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Historical Roots of Black Liberation

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CONTENTS

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As usual, the copy deadline for RA did not coincide with the gathering of materials on Black Lib-

The Historical Roots of Black Liberation

George Rawick

The Black Revolution, particularly in its latest phase, has challenged all previous interpretations of the history of black people, not only in the United States but everywhere in the Western world and in Africa. No longer is it possible to write credibly the liberal, integrationist history which pictures only black contributions to American society and stresses the victimization of the slaves. History written under the slogan "Black and White, Unite and Fight" does not give us grounds on which to understand the contemporary black movement. Unless we find the real historical roots of Black Power we are faced with a situation unparalleled in world history: a massive revolutionary movement which comes from nowhere and is born fully grown.[1]

The central focus of the recent discussion of slavery in the United States has been a discussion of the slave personality. What did slavery do to the development of the human being? One group of social analysts has refurbished the Sambo image, translating it from "racial" to "psychological" terms. Using an amalgam of Freudian psychology and social-psychological role theory, Stanley Elkins has essentially argued that slavery "infantilized" the slave personality. Although Elkins allows himself escape mechanisms from the full implications of this theory, nevertheless his argument does amount to the claim that slaves generally did not become full adults. Others such as Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan have added another dimension with a complicated discussion of the so-called matrifocal family. They conclude that a lack of social circumstances necessary to produce mature adults has been reinforced from slavery to the present. Black people, in these conceptions, are inherently maladjusted to American society,

implying that some figure or institution must shape them up. Thus the theory of the slave and his descendents as Victim.

On the other hand, there has been a continuation of more traditional liberal theory. If the slaves acted as if they accepted their subordinate status, it has been argued, they were only feigning such accommodation--only putting on "the Man." Like the first theory, this does violence to the facts and carries clear ideological implications. While Elkins and his academic kin have attempted to produce a sophisticated conservative defense of existing social relations, the second school's results suggest moderate reforms. Neither can be related to a revolutionary theory or practice.

Men do not make revolution for light and transient reasons, but rather only when they can no longer stand the contradictions in their personalities do they move in a sharp and decisive fashion. As Hegel, Marx, Camus and Farnon have well understood, the victim is the rebel, indeed all rebels are men and women resolving the classic contradiction laid out by Rousseau: "Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains." As Hegel demonstrated in the famous dialogue of master and slave in Phenomenology of the Mind, the slave struggles against the master by struggling with his own internal dilemmas. The social struggle begins, in an immediate sense, as a struggle within the slave and only them becomes externalized and objectified. Therefore, unless the slave is simultaneously Sambo and revolutionaly, Sambo and Nat Turner, he can be neither Sambo nor Nat Turner. He can only be a wooden man, a theoretical abstraction.

GENOVESE'S WORK

From the perspective of the Movement, the only work that seriously approaches a sufficiently high level of discussion is that of Eugene Genovese, who unites a study of Marxism with a respect for and deep knowledge of the concrete experiences of the slaves themselves. Genovese's studies reach far beyond those of others, but his work has not yet developed into a fully Marxist history. I hope to discuss first why I

believe this is so, and then briefly indicate an alternative direction.[2]

Like C. Wright Mills before him, Genovese concentrates largely on the nature of the ruling class. To paraphrase some remarks he made at the Smith College Conference on Negro Slavery in February 1968, we must be primarily concerned with comparative studies of the ruling classes produced by Negro slave societies. This concentration seems to me undialectical, one-sided, and needlessly schematic. My counter-thesis is that the most important problems inherent in the study of plantation production based on slave labor can be solved only by an analysis of the class struggle between masters and slaves; such analysis must begin with the self-activity of the slaves themselves. If one writes from such a perspective, then all history is indeed the history of the class struggle: as E. P. Thompson, Georges Lefebvre, C. L. R. James and other Marxist historians have brilliantly demonstrated, the defeats are inevitable and necessary stages in the struggle that leads to their ultimate triumph.

This view is central to the above mentioned master/slave dialogue in Hegel, dialogue which forms the basis of the Marxist dialectic. While Genovese knows the importance of this discussion in Hegel (and has quoted it in The Political Economy of Slavery), he shies away from exploring its full implications. A social passimism combined with what seems to me a sectarian impatience with history flaws his work. For example, he sees the American Revolution in the South essentially as a reactionary slave-owners rebellion. But it is apparent that the Revolution also represented the success of small farmers, non-slave-owners. Similarly, one could maintain that it was not until the 1830's that the conflict between planter and non-planter whites was decisively won by the former. Moreover, as Genovese understands, the struggle continued into the 1840's and 1850's with Hinton Helper's The Impending Crisis, published in 1857, as the manifesto of the non-slave-owning whites. But precisely because Genovese's work is not a sterile academic enterprise but a personal attempt to

intervene in the contemporary struggle, he allows his pessimism to interfere with his search for implications, presenting the South as a monolith.

Genovese handles the Sambo-rebel problem in a very brittle way, seeing it essentially as a problem of historical progression. Sambo could become the rebel in certain situations, and Genovese seeks to discover "the condition under which the personality pattern could become inverted and a seemingly docile slave could suddenly become fierce." He even suggests that had the French Jacobins taken power in 1790 rather than 1794, they would have abolished slavery in San Domingo and therefore liberated the slaves from the outside (rather than, as historical fact, they liberating themselves). If so, he comments, "we would . . .today be reading a Haitian Elkins whose task would be to explain the extraordinary docility of the country's blacks." All previous indication of rebelliousness in San Domingo is relegated by Genovese to unimportance: "We find a Sambo stereotype and a weak tradition of rebellion. . .when the island suddenly exploded in the greatest slave revolution in history, nothing lay behind it but Sambo and a few hints."

This conclusion is fundamentally absurd, the absurdity of sincere but pessimistic radical scholarship. Despite Genovese's stated respect for C.L.R. James, he seems to be turning the historian upside down. For the point James is making in The Black Jacobins--a point which cannot be missed by the careful reader--is that the oppressed continuously struggle in forms of their own choosing and surprise all mankind when they transform the day-to-day struggle into monumental revolutionary deeds. The pre-revolutionary activity was a necessary predecessor to the Haitian revolt; and without Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vessey and Nat Turner, there could have been no Fredrick Douglass, Rap Brown, Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver.

SAMBO?

This is not to argue that the slave was in no sense Sambo. A man is Sambo precisely when he is at the very point of rebellion he is fearful of being the rebel. Rebel he must be, but self-confident he is not. The greatest of all abolitionist leaders,

the ex-slave Fredrick Douglass, tells repeatedly in his autobiography that when in the very act of fleeing, he was not only afraid--he also felt he was doing something wrong. Everything seemed to tell him that he was incapable of being a freeman; but at the same time, everything told him he must be a freeman. Unless we understand the contradictory nature of the human personality in class societies, we can never portray reality. One never knows whether the victim or the rebel will manifest himself again, but then again one need never know. It does not matter. In real life, men engage and then they see. The man of courage is not afraid to act, not because he is certain he will not be the coward, but only because he knows that, if he does not act, he most certainly will be the coward.

The Sambo image is used often to give a facile explanation for the fact that there were very few slave revolts in North America. Because men were Sambo--and to be Sambo in this view, as we have shown, has meant that one could not be simultaneously the rebel--there were no successful slave revolts. This

is an example of finding a very complicated, cumbersome solution when a more simple and direct explanation is at hand. Slaves from the Caribbean and Brazil, areas where the Sambo image and reality were as present as in North America, engaged in great and at times successful slave revolts. No talk of Sambo and infantilization need be brought into account for the failure of large-scale slave revolts in North America. The matter was really much simpler. Slaves in North America were in every respect far outnumbered by the whites, who in any area could successfully hold off an attack until help came from elsewhere.

The slave revolt was not the usual method of direct action on the part of slaves in the United States because it was obvious that such a small, isolated minority could not successfully struggle this way. Rather the slaves usually chose other, more suitable tactics. While the slaves did not engage, particularly after the defeat of Nat Turner in 1831, in large revolts, they did struggle in a most conscious fashion and in a most successful manner through the Underground Railroad, strikes, and acts of individual withholding of or destruction of production. Most important, they fashioned their own independent community through which men and women and their children could find the cultural defenses against their oppressors.

The black community was the center of life for the slaves. It gave them, marked off from the rest of society, an independent base. The slave did not suffer from rootlessness - he belonged to the slave community and even if he were sold down the river, would usually be able to find himself in a new community much like his previous one, in which there would be people who shared a common destiny and would help him find a new life.

SLAVE SELF-ACTIVITY

The slave labored from sunup to sundown and sometimes beyond. This labor, which dominated part of the slave's existence, has often been described but never in terms of its relationship to the slave

community nor to what the slave did from sundown to sunup. Under slavery, as under any other social system, the lowest of the low were not totally dominated by the system and the master class. They found ways of alleviating the worst of the system and at times of dominating the masters. What slaves accomplished was the creation of a unified Negro community in which class differences within the community, while not totally eradicated, were much less significant than the ties of blackness in a white man's world.

While slaves were oppressed and exploited under slavery, they fought back in a day-by-day struggle which did not lead directly to liberation, but which in fact prevented that "infantilization" of personality that many historians insist took place. While there was, of course, an impact upon the slave personality of the institution, "infantilization" hardly describes it. In fact, what must be seen is the fact that the result was quite contradictory. On the one hand, submissiveness and a sense that one deserved to be a slave; but on the other, a great deal of anger and a great deal of competence to express this anger in ways that protected the personality and had objective results in the improvement of the slave's situation.

The metaphors of static psychology such as "infantilization" are most dangerous ones for they claim too much for conditioning. In any society based upon exploitation and social hierarchy, most people at all levels of the society display extreme ambivalence of personality. This "highest of the high and lowest of the low" syndrome produces social greatness as well as social incompetence. (Erik Erikson, for example, in The Young Man Luther, describes the religious revolutionary Martin Luther as a man who felt himself to be both a subservient worthless child and a man chosen by God the Father to do His work. Only in fighting his heavenly Father's enemies would the child become a man.) Those who have raised the issue of the "infantilization" of the slave personality do so in connection with the argument that the Africans in being taken to the New World were "deculturalized" and that the only

culture put in its place was the white man's culture. On this basis, no African culture and no new culture could really matter; thus cultural dependency, wardship, infantilization. The Negro in the United States, they argue, had no culture of his own and was simply a very deprived member of the majority culture.

This school of slavery historiography is dependent upon the curious notion that "personality" and "culture" are like old clothes that can be discarded easily. However, one can never remove culture, although one can transform it. The ability of men to learn the simplest tasks is dependent upon the utilization of the existing cultural apparatus. New cultures emerge out of the older cultures gradually, never completely destroying the traces of the past. Revolutions, at their best, do not obliterate past society but liberate that which is alive from its domination by social classes no longer able to utilize the achievements of mankind for human purposes. In short, culture is a profoundly historical reality and not an ahistorical abstraction.

