

Role of the Negro Intellectual— Survey of the Dialogue Deferred

The peculiarities of the American social structure, and the position of the intellectual class within it, make the functional role of the Negro intellectual a special one. The Negro intellectual must deal intimately with the white power structure and cultural apparatus, and the inner realities of the black world at one and the same time. But in order to function successfully in this role, he has to be acutely aware of the nature of the American social dynamic and how it monitors the ingredients of class stratifications in American society. The American people, aside from the handful of power wielders in the upper levels, have very little social control over the economic, class, and political forces of the American capitalistic dynamic. They are, in fact, manipulated by them. Therefore the Negro intellectual must learn how one might control and channel such forces.

Since the dynamics of American society create only one integrated class stratum, "the social world or worlds of 'the intellectual' and the creative and performing artist, whether literary, musical, theatrical, or visual,"¹ the Negro intellectual has the option of gravitating toward this world, under the persuasions of the American social dynamic, and resting there on his laurels. However, although this world exists rather independently of the main ethnic worlds, it manages to reflect the social aspirations of the WASP, Catholic and Jewish groups above all others. Among these three there is intense competition for recognition and group status, which, for political and propaganda reasons, is called fighting discriminatory practices. As long as the WASPS rule the roost, charges of discrimination will never cease until Catholics or Jews

¹ Milton M. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

achieve more power and privileges than any "minority" could ever hope for in Rome or Israel.

⌈The Negro intellectual must not be allowed to forget that the integrated intellectual world is not representative of ethnic group aspirations with regard to the world of American Negro or Indian. The Indian world of the reservation exemplifies the fate awaiting the American Negro, who is left stranded and impoverished in the ghettos, beyond the fringe of absorption. He will be pushed there through the compulsions of the American capitalistic dynamic if, as the most populous ethnic "out" group, the American Negro fails to galvanize his potential as a countervailing force. But the Negro group cannot act out this role by assuming the stance of separatism.⌋ The program of Afro-American Nationalism must activate a dynamism on all social fronts under the guidance and direction of the Negro intelligentsia. This already implies that Afro-American Nationalism be broken down into three parts: political nationalism; economic nationalism; and cultural nationalism; in other words, organizational specialization. Therefore the functional role of the Negro intellectual demands that he cannot be absolutely separated from either the black or white world.

Today, Afro-American Nationalism is not Garveyism; it poses an American problem growing out of a specific American historical condition—involving three racial stocks—the white, the black and the red. The problem will be solved under specifically American conditions or it will never be solved, for Afro-American Nationalism is basically a black reflection of the unsolved American nationality question. American culture is sick not just because it is discriminatory, but because it reflects a psychological malaise that grows out of the American identity problem. As long as the Negro intellectual is beset with his own cultural identity problem, his attacks on American culture, as discriminatory, become hollow: *Two cultural negatives cannot possibly add up to a cultural positive in society at large.* Every single American political, social and cultural trend has contributed its bit of illusion to the total Americanization fantasy. Insofar as the Negro intellectual has accommodated this grand myth, his acquiescence must be examined critically before one can dispel the myth. Then, one is on clear ground, the better to deal with the *realities* of America.⌋

In the effort to clear this ground it has been necessary to review

a whole gamut of thinking on various topics: ethnic community; multi-group America; the political leftwing; nationalism vs. integrationism; Negro creative artists as thinkers and spokesmen; aesthetics; Negroes and the theater; individual vs. group roles in society; white liberalism and Negro intellectuals; culture and integrationism; culture and nationalism; literary, dramatic and social criticism; the Negro writer as revolutionary, and so on.

Under the impetus of Negro activism, agitation has been reflected in different areas of the cultural front. The Rockefeller Report on the Performing Arts, and the White House conferences on cultural matters, are two examples. In New York, jazz magazines and critics' panel discussions are taking up such topics as "Jazz and Revolutionary Nationalism." Yet the cultural front and its relation to the Negro movement, while intuitively sensed in many critical quarters, is neither broadly understood nor admitted in any definitive way. It is the vaguest of all fronts, yet in many ways the most crucial. It is so little understood, even by Negro creative intellectuals, that its implications are absent in most of the dialogues Negroes carry on with white liberals and the intellectual establishment.

⌈The tentative acceptance the Negro intellectual finds in the predominantly white intellectual world, allows him the illusion that integration is real—a functional reality for himself, and a possibility for *all* Negroes. Even if a Negro intellectual does not wholly believe this, he must give lip service to the aims of racial integration, if only to rationalize his own status in society.⌋

This integrated status is not threatened or challenged; it is even championed, just so long as the black world is on the move in the struggle for integration. But when voices from the black world begin to raise doubts about the meaning, the aims, and the real possibilities of integration, the Negro intellectual is forced to question his own hard-won status. At the same time, those black Doubting Thomases begin to question the status of the Negro intellectual—"What is he doing out there?" "What is *his* function in relation to *us*?"

Such questions as these arise only because the social role of the Negro intellectual has never really been defined at all. For the most part, the Negro intellectual has been a rather free agent in

the black and white scheme of things. Inasmuch as the support, patronage and prestige of the Negro intellectual come from the white world and its cultural apparatus, his creative and cultural achievements have been seen by the black world as *Ebony* magazine and *Jet* see them. That is to say, such Negroes have achieved something, they have "made it." They have scored in the white world and are now recognized. It is not necessary to consider *how* they managed to score, the important thing is that they *did*. In this way, the Negro creative intellectual has never really been held accountable to the black world for his social role. If he scores, well and good. If he doesn't, that's unfortunate, but it will pass unnoticed and no one will care. This tacit agreement between the Negro intellectual and the black world has prevailed because it is understood that the black world cannot and does not, support the Negro creative intellectual. The black bourgeoisie does not publish books, does not own and operate theaters or music halls. It plays no role to speak of in Negro music, and is remote from the living realities of the jazz musician who plays out his nights in the effete and soulless commercial jungles of American white middle-class café culture.)

✱ (Add to the Negro intelligentsia who have no firm cultural base in the reality of either the black world or the white (even when they *have* achieved recognition), a large fluctuating contingent who make up the bulk of new aspirants to integrated cultural achievement. The result: a rootless class of displaced persons who are refugees from the social poverty of the black world.) At one time, the black world was rich in the pristine artistic essentials for new forms in music, dance, song, theater and even language; then, the black ethnic identity was seen as a unique advantage. But today the style has become a negation of that identity, in pursuit of cultural integration or assimilation. Today the failure of the black bourgeoisie as a class, to play any social role as patron or sponsor of the arts, is all the more glaring. For now the new Negro cultural aspirants are making vocal and specified demands for integration in cultural fields where the black bourgeoisie has never paid the piper, and therefore can call no tunes.

As long as the civil rights issue remained on the non-activist level of the NAACP's gradualist legalism, this state of cultural affairs remained static. But in the years right after World War II,

the outlines of new factors were already clearly, visibly, coming on the scene. All at once—in a manner of speaking—a new level of protest activity, a new nationalism and a new Africa consciousness converged to transform the content and quality of black and white relations into something never before seen. Today there are questions in the air that demand new solutions. The old stock answers that were once carted in to describe the meaning of old-time Americanism no longer suffice to satisfy the new mood. African emergence now begins to raise anew the question of black identity in America. New nationalists begin to call into question the whole concept of racial integration. On the other hand, the drive for racial integration begins to encounter serious resistance and hidden barriers, located deep in the living fabric of the social structure. There is violence and rumors of more violence to come. Sure enough, this situation brings to the fore the timorous voices of the Negro creative intellectual stratum—the Baldwins, *et al.* Never before held so accountable to the black world, they are now sorely frightened by the temper of the times. Their hard-won integrated status in America (and even abroad) seems shaky and precarious. They now become interpreters for the black world to the white—a new role for them. But this new dialogue between the black and white intelligentsia somehow sounds flat and unconvincing to the ear. While Negro intellectuals are busy trying to interpret the nature of the black world and its aspirations to the whites, they should, in fact, be defining their own roles as intellectuals within *both* worlds.

✱ ✱ (The special function of the Negro intellectual is a cultural one. He should take to the rostrum and assail the stultifying blight of the commercially depraved white middle-class who has poisoned the structural roots of the American ethos and transformed the American people into a nation of intellectual dolts. He should explain the economic and institutional causes of this American cultural depravity. He should tell black America how and why Negroes are trapped in this cultural degeneracy, and how it has dehumanized their essential identity, squeezed the lifeblood of their inherited cultural ingredients out of them, and then relegated them to the cultural slums. They should tell this brain-washed white America, this "nation of sheep," this overfed, overdeveloped, overprivileged (but culturally pauperized) federation

of unassimilated European remnants that their days of grace are numbered. This motley, supercilious collection of refugees from "Fatherland" poverty worships daily, and only, at the altar of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant superiority. Notwithstanding their alleged vows to contribute to the fashioning of an American nation worthy of the high esteem of the rest of the world, so far they have reneged. The job has hardly been begun. America is an unfinished nation—the product of a badly-bungled process of inter-group cultural fusion. America is a nation that lies to itself about who and what it is. It is a nation of minorities ruled by a minority of one—it thinks and acts as if it were a nation of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. This white Anglo-Saxon ideal, this lofty dream of a minority at the summit of its economic and political power and the height of its historical self-delusions, has led this nation to the brink of self-destruction. And on its way, it has effectively dissuaded, crippled and smothered the cultivation of a democratic cultural pluralism in America.)

The cultural mainstream of the nation is an empty street, full of bright lights that try to glamorize the cultural wreckage and flotsam of our times. Over this deranged, tormented cultural wasteland reigns a social stratum—a white cultural elite of America, the soured cream of our creative and aesthetic intelligentsia, that dominates nevertheless to the roar of prestigious acclaim. This elite has become intellectually bloated, dull, unoriginal, critically tongue-tied, smug (or downright scared), time-serving and societally dishonest. It came into existence during the 1920's, and by constantly renewing its ranks, has established and maintained its position as the supreme arbiter of American cultural styles. It has dominated the cultural arts, in all of their native trends, in every conceivable field. Even during its years of highest achievements, this elite was always, by outside standards, very second-rate and it has been steadily declining in creative virtuosity over the decades. And during all these years of gradual descent from its own Parnassus, it worshipped at the altar of the white Anglo-Saxon ideal. Thereby, it collaborated spiritually in spreading the pall of debased and unprocreative white middle-class cultural values that shroud America today.

