

BY WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY JR.

If it blurs in the mind just what and who are the Black Panthers, why, they are an organization founded a few years ago on the doctrine that the United States is a racist-oppressive country best dealt with by the elimination of its leaders and institutions. Suggestive of its rhetorical style is the front page of its house organ which featured on the day after his death a photograph of Robert Kennedy lying in a pool of his own blood, his face transformed to the likeness of a pig.

Do you think Robert Kennedy was a pig?, I asked Eldridge Cleaver a while ago. Yes, he said, Did he believe in the elimination of pigs? Yes he did.

So what do we do about the Black Panthers? Why if we are Leonard Bernstein the conductor, we have a big cocktail party to which we invite a local representative of the Party, and at the cocktail party we are so ingratiating that the Ford Foundation should have brought back Alistair Cooke so that the hungry of this world, like you and me, might have been permitted via television to be present at the love-in.

★

Bernstein was modishly dressed, in turtleneck sweater and double-breasted jacket, and had obviously been studying up on the idiom of the times, indeed so thorough is Bernstein that it is altogether possible that he staged a rehearsal or two, because a dialog with a Black Panther is every bit as difficult to perform as a symphony of Schonberg.

Anyway, the Black Panther, a man named Cox, began by announcing that if business didn't provide full employment then the Panthers would simply take over the means of production and put them in the hands of the people, to which prescription it is recorded that Bernstein's reply was, "I dig absolutely."

Cox told the gathering how very pacific he and his confederates are, that ultimately of course they desire peace, but that they have been attacked in their homes and murdered in their beds and have the right to defend themselves. "I agree one hundred percent," Lenny said, neglecting to ask Cox to explain to what defensive uses his confederates intended to put the hand

grenades and Molotov cocktails that were discovered in the raids.

One lady present, wife of a Black Panther who is in jail on the charge of planning to kill a few pigs and conspiring to dynamite mid-town department stores, expressed great indignation at the interruption of her husband's activities by the police, who recently arrested 13 Panthers, holding 10 of them on \$100,000 bail.

She brought along her lawyer, who asked the distinguished gathering of artists-capitalists for donations. Someone who desired to be anonymous promised \$7,500. Sheldon Harnick, the lyricist, came in with \$250. Burton Lane, the composer, gave \$200, and Mrs. Harry Belafonte gave \$300.

Lenny said proudly that he would donate the proceeds from his very next concert. He is too shy a man to say how much he earns per concert, but he didn't want to appear a tease, so he said that the sum would be in four figures.

★

We should study the Bernstein Approach. It is a singular contribution to conviviality. No doubt Bernstein curses himself for having only just now discovered it.

Just two years ago he might have invited George Lincoln Rockwell and his Nazis into his apartment, to ask him to explain the causes of his grievances, and raised a little money for those frequent occasions when Rockwell found himself on the shady side of the law, though to be sure Rockwell would have not been so romantic a guest as he never actually advocated killing anyone.

On the other hand, there are surely still around enough members of the Ku Klux Klan to fill Bernstein's living room, or at least most of it.

I remember, in the hour I spent with Cleaver the one thing I said to him that made him truly angry. It was that the Black Panther Party exists primarily for the satisfaction of white people, rather than black people.

The white people like to strut their toleration, and strip themselves of their turtleneck sweaters to reveal their shame. The Panthers have only a few thousand Black members, because the mass of the black people are too proud, too unaffected, to join the Panthers, to attend Leonard Bernstein's parties.

Los Angeles Times

★
WEDNESDAY MORNING, JAN. 21, 1970

Part II-7

A Visit With the Take-a-Panther-to-Lunch Bunch