defended it by the insistence that unless Negroes were lynched, no white woman would be safe, this despite the fact that only one-sixth of the persons lynched in the last thirty years were even accused of rape. Regardless of the accusation, an example must be made of the accused Negro for the sake of white womanhood.²⁰

Under the current reform measures pursued by the federal government, the notion of "place" remains, albeit in a far more sophisticated form: that of the welfare eunuch. Finally realizing that the conditions found in the black ghetto produce widespread unrest, the government attempts to buy off the new militancy with "War On Poverty" money; it attempts not to alter the structural conditions producing manifest dissatisfaction, but merely to take the sharp edge off ghetto oppression. The black man is now to feel that he is being "taken care of"; but, as Malcolm X said, "the welfare is taking care of us, making us beggars, robbing us of our dignity, of our manhood".²¹ How is the notion of "place" changed if racism still serves to guarantee employment for the white worker, yet systematically excludes the black worker? Would anyone argue that the black worker is in the superior position being "taken care of" by welfare? On the contrary: the Negro is made to feel that he must prostrate himself before White America in recognition that black people may enjoy a degree of well-being only by sufferance of the whites. Subsequently, such Negroes act as a check upon any of their brothers who might harbour ideas of revolt.

The notion of "place" calls to question function and possibilities for traditional leadership in the black community—for whom do leaders speak and how are they selected? Note this example cited in Silberman's *Crisis In Black And White*:

In the fall of 1962 a group of businessmen in Oakland became concerned over the extent of Negro unemployment and the possibility of a boycott or picketing by Negro militants, and decided to take the initiative themselves in developing a program to open up new jobs for Negroes. So far, so good. But when it came time to sit down and discuss alternatives, the businessmen did not call on the Negroes who would be most likely to organize a boycott or call out the pickets. "We didn't want any of those emotional fellows from the NAACP," Norris Nash, vice-president of Kaiser Industries and ad hoc chairman of the businessmen's group explained. "We wanted sound men who would be willing to ignore the past and just concentrate on the future, so we asked Mr. — to get a group together. He's a sound man," Nash added, "in fact, he's the whitest Negro we have in town." He also happened to be an employee of the city government, and consequently unable to display as much independence as someone deriving his livelihood from the Negro community.²²

"Place" has effectively removed the black man from the decision-making apparatus in urban America, to say nothing as to the ability to make vital decisions in his own community—it is only when the black community creates an independent base of power that it will be able to act as a powerful unified force to wrest control from their exploiters. Black Power spokesmen have decided that this notion of "place" will not be erased by White America; it must instead be crushed by black people unwilling to settle for anything less. This is a corollary of the argument that equality is never given to an oppressed group by a "benevolent" omnipotent group a liberal pipe-dream at best, far removed from the structure of existing reality—uality may only be taken by a group unwilling to accept its socially ascribed "place", unwilling to tolerate the system of status restrictions which keeps it on the bottom. Black Power spokesmen realize that these status restrictions, this notion of "place", will remain intact so long as structural economic exploitation continues. As Stokely Carmichael said at Berkeley:

In order for racism to die, the institutions of economic oppression of the colored peoples around the world must die. It is the institution of economic oppression upon which this country is based that is the cause of racism, and until it is wiped out, we will never be able to solve our problems.?

The black man alone should not bear the burden of restructuring America, and the immediate orientation of Black Power is toward altering the master-slave colonial relationship that is found in the ghetto. As such, it represents a temporary separatist stage directed against the immediate exploitation of the black community and to prepare the black masses, organizationally and psychologically, to enter into coalition with those other sectors of America which are ready to move toward radical change for all America. Because all social interaction between races in America are conditioned by "place", Black Power advocates assert that such a radical coalition cannot take place until these status restrictions are sufficiently reduced as to allow black people to participate on their own terms, as equals.