In other words, the prognoses and prophecies about American cultural trends, written by Randolph Bourne in his critical essays

of 1920, have been borne out in the forty-seven years since. Bourne warned against the stultifying and retarding effects that the idealization of the Anglo-Saxon tradition would have on the reality of American pluralism if that tradition became the main source of the "cultural makers of opinion." He argued truthfully and convincingly about the failures of the American melting-pot ideology and the presence in America of "diverse nationalistic feelings," of "vigorous nationalistic and cultural movements." He called English-American conservatism "our chief obstacle to social advance," and argued for the cultivation of a kind of culturally "federated ideal" as the main social hope of America.² But this cultural ideal has never taken form or even been approached in this country, making it necessary for sociologists such as Milton Gordon to survey the problem again with the advent of the Negro integration movement.

For American society, the most crucial requirement at this point is a complete democratization of the national cultural ethos. This requires a thorough, democratic overhauling of the social functions of the entire American cultural apparatus. First of all: For whom, and in whose interest, does the cultural apparatus exist in America? Does it exist for the social needs, the social edification, the spiritual uplift, the cultural development, solvency and morale of all the diverse minority groups in America? Or does it exist solely, and disproportionately, for the social supremacy, the group narcissism, and the idealization of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant minority? Up to now, the latter has been true, just as it was in 1920 when Bourne, himself an Anglo-Saxon, decried the supremacy of the "Anglo-Saxon tradition which [they] unquestioningly label 'American.'"³ However, the total schematic value of this Anglo-Saxon tradition is deeply entwined with the roots of the political, economic, and societal foundations of the American national structure; it, in turn, inspires ideologies of racial and ethnic exclusion, discrimination and exploitation. On this social level the Negro integration movement conducts its legal and activist struggles. Hence, through this strategy of struggle, the Negro move-

² See Randolph Bourne's *History of a Literary Radical and Other Essays* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1920); especially the essay, "Trans-National America," pp. 266-299.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

ment challenges Anglo-Saxon Protestant social supremacy in economics, politics and social life, but only indirectly and in the name of true democratic Americanism between the races—an unconscious, ignorant tactical error.

American group reality demands a struggle for democracy among ethnic groups, rather than between two races. What is called a racial struggle over civil rights is, in reality, the contention in America among several different ethnic groups, of which Anglo-Saxon Protestants and American Negroes are only two. However, among all the groups in contention these two are the most crucial: The fate of all the others depends on how they resolve the undemocratic differences in American society. Moreover, since no other ethnic minority in America is so thoroughly committed to racial democratization, the Negro group's civil rights engagement is, plainly, the most active force for social change. However, it is evident that if the Negro leadership is hampered by deficient conceptualizing of American group reality, then the Negro movement will defeat itself in the long run. It will defeat itself by encouraging other unassimilated ethnic groups to turn against the Negro minority, in a pro-Anglo-Saxon Protestant "racial" coalition. It will defeat itself by utilizing mechanical, narrow-minded agitational tactics that will discourage other unassimilated ethnic groups from assuming a pro-Negro attitude in the furtherance of their own group cultural rights. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) has been most guilty of such tactics in the North, for example, where it indiscriminately carries demonstrations into ethnic neighborhoods without giving due consideration to local neighborhood sentiments. This approach, however, stems out of the dominant NAACP ideology which does not sanction the reality of neighborhood group sentiments. This is yet another reason why the tactics of civil righters cannot be the same in the North as in the South. For the South is, specifically, the main bastion of the efficacy of the dominant Anglo-Saxon ideal. There, its dominance, *vis-à-vis* the Negro, is most naked and persuasive. All of these factors, and more, demand that the Negro movement adjust its strategy to fit reality, which means deepening its understanding and broadening its scope at the same time. But such an eventuality requires much educational groundwork, for here, where the role of the Negro creative intellectual is most crucial, it is most conspicuous by its functional absence.

Around 1960, a significant debate sprang up among the white intellectuals of the non-Communist Left, concerning the current relevancy of practically every dogma the Communist-oriented Left had preached since the 1930's. This debate was high-level and thoroughgoing, and nothing comparable to it has yet taken place within Negro intellectual circles. The leading inspiration of this debate was the late C. Wright Mills, professor of sociology at Columbia University, who initiated a critical review of the entire Marxist revolutionary tradition of this century, especially in Europe and the United States. The grassroots impetus behind this rather spontaneous review of the Marxist tradition was, of course, the upsurge of student sit-ins in the new Negro movement, but only a few of the critics said so. The curious thing about this debate was that not a single Negro sociologist, historian, writer, spokesman, leader (ex-Communist, pro-Communist or anti-Communist), took part in it. This, despite the fact that the only movement active at that moment on the American scene with any pretensions of radical potential, was the Negro movement. Nothing could point up more graphically the fact that the Negro intellectual does not rate as a serious thinker in the intellectual establishment. As things turned out, this debate brought out two main antagonists among the whites—Mills and Professor Daniel Bell, also of Columbia. Mills outdid all of his colleagues in critical dissent because he not only assailed the liberal establishment, but also called into question many of the sacred shibboleths of the established radical Left. Mills did not attack the Marxist philosophy as such, but left the door open for modern Marxism to render itself relevant to our contemporary issues. In fact, he went even further than that—he attempted to lay the foundations, with a new method, for a new radical criticism of American society.

As theoretical rationalizer for the decline and irrelevancy of the radical Left, Daniel Bell laid out his thinking in a lengthy tome entitled *The End of Ideology—Or the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*. He summed up his critique in his last chapter with the following observations:

Today, [these] ideologies are exhausted. The events behind this important sociological change are complex and varied . . . such social changes as the modification of capitalism, the rise of the Welfare States [are causes]. This is not to say that such ideologies as communism in France and Italy do not have a polit-

ical weight, or a driving momentum from other sources. But out of all this history one simple fact emerges for the radical intelligentsia, the old ideologies have lost their "truth" and their power to persuade.

Few serious minds believe any longer that one can set down "blueprints" and through "social engineering" bring about a new utopia of social harmony. . . . In the Western world, therefore, there is today a rough consensus among intellectuals on political issues: the acceptance of a Welfare State, the desirability of decentralized power; a system of mixed economy and of political pluralism. In that sense, too, the ideological age has ended.⁴

Given the premises—historical, sociological, and theoretical—on which he bases his conclusions, Bell is right. However, Bell's premises are invalidated because he does not base them on the complete objective picture. His book, including text and notes, amounts to 397 pages: There is not a single page devoted to any phase of the Negro movement, past or present. Negroes are mentioned four times, in very brief references to Negro voting habits, the class nature of race prejudice, Negro society, and crime waves. It seems almost incredible that in the face of a social movement of such dimensions that some people even call it a revolution, a sociologist could write such a book and not even mention the existence of this movement or its impact. What does one conclude from this? Evidently, Bell does not consider Negroes as an integral sociological quantity within Western society. Hence, being outside the Western pale, Negroes could not possibly have anything to do with the "exhaustion of political ideas in the fifties"—which just happened to be the very decade when Negroes became most insistent on being integrated within Western society.

If at this stressful moment in American history, Professor Bell could write off the 1950's as the decade of "the end of ideology," the question naturally follows: Whose ideology? Bell was talking about his own, a radical ideology that came out of the Western tradition. Since for Bell there is not the slightest possibility that anything could replace this "exhausted" ideology, the black social movement is not even worth mentioning inasmuch as the welfare

⁴ Bell, *The End of Ideology* . . . (Free Press of Glencoe, Illinois, 1960), p. 373. Used by permission of The Macmillan Company and Princeton University Press (for Dr. Bell's quote from *Socialism and American Life*, D.D. Egbert and S. Persons, eds., Princeton University Press, 1952).

state will ultimately subdue it. Or could it be that Bell was frightened and nonplussed by the implications of a movement whose ends *his* ideology cannot accommodate?

However, C. Wright Mills took serious issue with Daniel Bell and others of the "end-of-ideology" school of thought, which Mills discovered through his travels to exist not only in Columbia University, U.S.A., but in the NATO nations (as well as in the Soviet Union, which is not officially a NATO nation). Mills wrote:

I neither want nor need to overstress the parallel, yet in a recent series of interviews in the Soviet Union concerning socialist realism [N.B.] I was very much struck by it. In Uzbekistan and Georgia as well as in Russia, I kept writing notes to myself, at the end of recorded interviews: "This man talks in a style just like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr." "Surely this fellow's the counterpart of Daniel Bell, except not so—what shall I say?—so gossipy. . . . The would-be enders of ideology, I kept thinking, "Are they not the self-coordinated, or better the fashion-coordinated, socialist realists of the NATO world?" And: "Check this carefully with the files of *Encounter* and *The Reporter*." I have now done so; it's the same kind of . . . thing.

Mills further observes:

The end-of-ideology is very largely a mechanical reaction—not a creative response—to the ideology of Stalinism. As such it takes from its opponent something of its inner quality. What does it all mean? That these people have become aware of the uselessness of Vulgar Marxism, but not yet aware of the uselessness of the liberal rhetoric.

Hence:

The end-of-ideology is on the way out because it stands for the refusal to work out an explicit political philosophy.⁵

In this article, from which the above are salient quotations, Mills was addressing what was then called "the New Left." He continued:

But enough. Where do *we* stand on . . . these . . . aspects of political philosophy? . . . As for the articulation of ideals: there I

⁵ "The New Left," *Power, Politics and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, edited by Irving L. Horowitz (New York: Ballantine Books, 1963), pp. 247-259. (Published simultaneously in hardcovers by Oxford University Press, New York. Used by permission of Oxford University Press.)

think your magazines [*New Left Review*, etc.] have done their best work so far. That is *your* meaning—is it not?—of the *emphasis on cultural affairs. As for ideological analysis, and the rhetoric with which to carry it out: I don't think any of us are nearly good enough but that will come with further advance on the two fronts where we are weakest: theories of society, history, human nature; and the major problem—ideas about the historical agencies of structural change* [italics added].

Here Mills effectively destroys the conceptual premises of Daniel Bell's end-of-ideology school, but with the social awareness that such a challenge presents formidable problems of new social methods. In pursuit of the creation and formulation of such methods, Mills emphasizes that to be Left (wherever Left stands, ideologically, to the "left" of Right) means: "To connect up cultural with political criticism, and both with demands and programmes."

Note Mills' specific emphasis here on "cultural." The term culture has always been held in very vague and ambiguous disesteem in America. In Germany, one of Hitler's gauleiters once made himself famous by stating: "When I hear the word 'culture,' I reach for my gun." In America, however, when people hear the word culture, many of them respond with blank faces or wry grimaces, while the more practical revolutionists fail to see culture as a bread-and-butter, class-warfare issue. Hence, Mills had to advise:

Absence of public issues there may well be, but this is not due to any absence of problems or of contradictions, antagonistic and otherwise. Impersonal and structural changes have not eliminated problems or issues. Their absence from many discussions—that is an ideological condition, regulated in the first place by whether or not intellectuals detect and state problems as potential *issues* for probable publics, and as *troubles* for a variety of individuals. One indispensable means of such work on these central tasks is what can only be described as ideological analysis.

