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# Black Heroes, White Enemies

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AMONG the first casualties of the new black consciousness of the 1960s were the white-appointed black leaders and heroes.

Whether it was Booker T. Washington or Whitney Young, the easiest way to knock a black man off his hero's pedestal was to have white people say nice things about him. Let white folk describe you as "a credit to your race," and blacks automatically put you down as an Uncle Tom or worse.

The new axiom became: White people can't choose black people's heroes.

Well, I've got news: They are doing just that.

Angela Davis, Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver, George Jackson—all are heroes, particularly among young blacks, even though not one in ten can tell you what they have done to merit heroism.

They presented no superior philosophy, like Dr. King's; they led no national movement, like Stokely Carmichael or Rap Brown; they put together no comprehensive program like the Nation of Islam; they evidenced no unusual prowess on the order of Willie Mays' or Muhammed Ali's.

THEY BECAME HEROES not because of their own actions but because of the actions of white people. They were jailed, shot, exiled and hated by whites, and that was enough to make them the heroes of young blacks.

Not everyone has seen them as heroes, of course.

The Urban League, the NAACP and other old-line organizations joined in hearty protest when it appeared that the Black Panthers had been set up for extinction. That was the reaction of one who resists repression because he knows what repression can lead to.

victed" of the crime of thinking wrong thoughts. It is quite another to respond by draping the hero's mantle on any black man so "convicted."

For what it means is that the FBI, or any county sheriff, for that matter, can decide on his own who the next black hero will be.

IT MEANS something else, too. Let white people single out any black person for special harrassment and that person comes to be seen not just as an individual victim but as the embodiment of a victimized class.

If they orchestrate it right, they can make him, in the eyes of many, the personification of all the racial injustices of which blacks are victims.

Then all that is needed to complete the act is for them to treat that hero with unexpected justice—say a scrupulously fair trial resulting in acquittal—and the impression is not that one man got a fair shake but that the American system of criminal justice has overcome its shortcomings and is now treating black people fairly.

I sincerely hope the day will come when justice, for blacks as well as for whites, is a matter of routine fact. But that day isn't here yet.

Meanwhile, I'd just as soon not have the Attorney general, Frank Rizzo or some guard at San Quentin decide for me who my heroes shall be.

But then there is the reaction that makes it possible for a Joe Schmoe to be lifted from well-deserved obscurity to absolute heroism by the simple fact that the authorities move against him.

It is one thing to understand that black people cannot afford to remain silent when a black man is "con-