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That interview with Eldridge Cleaver, the Black Panther leader-in-exile in Algiers, obtained by Jesse W. Lewis Jr. of the Washington Post, was more interesting for what it didn't say than for what it did. Cleaver, once again, identified himself as a revolutionist "who wants to destroy America." The policy of the Black Panthers, he said, "is to change America by armed revolution," which confirms J. Edgar Hoover's appraisal of the organization. But nowhere did Cleaver explain what he wanted to change America to. Like so many of the young extremists of the day, he is interested only in destruction, not construction.

PERHAPS A CLUE TO WHAT CLEAVER wants for America comes from his favorable comments in the interview about North Korea and Arab guerrilla leader Yassir Arafat. That could mean either communism or some form of anarchy that Arafat still hasn't spelled out. Cleaver, for all his intelligence, eloquence and literary skill ("Soul on Ice"), won't find many followers, black or white, with that philosophy. Reforms in our democracy, si; armed revolution to nowhere, no.