From here Mills proceeded to the results of his own "analysis":

It is with this problem of agency in mind that I have been studying, for several years now, the *cultural apparatus*, the intellectuals—as a possible, immediate, radical agency of change. For a long time, I was not much happier with this idea than were many of you; but it turns out now, in the spring of 1960, that *it may be a very relevant idea indeed* [italics added].

He cautioned, however:

The problem of the intelligentsia is an extremely complicated set of problems on which rather little factual work has been done. In doing this work, we must—above all—not confuse the problems of the intellectuals of West Europe and North America with those of the Soviet Bloc or with those of the underdeveloped worlds. In each of the three major components of the world's social structure today, *the character and the role of the intelligentsia is distinct and historically specific* [italics added].

Then Mills sums up:

That's why we've got to study these new generations of intellectuals around the world as real live agencies of historic change. Forget Victorian Marxism except whenever you need it. . . .

"But it's just some kind of moral upsurge, isn't it?" Correct. But under it: no apathy. Much of it is direct non-violent action, and it seems to be working, here and there. Now we must learn from their practice and work out with them new forms of action.

"But it's all so ambiguous. Turkey, for instance. Cuba, for instance." Of course it is; *history-making is always ambiguous*; wait a bit; in the meantime, *help* them to focus their moral upsurge in less ambiguous political ways; work out with them the ideologies, the strategies, the theories that will help them consolidate their efforts: new theories of structural changes of and by human societies in our epoch [italics added].⁶

Now, from the analyses of C. Wright Mills, the hidden roots of the American radical phenomenon come into clearer focus. In disposing of Daniel Bell's end-of-ideology thesis as *an ideological problem in itself*, Mills abstracts a new class theory that pinpoints the locus of the American crisis in the intellectual stratum. But here we must say that Mills' analysis did not and could not go far enough, because, like Bell, he was speaking only from the white side of the American crisis. (Charles Silberman correctly termed it a *Crisis in Black and White*.) Mills' class analysis must be extended to include the role and the plight of the Negro intellectual stratum within the larger intellectual subsociety. It is a special class with its own group problems, *i.e.*, a class with its own "poten-

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

tial issues for probable publics, and as troubles for a variety of individuals," as Mills put it. However, the Negro intellectuals have never really exerted themselves and gotten fully involved in the ideological fracas—they only think they have. To the Negro intellectual elite, cultural issues represent no political problems for the black masses and have little connection, if any, with their troubles.

It was precisely the issue of cultural radicalism in the Mills-Bell controversy with which Negro creative intellectuals should have been involved. For in America, cultural radicalism is not so much a question of the controversial *content* expressed in art forms, as it is a question of what methods of social change are necessary to achieve freedom of expression within a national culture whose aesthetic has been cultivated by a single, dominant, ethnic group. This problem, however, was passed over by Daniel Bell and others in an extremely superficial fashion:

The pages of *Dissent* and *Universities* and *New Left Review* are full of attacks against advertising, the debaucheries of mass culture, and the like. And, often, phrasing these criticisms in the language of the early Marx, particularly in terms of alienation, gives these attacks a seeming political content. But the point is that these problems are essentially cultural and not political.

... and the problem of radical thought today is to reconsider the relationship of culture to society. Certainly few persons will assume the relationships of culture to politics to be as direct as Marxist critics assumed them to be twenty-five years ago. And when, with the lesson of totalitarianism and bureaucracy in mind, one comes to accept—in the mixed economy and political pluralism—moderation in social politics, *specifying the content of "cultural radicalism" becomes even more difficult* [italics added].⁷

Mills was clearly on the way toward "specifying this content" in his preoccupation with the intellectuals and the cultural apparatus. But Daniel Bell's sociological insights had not even an objective glimmer of such an attempt. In fact, Bell does not want the question answered at all. Never have I read a sociologist whose mind grasped so much data but whose eyes could look past so much objective reality—e.g., the Negro movement. One is forced to suspect that there is a method to Bell's blindness.

⁷ Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

Bell writes that if certain radicals had a "single unifying idea," it is the "conceptualization of America as a *mass society*, and its attack on the grotesque elements of such a society." But immediately he demurs: "The concept of the *mass society*, however, has a peculiar amorphousness. Those who used the older vocabulary of radicalism could attack the capitalists or even the bourgeoisie, but in the *mass society* one simply flails out against the culture, and it is hard to discover who, or what, is the enemy."

However, he understands quite well that some decades past, another school of writers, including Karl Jaspers, T.S. Eliot, and José Ortega y Gasset, had other attitudes on mass culture: "They have had an aristocratic, or Catholic, or elite conception of culture, and for them the standards of taste and excellence, once set by the educated and the cultivated, have been torn down by the mass. They stood against equalitarianism and industrial society. In effect, they did not want to give the masses cultural voting rights."⁸

All of this is true, but T.S. Eliot, for example, did not exile himself to England because his cultural views were really challenged by true mass cultural democratization; he left because his aristocratic group culture was manifestly empty, moribund, non-regenerative—thriving only by virtue of its past accomplishments in Western society. When the branches and the leaves of the plant shrivel up and die, one's only hope is to try to save the roots—hence, Eliot went to England. What really bothered Eliot in America was that the cultural status of his ethnic group was wide open for invasion by other culturally impure ethnic groups, such as niggers, Jews, wops, Polacks and bohunks. [The threat was not mass cultural democracy, but intergroup cultural competition and ideological warfare on the cultural front, disguised under the cloak of a variety of taxing issues: literary and art criticism; literary cliques; art vs. politics; the struggle between Negro and white jazz music for cultural supremacy; the patronization of newly-discovered Negro exoticism in music, dance, and theater; the simultaneous plunder of Negro music; the expatriate movement; plus other cultural vices, vanities and vicissitudes too numerous to recount here. T.S. Eliot was too much the aristocratic gentleman to be involved in much of what went on in America during the

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

1920's, but his cultural compeers stayed behind to carry out their rule-or-ruin cultural policies with a premeditated vengeance.⁷ Today, in America, we are suffering from the consequences of these developments. Hence, Daniel Bell is right when he points out that the young radical cannot adopt the stance of an Eliot on cultural problems today. However, they encounter another problem:

The paradox is that whatever is deemed radical in culture is quickly accepted, and whatever calls itself avant-garde, be it abstract expressionism or Beatnik poetry, is quickly acclaimed. When the products of high culture, from Schoenberg to Matisse . . . become best-selling cultural items, the problem of locating the source of the "corruption" of standards becomes a difficult one. The acceptance of the avant-garde has become so vexing that Hilton Kramer [an editor of *Arts*] . . . was moved to say, "The fact of the matter is that since 1945, bourgeois society has tightened its grip on all the arts by allowing them a freer rein."⁹

A "freer rein?" But how true is this? In the face of this free rein all that is grotesque, sick and corrupting in American culture persists. This is because what is called cultural radicalism is not truly radical, while what is called avant-garde, has only to do with *content* in art. "Bourgeois society" (or what I prefer to call the white cultural elite) can absorb any avant-garde content expression in art because the bourgeoisie themselves are not creating anything original. Hence, even a LeRoi Jones can be absorbed and tolerated, for the sake of being abused as a threat. The cultural status quo, then, is not challenged by any new trend in art that is termed radical or avant-garde solely on the basis of content alone. No literary or cultural movement today can be truly and effectively radical unless it presents a definitive critique of the entire cultural apparatus of America. More, it must analyze the functions of art and artists, creators and audiences, sellers and consumers, critics and group standards—or better yet—the politics of culture as expressed within the context of American intergroup status and relations in the cultural arts.

For me, the emergence of C. Wright Mills, with his critique of the policies, dogmas and vanities of the old Marxist leftwing, was a

landmark in American social theory. That Mills was a white man did not at all negate my own personal thesis that the American Negro was destined to become the vanguard social force in the revolutionizing of American society. On the contrary, the views of Mills served to corroborate a long-range strategic issue in the Negro movement, one that becomes more and more urgent as time passes. This issue involves the necessity of the Negro movement having white allies, as well as the aims, ideology and quality of such allies. It is to be noted, again, that when Mills ruled out the white laboring classes as having no radical potential, he theoretically eliminated the sole class basis on which Marxist Communism of all brands could maintain any effective links with the Negro movement. This was the chief reason why the Marxist theorists could not agree with Mills' findings. But Mills was trying to deal with American social peculiarities as they really are, and although they cannot admit this to themselves, the Marxists' historical model is European society.

These American peculiarities pose acute problems for the Negro movement, particularly for the Afro-American Nationalists, whose strong anti-white stance tends to rule out any functional alliance with whites. Although this aversion to any white alliance is perfectly understandable, in view of the long-standing disabilities and disorientation imposed on Negroes by the institution of political interracialism, the Afro-American Nationalists cannot, in the long run, continue to oppose white alliances. The question will be—the specific type and quality of the alliances. The quality will depend on the quality of the goals, but it is the Negro movement itself that must select these goals. Without specified goals plotted on the political, economic, and cultural fronts, the nationalist wing will wither away in isolation to be swamped by the aggressive American capitalistic dynamic. But these goals must be stated unequivocally by the nationalist wing and controlled by it on its own behalf, inasmuch as no other faction—black or white—can do it for them. This is the imperative of the Negro social dynamic.

The C. Wright Mills thesis contained the seeds of a Negro-White alliance of a new type, to be anchored first around the structural question of the American cultural apparatus. But not a single one of the leading Negro intellectual spokesmen saw this implication. In view of the deeply-rooted American tradition of

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

Anglo-Saxon anti-theoretical, anti-cultural, anti-aesthetic pragmatism and instrumentalism, C. Wright Mills was decidedly revolutionary, although isolated by the very conservative tradition that produced him. (He himself was Anglo-Saxon and a Southerner at that.) The problem here is that the nature of the American ethnic group composition—the white, black and red racial heritage—demands that each group produce for itself a *native* radical-intellectual trend, which trends should complement one another, so to speak. At least, the black and white groups must do this. Since the whites are divided into ethnic and religious subdivisions, with the Anglo-Saxons as the dominant and representative group, the Anglo-Saxon group must produce its representative radical-intellectual trend; or else social progress in American will be ethnically retarded, if not checkmated.

But the Anglo-Saxons and their Protestant ethic have failed in their creative and intellectual responsibilities to the internal American commonwealth. Interested purely in materialistic pursuits—exploiting resources, the politics of profit and loss, ruling the world, waging war, and protecting a rather threadbare cultural heritage—the Anglo-Saxons have retrogressed in the cultural fields and the humanities. Into this intellectual vacuum have stepped the Jews, to dominate scholarship, history, social research, etc.¹⁰ But Negro intellectuals function oblivious to the impact of these developments while protesting loudly about civil rights and freedom. In the face of new trends, new voices, new issues, the content of Negro intellectual opinion never varies, never changes. Negro intellectuals are moved by the world, but they hardly move *with* the world.

