

Dear Js,

8/2/72

The Ramparts came today, thanks. Worked up a bit of a sweat before supper mowing and read the Black New Left piece while cooling off.

Thompson acknowledges one thing I've never heard another black (presume he is) admit: Martin "ing alone among blackx leaders since Marcus Garvey, attained most precisely that kind of unity.

Let us forget for a moment the immeasurable numerical difference in their followings, those they unified. No blacks ever say this today. They don't talk about King. Many "left" used to call him "Tom".

There is to me wierd thinking and language: "But "ing...blew his chance at Pettus Bridge to die with maximum political effect." Here he also credits Ray with the killing, rather remarkable for any writer and for Ramparts editing. I recall clearly that they started a King assassination committee, asked me to s rve, I accepted and never heard another word.

Why should anyone elect to die with maximum political effect when he can live and do meaningful work, with political effect? Also, I dispute the reasoning, that the effect would have been greater. I don't think it could have been.

There lingers a black misrepresentation of that bridge incident. He and others would have been killed anyway but for an accident: they were loaned a Department of Justice car and it was known as such. Kyles, with wet eyes, told me the whole story. If King had then been killed there'd have been a massacre with him. Neither Kyles nor the Rev. Smith from SCLC hq, who was with him, expected to get away alive as it is.

What beither story says and what I think blacks should ponder is that the left groups have attained media attention and through that some support not on their own, not even on their shock value, which isn't news that long without real shocks, but through official excesses. Once Hoover wised up and started leaving them alone, they fell apart and with few exceptions lost their support. At least their larger if limited followings.

They owe Hoover much.

I have a friend who has friends in the RNA. I think they're nuts but he doesn't. I think their greater failure would be success.

Maybe Huey Newton has legitimate fear for his life, but what kind of leader has no direct contact with his following? How long can he lead how many?

Next to the Cubans, they're worst. Given ten Cubans you'll find 15 organizations. If all have the same declared purposes, all disagree too much to unite on any of them except, with the Cubans, hatred of Castro. This, too, I think is one of the few unifying hates among the balcks - whites.

Kinda discouraging. Especially for people who learn the hard way.

Glad to get the newest in this kind of thinking, though. I guess to many of them I'm a reactionary. ^{By} the way, they don't think that when Malcolm X was so anti-woman he was a sexist. Why? Because he was black. I've gotten it straight from black womens' libbers. Leaders, that is.

best,



What's Left of the Black Left, Part II

“If there is anything less devoutly to be wished than being killed by crackers vamping on a black community aroused by discordant political principles, it is being killed by another desperate black man in a fratricidal squabble deriving from those principles. This, in black terms, is the difference between dying easily and dying hard.”

IN A KEY 1968 ESSAY Eldridge Cleaver wrote: “The dream is to bring Robert Williams home and guarantee him safe conduct until Williams can stand in the center of Harlem and deliver a speech and the black people prevent the troops of the occupying army from coming in and taking him prisoner. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael, for instance, must be able to speak before an audience of assembled black people without fear of arrest by the Gestapo of the Mother Country.”

Robert Williams returned home the following year with a glaring absence of either fanfare or discernible political impact. Welcomed as the first President of the Republic of New Africa, he showed little heart for continuing his revolutionary activities and, after a brief tenure, stepped down in favor of Brother Imari, a former technical writer for the federal government. Stokely Carmichael can now come and go as he pleases and, evidently, is more pleased to be gone.

H. Rap Brown, who in *Die Nigger Die* wrote: “I only wish we would stop this petty stealing and take care of Chase Manhattan Bank, Fort Knox, or some armories,” has been shot by a cop in New York after allegedly being caught robbing black crap shooters and patrons of the “Red Carpet,” a black Manhattan bar.

Cleaver’s appraisal of Robert Williams as heir-apparent to Malcolm X as national black revolutionary leader, as well as Cleaver’s “dream” of a triumphal Williams’ return home were flawed by the premise, expressed in the 1968 essay, that for revolutionary movements to proceed the people must rise to the leader’s level of consciousness and “be ready for his style of leadership.”

Not so. Rather, the leader must discover, elicit and voice the people’s revolutionary consciousness; create people’s uncreated consciousness of their own condition, needs and objectives.

Martin King, alone among all black leaders since Marcus Garvey, attained most precisely that kind of unity Hashin Akin Shegun [Republic of New Africa] equates with “predictability.” King was able to draw out the people’s uncreated consciousness; by eliciting in people a clearer recognition of their own needs and goals, he put them on the street *en masse*. But, while King’s premises were noble — admitting the unreality of his goals — his execution faltered at Selma at the Pettus Bridge. There, King’s non-violent army included prominent white supporters prepared to march with him. The White House was monitoring a situation in which, had King led his followers across the bridge, cracker troopers on horseback would trample indiscriminately both black people and rich, white do-gooders.

Rather than get on his knees and persuade his God to command him to cross the bridge, King got on the phone and allowed Bobby Kennedy and Nick Katzenbach to persuade him not to.