What of the vulgar Marxist argument that pressures created in a capitalist urban environment should subdue the influence of race, since race, it would seem, would be dysfunctional and an irrational obstacle to the socialization of labour, a needless barrier to worker solidarity? The concept of race had its roots in the slave-based rural economy; when it is superimposed upon an industrial society would it not prove unworkable, a "fetter" on the urban relations of production?

A careful examination reveals that despite this crass theoretical prediction that race would not survive, but would be subdued by class pressure, race has survived and is clearly functional in perpetuating

the capitalist industrial system. In that system of a competition for a limited number of jobs, race helps secure and restrict class position; status, in the process of legitimizing class position, in turn reinforces the need for race (since race serves as one device to restrict status recognition and thereby stabilize the existing class structure). This is the sociological key which explains the interrelation between race and class in the urban industrial system. Race, by way of depriving the status recognition which would permit upward class mobility, relegates the black man to the undesirable unskilled occupations and removes him from the competition for positions in the skilled-labour and managerial strata—thus, for the overwhelming majority of black men, race serves to keep them permanently in the lower-class stratum. This also has the effect of supporting the white class structure, since race has monopolized for the white workers competition for positions in the skilled-labour and managerial strata—thus, for the majority of white workers, race serves to guarantee a higher class position.

Race, as used here, also plays a significant role in determining the class structure within the black community. It serves to create petty monopolies for a black Clite in professions and commercial enterprises which are segregated; in these fields, white competition has been effectively removed and the black Clite has a captive market. Thus, one perceives class conflict within the ghetto: this black elite has a vested interest in perpetuating the oppressive status quo and maintaining the ghetto (their captive market) firmly intact; yet it is in the class interest of the overwhelming majority of lower-class black men to put an end to race, to get rid of those status restrictions which keep them in their "place".

Those traditional Negro leaders for whom Black Power advocates have such great disdain are drawn from this Clite stratum, legitimized by virtue of their class position and accompanying status. However, because of race it is important to note that their position as an Clite exists only in relation to the black lower class. Their motives for aspiring to leadership can be seen as a function of class, status, and race: (1) they are motivated to remove the race-status which is ascribed to them in order that their black class status will be recognized as legitimate by White America—this explains why they stress status goals (legal reforms and other superstructural measures); (2) they are motivated to take the pose of "protest leaders" to re-direct lower-class antagonism from against themselves and steer it against the white man. The contradictions involved in being a spokesman for "the race" (which is predominantly lower-class), yet at the same time pursuing their vested class interest, have become apparent.

The sources of discontent among the black masses—squalid housing; structural unemployment; exploitation by landlords, shopkeepers,

and employers; police brutality—are material issues which traditional Negro organizations, like the NAACP, consider beyond their reach. As Dr. John Morsell, Assistant to the Executive-Secretary, has written in "The Crisis":

The police are frequently brutal, other Negroes are often insensitive to the needs of the disadvantaged, and exploitation is not unknown on the part of landlords, shopkeepers, and employers. But for the very reason that these are essentially class, not racial grievances, they cannot properly be top-priority items in organizational programs which are committed to the struggle against racial wrongs. Such programs are thus not within the direct reach of the organized efforts in which aggrieved Negroes are accustomed to think of themselves (actually or potentially) involved on a personal basis."

How could such an organizational posture meet the needs of the black ghetto? One is led to believe that there is no structural connection between race and economic exploitation—it is by mere coincidence that the overwhelming majority of black people find themselves in poverty! As Franz Fanon would say, this black bourgeoisie is nothing but an intermediary between the capitalist structure controlled by White America and the oppressed black masses; to expect more from this group would be to expect them to divest themselves of their own material interests in the *status quo*.