If the Negro intellectuals of the 1920's missed out on the debate between V. F. Calverton and the Communist Left on cultural compulsives, their spiritual progeny of the 1950's were also deaf to the debate between Mills, Bell and various leftwing diehards, on cultural radicalism. These two debates, although thirty years apart, are of course related historically, if only one would see it. And in the same way that Langston Hughes and company stood by

¹⁰ See "Zionist Influence on American Higher Education," *Issues*, Autumn, 1965, pp. 1-9.

during the Negro renaissance while the white Communist theoreticians beat down Calverton, the Negro creative intellectuals of the 1950's committed a breach of critical awareness.

No sooner had C. Wright Mills begun to emerge as a creative and original radical spokesman for the New Left, than the two main theoretical spokesmen of the official Marxist movement—Herbert Aptheker of the Communist Party and William F. Warde of the Socialist Workers' Party—took to the rostrum. Aptheker criticized Mills's findings in *The World of C. Wright Mills*¹¹ and Warde followed suit in an article entitled "A Marxist Analysis of C. Wright Mills."¹²

Herbert Aptheker, the Marxist-Communist historian, has played a very influential and specific role in the fashioning of the Communist Party's Negro intellectual and creative elite. The entire postwar generation of Communists of the 1940's and 1950's was educated on Negro history chiefly through his writings. He became *the* authority on what it meant to be Negro in America, both historically and contemporaneously. This situation raised some very serious and delicate questions concerning the problems of racial and ethnic identity and the historical ingredients that go into the formation of the Black American personality.

For no sooner was Aptheker elevated to the rank of official Marxist spokesman on Negro history, than practically the entire corps of Negro Marxist bureaucrats and intellectuals were duty-bound to pay political and theoretical homage to a man, a leader in radical thought, who, besides being white and a member of another minority, was also the possessor of distinctly second-rate theoretical equipment. Around Herbert Aptheker was built up a cult of worship as supinely uncritical as it was politically and theoretically deadening. It was the essential force of Communist dogma and organizational experience, applied to a dormant field, that wafted Aptheker to political stardom. If it were not for the fact that Negro historiography has always languished in the attics (or in the basements) of scholarship, for want of financial backing or institutional support, a man of his limited talents would not have had such a rich, untended field from which to reap such an undeserved harvest.

¹¹ Aptheker (New York: Marzani and Munsell, 1960).

¹² Warde, *International Socialist Review*, Summer, 1962, pp. 67-75, 95.

Aptheker's *Marxist* Negro historiography was supposed to be something special—unlike the more *Negro* historiography of Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B. DuBois, E. Franklyn Frazier, or John Hope Franklin. Aptheker is simply a hard-working, plodding historian and researcher whose Marxism is purely incidental; what he has achieved with Negro historical materials could just as well have been achieved by anyone else without the Marxist veneer—given the motivation and the resources. Nonetheless, by virtue of being a trained scholar, he widened the path that had already been prepared by James S. Allen to possible Communist Party dominance in the field of Negro historiography. More than that, his ascendancy placed theoretical leftwing control, of both the historical research and the interpretation of the Negro question, completely in Jewish hands. Here was another side of the process of the “Judaizing of Communism” (mentioned by Melech Epstein and cited earlier in this study). In fact it reflected the aggressiveness of Jewish scholarship in history and research to an extent that prompted a rabbi at a meeting of the Theodore Herzl Institute to remark that American Jews no longer represent a “problem” but are now the leading “problem solvers” of everybody else’s minority problems on the American scene. But here, as well, is a result of the default of the Negro intellectual. For we live in an age where many of those who speak loudest about how deeply they wish to see the Negro emancipated from capitalist bondage, can also conspire to keep the Negro eating out of their hands—simply by maintaining the grip of intellectual subservience and tutelage indefinitely.

For over twenty-five years Aptheker thought he had all the answers about Negroes past and present, and turned out nine pamphlets and books on Negro history. But in 1965, he said to an Associated Press correspondent, concerning the Communist Party: “We are less naïve than in the past. We tended to minimize the difficulties of building socialism, of the problems of power and the approach to religion and nationalism . . . we have had to learn the perils of dogma, of not growing.”¹³

Nationalism! How ironic . . . for here is a historian who simply

¹³ From a Saul Pett by-line, Associated Press correspondent, *Progress-Index*, Petersburg, Virginia, December 24, 1965, p. 10.

refused to accept history at its face value, who rewrote it to suit his own preconceptions. This violates every methodological tenet of the historian—Marxist or otherwise. Thus, the scholar-on-high minimized what everyone among the rank and file knew. Yet he rushed to the fore to answer C. Wright Mills, on everything from politics, culture, economics to, of course, “The Negro.”

Although hardly any of the Negroes in the creative fields were aware that Mills had said anything of any import Aptheker was sufficiently impressed to answer Mills by writing one of his longest pamphlets. *The World of C. Wright Mills* reveals Aptheker’s appalling ignorance of the cultural facts of life in America, the very area in which Mills excels. Aptheker could not deal with Mills’ ideas about the intellectuals and the cultural apparatus. Instead, he accused Mills of turning to what he, Aptheker, calls “unreal and utopian political devices—such as appeals confined to the intelligentsia.” Trotskyist William F. Warde agreed with Aptheker that Mills was wrong on the intelligentsia: “He founds his hopes for peace, freedom and progress, not on the victory of the working masses over the plutocracy, but rather on the benign influences to be exerted by scholars, ministers, scientists and writers, the peripheral and not the central forces of our society.”¹⁴

Both Aptheker and Warde were also critical of Mills’ attitude toward the Negro struggle. Says Aptheker: “His blindspot concerning the whole matter of the Negro, which impairs his analysis generally, is especially glaring.” Says Warde: “Mills seemed to look upon the Negro movement as something essentially separate from the general labor struggle.”¹⁵

These two Marxists, although both political and tactical opponents, approach Mills from *a priori* premises laid down in classical Marxism. These premises become their crutches, their sanctums of established creed. Although they both use the Negro question, in order to find weak spots in Mill’s argument, it is their Marxist creed they are defending, not the Negro movement, for Mills had very aptly ridiculed the Marxist dogma about the workingclass as a “labor metaphysic.” Aptheker, true to his Communist training and Jewish middle-class background, has been conditioned to a

¹⁴ Warde, *International Socialist Review*, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

peculiar type of catechism about the workers, a class he knows very little about. Thus his talk about workers is theoretical rote. The Trotskyists, however, are much more astute and resilient than the Communists. Hence, in Warde, they have a Marxist mind of far more depth and penetration than that of Aptheker.

Warde is a master of Marxist exegesis—probably the best in America. He sticks to the pithy essentials of theoretical problems. Thus, in his short debate with Mills, he more thoroughly illuminates Marxist tenets, but reveals, at the same time, why a Mills could not accept many of these tenets for American conditions. Mills would not discuss the implications of the Negro movement to any great degree, possibly because he was not prepared to. Warde criticizes this failure by claiming that the Negro movement “is an integral part of the conflict of American labor against the established order,”¹⁶ a statement that is patently untrue. A Marxist has to say this, in order to square his class-struggle theories with the facts of life; but it blinds him to other realities, especially realities about the very Negro movement over which Warde and Mills are at odds.

Neither Warde nor Aptheker understand that, in criticizing Mills's preoccupation with the intellectuals, they are ignoring the one great weakness of the Negro movement. The Negro movement is at an impasse precisely because it lacks a real functional corps of intellectuals able to confront and deal perceptively with American realities on a level that social conditions demand. But here the Marxists are simply bunching Negro intellectuals with white intellectuals, in general and as a class. Warde reveals the class narrowness of the Marxian creed in America when he relegates intellectuals to the periphery of society. But who was Karl Marx in his day but a free-floating intellectual and a member of the periphery of his times? What types of personalities were those associates of the young Marx who called themselves “Young Hegelians”? Who were they but young writers, students, philosophers, critics, rebels and assorted non-conformists? “We’ve got to study these new generations of intellectuals around the world . . .” said Mills, and “work out with them the ideologies . . . the theories . . . of structural changes.” Warde and Aptheker would object because

such are not central forces. Aptheker, and Marxists of his type, should in fact be the last ones to uphold this class dogma. They do not derive from the central working class themselves, but have risen to the position of high potentates of revolutionary class virtue. Therefore, we must assume that either such leaders are dishonest about crediting class factors, or that the working class is destined to make revolutions which, as a class, it is incapable of running from seats of power. What can one say of a Marxist creed that refuses to acknowledge the true authorship of active movements? William F. Warde went even further, willfully distorting living fact: “Radicalized intellectuals are particularly prone to swing faster and further to the left or to the right. . . . The initiatives of *radical intellectuals*, militant students, *oppressed minorities* [italics added] and insurrectionary peasants often serve to stimulate action by the proletariat.”¹⁷

Here we have open, unadulterated class bias. It is the American proletariat who is more amenable to turning “right” today. Ask any Negro how much sympathy white workers have with his cause. But in addition, Warde betrays his real attitude toward the Negro as an oppressed minority: To him, the Negro movement, even though active rather than “peripheral,” like “radicalized intellectuals,” is merely secondary to the “action by the proletariat” which must be stimulated in due time. Here, explicitly, is the theoretical dead end of American Marxism which prevents the creed from adjusting to realities. Confounded by three problems—the Negro movement, the intellectuals, and the proletariat—Marxists cannot reconcile them without drastic alterations in their theoretical schema, which they are loath to make.

C. Wright Mills was well on the road to solving the dilemma for them—but from the white side of the intellectual class divide. He pretended not to see Negro intellectuals (which was not difficult since they were saying and doing little beside repeating civil rights slogans after the civil rights politicians). But they represented the missing elements in the class role that C. Wright Mills tried to project for the intellectuals in his aim “to connect up cultural with political criticism, and both with demands and programmes.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁷ “Who Will Change the World?” *International Socialist Review*, Summer, 1961, p. 72.

He was not sure how he would achieve this and admitted as much. But historically, the tasks of the intellectuals in America today resemble those of the young Marx's generation in Europe of the 1840's that had to fashion a new political philosophy for the European scene of their time. C. Wright Mills was simply saying that the young intellectuals of America have to do the same thing for their own country, and that *we* must help them do it. But the Marxists of today cannot admit that they are of nineteenth-century vintage and therefore, "old hat."