AFRO-AMERICAN CULTURE

The process whereby the African changed in order to meet the new environment was dependent upon his African culture. While slavery altered social patterns, it did not wholly obliterate African culture. The Br'er Rabbit stories of North America are not as Joel Chandler Harris in his racist wisdom imagined them to be. They are not childlike tales for toddlers. They contain the insight of a people and express a most sophisticated view of human life.

There are a variety of myths and folktales from Negro populations in Africa and the New World in which a relatively weak creature succeeds in at least surviving in his competition with the greater beasts. At times he even wins, but he never really loses. He is absurd, but he is filled with life and he keeps struggling with his destiny. In West Africa he is often called Legba and is portrayed as a spider or a rabbit or at times as a little black man. He survives by his wits and manages to live in competition with his

more powerful neighbors. He appears in Brazil and as Papa Legba in Haitian voodoo. Elsewhere in the Caribbean we have Anansi, the spider trickster, who defeats Lion, Tiger, and Snake in great contests of wits.

Sometimes in the Caribbean he becomes Br'er Rabbit, the form in which he is known in North America. In all cases we have a creature whose life situation is very much like that of slaves. He survives, even occasionally triumphs, over the more powerful beasts; and whatever he does, he gains the sympathy of the non-powerful everywhere. In fact, he always seems to have a greater share of the classic human virtues than the Great Beasts.

In myth and folklore the slave not only acted out his desires, He accomplished much more than that. In his laughter and pleasure at the exploits of Legba, Anansi, and Br'er Rabbit he created for himself, out of his own being, that necessary self-confidence denied to him by so much of his environment.

We get another example, a most crucial one, of the relationship of the slave community to the slave struggle in the slave religion. The religion of the slaves not only provided a link with the most modern of naturalistic and humanistic philosophy, but also with the concrete day-by-day struggles of the slaves themselves. Slave revolts themselves were often related to what has been called in several accounts the "African cult meeting". We have an overwhelming amount of evidence of regular late night or early morning "sings" and religious meetings held either in the slave quarters or in nearby swamps or river banks.

But, above all, for the period from the defeat of the rebellion of Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831 to the Civil War, the African cult and its related community provided the basis for social life of the slaves. In these thirty years the Negro slaves retrenched, struggled to maintain a coherent culture, infused human dignity and human possibility into the day-by-day life of the slave, and above all built the Underground Railroad. The real Uncle Tom of Harriet Beecher Stowe's book was the leader of the slaves on the plantation precisely because he was more

courageous than all the other slaves as well as wise in the ways of protecting his people in their isolation. Also, Negro spirituals were the legitimate and necessary manifestations of this period. The slave personality was kept whole by the conscious and deep-seated realities of the Afro-American culture as expressed in the day-by-day and night-by-night life of the slave quarters. While the struggle was neither dramatic nor heroic in an epic way, it was real and successful.

Through the instrumentality of the African cult, a concrete expression of a philosophy most adequate to the task at hand, the Afro-American slave prepared the ground and built the community out of which could come the struggles of the abolitionist movement. Abolitionism was at all times dominated by Afro-Americans, not by whites. Every abolitionist newspaper depended upon the support of Negro freedmen for its continuation. And these black freedmen received their impetus from the struggles of their brothers and sisters in slavery. Rather than stemming from the New England Brahmin conscience, abolitionism grew from, and carried, the necessity of black liberation whatever the cost. And in liberating the black community abolitionism transformed American society; it took the lead in creating a new America.

Although it will seem outrageous for those who think of movements as primarily organizations, offices, finances, printing presses and newspapers, writers and petitions, the heart of abolitionism was the slave community itself. The Underground Railroad, the efforts of the slaves for their own liberation, and their struggles' impact on Northern Whites and slave blacks --these were the movement's indispensible core. In the South, it gave the slaves the hope that enabled them to engage in the daily struggles that won for them that amount of breathing space which made more than mere continued existence possible.

With the defeat of Nat Turner's rebellion the slaves turned more and more to building their day-by-day resistance: to the Underground Railroad, to individual acts of resistance, to slave strikes. There were countless strikes among the slaves, strikes that were often successful. A group of slaves would

after some particular incident of brutality on the part of master or overseer take off for the swamps where they would hide out. After a period they would send in a representative to arrange for a conference at which there would be "collective bargaining". Sometimes they lost, of course, and to lose meant to be whipped and at times even more severely punished. But nevertheless the strikes went on.

Resistance of the slaves had its results. While the corruption of the master class and other whites in Southern society has often been commented upon, the linkage with the activities of the slaves has never been made. The slaves themselves created the conditions for the inner corruption of the Master Class. While the rulers portrayed the institution of slavery as beneficent, the constant rebellion of the slaves made them know they lied. And when there is no way in which men can believe in the fundamental morality of a social system, even one they profit by, that system begins to die because the masters lose their ability to defend it. The slaves, in the struggle to the death with the rulers, repudiate the latter's claim of moral justification, demonstrate to all the bad faith of the masters. (Seen from this vantage point, Twain's Huckleberry Finn depicts the superiority of the moral claims of the runaway slave, Jim, to those of the masters based on property rights.)

BLACK CIVILIZATION AND WHITE

The southern slave owner was denuded of civilization by the very system he fostered. Instead of the southern plantation owner and the classes close to him being made up of the knights in armor of racist folklore, slavery produced a society in the American South dominated by a class who lived in corruption and within an atmosphere worthy of the Marquis de Sade. The picture of the life of the master drawn by the master class during slavery and by the romanticizers after slavery clashes sharply with the portrait drawn by the slaves themselves.

In the few ways in which some genuine civilization and humanistic culture came through in the lives

of the masters, it was the result of the humanizing and civilizing influence of slaves. Slave women provided some degree of a full humanity for the masters of whom they were concubines; they provided some genuine love and training for the young masters and mistresses; the slave children helped and taught the slave owners' sons and daughters. In almost every other way the slave owner was a cruel man who whipped horses, slaves, and women, gambled and drank hard, and was quick with the Bowie knife and the gun against any real or fancied opponent. The white women were not the delicate ladies of the southern myth. The slaves almost universally reported that the women enjoyed whipping slaves more than did the men, that they often took out on their slaves their anger at their husbands, particularly when these men spent more time with their slave women than with their wives. The myth of the gracious South dies hard, but die it must. The slaves as they report their experiences turn upon its head the image of mint julep and magnolia.

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1. It should be mentioned that the study upon which this article is based was begun before the slogan "Black Power" was born; it has a basis that precedes slogans and ideologies in the same sense that the concrete expression of Black Power in the independent black community preceded any internal ideological discussion. Nonetheless, the contemporary black struggle has clarified and illuminated many matters, rendering the discussion a very different one than the one begun nearly a decade ago.
2. The full defense of my point of view is developed in my forthcoming multi-volumed work, The American Slave: From Sundown to Sunup whose volumes will begin to appear in the spring of 1969 under the imprint of Greenwood Press. The full ten to fourteen volume work will contain a one-volume introduction by myself followed by many volumes of annotated and edited slave autobiographies and narratives in which thousands of slaves and former slaves tell their own stories, which have either

never been published or have been out of print for over a century. It is a telling commentary about American racism that no attempt previously has been made to develop a substantive history of American slavery based upon the records and artifacts left by the former slaves; indeed, most historians concluded that the material for such work did not exist. It is hoped that this work will be a challenge to others to revise history, based on even more careful and detailed studies of men's self-activity.

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When you seize Columbia, when you
seize Paris, take
the media, tell the people what you're doing
what you're up to and why and how you mean
to do it, how they can help, keep the news
coming, steady, you have 70 years
of media conditioning to combat, it is a wall
you must get through, somehow, to reach
the instinctive man, who is struggling like a plant
for light, for air

when you seize a town, a campus, get hold of the
power stations, the water, the transportation,
forget to negotiate, forget how
to negotiate, don't wait for De Gaulle or Kirk
to abdicate, they won't, you are not
"demonstrating" you are fighting
a war, fight to win, don't wait for Johnson or
Humphrey or Rockefeller, to agree to your terms
take what you need, "it's free
because it's yours"

Diane DiPrima May, 1968

Africa for Afro-Americans: Padmore and the Black Press

J. R. Hooker

One of the more striking testimonies to the current insistence that all black men share a heritage, whether or not they live in America, is the amount of African material in the black press. While Africa always has been with us, it always has been truer of the black than of the white American press. But, coverage frequently has reflected the same attitudes in both BASP and WASP papers. Being put in the white man's box meant that blacks read of savages who ate missionaries and opposed civilizing influences, or they were regaled with accounts of European heroism in feverish climes. Africans were presumed to be inferior, different, very far away. True, the ancestors of many Americans might have come from Africa, but that was a long while ago and under shameful conditions.

There is, of course, a history of solid journalism, exemplified by The Crisis during DuBois' editorship, which carried a tremendous amount of African material. But, with this exception, and a few others to be mentioned below, until very recently when Muhammed Speaks and Freedomways achieved national coverage, the Africa portrayed in the black press was the white man's Africa. I have suggested elsewhere[1] that Africa was seen either as an embarrassment, as a place to exploit, as a symbol of white injustice or as a place to redeem (in the Christian sense).

This has pretty much changed, so that today's reader of the slick Luce-like weeklies stands a better than even chance of seeing something solid on African art, history or government, and is likely to recognize individual African leaders - especially those like Mboya or Nkrumah who have an American connection. And if any one man is to be credited with alerting black Americans to the significance of Africa during the lean

years between Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X (always apart, that is, from Dr. DuBois), it is George Padmore (1902-59), the American-educated Trinidadian race specialist for the Communist International, who is better known as "the father of African emancipation."[2]

PADMORE

A journalist since his 'teens, on an English paper at home and with the student publications of Fisk and Howard, Padmore was by the early 1930s the communist world's greatest authority on race matters. But, when he reluctantly concluded that the Stalinists were insincere, acting in short as white men, he quit, and in association with other expatriate blacks adrift in London tried to bring blacks on both sides of the Atlantic into common cause. To this end he organized first the International African Service Bureau (1937) and then the Pan-African Federation (1944). The role of black Americans, though taken for granted, was considerably altered however. Whereas, previously Americans had dominated such scenes (e.g. the first five pan-African conferences) and emphasized the American situation, it was Padmore's notion that Africa's time had come. For the immediate future, he argued, all black men should devote their attention and energies to the attainment of African liberation. So for the first time outside the pages of The Crisis anti-colonial and anti-imperial articles began to appear in the black press under Padmore's byline. Overwhelmingly his copy concerned Africa. He did not ignore the rest of the world; indeed, his material on southeast Asia and the West Indies remains strikingly topical, but most of his prose was devoted to African affairs.