Black Power accounts for the fact that the ghetto masses are black and they are poor: it addresses itself to the problems of class, status, and race. Advocating separation as a temporary step toward an eventual coalition with the white poor, Black Power advocates wish first to seek racial unity so they can speak as one voice in ending the economic exploitation that takes place within the ghetto. The basic problems confronting the black man cannot be solved in this separatist phase because these problems are centred around the capitalist system itself, and nothing less than the destruction of this system will remove the function that racism serves: the easy profit and the artificial rationalization of the labour market. However, before unity could be attained along class lines—as in a coalition of poor blacks and poor whites—the status recognitions based on race must be abolished. These can only be destroyed by black people unwilling to settle for less, prepared to work side by side with whites as equals. In this context one might view the actions taken by the Black Caucus at the National Conference For A New Politics in the summer of 1967. Called as a liberal-radical coalition by middle-class anti-war whites, the Conference had failed to encourage black participation either in the planning stage or in the committee structure. Black delegates insisted that if there was to be black participation at the Conference, they must have equal representation on all committees and voting power equal to the whites. Though considered as political blackmail by the right-wing of the

Conference, the Black Caucus was responsible for making a meaningful coalition possible for the future, as well as forcing the Conference to take a more radical posture than its initiators had intended: foregoing third-party politics (the Spock-King ticket) for the present; concentrating, instead, on community organization to create the base with which such politics might be feasible in the future.

II

The key to race problems does not rest merely in white attitudes or black attitudes; it rests rather in the system which lies at the core of these psychological manifestations. As Robert Lynd once said:

Liberal democracy has never dared face the fact that industrial capitalism is an intensely coercive form of organization of society that cumulatively constrains men and all of their institutions to work the will of the minority who hold and wield economic power; and that this relentless warping of men's lives and forms of association becomes less and less the result of voluntary decisions by "bad" or "good" men and more and more an impersonal web of coercions dictated by the need to keep "the system" running."

Race has been manipulated by capitalists and unions alike for their own self-interest. Hostility to the Negro within the labour movement can, in part, be attributed to the sinister policy of using black agricultural workers from the South to weaken the union movement in the industrial North. For example, a prime cause of the racial animosity one encounters in Detroit can be laid to Ford's policy during the 1940's of recruiting southern Negroes to act as scabs to break UAW strikes and flood the labour market; the same policy was largely responsible for the Race Riot which rocked Chicago in 1919. The labour movement, on the other hand, chose to get what they could from American capitalism instead of seeking a radical transformation of that system; this meant a policy of exclusionism to restrict competition, an attempt to impose rationality upon an irrational labour market. Economic insecurity is the hallmark of the capitalist system, and in seeking protection against it the brunt of exploitation falls most heavily on those who are readily distinguishable and who can be structurally repressed—in this case the black man via institutionalized racism.

Advanced capitalist development has caused a shift in its black population from agricultural peon to industrial proletariat to lumpen-proletariat. As early as the 1920's, the mechanization of agriculture began forcing black workers off the farm and contributed to the exodus north for industrial employment. According to Silberman, World War II really opened the floodgates; within the context of a

war economy—ten million men in uniform and industry operating at full capacity—labour became a scarce and precious commodity. In all some 2.75 million Negroes left the South between 1940 and 1960—the Negro population outside the South has increased five-fold since 1910, and it has nearly trebled since 1940. Within the South itself, the mechanization of agriculture has caused a substantial decline in the Negro rural population, the Negro urban population in the South jumping from 7 per cent in 1919, to 21 per cent in 1940, to 41 per cent in 1960.¹¹

The vast majority of Negroes moving to the industrial North have crowded into the slums of the twelve largest cities, which in 1960 held 60 per cent of the Negro population living outside the South. Between 1940 and 1960 the Negro population in Chicago increased more than two-and-a-half times to 890,000 or 24 per cent of the city's population; the Negro population in Detroit has more than trebled to nearly a half-million, or 29 per cent of the city's population. In Los Angeles County, the Negro population has increased an amazing 600 per cent between 1940 and 1960, from 75,000 to 454,000.¹²