When C. Wright Mills delved into the problem of the cultural apparatus he knew whereof he spoke. The nineteenth-century revolutionaries dealt with nineteenth-century capitalism, but a capitalism without the cultural apparatus that has grown up as an integral part of American capitalism today. Nineteenth-century capitalists might have controlled the press, but they did not have radio, television, film industries, advertising combines, electronic recording and computer industries, highly developed telecommunications networks, and so forth. Nineteenth-century capitalism was an industrial system without the twentieth-century trappings of the new industry—mass cultural communications, a new and unprecedented capitalistic refinement of unheard-of social ramifications. Marx never had to deal with this monster of capitalist accumulation. Mass cultural communications is a basic industry, as basic as oil, steel, and transportation, in its own way. Developing along with it, supporting it, and subservient to it, is an organized network of functions that are creative, administrative, propagandistic, educational, recreational, political, artistic, economic and cultural. Taken as a whole this enterprise involves what Mills called the *cultural apparatus*. Only the blind cannot see that whoever controls the cultural apparatus—whatever class, power group, faction or political combine—also controls the destiny of the United States and everything in it.

The arguments of C. Wright Mills on the cultural apparatus were incomplete and irresolute because the Negro creative intellectuals were not involved in the debate. They did not participate because they were not prepared to debate cultural issues on this level. It is a reflection of the general intellectual backwardness of Negro thought that the Negro movement has failed, so far, to deal with structural problems pertaining to American society.

Even at this advanced stage in Negro history, the Negro intellectual is a retarded child whose thinking processes are still geared to piddling intellectual civil writism and racial integrationism. This is all he knows. In the meantime, he plays second and third fiddle to white intellectuals in all the establishments—Left, Center, and Right. The white intellectuals in these establishments do not recognize the Negro intellectual as a man who can speak both for himself and for the best interests of the nation, but only as someone who must be spoken for and on behalf of. But the present impasse of the Negro movement demands that the black and white dialogue must transcend this level of mere evasive debate if the Negro movement is to avoid defeat and racial stalemate in the United States. For the Negro creative intellectual, the watchword is this: There can be no real black revolution in the United States without cultural revolution as a corollary to the scheme of "agencies for social change." If, as Gilbert Seldes said, "the cultural institutions of a country belong to its inhabitants," the only inhabitants who will return those institutions to the people are those with the greatest conviction that this has to be done for the good of the nation and, therefore, have the most potential for carrying it out.

Postscript on Black Power—The Dialogue Between Shadow and Substance

The old proverb, "Necessity is the mother of invention," was given a unique civil rights configuration when the slogan of Black Power was popularized during the summer of 1966. The necessity lay in the fact that the SNCC-CORE united front, in its direct-action-protest phase, had bogged down. Like an army that had outdistanced its supply units, it had finally been stopped by the enemy counter-attack—the backlash.

The slogan Black Power was conjured up and used in the manner of a rallying victory cry. In effect it covers up a defeat without having to explain either the basic reasons for it or the flaws in the original strategy; it suggests the dimensions of a future victory in the attainment of goals while, at the same time, dispelling the fears of more defeats in the pursuit of such goals. Yet, each and every goal was already implicit in the direct-action movements even before the slogan was projected. Black Power, then, was raised when social reality forced so-called revolutionaries to put action aside and start thinking. A movement that up to then had placed its highest premiums on practical activism now turned over a new leaf and began to get theoretical about the real *substance* of its civil rights objectives. The old slogans about "justice," "liberation," "Freedom Now," etc., were now mere shadow terms. If direct action-protest had been defeated by certain structural barriers of society, the new slogan became a commitment to deal with the real substance of those barriers that block the attainment of civil rights. Thus fears, opposition, and startled cries of alarm were immediately raised. A new threat fell across the land like an ominous shadow, even though the exact concept of Black Power has not yet been clearly defined. At this writing, as a concept it remains as vague as the former abstractions—Justice and Libera-

tion. Although the Black Power concept is a more specific and provocative abstraction than Freedom, it is open to just as many diverse and conflicting interpretations. While it tries to give more clarity to what forms Freedom will assume in America as the end-product of a new program, the Black Power dialogue does not close the conceptual gap between shadow and substance, any more than it plots a course for the program dynamic. Whatever Black Power is supposed to mean to its adherents and its foes, its implications cannot be clearly understood unless one examines the slogan's aims and origin. Who originated the slogan? Are its aims revolutionary or reformist?

It was originated by a leading member of the radical wing of the black bourgeoisie, Adam Clayton Powell: He first mentioned it at a Chicago rally in May, 1965, and elaborated upon it in his Howard University Commencement speech of May 29, 1966. It was picked up and popularized by a leading member of the radical wing of the civil rights movement, Stokely Carmichael, from the lower-middle-class students' front. Carmichael was then joined by certain nationalist elements from integration-minded CORE, the radical wing of the civil rights movement in the North. Thus, the slogan of Black Power appeared to signal a concerted shift from SNCC-CORE radical-protest integrationism—not to nationalist separatism—but to some intermediate position between separatism and racial integration.

Since all of these diverse protest elements, separatists, nationalists, and direct actionists, had made up the sum total of what was called the Black Revolution, formal logic would conclude that this tumultuous shift to Black Power denoted a turn to a more revolutionary posture than formerly held by SNCC and CORE when their direct-action battering rams were at full strength North and South. But a closer examination of every analysis by each Black Power exponent from SNCC and CORE reveals that while the slogan cast a revolutionary *sounding* theme and a threat of more intense revolt across the land, the *substance* was, in fact, a methodological retreat to black social reforms. In pragmatic America the slogans catch the imagination while the implicit substances are glossed over and ignored. The Negro thinks and acts like the American he is; thus the leaders of the Black Revolution who seized so readily upon Black Power had never made the dis-

inction between social revolution and social evolution, or social reform.

As this entire critique has tried to show, there can be no such thing in America as a *purely* economic, or political or civil rights revolution. There *can* be economic or political or civil rights reforms, but these are all *evolutionary* social changes that are part and parcel of the very gradualism of the NAACP. Never mind the fact that Roy Wilkins and his "class-brothers" are frightened by Black Power—that proves nothing. What a Wilkins is really saying is—"Please don't start throwing around power you don't really have, or power which you *might* have but which you obviously don't know how to use. All you are doing is scaring people (like me) and provoking other people to mobilize white power for a showdown which you are not ready for." What these gentlemen want most avidly are a number of civil rights, legal, economic, social, and educational reforms in America. But the radical direct-action civil righters (plus the nationalists) vociferously claim that this is inadequate. They say: "Those bourgeois NAACP Uncle Toms can't reform this white man's society. Man, you got to resort to revolutionary tactics if you want to shake up these white folks!" But what were these so-called revolutionary tactics? The Black Revolution included everything in the pot: sit-ins, freedom rides, demonstrations and marches of all kinds, ghetto uprisings, stall-ins, voter registration, self-defense, boycotts, black (third) party attempts, etc. These were the elements of the revolution, particularly in the South. But today when the main bulk of the direct actionists of SNCC and others have quit the South, what have they left behind? Scattered groups devoted to voter registration and economic programs for self-help. CORE has left a "cooperative marketing program for farm produce" in Louisiana. There were a few local election victories here and there, but the political reform movement of the Mississippi Freedom Democrat Party has closed its doors in LeFlore County. This is not to say that the achievements of the direct actionists are not valuable bases upon which other things can be structured, but they are still *reformist and gradualistic ideas with which not a single NAACP-er nor King passive resister could argue*. The question arises: Why was it necessary for all those idealistic and intrepid direct actionists to submit themselves to such a terrible physical and psychological batter-

ing in the South to establish a few struggling groups for local reforms in politics and economics, attempting in vain to breach the jimcrow barriers, which are, in effect, "separate" movements? It was because these young radicals did not understand, at the outset, the divergent natures of reforms and revolutionary movements for social change. They confused the methods without understanding them, thus imputing revolutionary interpretations to merely reformist methods. Hence, when direct-action methods failed against hardening barriers, they had to fall back on what few political and economic reform gains they had won. From this point on, the direct actionists advanced to the slogan of Black Power, as if to convince themselves that they were taking a revolutionary step forward, to wit: instead of radical integrationism the theme became *economic and political control by blacks in the black ghettos and in geographical areas of black majority in the South*. But is this a step forward or backward . . . or perhaps a one-step-backward-two-steps-forward sort of gambit? Whatever it is, it is essentially another variation of the old Communist leftwing doctrine of "self-determination in the black belt areas of Negro majority"—but with certain innovations. The old Communist Party doctrine did not include the Northern ghettos in this scheme as the Black Power exponents do. Moreover, the Communists did not envision any separatist black party movements as part of "self-determination," nor include any separatist economic reforms for self-help (such as cooperative consumers and producers movements). For the Communists then, and forever more, trade unionism was of paramount importance. The Northern CORE found itself in the 1960's, for instance, still forced to battle for integration in certain unions such as the building and construction trades. But when the subterranean nationalists inside the organization came to the fore in 1966 in answer to Carmichael's Black Power call, they demanded that Negroes reject integration as their major aim. Negroes were called on to band themselves into a racially-oriented mass movement, using political power and economic boycotts to win complete economic and political control of Northern ghettos and Southern counties in which they are in the majority. Except for time, place, circumstances, plus a few innovative, ideological twists, there is very little that is new in all of this.

In essence Black Power represents nothing more than a strategic retreat for a purpose. It proposes to change, not the white world outside, but the black world inside, by reforming it into something else politically and economically. In its own way and for other purposes the Nation of Islam has already achieved this in a limited way, substituting religion for politics.

Malcolm X quitted the Nation of Islam because this type of Black Power lacked a dynamic, was static and aloof to the broad struggle. He proposed to create another movement (the Organization for Afro-American Unity, OAAU) and link up with all the direct actionists and even passive resisters, believing that one must be involved in all forms of struggle wherever they are on all fronts. But after Malcolm's passing, the most dynamic of all the direct actionists gave up their dynamism and took a position almost in the lap of the Nation of Islam. They merely substituted politics for a parochial religion to go along with economics, but they added a more secular religion of Black Power invented by a Baptist minister-politician. As the fates would have it, all of this took place at a time when Powell, in whom more black political power was invested than in anyone else at the moment, was under fire from a Congressional white backlash in Washington, D.C.

On the face of it, Black Power adds up to some profound questions: Does this strategic retreat from integrationism mean that the civil righters are settling for gradual evolutionary reforms within the black communities? Can these economic and political reforms be achieved without effect on, and interaction with, the white world? Will the achievement of certain levels of Black Power enable the exponents to deal more effectively with the white world than the dynamics of direct-action integrationism? What manner of social dynamic is to be added to Black Power to make up for the dynamic that was discarded along with direct action? The real answer at this stage is that the Black Power slogan has no other dynamic than what is implied in its emotional necessity. Taken by themselves, all purely economic and political reorganizations of any type in America can be only reformist movements, whether in black ghettos or the white world. In order to be revolutionary in method to effect social change, such as transforming ghettos, other dynamic elements must be added to the

economic and political combination. The Black Power exponents have not understood these elements. Yet there is a unique inner dialectic at work in all this that must be examined.