He broke into American journalism through the good offices of a former tutor at Howard, Dr. Metz Lochard, who by the later 1930s was working on the Chicago Defender. Padmore already was in touch with DuBois and had written for The Crisis as early as 1935, at the time of the Italo-Ethiopian crisis,

but these had been isolated contributions. Now in 1938 he became European correspondent for The Defender, which began to carry considerable copy. Much of his material also began to appear in the Baltimore Afro-American and the Pittsburgh Courier. In this way the black press came to carry more African material than its far larger white counterpart. Indeed, once Padmore joined The Defender's staff, the black press held a near-monopoly on such matter. Whether it was a question of labor conditions in the South African gold fields, increased taxes in Rhodesia, press censorship in the Gold Coast or land alienation in Kenya, Padmore was willing to write it up. Moreover, he was alone among the journalists of his time in preparing background pieces, writing essays rather than articles. And while some of his more solemn offerings look a trifle incongruous juxtaposed to the flamboyant productions of his American colleagues, there is no doubt that his readership had at its disposal as much solid material as was available in America. For example, they could judge the importance of Kwame Nkrumah long before he attracted the white world's attention.

Padmore was not uniformly appreciated for his self-imposed efforts. His denunciations of French and British imperialism and revelations of Belgian injustice were welcome fare to his employers, but the philosophy which underlay his themes was unpalatable. First of all, he was uncompromising in his defense of African ways (at least in public). Then, too, he was distrustful of American intentions, as well as anti-capitalist and at least by implication anti-white. None of this could be expected to endear him to the black establishment whose attitude he deplored and whose checks he cashed.

PADMORE AND GARVEY

In writing this way he contributed, without using the phrase, to a definition of black power. Though as a communist he had attacked and ridiculed Marcus Garvey's program, he nevertheless came to

recognize Garvey's substantial contribution to the cause of black dignity. However, where Garvey had promoted black capitalist ventures, Padmore stressed what has come to be called African socialism.[3] Both agreed that the elevation of black men was a black responsibility and that the very system of race relations under present capitalist conditions guaranteed the perpetuation of black degredation. It did not follow that all whites were bad or that any whites had to remain that way, merely that till now many had been bad and all had shared in the benefits of exploitation. White men were not congenitally untrustworthy, but the world certainly inclined them in that direction.

Padmore did not seek to place black feet on white necks, but he did insist that where black feet prevailed, they should dance to their own music and wear their own shoes. To the extent that all nonwhites suffered from white exploitation, Padmore belonged to the third world, but this concept would lose significance under conditions of global socialism. (It is impossible to prove, but permissible to suggest that some of Padmore's ideas wore off on Frantz Fanon during their brief intimacy in Accra in 1959.) Padmore, then, was ecumenical over the long haul, inclined to be impatient with the notion of negritude and scornful of what he termed the fascist notion of racial distinctions. Though he frequently reminded people that he was the grandson of a slave, the point was made for historical purposes (and of course to create unease in his auditors), not to explain his psychological posture.

It could be argued that in all this he was being West Indian, thereby revealing a world view far more comprehensive than his black counterparts in America could be expected to possess. There is much truth in the proposition that no matter what else the colonial regimes have done in the Caribbean - and the catalogue of injustices is formidable - they have produced men such as C.L.R. James, Eric Williams, Marcus Garvey, Henry Sylvester-Williams, Arthur Lewis, Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon and George Padmore. Indeed, Stokley Carmichael is best interpreted in

this light. The last, the most terrible indictment which can be laid against white America is that the system creates black men who are, if possible, even more parochial than their white fellow countrymen. For generations in black America the past was a dark tunnel, while the future could be imagined as a projection of the hopeless present. Not so for the West Indian boy with brains. He possessed a history, almost unimaginably harsh, to be sure, but nevertheless a history linking him to the whole of the British Empire, which for a century meant the whole of this earth. It is this infusion of self-confidence into the leadership of black American movements by West Indians (tension-producing at the best of times) which must be grasped if their full dimensions are to be understood. By framing his questions against the widest possible background, Padmore was fulfilling a conventional Caribbean role: on the one hand working out his own destiny in exile; on the other enlarging the understanding of men who systematically had been denied the chance to measure their own woes on a global scale.

AFRO-AMERICAN NATIONALISM

Finally, however, Padmore made conventional an idea long espoused by DuBois. Africa, if free, could redress the wrongs endured by those of African descent. Not perhaps through the sword of vengeance, but certainly by a moral pressure which the imperialists would find it impossible to ignore. Thus, when The Black Panther (4 May 1968) prints a letter of support from the African National Congress, the impotence of this exiled nationalist body does not matter. What counts is the feeling that southern Africans are aware of and determined to change conditions in northern California. (Robert Kennedy's quickness to preceive the enlarged horizons of black Americans led him to make his South African trip. I doubt if very many other American politicians then understood the way in which the US and South Africa are linked in the minds of black intellectuals.)

Today, then, even in the black bourgeois press

Africa is accorded respect, and its affairs are treated seriously (see Tan, Ebony and the Negro Digest.) To this extent, Padmore's ghost must feel vindicated. But, where his influence really has scored is in the newer radical press where the ideas of Nkrumah, whom he publicized tirelessly for 12 years, find their most congenial abode. Africa must unite, Padmore constantly asserted, but this was in aid of a greater cause - black dignity - by which he would have understood the phrase black power.

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1. See my article "The Negro American Press and Africa in the 1930s" in the Canadian Journal of African Studies (1967).
2. See my Black Revolutionary: George Padmore's Path from Communism to Pan-Africanism (London & NY, 1967).
3. His best exposition of this concept is printed as an appendix in W. H. Friedland and C. G. Rosberg, eds., African Socialism (Stanford, 1964).

Document: C.L.R. James on the Origins

Editor's Note: Born in Trinidad in 1901, C.L.R. James, after being educated and teaching in his native country, went to England in 1932. Here he became involved in both the struggle for national emancipation of the West Indies and Africa and in the revolutionary socialist movement. He was, along with George Padmore, one of a handful who organized the International Africa Bureau, a small agitational group which became a center of African revolution. In 1938 his History of the Negro Revolt, the first significant study of slave revolts, was published; later in the same year, The Black Jacobins, Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution, best known of his works, appeared. Soon he came to United States on a speaking tour, and remained until 1953, involved in basic theoretical work, political struggle, and even for a time as an organizer of tenant farmers and share croppers in southern Missouri. At the height of McCarthyism he was deported from the United States. From 1957 to 1961 he was Secretary of the West Indian Federal Labor Party and the editor of the official newspaper, The Nation. In 1961 he broke with the Party's leadership and since that time has engaged in literary and political activities in England and the West Indies. In January of 1968 he was a delegate to the cultural Congress in Havana.

The following portion of a speech delivered in Detroit in January, 1967, is printed as a document of the internationalism of the black struggle and a reminiscence of an important but too little-known figure.

. . .W. E. B. DuBois wrote about Africa for a long time, and he set himself to make not only Africa, but Western Civilization understand that the enslavement of the African people was not only a disgrace but a burden to Western Civilization itself. He held a series of Pan-African conferences. I hear people say that DuBois was a great Race leader. That was only part of it. At the time DuBois was holding these Pan-African conferences, there were secretaries of state in the United States, there were journalists, there were writers, there were travelers--not one of them understood what Africa meant and would mean in the years to come. DuBois stood alone. It is true he was helping the Negro people, the African people, but it was not an African task. He was not an African leader. In that respect as well as in the writing of history, he was one of the foremost

CLR JAMES

Americans of his time. And in regard to what he was saying about Africa he was one of the foremost men among politicians, economists, sociologists and the others who were dealing with world civilization at the time and not confining themselves to the narrow limitation of one country. In 1935 DuBois wrote Black Reconstruction, a history of the Negro in the Civil War and its aftermath with general remarks about the Civil War, and what happened in the states Negroes governed or took part in governing after the Civil War. DuBois not only told that story; he brought into it many important matters -- the French Revolution, the American Revolution, the Paris Commune, the Treaty of Versailles, the condition of the Communist International--and he knitted all of these into a structure in which he placed the contribution of the Negro people to their own emancipation. It is one of the greatest history books ever written. . . .

The world needed the work of DuBois at the time. It was what was required. The beginning of the twentieth century saw the beginning of the necessity of involving not only Negro people in Western Civilization, but also the African people in the world that was being born. DuBois saw the importance of history, economics, sociology, etc., and saw that without an understanding of the role of the Negro people it was impossible to get a clear and consistent and comprehensive view of American civilization as a whole. And that I believe was the cause of his strength and the remarkable range of his accomplishments. I insist that to call him only a Negro leader is to do him an injustice; it is to do an injustice to the Negro people, to strike a great blow against clear view of Western Civilization as a whole.

GARVEY

Next, I want to speak of Marcus Garvey, who marks a new stage. What DuBois did in regard to the Pan-African movement, in educating intellectuals, journalists and persons who were interested in Africa,

Garvey took up. He did not get it from DuBois. Garvey found his task because the West Indies were in a certain situation, and being a black man and limited by this, Garvey felt it necessary to clear a space. And in clearing a space for himself and the Negro people of the West Indies, he cleared up a lot of litter about the history and development of the African people.

Marcus Garvey was not a scholarly man, he was careless in the things he said. He used to say "400 million Negroes"--multiplying the number by two. That is okay with me; he could have multiplied by three as far as I am concerned. He was saying something that had to be said. He had picked it up from various books he had read, but I don't think it was so much a matter of scholarship with him. DuBois had been writing scholarship about Africa for many years. Garvey said: the Negro was born free, but is everywhere in chains, and he must break the chains to recapture a lost freedom. It was a conception, it was a necessity he saw; there was an encumbered space that had to be cleared up, and he did so with great vigor.

Marcus Garvey at his height functioned from about 1917 to about 1923. When he was finished, the Negro people and the people of Africa were an integral part of world history, where they have remained ever since. This despite the mistakes he made.

Garvey mobilized, he put forward schemes that were not very good. Many men have done that. But what Garvey did was to make people understand that the African people had to be incorporated into the future, that they had had a civilization in the past. Garvey did not have the historical knowledge for speaking about Africa's ancient civilizations (which have since been established by scholars), but he felt it was right, that it was needed. Garvey, without scholarship, felt an empty space in the history of the Negro peoples, and according to his limited historical ability, he filled it in the best way he could. In doing so he accomplished, in my opinion, the greatest propaganda feat of the twentieth century. . . .