Whereas before Negroes comprised controllable minorities in America's key cities, present trends indicate that they will represent the largest ethnic group in the near future. *The Boston Herald* had good reason to fear class conflict, but it mistakenly tried to pin it to Black Power; objectively, America's industrial centres would have been populated by large numbers of black people—poor black people—whether Black Power would have emerged at this time or not. That it did emerge was a response to these objective conditions, certainly not the cause; as Carmichael says, the whole structure of race problems emerges from the fact that the Negro is black and that he is poor. Since we have seen how racism is functional given the existing system, one might further add that the Negro is poor because he is black. His "place" has been structurally set below the skilled-labour category of employment, in precisely those occupations which are being obliterated by technological displacement. Upon re-examining Chicago's ghetto sixteen years after their monumental *Black Metropolis*, Cayton and Drake found that, in 1960, two-thirds of the non-white men were still below the skilled-labour level (67.3 per cent), while the same proportion of white men were above it (67.9 per cent).¹³

As the American economy advances, the contradiction between the automated forces of production and the black man's race-structured relations to that productive process will grow more severe, causing greater black unemployment and an increased rate in the transition from proletariat to lumpen-proletariat: As Silberman said:

Automation, new management techniques, and changes in consumer spending patterns are all reducing the demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labor

and increasing employment in professional, managerial, clerical, and sales jobs, many of which require considerable education and spending. These white-collar occupations account for no less than 97 per cent of the total increase in employment that occurred between 1947 and 1963. The professionalization of the labor force accelerated during the mid-fifties, and will pick up momentum in the middle and late sixties. But Negroes are badly prepared for this change. Seven Negroes in ten now work in unskilled or semi-skilled blue-collar jobs, compared to three out of ten white men; and more than half of the Negro men over the age of twenty-five (vs. 21 per cent of white men) have had less than a grammar school education. Small wonder that in Northern industrial centers one out of every three Negro workers has suffered unemployment in the last several years, or that in some Negro neighborhoods, the unemployment rate may run as high as 40 per cent. To anyone walking through the Negro neighborhood of any large city—and to children who grow up in them—few sights are more familiar than the groups of idle Negro men congregating at street corners, or the lonely Negro men sitting on their front stoops all day long, sipping wine from bottles discreetly hidden in brown paper bags.²⁹

In a recent *New York Times* article entitled "Negro Is Called Victim Of Technology"; reference was made to a recent study conducted by the U.S. Department of Labour on "subemployment" in ten urban slums. Subemployment is a more accurate measure of the growing lumpen-proletariat, since it includes: those able to work and looking for jobs; those who have dropped out of the labour market in despair; those who are working part-time but want full-time jobs; heads of households under sixty-five working full-time but earning poverty wages (less than \$60 per week); individuals under sixty-five who are not heads of households and earn less than \$56 a week in full-time jobs; and a ~~conservatively-estimated~~ portion of males known to be living in the slums but who somehow do not show up in employment or unemployment statistics. The average unemployment rate (those able to work and looking for jobs) is 10 per cent for the ten slum study, three times the average for the rest of the country; the average subemployment rate is close to 35 per cent.³⁰

Professor Thomas Pettigrew of Harvard estimated that at the rate of employment from 1950 to 1960, Negroes would not arrive at proportional representation among clerical workers until 1992, among skilled workers until 2005, among professionals until 2017, and among managers and proprietors until 2730.³¹

The growing lumpen-proletariat represents a socio-economic time-bomb, ready to explode as the contradictions causing its increase become more severe. In his analysis of the process of decolonization, Frantz Fanon described the role of the lumpen-proletariat as follows:

It is within this mass of humanity, this people of the shanty towns, at the core of the lumpen-proletariat, that the rebellion will find its urban spearhead. For the lumpen-proletariat, that horde of starving men, uprooted

from their tribe and from their clan, constitutes one of the most spontaneous and most radically revolutionary forces of a colonized people.?"