For this purpose the Black Power exponents themselves have laid out their thinking for all to see. We can discount the frenetic avowals of black consciousness that made *New York Times* headlines and television panels, that frightened the bourgeois "Toms," white resisters, and lost "friends." It was but a new way of singing the same nationalist theme heard before from other quarters. But the CORE Black Power exponents came out in midwinter with a new publication called *Rights & Reviews* (Winter 1966-67), subtitled the "Black Power Issue," in which the substance of the slogan was discussed at some length. Here it was revealed that behind the brave verbalizations of Black Power, lay a muddled intellectual world of vague ideas and conceptual confusion. Sixteen articles by an interracial lineup of nationalists, Black Power integrationists, white leftwingers, Jews, Africans and others, spelled out the implicit Black Power retreat to the more leveled progression of an evolutionary black reformation. One cannot argue against this tactic since it is premature to state categorically where it will lead; but one should not, in this instance, refrain from calling reformism what it is. After all, the social realist must be aware that the New Deal heritage of the 1930's still hangs heavy over the land, and the American social dynamic has the built-in persuasion to bend all so-called revolutionary inclinations into the reformist groove. This is what Anti-Poverty is all about; it is why the Anti-Poverty program is able to buy off all the ghetto rebels with consummate ease. At a recent Anti-Poverty meeting in Harlem where an Independent Citizens' Committee* was challenging the efficiency and propriety of HARYOU-ACT's dominant role in

* This Independent Citizens Committee of Harlem has its roots in a rank-and-file oppositional move against the undemocratic control of HARYOU-ACT over the dispensation of Anti-Poverty funds. Active within this ICC are individuals from the Harlem Neighborhoods Association (HANA), a pioneer middleclass civic organization established in 1958. HANA grew out of the Central Harlem Coordinating Council established in 1938 for the purpose of encouraging and supporting "resident involvement and self-determination in community affairs." Harlem community politics is such that HANA was actually the creator of HARYOU and a number of other autonomous social welfare groups. The executive director of HANA, James Soler, is active in the ICC.

Anti-Poverty politics, certain CORE leaders were present—and silent. It remains to be seen just how Black Power will handle Anti-Poverty issues within CORE.

But in the maiden issue of *Rights & Reviews* on Black Power, Roy Inniss opened up with “Black Power—Phase 1: Psychological Warfare,” in which he said:

There is an impelling need to emphasize the socio-psychological aspect of Black Power. We can cry “Black Power” until doomsday, but until black children stop saying, “You’re blacker than me and so is your mama”; until grown black men stop using black as a curse word; until *Ebony* stops asking such asinine questions as: “Are Negro women getting prettier?” and stops carrying bleaching cream advertisements; until black people stop saying such things as: “She’s dark, but pretty”; in short, until black people accept values meaningful to themselves, there can be no completely effective organizing for the development of Black Power.¹

Mr. Inniss, a West Indian nationalist (once removed), was not merely being rhetorical about the much maligned values of “blackness.” He himself is black and Africanesque. In fact, his sensitivity to this question was shown much earlier, in a *New York Times* article where he discussed his fears of “genetic destruction” through enforced “integration.” Yet, if one is to discuss the color question among Negroes one cannot be as superficial as Mr. Inniss and leave it there. Granted, the Negro in America has been conditioned in many ways to a disrespect of blackness, but this is not as universal as Inniss makes out. On the other hand, if Inniss truly believes that there can be no “effective organizing . . .” (even for Black Power) until Negroes stop derogating “blackness,” then he will never see “Black Power,” whatever he means by it. Ideas about skin-color and the social values attached thereto are like ideas about all things social. Take the notion, for example, that holds slavery as a human institution to be a good thing. Had the slaves waited for the slavemasters to *change* their views on slavery before fighting for freedom, they would never be free. For even *after* the slaves won their freedom there would still be ex-slavemasters and ex-slaves who thought that slavery was a good thing.

¹ *Rights & Reviews*, Winter 1966-67, p. 5.

By the same token, even after the hoped-for ascent to Black Power, there will still be Negroes who will wish they were white inasmuch as Black Power will demand more responsibility than some blacks care to assume. However, the conceptual flaws noted here in Mr. Inniss’ thinking on social dynamics are typical of the social thinking of all black revolutionaries. Either they are activists without ideas or they fail to connect their ideas to the appropriate kind of social actions. If a person has a low opinion of himself and is unhappy because he lives in a filthy, dilapidated, rat-infested house, you cannot tell him to apply positive thinking—and “Be happy!” Happiness will begin to blossom only when he finds a way to get out of his physical trap into improved surroundings. In other words, what are the social dynamics of the program implicit in a Black Power kind of happiness?

It was noted that this Black Power magazine issue went to great lengths to play up the ideas, the imagery and the symbolism of the African Personality. All of the artwork, with exception of an amusing Jules Feiffer cartoon, relied on African tribal symbolism. One of the articles, written by a Black Nationalist-Africanist, Yosef Ben-Jochannan, asked—“What is Black Power?” He said:

It is that power which black peoples had in Africa before the invasion and domination of Africa by the Europeans under the guise of “taking Christianity to the heathen Africans.” . . . It is that power which caused Africans to build their many civilizations of high culture and institutions of science, law, medicine, philosophy, religion, etc., while Europeans were still asleep in their ignorance of the universe around and about them.²

Here, along with the historical romance of the African past, was an echo of Back-to-Africa Garveyism. For Ben-Jochannan, Black Power means that Negroes in America must take their “rightful place within the African community.” “Why all the sudden fuss and fury against the call for Black Power?” he asks. Why the fear? —“Fear by those who allegedly lead those of us who remain on the colonial plantations throughout the Harlems of the United States of America.” There is an element of truth in Ben-Jochannan’s message, but also much propagandist rhetoric, and it is the rhetoric

² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

that one must watch out for. It is from a school of Harlem thought that condemns *any* effort on the part of the American Negro to seek racial equality within the American system.

Thus, within the CORE Black Power outlook reappears the old dichotomy between DuBois-NAACPism and West Indian nationalist-Garveyism, for one must remember that CORE, the first direct-action group following World War II, merely extended the NAACP philosophy on another level. Even the present transition of the CORE philosophy to Black Power reformism is not complete, for witness the interracial lineup of the magazine content. The Black Power concept is due for a possible split between African Black Power and Afro-American Black Power, two related but different propositions in terms of emphasis. The clue to all this lies in the fact that neither in Ben-Jochannan's article, nor elsewhere in the issue, is the status of the West Indies (or the West Indian) discussed. Recall that when Black Power was first projected, the white press plus Inniss, Carmichael, and Lynch, played up the alleged Caribbean influence behind the slogan. Yet, although Ben-Jochannan discusses White Power vs. Black Power all over the world wherever it involves "the undying and unquenching energy of African peoples everywhere . . .," he makes no reference to either the black West Indies or the British Commonwealth. The implicit, typically Garveyite, assumption here is that the black West Indies already has Black Power (poor but proud), and that the Caribbean islands, unlike the "Harlems of the United States . . ." are not what Ben-Jochannan calls "colonial plantations." For the West Indian nationalists in the United States, the Caribbean "image" must be preserved and the exact nature of the "political independence" achieved is not to be examined too closely especially since the success of Black Power (at home and abroad) is predicated on both *political and economic independence*.

However, let us see what an African representative says about Black Power in the same publication. Chief S.O. Adebo is Nigeria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Writing on "The Black Revolution—An African View,"³ he discusses the "parallel movements" for freedom and independence of Africans and people of African descent in the United States:

³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Where the blacks constitute the majority of the country's population, as in Africa, the movement has taken the form of a struggle to take over the exercise of the governing power; where, as in the United States, the blacks are a minority, the struggle has been one for participation on level terms with everybody else. . . .

So far even the NAACP and King would concur, but Chief Adebo added "but, fundamentally, the objective is the same, an objective which can be described as securing a square deal for the black man in this world."

On the implementation of this objective, every faction from the NAACP to the Nation of Islam—clear across the spectrum, including the Black Power exponents themselves—are divided. But, as Chief Adebo said, "The wind of change has of course caused a lot of transformation on the African continent" and in the United States. "But you will no doubt agree with me that here, as in Africa, the task still to be done is more than that which is already accomplished. For both of our communities it is a long, long way to Tipperary."

"We must coordinate and work together," Adebo advised. "In order to do this, an essential prerequisite is that we should strive to remove the misunderstanding created between the African and the American Negro by centuries of lack of intelligent communication between our communities." And he concluded:

The African must recognize the American Negro as his brother, and American Negroes must acknowledge Africa as their ancestral home, and Africans as their kith and kin. This mutual understanding already exists within the top echelons both in Africa and in the United States. But this is not enough; it must go right down to the grass roots.

Again, curiously, the African said nothing, even in passing, about the West Indies, the natural home of Garveyism abroad. And, exactly who are those "top echelon" leaders in Africa and America who have this "mutual understanding" of which Adebo speaks? Such American Negro top echelon leaders would also, presumably, support Black Power. But which top leaders besides Powell support Black Power? They are not found in the NAACP, the Urban League, or in King's top echelon (the very leadership, in fact, that Ben-Jochannan sees as fearing Black Power). No, there

is much confusion here both in the outlook of Africans such as Adebo and in the Afro-American Black Power exponents over the African Revolution, the alleged Black Revolution, and their parallels. There is too much romanticizing about Africa going on in certain nationalist circles; too much rhetoric and too much Garveyite Back-to-Africa lip service by certain black redemptionists in America who haven't the least intention of going to Africa unless there is the guarantee of a good job or a money-making scheme in the offing, or the possibility of a "top echelon" marriage into the African diplomatic corps.

Africans such as Chief Adebo are just as much in the dark about the inner dynamic demands of the American Black Revolution as the Black Power exponents are about the dynamic substances of their new slogan. As a result, the readiness of most Black Nationalist trends, to lean heavily on the African past and the African image, is nothing but a convenient cover-up for an inability to come to terms with the complex demands of the American reality. A Roy Inniss, for example, will have one believe that no one in the black world but the American Negro has a complex about being black. In a black African country, inasmuch as nearly everyone is black, there is no basis for any psychological conditioning of inferiority complexes. However, pick up any popular African magazine such as *Spears* from Nigeria, *Parade* from Rhodesia, *Post* from South Africa, and also *Drum* of Ghana and Nigeria, and Lo and behold! There are skin-bleaching advertisements galore, also hair-straightening creams and black women in long-haired wigs—just like Harlem. Said one full-page, Madison Avenue-ish spread in *Drum*: "Amazing ARTA made my skin—Lighter, Smoother, Clearer . . . Because it is Pure White." "This is how I look now that I use pure white Arta." But, . . . "this was how I looked before. . . ." (She was *dark*, but pretty!)