PADMORE

And now I go quite rapidly to George Padmore. I have to spend a little time here. You know, when I was a boy I lived in Trinidad. My parents were Trinidadian. We knew nothing about Africa except what we had learned from the British. And what they taught us was what they themselves believed about Africa except what we had learned from the British. And what they taught us was what they themselves believed about Africa--or perhaps what they wanted us to believe.

I knew a boy in Trinidad named Malcolm Nurse, who later became George Padmore. I knew his family, he knew mine. He used to go to Arima (Trinidad) as a boy of 10 or 11 where my father used to teach and spend his vacation. During July and August, morning after morning, Malcolm and I used to go to the Arima River to bathe. At the bottom of the hill, which at the top was an ice factory, we'd go walking up the river about a mile to the Blue Basin and swim. We hadn't the faintest idea that the time would come when we would be heading movements in Europe and America for the emancipation of the African people. You never know where you will be and what will happen to you. Well, we remained great friends. In about 1922 he went to the United States and joined the Communist Party. I think he was profoundly influenced by Garvey. I know I was. Because Garvey used to publish a paper called the Negro World, the Trinidad government forbade it coming into the country, but I managed to buy my copy every Saturday morning down St. Vincent Street in Port of Spain. I'm pretty sure George used to read it, too.

Well, Padmore went to England, to America. Then in 1928 the Communist Party made him head of the Negro department of the Third International. I do not think any other Negro had such a position of power and influence in the International. George really was one of the Communist leaders, and he did tremendous work organizing Negroes, stimulating Negroes, writing in Negro journals, writing books, etc., and all with the power and authority of Moscow.

I used to see him. In those days I was a Trotskyist, but we remained good friends and never quarelled about our differences. He was a remarkable man in many respects. One day in 1935, I remember it well, there was a knock at the door of my flat in London. I opened it and there was George. I said, "George, is something wrong?" He said, "I have left those people, you know." I was startled. He supported Moscow, I was against them, and he had left them. So I said, "Well, come in, sit down." I said, "What is it?" He said, "They are changing their policy." And George told me that they had now told him they were going to make friends with the democratic imperialists, Britain, France and the United States; and that future pro-Negro propaganda should be directed against Germany, Japan and Italy, and played quite softly in regard to the "democracies." Padmore said, "But that is impossible." He said, "Germany and Japan have no colonies in Africa, so how can I say that the Negroes in Africa must be emancipated, but they have friends in the democratic imperialists of France and England?" They say, "Well, that is the line." He said, "Well, that may be your line, but that is a mess," and packed up and left.

There was something else very important about him. Padmore remained a leader of the people who had joined him when he worked as a leader of the Communist Party, and no attempt of the Communist Party to change them ever did. I think he was one of the few who were members of the Communist International, left it, and retained his influence over the people he had built up while under their aegis.

At the time I was chairman of an organization in London, "The International African Friends of Ethopia." George joined the organization and when it came to an end, formed the International African Bureau. Padmore was chairman of that, and I was editor of the paper, International African Opinion. The Bureau was at that time the only political organization devoted to the emancipation of the African people. A more tireless leader than George would be hard to imagine: anyone who came from Africa, whether as a member of the government or to

escape persecution by the British police, found his way to Padmore's house and received Padmore's advice.

In New York I met a man called Francis Nkrumah. I used to call him Francis in those days, we all did. We became very friendly, and when he said he was going to London, I wrote a letter to Padmore saying, "George, this young man is coming to you. He is not very bright, but nevertheless do what you can for him because he's determined to throw the Europeans out of Africa." I am not disturbed about saying he was not very bright; he used to talk a lot about imperialism and Leninism and export of capital, and he used to talk a lot of nonsense. But he went to England; Padmore met him at Victoria Station. And he began to work with Padmore. In 1945 there was a conference in Manchester, the Fifth Pan-African Congress, organized by Padmore. Kwame Nkrumah delivered a speech on imperialism which was an absolute masterpiece. He had learned all there was to be learned from Padmore.

From that conference in Manchester in 1945 Padmore got Dr. DuBois to come from the United States and be the chairman because of the work DuBois had done on Pan-Africanism from the time before Padmore had been born.

That was quite an event, in 1945; a little later something happened. Kwane Nkrumah was invited to Ghana to work, the Gold Coast it was called then. The story runs that he didn't want to go particularly, because he was busy organizing in London and Europe. Padmore insisted that he should go. Francis went, and led the revolution, and while that was going on in the west of Africa, the Mau Mau were carrying on their activities in the east, and I want you to understand that we had no idea that the things which we were fighting for would come with such rapidity. Naturally we backed Nkrumah, and Padmore worked with him to the end; I did what I could also. But we had not the faintest idea that after it had taken place in Ghana, before ten years had passed, seven-eighths of Africa would be independent. That demonstrates an important political lesson: do your business, do you work, and trust that things will come your way if you have an idea that is ready to work.

You know, in those days they must have thought Padmore and the rest of us (Jomo Kenyatta was a member, Nkrumah became a member, but most of us were West Indians at the time) were well-meaning but illiterate people talking about the independence of Africa, Pan-Africa, a lot of nonsense. But it turns out that we were right and they, the learned ones, were wrong. We were able to see it because we were members of an oppressed group of people and knew what was in front of us had to be cleared up. That is what made DuBois and Garvey the historical figures that they were. Now Padmore went to Ghana when it was established, working with Nkrumah, organizing the first Conference of Independent African States and the first Conference of African Freedom Fighters. He worked in Ghana until he died, and I was then in the West Indies. Three or four days after I heard the news came a bundle of pamphlets and documents about a conference from Padmore, saying "We have finished and I sent this to you."

FANON

Finally, I wish to discuss Franz Fanon. I want you to follow the general trend. First, DuBois the scholar. A wide range of matters concerning Africa -- he dealt with each of them and laid down lines which are valuable to this day. DuBois introduced Africa to the intellectuals. Then came Garvey, who translated a view of Africa into public property: that was a stage in the development of the consciousness of the world. The next, Padmore, who became a political organizer, was a man very different from Garvey and from DuBois, but an organizer of the first class. And the last one, Fanon, from Martinique, French West Indies, went to France and studied psychiatry. Fanon then went to Algeria and joined the Algerian Revolution. While Padmore organized various people to prepare for the Revolution in Africa, Fanon went himself; he went to Algeria, and as a doctor and a revolutionary he played a tremendous role.

Before he died, he left a book that has recently been translated, called Les Damnes de la Terre. In this book Fanon went a stage beyond DuBois, Garvey and Padmore.

Fanon said: In the nationalist revolution of the twentieth century, the people must be against not only the imperialists. Some of the people's leaders who come forward to lead the revolution have nowhere to lead the people, and the revolution must be as fiercely against them as against the imperialists. He said that some of the writers, having learned all they could from Western civilization, will join the revolution, but bring nothing positive and corrupt the revolutionary movement. The intellectuals will have to learn that they must dig deep among the mass of the population to find the elements of a truly national culture.

While one can find many mistakes in Fanon's work, his greatness lays in this total devotion to the revolution, to wiping away everything but the mass of the population, to creating a new and revolutionary nationalism. Nothing else will do. And the book is, in its way, a hymn to the idea of revolution. Sartre says that Europeans have to read the book because the state in which civilization now is, demands on the part of "les damnes de la terre"--not only the colonial peoples but all who suffer the weight and bitterness of what Western Civilization has done--must feel all this totality of revolution and of what government is as Fanon felt it.

Fanon was swept away by a certain conception, the necessity to finish off what is bound to corrupt and pervert the development of a colonial population. And the value of the book is not only what it says to colonials. It is recognized more and more by Europeans that something of this spirit is needed to rid from Western Civilization the problems and burdens that are pressing down humanity as a whole!

Now I think that this is the final stage which we have reached so far. I don't know where we will reach tomorrow. That is a consistent sequence that tells not only the history of the development of the Black intellectuals, but the history of the

development of ideas which are of the greatest value to civilization as a whole. Fanon calls his book Les Damnes de la Terre; it is translated as the "Wretched of the Earth," but I prefer "The Condemned of the World." I want to end by saying this: the work done by Black intellectuals, stimulated by the needs of the Black people, had better be understocd by the condemned of the earth whether they're in Africa, the United States or Europe. Because if the condemned of the earth do not understand their pasts and know the responsibilities that lie upon them in the future, all on the earth will be condemned. That is the kind of worldwe live in.

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Black Editor: An Interview

The following is from an interview with John Watson, the editor of the Inner City Voice, Detroit's black revolutionary newspaper. Watson has had a wide experience in the movement, both in various aspects of the black student movement and as a black auto and newspaper worker. In addition to being editor of the Inner City Voice, Watson is now the editor of the Wayne State University newspaper, the South End.

Q. What were the origins of the Inner City Voice? What are its aims? What has been its experience?

A. The Inner City Voice was created in response to certain adverse conditions that black militants had found in Detroit and in the country as a whole, conditions stopping the further development of a permanent and powerful revolutionary movement among black people. In the last ten years there has been a rise in consciousness among blacks, particularly students, that created an entirely different political climate. But this has serious drawbacks and hangups. The major one is the general instability of the movement. As far back as 1960 or 1959 there were people involved in various organizations that were single issue oriented, they had some particular object such as a sit-in campaign, police brutality, war, the peace movement, etc. These organizations had a life of their own -- internal organizational activity, with lots of people doing concrete work against the system. But they could not sustain themselves, they would fall apart. Then there would be a new upsurge, a new organization.

There was a wave like character of the movement, it had its ebb and flow, and because it had single issues it had no clear ideology. There was everything from bourgeois integrationists to black nationalists to Marxist-Leninists. But the movement could not keep up with either these single purpose organizations or with the general movement of the black community. Before the July Insurrection we had an advanced community but no organization or leadership as advanced. Therefore, there was no organizational continuity. That is one of the lessons that the July Insurrection reinforced.

How to build a party, a black Bolshevik Party? How to organize black workers coordinate the activities of black students, how to break away from the old radical organizations? As students of history we went back to see how people did these kinds of things, how in particular they attained relative permanence. We had studied the history of the Russian Bolsheviks and found a specific pamphlet by Lenin called "Where to Begin", written in 1903, before he wrote "What is to be Done?," where he described the role a newspaper could play. A newspaper was the focus of a permanent organization, it could provide a bridge between the peaks of activity. It creates an organization and organizes the division of labor among revolutionaries. Revolutionaries do something, not just a meeting on Sunday, making speeches and passing resolutions. It creates the kind of division of labor needed not just for the newspaper but for a revolutionary organization.