While King lived, he rendered on enough levels the unspoken aims of enough black people to bring, on relatively short notice, 15,000 followers on the streets of San Francisco. No other leader in the past four decades has matched this accomplishment.

by Walt Thompson

But King, ironically destined to die violently anyway, blew his chance at Pettus Bridge to die with maximum political effect. In this sense, James Earl Ray not only eased the circumstances of King's death, but eked out vindication of his prior life and activity. And King at least was spared a far more bitter death when he escaped a degraded Harlem black woman's earlier attempt to take his life.

Inevitably, if you're black and have thought of death and dying, you grow more concerned about the political circumstances of the event than about the event itself. You know that, if there is anything less devoutly to be wished than being killed by crackers vamping on a black community aroused by discordant political principles, it is being killed by another desperate black man in a fratricidal squabble deriving from those principles. This, in black terms, is the difference between dying easily and dying hard.

In this respect, the last five years have seen too many hard deaths of too many black men and women — Malcolm X, Sandra Pratt, Huggins and Carter in L. A., Ronald Gene Black in Oakland, Alex Rackley in New Haven. How many others? In Odessa, Florida on January 1 the F. B. I. ushered in the New Year by announcing that one of its agents had shot and killed Panther Frank Fields outside of a motel. Fields, the Bureau said, had killed Oakland Panther Samuel Lee Napier at the Panther's Queens, New York headquarters in April of the year before.

Cases closed.

H. Rap Brown, who in *Die Nigger Die*, presents the most successful effort to mix Marxist cant with color, said it well: "... We treat revolution as if it is an historic process rather than an evolutionary movement. In other words, we all got a monopoly on Truth. Whites who consider themselves allies add to this by deciding which tribe is 'correct' and which is 'incorrect.' In other words, which best fits their needs. As a result of this kind of external control, tribes engage in fratricide (unknowingly in most cases) to gain the favor of the white ally." Even Eric Hoffer, whose long political senility is occasionally interlaced with brilliance, has made the point that, during

the height of mid-'60s black revolutionary rhetoric, so-called black leaders were ranting at white TV cameras with their asses to the masses.

Black political observers as disparate as the leftist millionaire publisher Dr. Carlton Goodlet and militant Professors Harry Edwards and Nathan Hare agree that the Panther vanguard, equipped with strict white or foreign Marxist philosophy, strung themselves too far from their base, the black community, importing alien political cant to relate distant revolutions to the black American scene. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale have come to acknowledge this and are presently trying to correct it.

Last summer in a Chicago speech marking the second anniversary of the assassinations of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark by Chicago police, Seale disavowed the use of guns except to defend community survival programs and climbed off the Maoist cant completely, calling for black unity across the board.

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HISTORICALLY FEW LEFT FORAYS by prominent black people have caught fire and resulted in movements able to withstand official repression. The organized American Black Left movement began with the communist-sponsored International Labor Defense, included the National Negro and Civil Rights Congresses, and pursued an uneasy course through the Harlem Progressive Party to the Black Panthers. The Civil Rights Congress was quashed by McCarthy-era repression; the jailing of Bill Epton finished the Harlem movement.

And, if political labels in general are slippery or relative, they are now more so in the black American context. When the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was fighting for the black franchise in the South, it was already labeled "left wing." The Congress of Racial Equality, now Ford-funded and embracing an invisible Nixonian "Black Capitalism," was once considered leftist.

One problem is that both revolutionary leftists and what Bob Allen (author of *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*) calls "Liberal Corpor-

ate Capitalist Reformers" can view ghettoed black people as unliquidated internal colonies and white cops as occupying forces, and still come up with reformist "remedies" on the one hand and revolutionary "solutions" on the other.

For example, in the *Harvard Business Review*, University of California Professor Richard America Jr. writes: "The colonial analogy permits perception of the black community as a 'nation' systematically deprived of an opportunity to save and invest. It, therefore, can claim control of very little capital wealth . . . this deficiency must be corrected." Whereupon, taking Mr. Nixon very seriously, Dr. America calls on the federal government to act as Robin Hood in transferring a fair share of major U. S. corporations to black control.

But the most pressing challenge to black leftist ideas is on the more immediate issues that strike closest to home. For example, black leaders in Oakland, California last November rallied to support Police Chief Charles R. Gain when old-line white cops demanded the liberal chief's ouster. This was just two years after Eldridge Cleaver, charging Gain with the death of Bobby Hutton, labeled the chief "No. 1 Murderer."

Says Harry Edwards, "What am I? If the issue is Vietnam, I'm left or further. If it's cops in the black community, I'm conservative."

While Black Panthers have long demanded that occupying troops get out of Black Colonies, black people today in California's East Palo Alto are calling for more policing due to an increasing incidence of black-against-black crime. Whether you call East Palo Alto a black ghetto or a black colony, people there are buying German shepherds and Doberman pinchers for protection, putting personal IDs on household goods that are regularly being ripped off, and generally calling for Law and Order.

Even for those with a total political agenda, the first order of business must be the practical needs of the black community. The timetable for liberation is long, but every day there are deadlines for survival.

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