Roy Inniss thinks *Ebony's* query "Are Negro Women Getting Prettier" rather asinine. But if he looks, he will observe that the African male in the United States has a female-beauty standard that parallels not only the prevailing standards of American Negro males and *Ebony* magazine, but also the standards of the varicolored spectrum of the United Nations. On this question there is very little misunderstanding between the two ancestral progeny. The problem is deeper: The American Negro is wedded to Amer-

ica and does not want to return to his ancestral Africa except in fancy, perhaps. The African *has* Africa, but a severe psychic problem has cropped up among Africans sent to the United States on various assignments: Many of them have very little contact with American Negroes, feel alienated within themselves, *but do not want to return to Africa*. Alienated or no, they have become passionately attached to the ways of the cosmopolitan West, the high standard of living, the creature comforts of the affluent society. These sons of Africa do not care to share the enforced status of the American Negro (who can blame them?), but they exist from day to day, from year to year, in levels and areas of American society where for years our American Negro integrationist leadership sought to be accepted on a peer basis of merit and educational qualifications. Despite his blackness, the African is handed this status almost *gratis*, without a "civil rights" struggle. This is what he wants, and he likes it, and regrets to have to give it up. Compared to the American Negro, he is *persona grata*. Ironically, however, for the Black Nationalists and the Black Power exponents in Harlem, any American Negro from the black elite functioning in these privileged areas of metropolitan interracial life has sold out his birthright to the white power structure.

Despite the historical affinities, the African and the Afro-American dilemmas differ—each has its own qualities, peculiarities, and imperatives. And the Black Power controversy illuminates all too well the deep confusions about these imperatives. What is the program for Black Power? That is the fundamental, unanswered question. In *Rights & Reviews*, Julian Bond, formerly of SNCC, wrote: "Black Power must be seen as a natural extension of the work of the civil rights movement for the past few years. From the courtroom to the streets in favor of integrated public facilities; from the streets onto backwoods roads in quest of the right to vote; from the ballot box to the meat of politics, the organization of voters into self-interest units." This is the dialectic of reformism! But, Bond advised that "conflict and struggle are necessary for social change."⁴

However, another writer said: "Forget Black Power. There is more to it than that, and our life might perhaps become the truth

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

of the moment we seek without the need of slogans. In times past people were content to *experience* their lives, but today one is not really living unless one has a program."⁵

Floyd McKissick, CORE's top man, wrote: "The doctrine of Black Power is this new thrust which seeks to achieve economic power and to develop political movements that would make changes that are vast and significant."⁶ *But economic power for whom?* For workers? Black capitalists? Black farmers? Black middleclass? Black racketeers? Welfare clients? The crucial economic issue in the ghettos today is Anti-Poverty, *but Anti-Poverty is not only a black issue*. How would CORE Black Power deal with this question? Or, on the question of political movements—around what particular issues would these political movements be developed? So far, the mentality of the Black Power theorists is so narrow that they see politics on merely one plane—running some black candidate for office—a hackneyed reformist tactic. No one can beat the Democrats and Republicans in the field of reform politics, especially black reform. Black radicals do not understand the art of creative politics, which is to make the superabundance of people's grievances political. But this is not all that is awry in Black Power ideology.

When one starts with the skin-color premise of a Roy Inniss on the Afro-American problem, one is, unfortunately, feeding a strong tendency within the Black Nationalist movement towards black-skin chauvinism—a policy which cannot work politically in the United States. It has never worked in the West Indies either; it can work only in Africa, it seems. But, in the United States, the American Negro group is too large and mixed with too many racial strains for the ideology of black-skin supremacy to function within the group. It can lead to the reasoning that "I'm blacker than you, and so is my mama, so I'm purer than you and your mama. Therefore, I am also more nationalistic than you, and more politically trustworthy than you and your mama, in the interests of Black Power." But inside America this is a pure fiction. The blacker skin does not always denote the deeper racial pride. In fact, some of the darkest Negroes are the most "white-minded."

⁵ *Ibid.*, Lorenzo Thomas, "Spontaneous History and the Ethics of a Revolution," p. 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

In America, the Negro group is more an *ethnic* than a racial group—meaning a group of mixed African, Indian, and white strains. Of course, the American-West Indian fusion of Black African-nationalists prefer their converts to be truly "black" both in pigmentation and ideology, and look rather doubtfully at others. There have been several trends who have tried to exclude Negroes with non-Negroid features and straight hair, overlooking the fact that Marcus Garvey's second wife, just such a female type, wrote of Garvey: "My hair let down, thrilled him. It was long and naturally wavy, he asked me never to cut it. The first time he saw it down, curiously he felt some strands and said, 'why it is soft,' as I tossed my head, he exclaimed, 'Oh, but it is so live.'"⁷ There is little doubt that Mrs. Garvey, a racial hybrid, was just as much of a Black Nationalist as the great redemptionist. And in our time, the two leading exponents of Black Power and Black Nationalism have been racial hybrids—Adam Clayton Powell and Malcolm X. The color problem among American Negroes is more complex than Roy Inniss admits.

Yet this problem among Negroes is of less signal importance today than the glaring fact that the Black Power theorists have learned very little from Afro-American history, which is of more immediate political significance than how many black Africans sat on the thrones of ancient Egypt. The trouble with the Black Nationalist Africanists is that most of their intellectual capacities are used up glorifying the most attractive aspects of Africa's pre-slavery past, while most of the African elite today have ceased being revolutionaries (if they ever were). In fact, most American Negroes who have been to Africa and back have almost as low an opinion of the African elite in Africa as some of the Africans have of the American Negroes' lack of cohesion. Hence, it would serve a very good purpose here in America for Negroes to cease romanticizing Africa and pre-feudal tribalism.

The radical wing of the Negro movement in America sorely needs a social theory based on the living ingredients of Afro-American history. Without such a theory all talk of Black Power is meaningless. One of the keys to the confusion over the meaning of the slogan, is the ambivalence in CORE's publication over the

⁷ Garvey and Garveyism, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

choice of historical leadership symbols and the interpretation given to the implications of these leadership trends. For example, the strong tendency of the Black Power theorists to associate only the names of Denmark Vesey, Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner, Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammed and Malcolm X with the social, political and ideological implications of Black Power is being absolutely false to history. Even the addition of Frederick Douglass to this historical leadership gallery is insufficient. For one thing, Douglass was no nationalist, and no pre-Civil War data is complete without the name of Martin R. Delany, the real prototype of Afro-American Nationalism.

But of more relevance to the present-day Negro movement as a whole are the twentieth-century leaders and their trends—Washington, DuBois, and Garvey. *These are the big three for our century.* Anyone who does not understand this cannot talk seriously about Black Power or any other slogan. But the Black Power theorists are romantics who do not understand this. Of course, spokesmen like Roy Inniss, Ben-Jochannan, etc., will find it difficult to accept this. In their conceptual scheme of things they would accept Marcus Garvey and reject Washington and DuBois. But this is predicated not on any profound theoretical or scientific examination of historical facts but on passion, emotionalism, and prejudice. They accept Garvey without Washington because they have not examined the reasons Washington was Garvey's only American hero. Similarly, they accept Douglass without DuBois, although it was DuBois who upheld Douglass and carried his abolitionist-protest-civil rights trend into the twentieth century. Although in terms of economics, Elijah Muhammed carried out Booker T. Washington's philosophy of economic self-sufficiency and self-help more thoroughly than any other movement, the Black Power theorists accept the Nation of Islam, yet reject Booker T-ism. They fail to see the fallacy of such reasoning because they have no understanding of economics as a science or the different schools of economic theory and how to apply them to the Negro movement. With such an innocence about economics, politics becomes child's play once the direct-action dynamic is taken away. Unschooled in the deep politics of the Negro movement since World War One, the leaders of CORE and SNCC are unaware that even the few economic cooperatives they initiated in the South are forty years too late.

How can people like this expect to cope with the economic policies of Anti-Poverty today?

In terms of economics, the Negro's heritage today is New Deal capitalism and Anti-Poverty, broadly speaking. His only "race" economics of any importance are those of Elijah Muhammed. Garvey's economic ideology which was tied to the African scene is useless today, since there is no Back-to-Africa momentum. The only leader of the big three who left behind, in writing, an economic program for the United States was W.E.B. DuBois, yet nationalist prejudice against him prevents Negro leaders from acknowledging this. Moreover, it was DuBois' brand of Pan-Africanism that won out in Africa, not Garvey's, *because Garvey was not a socialist but a thoroughgoing capitalist.* In terms of economics, neither Africa nor the West Indies has achieved the kind of independence and autonomy Garvey wanted. However, the unreality of Garvey's program in the 1920's meant he would have had even less chance of expunging neo-colonialism from Africa than the leaders of the African Revolution have had today. The result has been that Garveyism has failed to muster up any aid or political and economic assistance from Negroes in the Western hemisphere. The real foreign aid must come from both capitalist and socialist governments. The politics of certain African leaders are sufficiently ambivalent that they avidly seek this capitalistic and socialistic aid with one hand (for their version of Black Power), while with the other they either point the finger of criticism at the American Negro or else mouth vague platitudes about black cooperation. They simply do not understand the Afro-American's complex problem and its imperatives.

The Black Power enthusiasts practice the same dubious verbal skin-game in another way. They cannot cope with the realities of the economics of their own foreign aid, *i.e.*, Anti-Poverty, yet they talk boldly about economic independence as the basis of real power. How can such people talk seriously of cooperating with Africa when they cannot help themselves with a definitive economic program for Black Power in America? The "reluctant African" in the United States has adequate reasons for his stand-offishness. He has deep personal problems of identity to cope with, in the midst of a situation that has trapped the American Negro both physically and intellectually. The worst effect of his American

conditioning is not his color-complex about blackness, but that it renders him unable to look at his own history and influence in America objectively and understand it scientifically. He is so dazzled by the personalities of his chosen leadership symbols that he cannot peer behind the façade and examine what were the political, economic, class, and cultural trends that influenced the actions of those chosen leaders.