It was these tasks that we set out to perform through the creation of the Inner City Voice. The people who created it were Marxist-Leninists, revolutionary socialists, or at least thought of themselves in this way. We wanted to build an organization of black workers, of black students, both in high schools and colleges, and ultimately to create a black Marxist-Leninist Party, flowing from the newspaper.

This was no easy task - we draw all our resources from the black community. And there was no experience among us in terms of publishing, we had

no experience insofar as conducting a business operation, we had no money. When we first began we went around to a lot of people. Lenin's idea about a newspaper seemed so logical to us but unfortunately many people didn't see it. Only some young black radicals did. We had only to face the question of going ahead and creating that kind of paper. We had a lot to learn. We had an organization that operated day-to-day rather than week-to-week and meeting-to-meeting. And that kind of activity got us involved in all the problems of people working closely together on a day-by-day basis. We had to solve this.

We started work in May of 1967. We worked through the July Insurrection and came out finally in September. There was a great deal of criticism of the paper, we had too many typos, the articles had errors, etc., etc., but the important thing is that each issue has improved from the experience of the last issue. We had to make our own experience, typos and all.

When we first began there was the question about whether we were a vague black nationalist organization or a Marxist-Leninist organization. The revolutionaries won despite the fact that because we have not yet written out a program, many essentially reformist people came around to play off the rhetoric of the movement.

The Inner City Voice has proven many things. It is a very popular paper. We have been printing 10,000 copies each recent issue and these have been almost all sold. We are popular despite the sporadic nature of prcduction - we have only been coming out about once a month. Even the most reformist cannot attack us because we have created an independent base in the black community. No one can redbait us -- a lot of people read the paper and we can attack and hurt those who call us "Black Power Communists." The power of the black left has been able to increase through the Inner City Voice.

We are well received in the black community. Most of our problems are financial. The organization of circulation is very diffuse. It is difficult to get back full value from sales. But we have managed to survive. And more than that. Since the initiation of the Voice, several other things have happened. All of them, including the development of the Voice, are part of an objective development around which groups could coalesce. And this has been so because the first problem has been solved: despite the ebb and flow of activity, we have a permanent organization.

Around the Voice there is a conglomeration of activity. We have our office in a large building with our own coffee house and with our own school, teaching black history and now courses in Marxism-Leninism. The coffee house is very popular with the community. Also housed in the same building is the new publication, the Black Student Voice, which coordinates the activities of the spontaneous groups that have been formed in inner city schools. We are involved with organizing workers. At the Dodge Main plant in Hamtramack, 60-70% of the workers are black.

(continued on page 36)


6-17-50

Michael Kalmen

Some of the Inner City Voice people were working there and were deeply involved in a wildcat strike. Out of this came the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement and now a weekly paper, DRUM. This is a very important development because this is the first time recently that black radicals, any radicals for that matter in the country, have organized workers.

What we know is that black workers have the power to close down the American economy. Only workers can end the war and black workers will be and are in the lead. Only the working class can carry through the revolution. Ultimately we must see all segments united around the working class in a revolutionary party - workers, students, intellectuals, community organizations.

The newspaper is moving in this direction. The Inner City Voice has gone far to accomplish what Lenin described in "Where to Begin". It has been the focus of a permanent organization, it provided a bridge between peaks of activity. It has organized the division of labor among black revolutionaries and created a network throughout the community.

Q. Stokley Carmichael in a speech to the Black Panther conference in Oakland some months ago said that socialism and communism were not for black people, despite the fact that he had been going all over the world, including to the OLAS conference in Havana, speaking for socialism. What is your reaction to all of this?

A. Our position on this is that it is bullshit. To say socialism or communism is irrelevent is foolish and we oppose this. We know, of course, that you don't go around to the ghetto community and tell them with every breath that socialism is the answer. You organize around concrete issues. But in a public debate in which this subject comes up, we oppose Stokley. There are a number of different kinds of black nationalists. I don't know exactly where Stokley stands. There are black capitalists, there are black mystics, there are black community organization types, there are those with no ideology, there

are those who see it as a straight cultural matter, a matter of identity.

We take a Marxist-Leninist position. The question of black people in the United States is a caste and class problem. Black men are exploited as a function of the capitalist system as a whole by white capital. Racism is a tool which the man uses to carry out his exploitation. And we are no more for integrated capitalism than segregated capitalism. Neither are we in favor of a separate state, based on the same class lines as in this society. We are against a separate state in which a black capitalist class exploits a black proletariat. We are opposed also to all sorts of haphazard analyses which certain revolutionaries talk, even in semi-socialist terms, haphazard talk which doesn't tell us what to do with the United States capitalism and imperialism - As to separatism, we leave that question until it can be decided by the whole black people, after the destruction of capitalism.

If Stokley comes to Detroit, in a city with socialized production, owned by capitalists, in which speedup, bad working conditions, automation, "niggermation" (in which one black man does the job previously done by three white men) prevail, what does he say? Is he for the white capitalists? Is he for turning the industry over to black capitalists? Is he for destroying industry? Is he for black workers being exploited no more than white workers?

There is a struggle over cultural nationalism and it is not an abstract ideological question. There is all sorts of analyses but unless we see slavery and racism as extended under capitalism as tools of capitalism, we cannot go anywhere. What should we do? Work primarily with students? Work primarily with workers? Get students involved with workers? These are concrete questions.

I don't know whether Stokley has capitulated to the cultural nationalists. I am surprised by someone who goes around the world and makes all sorts of statements, revolutionary statements, and comes

back here and makes statements like the one at the Black Panther rally. We note that Huey Newton, the Black Panther leader, from jail said that blacks must be socialists. Not an abstraction which you preach at people but a concrete ideology which directs what you do.

A lot of black nationalists go around and say we need a new ideology because the experiences of black folk are different. But these people have never studied history, not even the history of black people in this country. They talk of a new ideology, out of the sky, rather than looking to Marxism-Leninism. Not that the Marxism of the past had all the answers. But we know that Marxism is a particular method and that it is a newer and more inherently revolutionary method of gaining black freedom than haphazard analysis. Of course, there should be discussion in the movement but this is our point of view.

There are all sorts of people who say that what we need is black unity. But the thing is that the real world doesn't operate that way. There are real differences in the black community and some of them are class or at least semi-class based. We are one contending force in that community. We have to put forward not a diluted reformist program based on a false unity, but our point of view and win that struggle. We cannot unify with everybody. That's bullshit. Certain programs we can support wholeheartedly, certain programs we can support tactically and certain programs we can't have anything to do with at all. We can coexist with cultural nationalists but we are black Marxist-Leninists and therefore when Stokley is attacking socialism he is attacking us. How can socialism be irrelevant? We don't understand that.

Sunday, 7 July 1968
Detroit, Michigan

Boston Road Blues

Boston Road is as wide as a boulevard
but lacks the classic grandeur of verdure
Tenements and bleacher-like stoops
line the cobblestone expanse through Mid-Bronx
the cars & trucks sound faster then they go
often
cobbled stone runs up into pink brick
of the Housing Authority's stadium

ride a speeding Bonneville
along this main street
and you will see the Negroes waiting on either side
on stoops on dinette and aluminum beach chairs
like the retired
bop cap and sneakered Jews
of the Grand Concourse

at 149th st Boston Road passes perpendicular
under the El
then the Shadow Box Cabaret, Freddy's, the Oasis,
Sylvia's Blue Morocco, Paradise Club, Goodson's
on to Crotona Park
where one summer of the fifth decade
the burning Enchanters bopped down
on the Crowns, the Bathgate Avenue Stompers,
and the Scorpions from PR
in rapid fury & succession
and now where the same adolescents
play softball for the Youth Board.

and the inlet to Public School 55
the swinging "Cadillacs" always took
Earl at the fishtail wheel
responding to 'hey Speedo' when in reality
his real name *was* Mister Earl
singing as he was
his teeth jumbled & contorted
the Cadillacs personnel tall and short
sundry and aloof
gleaming bemused hair
the only top to the convertible
the only road map to the sun.
parked in front of all-girl Jane Addams
their marijuana their argot their ornate auto
routed by a militant lady principal...
All the quartets sang louder
when the Cadillacs cruised Brook Avenue—

P.S. 55 is to integrated this Autumn
the Cadillacs have passed (Earl now with the Coasters)
and the Housing Authority has arrived
as influential as Jesus
as gigantic as the Tennessee Valley Authority.
1501 Boston Road is Bronx C.O.R.E.
(stompers haven risen to politics)
Herb Callender Isiah Brunson knife riding
shit talking genius pacifist—
The road swirls until ghetto limits
where above two hundred street
it becomes tar smooth single similar double
caucasian family homes
and Boston Road become Boston Post Road.

II
When I was a singer
I stayed on Boston Road

among the cabarets & the singers: the Dells,
the Mellotones, the Cadillacs...
our quartet calling ourselves Starsteppers
(perhaps to insure a goal
other than a ghetto)
evinced no concept of space save
where the cobblestone Road
and the bleachers-on-residence tampered to a point
where The Road became post—itself.

by twilight the clubs released their exotic lures
Sylvia's Blue Morocco sheds blue light both neon & real
on sidewalk and cobblestones between Shabazz Beauty Parlor
& Denzil's Fabulous candystore
Velvet Blue drapes hang ceiling to floor
and all to be seen inside is the spotlighted face
of the singer the dim blue faces of the music
the soloist the master of ceremonies —heads
truncated in blackness
puppeted by galloping Hessians from Scarsdale

And Freddy's white enamel front white lights
all outward upward
harlem jazz exude bandstand tall /mixing
with moth & mosquito insect-serendipity
all white light reflected spill over bleacher sitters
parked car residers, vigillers, standee's dispersed
and reassembled.
The tenements soar skyward
half white light half black dwindling to sky
stars dismissed by energy of mortals.
& for a moment Club 845 the combo in the window (display)
sunday combination cocktail sips jam sessions
for bored number players 4pm to 8pm
after church and before chicken.

III
We Starsteppers
wore the same type cord suit blue
and as a rhythm 'n' blues singer my PAT BOONE endorsed
one afforded uniform discomfort as just reward
for being in a hurry in an 125th Street clothing store
(probably thinking the street was in Harlem)
and contributing to the corny man (: Patrick Alphonse Boone
Columbia University 1959)
who stole Little Richard's tunes
& parodied them into a fortune.
Little Richard receiving lyricist royalties
but no TV show
no life insurance & old age compensation
only a backwater church Southern
the God
the Holy Ghost
the Son
of a pagan country.