The structural conditions mentioned herein have made the black man, especially the young black man, a rebel. As Carl Oglesby has written, "The rebel is someone for whom injustice and society are only different words for the same thing".³³ Misery alone does not breed revolution—it is only when an oppressed group recognizes what it does *not* receive in relation to the controlling strata of society that injustice and society become merely different words for the same obvious reality. Some statistics: the median Negro family income is \$3,233, or 54 per cent of the white family's \$5,835; two out of every three Negro families subsist on less than \$4,000 annually, as compared with 27·7 per cent of white families; only one out of five Negro families earn \$6,000 or more, as compared with one out of two white families.³⁴ Such a gap cannot be explained merely by lack of education and training, the basis from which the liberal argues that "education is the answer"—despite all the publicity designed to discourage Negro youngsters from quitting school, unemployment among Negro high school graduates is 16.1 per cent, while the rate for Negro drop-outs is virtually the same, 16·3 per cent.³⁵ The more education a Negro male acquires, the lower his lifetime earnings are as a percentage of his white counterpart. As Tom Kahn writes, the Negro male who finishes four years of college will earn less than a white male with only eight years of elementary school. While 22 per cent of white college men become proprietors, managers, or officials, only 5 per cent of Negro college men do. Negroes with some college training are found in service and labourer jobs in numbers five times as great as their white counterparts; 10 per cent of the Negro women who finish college end up as domestic workers.³⁶ The Negro unemployment rate is higher than the white rate in every occupational group: among craftsmen and foremen, for example, Negro unemployment ran to 9·7 per cent, compared with 4.8 per cent for whites; among clerical workers, 7·1 per cent Negro to 3·8 per cent white; among unskilled labourers, 15·8 per cent to 11 per cent.³⁷

"What makes you think you are going to Heaven?" Langston Hughes once asked his folk-hero Jesse B. Simple. "Because I have already been in Harlem," Simple replied. Squalid housing, chronic health problems, and malnutrition—condition-which typify slum existence—are all derivatives of the structured economic oppression of the black man. What paltry wealth exists in the ghetto is systematically exploited by Mr. Charley, that heroic knight of the private property, free-enterprise system whose operation (maximizing profit and offering nothing in return to the natives) has caused Black Power leaders to view the ghetto as a Third World colony.

The perception on the part of the black masses that it is the system of private property, colonial private property, that lies at the core of ghetto exploitation may be seen from the fact that none of the recent riots have been "race riots"^w—there were no clashes between black and white civilians—instead, violence was directed against white-owned property. In Detroit, for example, white civilians could travel unmolested through the ghetto at the height of the disturbance, and, further, poor whites participated freely in the looting of ghetto shops. Violence directed toward any group of whites was aimed at the police authorities whose function is to maintain "law and order", or, more accurately, to protect white-owned "colonial investments". Of this Malcolm X once said:

Harlem is a police state; the police in Harlem, their presence is like occupation forces, like an occupying army. They're not in Harlem to protect us; they're not in Harlem to look out for your welfare; they're in Harlem to protect the interests of businessmen who don't even live here."

So obvious has the function of the police in the ghetto become that in the Newark riot of the summer of 1967, the police and National Guard were actually observed in the ghetto destroying black-owned property which was marked "Soul Brother", and thus left unmolested by rioters. The wanton disregard for human life on the part of the police has become so much a part of riot journalism that it bears little mention here—it has ranged from the indiscriminate use of such heavy-duty equipment as tanks and machine-guns to instances of deliberate murder.

The police, we are told, must protect against the criminal, anti-social behaviour of the ghetto; yet this fails to take into account that what the ghetto faces is nothing more than the "law and order" of oppression. What, after all, is the act of mass looting, if not the assertion that the system provides no adequate share in the distribution of goods for the black man? It is not misery alone which is causing the riots, it is the recognition of the black man's comparative disadvantage: that white businessmen who rob him by outrageous credit rates and fraudulent representation are considered within the bounds of legality under the same system which forces the black man either to loot or be played for a fool. Even the ultra-conservative *Time* Magazine perceived such practices to be a basic cause of the Detroit riot:

In Detroit's slums, a 5 lb. bag of flour costs 14 cents more than in fashionable Grosse Pointe—peas 12 cents more per can, eggs up to 25 cents more per dozen. A television set selling for \$124.95 in downtown Detroit costs \$189 in a ghetto shop.³⁹

It is the very property system that makes a rebellious black ghetto all the more threatening, since they own none and therefore have

nothing to lose but the oppression caused by these white-owned colonial enterprises, the targets of their rage. Said Malcolm X:

When you're inside another man's house, and the furniture is his, curtains, all those fine decorations, there isn't too much action he can put down without messing up his furniture and his windows and his house. And you let him know that when he puts his hands on you, its not only you he puts his hands on, it's his whole house, you'll burn it down. You're in a position to—you have nothing to lose.⁴⁰

Max Weber suggested that the state represents a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence for any given society. The state, king a legitimized reflection of the power configuration which exists in that society, uses violence to protect the vested interests of the given social system. The transition of the black man from citizen to rebel signifies for him that the state no longer has any claim to legitimacy; its monopoly of violence is as legitimate as the chains which bind him to the wall of oppression. The act of rebellion is nothing less than the severing of those chains and defining violence vis-à-vis his own liberation. This is not necessarily a totally internal process, but may have a relationship with revolutionary conditions elsewhere in the world. Arthur Waskow suggests that one factor contributing to the use of violence by Negroes in 1919 was the perception that violent revolution could change the structure of existing systems—1917 was but two years behind." Presently, the American Negro is confronted with a revolutionary Third World—violent and impatient with respect to settling for nothing less than total self-determination—the Third World is a coloured world, making the identity all the more real.

Influenced heavily by Malcolm X, the present Black Power leadership relate their struggle to those efforts in Asia, Africa, and Latin America which are aimed against the oppressive apparatus of US imperialism. Indicative of this was the presence of Stokely Carmichael in Havana at the Latin American Solidarity Conference where he said: "We must internationalize our struggle and, if we are going to turn into reality the words of Che to create two, three and more Vietnams, we must recognize that Detroit and New York are also Vietnam."⁴¹ The black masses have struck a new identification with their ancestral Africa; Associated Press reports:

Young Negro women with their hair cropped in the "natural" unstraightened style associated with Africa can be seen all over Harlem any day. The style is slowly spreading to other Negro slums, along with African-derived styles of dress. African culture centers and Afro-American bookstores, long fixtures in Harlem, are springing up in places like Buffalo. They report a thriving business in the works of Marcus Garvey, the late Malcolm X, nationalist poet and playwright LeRoi Jones, Frantz Fanon, an anti-colonial Algerian doctor, and the speeches of Stokely Carmichael.⁴²

Like Third World revolutionaries, Black Power leaders see their relationship to White America as colonial subjects for whom the use of violence, urban guerrilla warfare, is a basic ingredient. The riots have been acts of rebellion in that they unleashed that hitherto pressurized muscular tension which only becomes manifest when individuals realize that their backs are to the wall—or, as Fanon said, the electrode is to their genitals—that there are no alternatives, that they become their own subjects only by changing themselves from objects. Revolutionary consciousness is, by definition, spontaneous—it is the sudden will of self-emancipation. Effective leadership cannot divorce itself from mass spontaneity, and when the masses are ready to move, leadership must accept its historical responsibility. It should therefore come as no surprise that Black Power leadership has moved from its original aloofness with regard to riots (said Carmichael, summer 1966: "It's not for me to condone; it's not for me to condemn. If they are willing to face the consequences of their act, I am for them.") to Rap Brown's recent invocation to burn and shoot as the means by which black people will seize control of their own communities. This is not to say, however, that leadership should neglect a long-run perspective of the struggle, or, for that matter, to suggest that leadership should satisfy itself with nihilism or undirected violence in lieu of effective revolutionary strategy.