Another important issue the Black Power theorists evade is the class problem among Negroes. When one talks bravely about developing political and economic black power one had best start clarifying which class is going to wield this power. Better yet—which class among Negroes has the most power now? And which class will benefit from Black Power when it arrives? Here is another clue to the essential reformism inherent in the Black Power slogan: The theorists, although they snipe at the black bourgeoisie, are themselves prey to bourgeois aspirations—major or minor. This is by no means a bad thing in itself. To better one's material (if not spiritual) condition in America necessarily means adopting either the petty or the garish trappings of middle-class existence. However, the Black Power theorists are thrown into a reformist muddle involving class aspirations and economic power for the simple reason that they have no recognizable basis for economic power. To be brutally frank, some do not even know what economic theory is, while others do not want to be bothered with it. Despite their vaunted anti-Americanism, they are more American than they think. Congenitally pragmatic to the core, they are anti-theoretical. Thus, the white power structure does their economic theory and practice for them. New Deal economics, in force for thirty-four years, decides how Anti-Poverty funds are allotted to black ghettos, but people in ghettos have no say in how much funds or how often they are to be allotted. Is *this* economic Black Power? If not, ask any Black Power theorist what kind of politics can change this arrangement. Or better—ask any Black Power theorist whether economics determine politics, or vice versa? Ask any Black Power theorist why Anti-Poverty funds pay out so much money in middle-class salaries? Is this good or bad—for Black Power economics? You will get no clear answers.

However, from one familiar source we get some very clear convictions on the question of which class attributes and Black-Power

economics go together. Discussing Black Power in the *Negro Digest* of November, 1966, our literary sojourner from the old Left, John O. Killens, had this to say:

It seems to me there need be no strong schism at this moment between the advocates of black power and the "black bourgeoisie". . . . If one of the principle [sic] tenets of Black Consciousness is economic power, the starting place is with the black middle class. May their tribe increase. Black Power advocates are no present danger to them.⁸

When Black Power was simply Black Nationalism unqualified, Killens was by no means so certain that no middle-class Negroes were endangered. But since Black Nationalism is obviously here to stay, let us reform it nearer to the heart's desire. If John O. Killens had been told during the early 1950's that the black middle class on *Freedom* newspaper, with Robeson leading, had reformed leftwing Communism into leftwing integrationism (which is not Black Power) in the interests of the black middle class, Killens would have replied something like this—"Oh no, Robeson's *Freedom* appeals to the black working class, may their tribe increase. But this is no present danger to the black middle class." In fact, it was not. But today it should be clear to all Black Power advocates that these two "tribes"—workingclass and bourgeois—cannot both increase. Somebody has to give in, or give up, or simply "give" somewhere. Moreover, when a John O. Killens declares "all power to the black bourgeoisie" instead of the black proletariat, he admonishes: "Black Power is not an advocate of violence. It advocates non-violence, but in depth. It keeps everybody non-violent. It stays the hand of the practitioners of violence."⁹ Of course, it was not long ago that Mr. Killens was upholding "violence" when "necessary."

Nothing better demonstrates the reformist ideology behind Black Power than the Killens stamp of approval. Never the originator of a single new concept, style, or exposition whether in literature or politics, Killens has been the neutralizing temporizer, the non-controversial, moderating lid-sitter par excellence. He is not averse to changing his opinions or shifting his position when nec-

⁸ *Negro Digest*, November, 1966, p. 34.

⁹ *Ibid.*

essary; but he possesses that reform politician's knack of catching on belatedly to all advanced demands and slogans, once it is certain that the establishment must bend to popular appeal. He then becomes the propagandizing expert just as if he were *always* of that opinion. Thus, it is quite proper for Killens to say of Black Power today: "It means that all the Harlems of the U.S.A. should be in the hands of Harlemites. This is the starting point for black liberation. . . ." ¹⁰

. . . But you will find no such declaration of this tenor in a single issue of Robeson's *Freedom* newspaper in the early 1950's. *Freedomways* tried to prove that Robeson anticipated SNCC's direct action but it cannot be proven that the *Freedom* newspaper family anticipated Black Power in Harlem even when conditions existed in the Harlem radical movement of the late 1940's and early 1950's for such a slogan. Certain members of the pioneer Harlem Writers' Club, not Killens' Harlem Writers Guild, raised the idea that the black radical movement in Harlem should be run by blacks. The Harlem Writers Club, not Killens' group, forced the first conference on Negro cultural problems, the root problem of black consciousness. The leaders of the Harlem Writers Club first challenged the Committee for the Negro in the Arts' (CNA) concept of Integration in the Arts as cart-before-the-horse cultural policy in Harlem, *not* the Killens group. And, members of the Harlem Writers Club first attempted to debate these issues in their magazine *Harlem Quarterly* in 1949 and 1950, *not* the Killens Harlem Writers Guild and *Freedom* newspaper cliques. True, these issues were not debated with the thoroughness they should have been, but they *were* raised. Hence, it was the members of the Harlem Writers Club who took the brunt of the attacks, the slander, the abuse, and the ostracism from the interracial leftwing Harlem establishment. There is nothing new under the Harlem sun, but if John O. Killens had said of the black middle class—"May their tribe increase!"—in the pages of *Freedom* newspaper, everything would have been clearer for all concerned. For the black bourgeoisie *is* important as a class within the Negro movement. One cannot analyze leadership trends unless it is done within the context of the role of the black bourgeoisie. The problem is—the Black Power theorists have not done so.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

The last outstanding leader was Malcolm X, but did his followers really understand the man's positive side, or his limitations, or why he acted as he did? Did they see any Afro-American historical trends repeating themselves in Malcolm X's career? Unfortunately, they did not. The editors of CORE's magazine leaned heavily on quotations from Frederick Douglass' speeches and writings. But, historically, Douglass' Abolitionism and Reconstructionism are nineteenth-century achievements that became overshadowed by American twentieth-century developments. Besides, Frederick Douglass is also the chief hero of the NAACP integrationists, hence, the Black Power fellows are in strange company, sharing "heroes." Yet Malcolm X was no hero to the NAACP worshippers at Douglass' shrine, so how then, do divergent integrationist and nationalist trends wind up honoring the same hero? Because neither integrationists nor nationalists truly understand the crucial impact of the integrationist vs. nationalist conflict within the contours of American Negro history.

The Black Power exponents who uphold Malcolm X, yet cannot come to terms with either Washington or DuBois as historical leaders, understand neither the break between DuBois and Washington, nor the break between Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammed. These two breaches are historically related and stem from the same root in Afro-American history, albeit under different circumstances. Malcolm X broke with the Nation of Islam because of Muhammed's refusal to participate in the broad struggle for human rights, as Malcolm X explained it. But W.E.B. DuBois, the turn-of-the-century radical, broke with Booker T. Washington's leadership school for the same reasons (as a reading of *The Souls of Black Folk* will show). DuBois said that Washington shied away from participating in the struggle for the Negro's manhood rights. Malcolm X's break was that of a radical nationalist with the conservative nationalism of Elijah Muhammed, the latter inherited from Booker T. Washington, by way of Garvey who had "radicalized" Washington's economic philosophy.

The only way to understand this process is not to be led astray by mere slogans, but to see the fundamentals at work: the underlying conflict between integrationist and nationalist tendencies historically projected in the contrasted outlooks of Douglass and Delany. No matter how nationalistic Malcolm X remained after his break, he was forced by circumstances to swing closer to the

civil rights-integrationist forces in order to participate more fully in the broad struggle.* That was why certain of Malcolm X's former followers could charge him with "selling out" by seeking an alliance with the direct-action-integrationist forces.

American Negro history is basically a history of the conflict between integrationist and nationalist forces in politics, economics, and culture, no matter what leaders are involved and what slogans are used. After Malcolm X's death, the Black Power slogan was actually a swing back to the conservative nationalism from which Malcolm X had just departed. The pendulum swings back and forth, but the men who swing with it always fail to synthesize composite trends. W.E.B. DuBois came the closest of all the big three to understanding this problem, when he wrote in *Dusk of Dawn*: "There faces the American Negro therefore an intricate and subtle problem of combining into one object two difficult sets of facts."¹¹

The "two difficult sets of facts" DuBois refers to are integrationism (civil rights, racial equality, freedom) versus nationalism (separatism, accommodationist self-segregation, economic nationalism, group solidarity and self-help). This was truly the first theoretical formulation of the historic conflict between tendencies, but DuBois never developed his basic theoretical premise. He failed to go beyond this first principle into a greater synthesis of all the historical ingredients of Afro-Americana, which he knew better than all the Washingtons and the Garveys combined. Like Karl Marx, W.E.B. DuBois was one of history's great researchers—a sifter, interpreter and recorder of historical and contemporary knowledge; but unlike Marx, he could not reinterpret his data into new conceptions of social reality. Still, he came close, albeit late in life.

It was historically unfortunate that the American Negro created no social theorists to back up his long line of activist leaders,

* Malcolm X's plan to take the Negro issue to the United Nations as a Human Rights question in 1964 had been first attempted in 1947 by W.E.B. DuBois in collaboration with the NAACP. See "Appeal to the World," A Statement on the Denial of Human Rights to Minorities in the Case of Citizens of Negro Descent in the United States and an Appeal to the United Nations for Redress (NAACP, pamphlet, 1947).

¹¹ *Dusk of Dawn*, op. cit., p. 199.

charismatic deliverers, black redemptionists, and moral suasionists. With a few perceptive and original thinkers, the Negro movement conceivably could long ago have aided in reversing the backsliding of the United States toward the moral negation of its great promise as a new nation of nations. Instead the American Negro has, unwittingly, been forced to share in many of the corrupted values of the society—not enough, to be sure, to cancel out completely his inherent potential for social change. However, the intellectual horizons of the black intelligentsia have been so narrowed in scope and banalized by the American corrosion that Negro creativity has been diminishing since the 1920's. An examination of the pronouncements of the Black Power theorists reveal that they have not advanced one whit in their thinking, beyond the 1919 writers of A. Phillip Randolph's *Messenger* magazine. They have, in fact, retrogressed. There is not a single Negro publication in existence today that matches the depth of the old *Messenger*. CORE's new Black Power publication talks of developing "political and economic power" as if speaking for the first time. But back in the 1920's, when Randolph's writers were chastising DuBois and boasting of how they were "correctly" giving precedence to economics and politics over culture and art, they knew what they were talking about and said it with infinitely more expertise than today's Black Power exponents. In fact, the Black Power theorists do not even know how to deal with culture and art, as the CORE publication reveals. This is shocking to contemplate.

Black Power slogans reveal the depth of unpreparedness and the lack of knowledge that go along with the eagerness of the new black generation of spokesmen. The farther the Negro gets from his historical antecedents in time, the more tenuous become his conceptual ties, the emptier his social conceptions, the more superficial his visions. His one great and present hope is to know and understand his Afro-American history in the United States more profoundly. Failing that, and failing to create a new synthesis and a social theory of action, he will suffer the historical fate described by the philosopher who warned that "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."