The Starstepper organization carried four singers
three managers and a lopsided Cadillac
Let's take a cocktail sip
and talk of the crippled '55 Caddy in 1960
—the epoch of reform—
Buddy, our main manager, wrote and recorded a song
called "SCHBOOM"
then the Crewcuts swept away the bread
the Man couldn't use a colored group on TV 1954
Buddy got the writer's royalties /tho
and I would suppose that Sunset Boulevard
in a brand new white caddy convertible
things travel quickly
as that colored group did in L.A.
singing the Crewcuts song.
Spenser—yet another manager—

torpedo-head lank lipped sold "Let the Little Girl Dance"
for one hundred bills
Fat Billy Bland & three young colored girls took over
and Spenser
because he had a hit record (moneywise not his)
sported his long red conk all over Tin Pan Alley
haranguing the Brill Building and shit
borrowing the singled axled Cadillac
by day
to return at night
hair out of gas car out of gas
spent

IV
So
after record hops (anywhere and everyone)
community center and house party gigs
background harmony (of our own invention) for
BIG TIME RECORD COMPANY
ten dollars a day
steady gigging Goodson's (gay) Little Club
on Boston-Road-by-Randolph
(The clientele loved fresh young talented
they said / Goodson too)
We recorded Broadway in a white Cadillac
High School boys & old hustlers
Handkerchiefs Sabu over Pozner-fresh conk
black and red

Then one day I told Goodson, sir
the Starsteppers have a recording out now
and we are not accepting anymore clubdates
on Boston Road, our managers have instructed me
to tell you.
ZAP!

Outside the "Little" club on the Road that last night
I watched the tiny attracter light
swing its eerie strobic beam twenty times yellow
a minute
to the street stones of steep 167th
long across Boston Road the island in front of A&P
through the trees catching the tenements high
then diffused and broken runs to re/wing
the tiny canopy of Goodson's Little Club
then down 167th again
(which in the Bronx has a common level of understanding)
take Sunset Boulevard
to give a sense of dimension

Later
the higher forms of publicity
our managers had subsequently informed
Mr. Goodson of
consisted of giving all available copies
of our hit record to friends
occasional pilgrimages downtown
for pep talks about word-of-mouth
waiting days waiting nights
New York Radio stations New Jersey Stations
(WVNJ played it at six one morning)
JOCKO MURRAY THE K ALLEN FREED CLAY COLE
DR JIVE BRUCE THE MOOSE announcing to their
boys & girls the new boss hit by the starsteppers
"You're Gone" the flip side that you'll wig over
"The First Sign of Love"

We were told
it often takes months up to a year
for a record to be picked up on
sometimes they start big on the Coast
we waited

six months a year
reading CASHBOX weekly
we waited (never to Goodson again)
we waited
and after a while
started singing to ourselves once more.

David Henderson

New Perspectives on American Radicalism

Paul Buhle

Only the naive or the willfully blind can believe that the Left has not failed in America. A successful radical struggle forcing U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam (and there is every reason to believe it is the victory of the Vietnamese, and not our own feeble protests, that can accomplish this end) would be a striking exception to American history. The gains in unionization of industrial workers have arrived alongside a massive dessecation and fragmentation of American culture and an ever-increasing American imperialism. As life at home mirrors a subtle social manipulation, and our government's foreign policy teeters always on the edge of nuclear attack on People's China, the positivist notion that socialism can be gained by accretion, or gradual transformation, becomes a ghastly irony. It is time for a major reassessment of our traditions and the basis on which we stand.

To a student of intellectual history, the most glaring defect of American radicalism has been its failure in analytical terms, the almost total inability of radicals to grasp rudimentary problems of revolutionary development. It is significant that of the few countrymen who have made anything approaching independent contributions to Marxist theory--Daniel DeLeon, L. C. Fraina/Lewis Corey, Paul Baran, Paul Sweezy, Herbert Marcuse and C.L.R. James--only two were American educated (and even in those cases, a major European influence could be argued). The explanation cannot be that Marxism has been

"foreign" to American conditions, but rather that American radicals have been foreign to Marxism.

One key is the wide acceptance of a petrified version of Marxism developed during the Second International and challenged but only temporarily defeated by Leninism. As early as the 1890's, the implications of this acceptance were clear. Daniel DeLeon, widely known at the time as the most orthodox of Marxists, freely admitted that he gained his first taste for Marxism from Lewis Henry Morgan, the anthropologist, and just as DeLeon continued to call his methodology the "Marx-Morgan System," he sprinkled his famous speeches with continual analogies between man and nature, modern history with the pre-ancient history that Morgan described. The one Marxist classic which seems to have made a great impression on DeLeon was not Capital but rather Engels' Anti-Duhring, the very work which developed the notion of a "dialectic of nature," in which the history of man could be interpreted as mechanical and pre-determined.[1]

Concommitant with the use of a stultified Marxism which "explained" the world in static terms was, in DeLeon and his successors in American socialism, a crude adaptation to American traditions and history. In the early days of his Socialist Labor Party leadership, DeLeon continually asserted that the SLP was the "third third party" of American history (hence, following the parties of Jefferson and Lincoln), that the socialists were the abolitionists of wage slavery just as the abolitionists of earlier years helped banish black slavery. It seems clear that Marxism to DeLeon meant not a dialectical approach to human events, but a system which allowed in theory a nineteenth-century assurance that Science resided with the socialist movement, and in practice a crude materialism which was, in fact, a characteristic throwback to the ideology of the bourgeois revolutions,[2] for DeLeon continued to hold in practice that the mass of wage-earners responded only to their immediate material needs. In retrospect his actions seem pragmatic, but tempered by a shrewd

consciousness of the implications of the proletariat's relative economic position in society.[3] DeLeon's failure to build a leading socialist party reflected that not he, but Debsian socialism, was the successor to the American reform tradition.

DEBSIAN SCCIALISM

In recent years the Debsian socialist movement has, for very good reasons, been debated in the sharpest terms. The Socialist Party at its height had a major press all across the country and grassroots of socialist belief that no party has approached since, and therefore its successes and failures must weigh heavily on those who look toward the creation of a new revolutionary movement. The central point in the discussion of radical historians has been the rapid transformation of the Socialist Party from a party of largely American-born skilled workers, farmers and others in 1912 to a party of largely foreign-born industrial unskilled workers in 1919.[4] One solution to this puzzle has always been obvious, and was stressed by the old socialist leader James Maurer three decades ago: the pre-World War I civilization was dramatically, almost totally different from our own in some ways. The mass slaughter of world war, the concentration camps and ovens, the extent of perversion of culture into a saleable commodity, were scarcely imagineable in those times. There was, perhaps, good reason to believe that capitalism had gone through its heroic period in the world and was "logically" due to disappear rapidly. More important than a timetable for the arrival of socialism was the linear mentality of the socialists themselves, who believed with historically understandable optimism that things were getting better and better, that socialism was the logical fulfillment of the American Dream. The war, the Wilson administration's appeals, the repression in America, the coming of the Bolshevik revolution shattered the ideological basis for a world-view; and in the wake of those events, the American socialist movement was left a shambles.

Foreign-born workers, with fewer illusions and perhaps less to lose, took up the slack only so long as European revolutions seemed in the offing.

Significantly, in the last years of Debsian socialism there were those who reached out for a new understanding. Louis C. Fraina began to analyze capitalism as a system, picturing Progressivism as essentially a regulative device for monopoly's interests, viewing philosophy as a servant of the system, studying Futurism, the poetry of Robert Frost, and even jazz dancing as symbols of the cultural stage through which Americans were passing.[5] In 1917-1918 Fraina tried to develop a new strategy for revolution in the U.S., piecing together syndicalist, Bolshevik and left-socialist theories into the notion of "mass action," which sought to return the motor of the revolution to the industrial masses. Similarly, the talented editors and contributors to the Masses and the Liberator developed new dimensions for the political cartoon, a rudimentary social criticism of American mores (with a vague but real grasp of the generational revolt), and an alliance with the most creative elements of the artistic community which the Left has never fully revived.[6] Of course, neither Fraina nor the Masses editors went far, and their cultural insights were due more to an insightful socialist humanism than a conscious use of Marxist methodology; but the poverty of American radicalism can be measured by the failure of the Left to advance further analytically until the 1960's.

Most of all the failure of Americal socialism in the 1920's was that it could not outgrow the basis of its strength, its links to American reformism. Liberalism on the one side, and the Bolshevism of the Third International on the other, proved poles irresistable to the weakness of the American movements. The most profound cultural criticism of America in the decade was perhaps provided neither by the New era liberals or the blindly groping communist movement, but by T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound who attempted to grasp American culture

as a total entity and sought a monolithic rejection of its modern tenets.

In time the Marxian critique of America became an undialectical account of capitalist economics and its "inevitable" crash, along with a side-dish of tasty fictional sentimentalism provided by the proletarian artists for those who could not easily absorb a turgid row of statistics. It was not an accident that DeLeon had translated for mass consumption Ferdinand Lasalle's Franz Von Sickingen, condemned by Marx for historical inaccuracy, or Eugene Sue's proletarian vignettes whose fraudulent glorification of the common people was anathema to the leader of the First International. Similarly, it was a distinct symbol of the quality of American Marxism (and not merely "Stalinism") that good authors in the 1930's distorted their art for the sake of a political cause. For in both cases, as throughout most of American Marxist history, "culture" was viewed not as a critical social mechanism, but as a product of certain specialized types (as personally fragmented as the tough-talking party bureaucrats) whose role was to inspire and not to teach.[7]

THE 1930's

In a political sense, the 1930's activities represent the watershed--but also the fulfillment--of a phase of American radicalism. The Depression descended at a time when the Left was at its weakest, most fragmented stage; the Socialist Party was a decayed body, the Communist Party a bureaucratized sect. The first half of the decade was spent in a desperate but futile attempt to break from the pattern. Communist Party internal life became increasingly rigidified and intolerant of political deviations--Earl Browder commented proudly in 1935 that the Party burned out factionalism "with a hot iron"--and while the Communists sought to gain hegemony over all sectors of a leftward-moving public, it mostly succeeded in alienating its allies. But whatever its failings, it organized people most effectively and

very early established an almost total, unbreakable hegemony on radicalized workers. The Socialists' leadership shifted, by the middle of the 1930's, from the Old Guard, social-democratic chiefs to a new group of middle-class editors, churchmen and pacifists, allied with the municipal socialists who still retained some local power in places like Milwaukee, Reading (Pennsylvania) and Bridgeport (Connecticut); but the attempt to revitalize and revolutionize the party was a distinct failure. In neither case did really new attempts to assess American life emerge: old Marxists repeated ad nauseum the inevitable economic breakdown of capitalism, and young followers flocked to factories to proclaim the messianism of the industrial proletariat, to compuses to fight for a liberal-radical "no war" pledge.