III

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx brilliantly analysed how the ideals of the French revolution were subsequently flouted by the triumphant bourgeoisie once it attained power. Presently, White America's obvious desire to repress the black revolution at the expense of its own once-revolutionary bourgeois ideals once again illustrates the contingency of those ideals upon vested interest. White America could hail an Abraham Lincoln who asserted the right of a people to self-determination by saying: "This country belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing government, they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it, or their revolutionary right to dismember or overthrow it." Not so with regard to black people and their right to control over their communities; White America will not listen to the argument of Rap Brown, despite its kinship to the preamble of the Declaration of Independence:

I am charged with inciting black people to commit an offence by way of protest against the law, a law which neither I nor any of my people have any say in preparing. . . . I consider myself neither morally nor legally bound to obey laws made by a body in which I have no representation.

That the will of the people is the basis of the authority of government is a principle universally acknowledged as sacred throughout the civilized world and constitutes the basic foundation of this country. It should be equally understandable that we, as black people, should adopt the attitude that we are neither morally nor legally bound to obey laws which were not made with our consent and which seek to oppress us.⁴³

Black people are oppressed by a system which is controlled by White America; this is not to say that all white men are the exploiters of the black masses. For the present, Black Power leadership, especially Rap Brown, has articulated the rage felt by the black community against the white man or "honky". In a sense, black leadership is saying what it is easy for it to say; rallying cries can be stated in terms of white-black, oppressor-oppressed. The movement has not matured to that stage, described by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, when the native realizes that exploitation can wear a white face or a black face: "This discovery is unpleasant, bitter and sickening: and yet everything seemed to be so simple before: the bad people were on one side, and the good on the other."⁴⁴ Carmichael may say: "The capitalist system produces racism. They go hand in hand. We are fighting both racism and exploitation. White people who enjoy the luxuries of imperialist society are our enemies."⁴⁵ Fine, but what about the class conflict within the ghetto? What of that exploiting black élite of whom a Detroit Negro community organizer said, "Those Negroes might just as well be white, as far as the guy in the ghetto is concerned"?⁴⁶ The same might be said of SNCC's stand against the "imperialistic Zionists", yet saying nothing against those reactionary Arab régimes with which Nasser has established closer than a "peaceful coexistence" relationship, or, then again, the long history of suppression of black African majorities by exploiting Arab minorities of which Zanzibar was a prime example till it rebelled some three years ago. Exploitation must be accepted as exploitation, regardless of racial or national identification—only then can meaningful coalitions be formed on the basis of an objective unity of interests in combating the real enemy, capitalistic exploitation.

Without doubt, the Black Power movement is a revolutionary response to the oppressive structure discussed here. Only time will tell whether the present Black Power organizations or leadership will not only speak to the objective needs of the ghetto masses, but, in fact, represent the ghetto masses. At this time, absurdly premature for evaluation, the Black Power movement has yet to produce viable grass-roots organisation within the ghetto, and hence has not mobilized—politically or economically—that latent, unstructured power of the ghetto which awaits strategic activation. It remains to be seen whether the Black Power movement will, in fact, represent that rebellious

lumpen-proletariat which has declared war on their colonial masters — organizationally, they do not at the present time.

The major complication confronting the Black Power movement is the necessity of operating at two levels simultaneously: on one level Black Power must decolonize the ghetto and establish black control over black communities; on the other Black Power must lay the groundwork for a coalition with other groups to produce a potent radical movement. Perhaps this is where the analogy to Third World revolution falls down, as such a comparison would entail only the first level, the second level being peculiar to the struggle of an oppressed minority within an advanced industrial system. In Third World revolutions, one finds oppressed racial and national majorities rebelling against a small colonial Cite—all within the context of underdeveloped economies. However, in America one is confronted with an oppressed racial minority which must ally itself with other groups if it is to stand any chance of restructuring the system by revolution. If the first level, decolonization, is pursued to the exclusion of the second, namely coalition, the Black Power movement will fail—that is unless one can foresee the possibility of a black US Steel, General Motors, etc., which would provide the ghetto with a potent economic base to guarantee meaningful independence from White America. The level of decolonization, or black control over black communities, cannot solve the structural problems of American racism because the ghetto itself is economically insignificant; it is dependent upon White America for employment, the source of that black income which Black Power hopes to utilize for community welfare. The problem of structural American racism cannot be solved until the capitalistic system which has been responsible for it has been replaced by socialism, until structural economic insecurity has been replaced by the rational allocation of resources, guaranteeing economic security for all. This, no one group can do through even the most sophisticated techniques of self-help and co-operative economics—it can be done only by wresting the levers of economic control from those who exploit others for the maximization of their profits, only when corporate capitalism has been obliterated so that master-slave becomes like lord-serf, relics of antiquity.

What Black Power can and must do is to prepare the ghetto for coherent revolution—it must give expression to that amorphous, yet intense revolutionary consciousness; it must give direction to show the ghetto masses the path from oppressive alienation to revolutionary self-actualization. In essence, Black Power must impress upon the black community that its future lies in its own will toward liberation, that the black man no longer is the object of manipulation, but that his destiny rests in his own hands. All of this presupposes intense **grass-**

roots organization which will be less flamboyant than the present pre- and post-riot rhetoric, but, nevertheless, will mean the life or death of a sustained black revolution.

The challenge put forth by Richard Wright falls upon eager hearts who must tread the thin line between reactive nihilism and revolutionary tenacity.

NOTES

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3. *New York Times*, July 12, 1966.
4. *Malcolm X Speaks* (Breitman, ed.), New York 1966, p. 111.
5. *New York Review of Books*, September 22, 1966, p. 5.
6. Cayton and Drake, *Black Metropolis*, p. 84.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
8. Broderick and Meir, *Negro Protest Thought in the 20th Century*, New York 1965, p. 203.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
10. *New York Times Magazine*, August 29, 1965 (Woodward, "After Watts").
11. Mills, *Power, Politics, and People*, New York 1964, p. 43.
12. Ossowski, *Class Structure in the Social Consciousness*, London 1963, p. 54.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
14. Cox, *Carte, Class and Race*, New York, 1959, p. 320.
15. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, New York 1966, p. 7.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
17. Cox, *Caste, Class and Race*, p. 42.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 537.
19. Baker, *Following the Color Line*, New York 1908, p. 167.
20. Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching*, Chapel Hill 1933, p. 20.
21. *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 155.
22. Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White*, New York 1964, p. 138.
23. *The Militant*, November 14, 1966, p. 3.
24. Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White*, p. 138.
25. Cox, *Caste, Class and Race*, p. 190.
26. Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White*, p. 30.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
28. Cayton and Drake, *Black Metropolis*, p. xlvii and preface to Vol. II.
29. Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White*, p. 40.
30. *New York Times*, July 28, 1967 and *New York Times Magazine*, August 13, 1967 (Rustin "A Way Out of the Exploding Ghetto").
31. Pettigrew, *A Profile of the American Negro*, New York 1964, p. 188.
32. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York 1966, p. 103.
33. Oglesby, *Containment and Change*, New York 1967, p. 148.

BLACK POWER

34. *The Radical Papers* (Howe, ed.), New York 1966, p. 151.
35. *Time*, August 11, 1967, p. 13.
36. *The Radical Papers*, p. 154.
37. Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White*, p. 41.
38. *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 66.
39. *Time*, August 11, 1967, p. 13.
40. *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 103.
41. Waskow, *From Riot to Sit-In*, New York 1966, p. 221.
42. *New York Times*, July 28, 1967.
43. *The White Plains Reporter Dispatch*, August 23, 1967.
44. *New York Times Magazine*, September 10, 1967 (Lynd, "A Radical Speaks in Defence of SNCC"), p. 148.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
46. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 115.
47. *National Guardian*, August 12, 1967.
48. *New York Times*, July 28, 1967.