The irony was that the radicals, far from a vanguard, were the followers of events in America. While the Communist Party tightened its hold upon its followers and the sects, along with the Socialists, struggled for a reorientation that never took shape, the labor movement was preparing itself (albeit with the rank-and-file help of radicals) for a new leap. The General Strike in San Francisco, the victorious battles of workers in Minneapolis and Toledo were not signs of a coming revolution but indications of the workers' determination for unionization. Over the next fifteen years, the power of American liberal capitalism was once more vividly demonstrated: the industrial union idea, popularized by radicals like DeLeon and the I.W.W., became the most effective means ever developed to discipline workers in the industrial plants and integrate a whole stratum of Americans into the system. The irony was that the socialists and communists of the 1930's scarcely dreamed of the results of their labor.

No doubt the situation was so tempting that new leftists today would have difficulty being wiser. For many young radicals then, and especially intellectuals, working in a plant to organize the proletariat was a means of destroying their own

identity, of communing with a group which seemed more real and powerful than their own. For others, walking picket lines and boycotting goods was a direct continuation of the Progressive tradition of paternalism toward the lower classes, a manifestation of middle-class guilt. For still others, who came out of the working class, it was a career-fulfillment at the same time as a radical promise (just as, for an earlier generation of skilled foreign-born workers, the American Federation of Labor was both a vehicle for social mobility and a place where a certain kind of socialism could be advocated). When millions of American workers seemed to need only a union to salvage their humanity and put food on their tables, the role of radical organizations was simple: organize now, talk later.[8]

Thus by the late 1930's, radicals had fulfilled their mission of introducing a countervailing but non-revolutionary force which aided the anti-revolutionary pluralism of the New Deal coalition. The Popular Front, which non-Communist party radicals have always believed "sold out" the Revolution, was only a symbol of what already existed. In its writing, in its style of politics, in its general orientation, the Popular Front was nothing so much as a reassertion of the American reform tradition (real or imagined). James Weinstein and Martin Sklar have pointed out that Communist Party policies in the 1930's were foreign imports, having nothing to do with bringing socialism to America.[9] But that is only half the equation. The "foreign" inspired alliance of liberals and radicals was also the fruition of the dreams of liberal-radical American intellectuals and of industrial workers who believed in American culture: the best of both worlds, the security of the American tradition and the militancy of anti-fascism. The Communist Party, which by 1938 entirely dominated the American Left, was a true replica of its vision that "Socialism is Twentieth-Century Americanism." Its positivism was total, its notion of achieving socialism a classical bit of nineteenth century optimism based upon the supposedly revolutionary traditions laid down by the

Founding Fathers and renewed by Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln. If the New Masses, therefore, blew hot and cold on Roosevelt, depending upon whether he was sending strikebreakers to Flint, Michigan or fighting the Supreme Court, it was not "communist jesuitism" but the incapability of a consistent analysis bearing down upon the Party. Desperate to find an American heritage for their "revolutionary" politics, the Communists helped to prevent a realistic analysis of history and a set of strategy/tactics for mid-century America.

The 1940's and 1950's were post-fulfillment for the Left generations active in the 1930's. The CIO was "radical" primarily in the sense that socialists and communists had power in the unions' leadership circles (or personal influence among the workers) and not in the sense that rank-and-filers became committed revolutionaries. The strikes during the war, and especially 1945-46, indicated a persistent militancy, but the radicals by every indication rode the crest of the wave, making gains insignificant to their losses from the previous decade. For the Revolution was over. The dreams of most Leftists in the 1930's had been based on (1) the proposition that the American economy could not recover; and (2) the belief that the Soviet Union was building a socialist democracy. The Wartime prosperity and the disillusionment in Stalinism (the Moscow Trials, Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, adherance to the "no-strike" pledge) destroyed the basis for radical faith, as the coming of World War I had destroyed the basis for Debsian Socialist optimism. Given the continued economic growth after World War II, it was probably inevitable that radical union leadership would be stultified and become opportunistic; the witchhunts and successful "Red Purges" indicated primarily that most leaders knew which way the wind was blowing.

Similarly, the intellectuals and middle-class elements of radicalism crumbled under the new conditions. As Kolko has phrased it, the socialists and communists by 1945 hoped to succeed with the middle-class as they had failed with the workers. From both movements, the promise was essentially: socialism can give economic order to America, end depressions and war, and eliminate exploitation (racial, class, national). The Communists added that a first step from monopoly control, the Progressive program of Henry Wallace, would cool the war tensions and renew the New Deal alliances. But socialists and communists made their offers from positions of weakness, and their promises were so close to those of orthodox Liberals that it must have seemed the latter could fulfill the practical ones, anyway. The growing anti-Communism (which the socialists helped promote) was close to a fundamental anti-radicalism, and by 1950 the international spectre of Soviet "totalitarianism" (a term which was, ahistorically, used on Nazism and Communism alike) brought an almost-total American unity. Finally, those who dissented were silenced by various forms of persecution. By the mid-1950's the largest remaining segment of the Left had the Guardian; other grouplets had sectarian organs, or an emotional stake in one of the new journals (Dissent, American Socialist, Monthly Review, or Studies On the Left whose appearance in 1959 welcomed the end of the decade) which were the most hopeful signs of a future re-awakening.

The 1950's were for the Left a remarkably fruitful period of depression, ultimately more productive than either the 1920's or the 1940's despite the utterly low level of activity. The final death of the old tendencies as significant forces even over the Left freed new energies and created new possibilities for development. The black movement, so long shunted aside or misused by the white Left, came to stage center and dominated the open

activities of American radicalism. Characteristically, the movement at first assumed form reminiscent of the Popular Front: an appeal for amelioration within capitalism until the Judgment Day (analogous to white radicals' vision of socialism) far off. But much more than the Popular Front the indigenous radicalism of the blacks was their own product, thus capable of transforming itself. Concommitantly, the figure Mailer called the "White Negro," the hipster, appeared and attempted to reject American culture as a totality.

IN WITH THE NEW

By the coming of the 1960's, the forms which emerged were not so nearly bound by the past. The "End of Ideology" doctrine of the mid-1950's had its grain of truth: the old mechanistic Marxist notions did not explain reality for most of the American people. Marxists could explain in the crudest terms why "underdeveloped" countries were exploited, why blacks in America were underprivileged--but they could not explain the growing sense of emptiness among the well-clothed and well-fed Americans, the deeply cultural crisis that swept across America. Certainly, the early new leftists had no better ideas; but they were not bound to repeat the stories of impending economic disaster, or the various versions of what the Soviet Union was (or was not). They had the potentiality (if by no means the certainty) of sensing and analyzing the ways in which people's lives had been changed under modern capitalism and ultimately reworking the half-truths of American mythology into a new Marxist synthesis.

Most of all, the failure of the various "Old Lefts" in the 1890's, 1910's and 1930's was a failure to grasp the American reality and reformulate an analysis to transform it. The notions they possessed of Marxism have made that methodology, in popular eyes, synonymous with the crudest materialism of ascribing people's motives to their

immediate economic interests. When the notion of "culture" was dealt with at all, it was broken down mechanistically into class components with one (high) culture for the ruling class and another for the toilers. Rarely if ever was culture seen as a mediation between immediate economic concerns and ideology, seen as the way in which people adjust their understanding to live their lives within a system. Still less rarely was the possibility of a mass cultural bourgeoisification recognized; the role of advertising and the mass media in penetrating the consciousness, in making a group of people into a mass, were apparently never considered.[10] One result of this analytical failure was an inability to recognize the possibility that the most militant of union struggles may have been non-revolutionary in nature, a striving for an updating of the Social Contract (with rights for the owners and workers, in a common scheme of development). Another has been the fluctuation of the Left between an ultra-militant rhetoric (often in the periods of the greatest weakness) and as adaptation to the most unradical of conditions and relationships. Again, the liberal historians of radicalism have captured a half-truth: the inapplicability of mechanistic Marxism to the problems of modern America (and indeed any developed capitalist country) doomed the movements to bobbing on the seas of American development, intermittently deluded by the numbers gathered around their reform struggles.

One would, ideally, be able to relate this failure of Marxists to some form of positivism inherent in the American culture. Unfortunately the links between intellectual analysis and social history, especially over two centuries, are difficult to establish. At least one thing is clear: radicals have failed to oppose the perverse logic of a culture which, in the twentieth century, has assumed a deadly potentiality to all the people of the world. The drive for profits of corporations which do not depend upon certain individuals for their perpetuation and expansion, the thrust of

foreign domination which by its own logical development creates weapons which threaten the destruction of all civilization--these are the products of American society today. This is what Marcuse means when he says that the death camps of Dachau are the symbol of our civilization: there can be no simple reconciliation with the old radical notion that American society possessed healthy, democratic culture which only the militarists and corporation presidents temporarily polluted. The worst of the New Left's heritage is the Old Left's failure to break decisively with that culture, to willingly throw aside old illusions about traditions and groups and begin to propose alternatives.

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1. For an account of DeLeon's activities and theories in the 1890's, see Paul Buhle, "The Struggle for Socialism in America: the 1890's," PL, July-August, 1967. The notion that Engels inadvertantly helped lay the basis for mechanistic Marxism is demonstrated in Donald C. Hedges, "Engels' Contribution to Marxism," Socialist Register, 1965.
2. What are the implications of this? In some countries (e.g., Germany) the retrogression to mechanistic materialism could be credited to the incompletion of the bourgeoisie revolution. In America, it can be explained partially by the German dominance of American socialist ideology--especially through Kautsky--and the difficulty of Marxism penetrating a cohesive positivism very strong in America by the turn of the century.
3. DeLeon held that the economic position of the proletariat made its ascendence to revolution more difficult than that of the brougeoisie, because while bourgeois economic power continued to grow and drag along its ideology, the proletariat was perpetually weak and more susceptable to lures--and to capitalist ideological formations. See the brilliant Two Pages From Roman History, which Lenin sought to print in Russian around 1922.
4. One recent debate has been between Paul Buhle and James Weinstein, "The Meaning of Debsian Socialism,"

Radical America, January-February, 1968.

5. Fraina's role, so long ignored, is now being re-examined. See especially a forthcoming collection of Fraina's aesthetic works, edited with an introduction by Lee Baxandall.
6. See Echoes of Revolt, an anthology of the Masses, which despite its weaknesses makes available a wealth of original material which new leftists can study for technique, style, etc.
7. A brilliant interpretation of the cultural problem is contained in the various essays of T. W. Adorno, Prisms (London: 1967), the first collection of essays in English by that author.
8. I do not mean to imply that radicals should not have helped industrial union organization, but that the problems arising from it may well have been insuperable for a sustaining radicalism.
9. Weinstein and Sklar, "Socialism and the New Left," Studies On the Left, March-April, 1966.
10. Gabriel Kolko, "The Decline of American Radicalism," Studies On the Left, Sept.-Oct., 1966. This invaluable article has now been reprinted as a REP pamphlet.
11. See Adorno, Prisms, and Herbert Marcuse, "The Affirmative Nature of Culture," in Negations, for an explication of this difficult concept.

The Poets

Dan Georgakas

Poems from Prison by Etheridge Knight, Broadside Press, $1.
Think Black & Black Pride by Don Lee, Broadside Press, $1 each.
Cities Burning by Dudley Randall, Broadside Press, $1.
Broadside Press, 12651 Old Mill Place, Detroit Michigan, 48238.

The Black Revolution is unleashing creative forces that have been deformed and bound for centuries. The poetry that is beginning to emerge from the Black Power phase shows how much we all have to gain. One of the new voices belongs to Etheridge Knight who says of himself, "I died in Korea from a shrapnel wound and narcotics resurrected me. I died in 1960 from a prison sentence and poetry brought me back to life."

Knight's work will not please the literary profs or the loveniks. His most moving poem is for Hard Rock, "known not to take no shit from nobody." Hard Rock is the tough nigger con who cannot be stopped by anything less than a lobotomy. The other prisoners are heartbroken to see their "Destroyer" crushed. Only the myth of Hard Rock lives, "the jewel of a myth that Hard Rock once bit/A screw on the thumb and poisoned him with syphlitic spit."

In Knight's poems on Malcolm, in his harshly chisled haiku, and in the moving Idea of Ancestry, the revolution smashes through prison walls and comes out enriched. Knight's work is somewhat uneven. This is most evident when he indulges a taste for the kind of stuff found in textbooks or attempts to define his people with European mythology. At those times his voice becomes

self conscious and he loses the power that marks this section of one of his Malcolm poems:

> You rocked too many boats, man.
> Pulled too many coats, man.
> Saw through the jive.
> You reached the wild guys
> Like me. You and Bird. (And that
> Lil LeRoi cat.)

LEE

Those who suspect an irrational reverse racist (hideous white term) beneath every natural might benefit from Don Lee's introduction to his first book of poems, "I was born into slavery in Feb. of 1942. In the spring of that same year 110,000 persons of Japanese descent were placed in protective custody by the white people of the United States." One of the concerns of poets like Lee is that blacks never submit to that kind of treatment, much less the treatment accorded to Jews by the Nazis. Thus his attacks on William Faulkner, Louis Lomax, Frank Yerby, and Ralph Ellison are not a literary game but a matter of survival. The bouquets for Du Bois, Turner, and Fanon only emphasize the rich and varied soil black poets are growing in.

Lee's poems are hard and exciting even tho there are few quotable lines or individual poems that stick with the reader. What does stick is the total impact of the creation. His second book is better than his first. The symbols, forms, images, and words are coming together in ever stronger combinations. Lee has been spared the odyssey of Le Roi Jones. He is spending his formative years developing his power, listening to black people, and talking to black people. And poets like Lee and Knight and all the others who are benefiting from the supreme and costly effort to return to Black pioneered by Jones are talking to blacks. Their books sell in the small militant bookshops found in every ghetto, Moore's in San Francisco, Vaughn's in Detroit. Any whites who happen along are getting

a good ride cheap. Lee's work is the black revolution in process, just as Lee is the black poet as becoming.

RANDALL

The very title of Dudley Randall's first collection shows how far black writers have had to travel. Randall is of an older generation of black poets. He was in the fight to see blacks accepted into white anthologies as equals. He knew the neglect of M. B. Tolson and the strange role Langston Hughes was cast in. Randall has lived through the Malcolm revolution and he has emerged, refreshed and renewed. With a trace of respect for Booker T., Dudley has taken sides with W.E.B. If his Dressed All In Pink and Ballad of Birmingham seem too routine for some ears then his Black Poet, White Critic and the Idiot prove he is indeed of the time of the burning of cities. He writes, The age/ requires this task: /create/ a different image; /re-animate/ the mask.

Randall is a fine poet but he is an even greater editor, perhaps the most important black editor now publishing. His Broadside Press was responsible for the dynamic For Malcolm: Poems on the life and death of Malcolm X with tributes from just about every black poet now writing. His excellent broadside series has featured the work of over twenty different poets on posters. In addition to the books mentioned here and a possible publication of a collection of works by Sonia Sanchez, one of the best black poets who writes not only of the black revolution but of the revolution of black women, Broadside Press is preparing Black Arts, an anthology of black creations which should be as explosive as the Malcolm volume.

The titles of the books discussed here, Black Pride, Poems From Prison, Think Black, and Cities Burning are like touchstones of the revolution. The language of the books is the language of the black masses. Their point of view will offend and frighten non-revolutionary whites.

A whole generation of black artists coming by way of different roads is now completely in and of the black revolution. They do not need the approval of the outside, but they do not feel automatic hostility to it. Their work has a living audience. They have been forced to create their own press just as they have created their own audience because white America had no room for them, not even the white America of the small magazines and mimeos. The blacks are doing their own thing now and they are doing it very well.

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DARK PROPHESY

I sing of shine

And, yeah, brothers,
while white/america sings about the unsink
able molly brown
(who was hustling the titanic
when it went down
I sing to thee of Shine
the stoker who was hip
enough to flee the fucking ship
and let the white folks drown
with screams on their lips
(jumped his black ass into the dark sea,Shine did,
broke free from the straining steel.
Yeah, I sing of Shine
and how the millionaire banker stood on the deck
and pulled from his pocket a million dollar check
saying Shine Shine save poor me
and I'll give you all the money a black boy needs--
how Shine looked at the money and then at the sea
and said jump in muthafucka and swim like me--

Shine swam on--Shine swam on--
how the banker's daughter ran naked on the deck
with her pink tits trembling and her pants roun her neck
screaming Shine Shine save poor me
and I'll give you all the cunt a black boy needs--
how Shine said now cunt is good and that's no jive
but you got to swim not fuck to stay alive--
how Shine swam past a preacher afloat on a board
crying save me nigger Shine in the name of the Lord--
how the preacher grabbed Shine's arm and broke his stroke--
how Shine pulled his shank and cut the preacher's throat--
Shine swam on--Shine swam on--
And when the news hit shore that the titanic had sunk
Shine was up in Harlem damn near drunk--
and dancing in the streets.
damn near drunk and dancing in the streets.

Etheridge Knight #32653

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RESOLVED: That there has been entirely too much empty rhetoric about the need to organize the working class. The Movement has had certain concrete experiences in this area, and it is time for calm evaluation of these experiences rather than vague gener generalities.

In the past the Movement has had particular success among:

(a) The new working class (fur trappers, explorers, pony express riders, and workers in similar occupations who can be reached on the basis of similar life styles) and

(b) One-eyed workers (in 1917 three of the most militant members of the General Executive Board of the I.W.W. were each blind in one eye: Big Bill Haywood, Frank Little, and Richard Brazier).

It is true that there has so far been only limited success in reaching craft, industrial, white-collar, and two-eyed workers, but . . . Can the day be far off? The pusillanimous outfit that recently tried to impose its sectarian views on the Madison Area Labor Committee, until being thoroughly discredited, found it expedient to answer this question in an ambiguous manner. The manipulative psychology of this group was such that we are still unclear as to its identity. Imagine their chagrin, however, when one member of what is now the Majority Faction, whose uncle is a worker, reported that the main obstacle to the further progress of the radicalization of the working class has been a simple matter of structure.

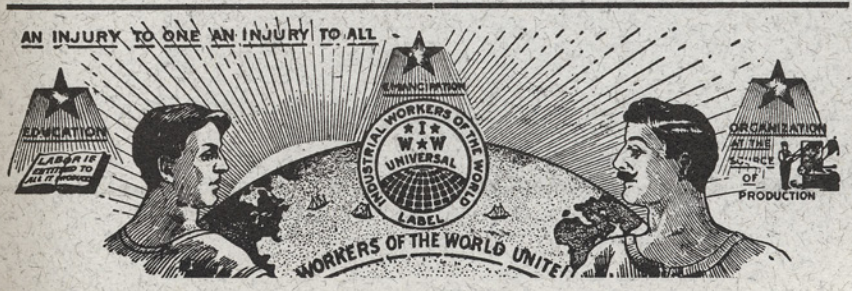
Father Thomas Hagerty's organizational plan, adopted overwhelmingly at the founding convention of the I.W.W. in 1905, called for a wheel-like structure. Sixty-three years later, S.D.S. quibbles over whether there should be one, three, or nineteen national secretaries, in a desperate attempt to evade the basic question posed by Father Hagerty. The tolerance of supposedly "revolutionary" students for empty rhetorical flourishes is in sharp contrast to the attitude of the factory workers who interrupted a long harangue by a member of the minority faction within the Madison Area Labor Committee with repeated taunts of "Talk about the wheel!" Anyone who thinks they were merely expressing a desire for more national secretaries is a crazed fanatic.

eration. Thus Mark Naison's study of the Southern Tenants' Farmers' Union and several reviews have been pushed back to future issues. Also held was James O'Brien's second installment on the history of the New Left. But we are happy to put into print the contributions made, the credit for which goes largely to George Rawick who collected most and conducted the interview with John Watson. The poems of Sonia Sanchez and Etheridge Knight, published first here, and the reprinted poem by David Henderson help to add another dimension, we think, to our treatment of the black movement.

Just now there is no financially feasible way for us to expand beyond 60-70 pages--the jump to professionally-done folding, collating and stapling would be far too expensive. But we hope to make up the difference by launching a pamphlet series, information on the first of the publications being available in our next issue. Our initial aims are to cooperate with national SDS in covering certain current problems (the French crisis and the European student movement generally) and make our own unusual contribution in such areas as art/culture studies and publication of significant but little-known American theoretical figures--for instance, Paul Mattick and C.L.R. James.

CONTRIBUTORS

DAN GEORGAKAS, editor of Z, is a rambling agitator; JAMES HOOKER is Professor of African History at MSU; DAVID HENDERSON's poem is reprinted, with the kind permission of the publishers, Poets Press, from Felix of The Silent Forest. ETHERIDGE KNIGHT and SONIA SANCHEZ are, as Georgakas' review indicates, among the finest of the radical black poets; GEORGE RAWICK is a Marxist historian in Detroit, who teaches at Oakland University.



HEAR YE! HEAR YE!

starting july 4th is
bring in yr/guns/down/to/
yr/nearest/po/lice/station/
no questions/asked/

wk.

and yr/po/lice/dept/
will welcome
all yr/
illegal/guns. (and they won't say a thing)
cept maybe
at the next re/bel/lion
maybe just
the small sound
of murder:
yr/own...

--sonia sanchez