

Black Power, 1966–1980

Elizabeth Catlett's "Negro es Bello II" (14.1) translates the Black Power maxim, "Black is Beautiful," into Portuguese, the language of multiracial Brazil, in which "Negro" means black. For African Americans, the Black Power movement emphasized their African heritage rather than their American-ness. People who had earlier been known as "American Negroes," or, simply, "the Negro," became "black" and "Afro-American" in the late 1960s. In "Negro es Bello II," Catlett accents the resemblance of two black faces to ancient Nigerian sculpture. The circular emblems framing the faces evoke the most prominent Black Power organization of the 1960s: the Black Panther Party (BPP). As the most visible embodiment of Black Power, the BPP's origins, strengths, weaknesses, and evolution characterized a multitude of local movements. Summing up the revolution of values within Black Power, Catlett inscribes the words "Black is Beautiful" around each panther. Black Power repossessed what had formerly been a stigmatized identity. It made "black" into a badge of pride and proclaimed black as beautiful.

The war in Vietnam, with its heavy toll of poor and black soldiers, furthered black doubts about American politics. The war itself radicalized black soldiers, who created their own symbols of black pride. By 1967 many in the Civil Rights movement, including the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., were speaking out publicly against the war, as well as against poverty. King's assassination in 1968 destroyed the remnants of faith in nonviolent protest and shook many people's faith in American democracy.

By the late 1960s, many African Americans were turning away from the American majority that had elected Republican Richard Nixon president in 1968 and had given millions of votes to George Wallace, the segregationist governor of Alabama.

(Opposite)
14.1. Elizabeth Catlett
"Negro es Bello II,"
1969¹

Catlett combines African-American faces stylized as African masks with badges reading "Black Is Beautiful" with a black panther—for the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense—in the center.



The growing separation of the American population into poor, black, neglected inner cities and prosperous, thriving, white suburbs worsened racial tensions.

During the Black Power era of the late 1960s and early 1970s, masses of African Americans—workers, intellectuals, artists—looked inward. They broke from the prevailing American mind-set of seeing black people as a problem and found beauty and value in blackness. Almost paradoxically, racial separation began to weaken in the 1970s, even as whites vigorously fought desegregation. At the same time that local police were acquiring tanks and helicopters to control black neighborhoods, black people began to enter the national political economy in unprecedented numbers. But the changes came gradually, almost too piecemeal to be perceived in deeply agitated times.

While many embraced separatist Black Power rather than continuing to petition for the rights of American citizenship, others seized new economic and political opportunities. In Detroit, Berry Gordy, Jr.'s (b. 1929), Motown Records produced a string of hits that made his company the richest in African-American history. Seeking to rescue their communities, local Black Power activists made their way into local politics. Northern urban voters began electing black mayors and congressional representatives in unprecedented numbers. The number of black elected officials continued to climb, although many other black people lost their jobs after the oil embargo of the mid-1970s set off a catastrophic economic collapse.

By the late 1970s the glory days of Black Power had ended. In the presidential election of 1980, Republican Ronald Reagan won overwhelmingly. He attracted millions of white Democrats, North and South, in a campaign calling for "states' rights"—a campaign that was launched in Philadelphia, Mississippi, the site of the murder of three civil rights volunteers in the Freedom Summer of 1964.

The Emergence of Black Power

The justice of the demands for civil rights and white supremacists' tenacity produced both success and frustration. On the one hand, the federal legislation of the mid-1960s dismantled the legal basis of segregation and exclusion. On the other hand, federal laws were spottily enforced, and new forms of discrimination were appearing. Continuing antiblack violence led many African Americans to question the logic of nonviolent protest. And Malcolm X's steady criticism of nonviolence in the face of racist assault had supplied a counternarrative since the late 1950s (see also chapters 12 and 13). His assassination in 1965, the publication of his *Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), and his recording *Message to the Grass Roots* (1966) brought his critique to a very wide audience.

"Black Power" meant black people defining themselves positively, regardless of what white people thought. Black Power turned African Americans away from American values, even away from American identity. The phrase "Black Power" antagonized most white people and dismayed many blacks. Black Power carried multiple, even contradic-

tory, meanings. Fundamentally, however, Black Power meant that African Americans would tend to themselves without paying heed to white people.

In the mid-1960s, Malcolm X's long-standing support of self-defense rang true to the young men in the Southern Civil Rights movement, where so many black people were being beaten and killed. Antiblack violence deeply disturbed Stokely Carmichael (1941–1998) and H. Rap Brown, SNCC (Southern Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) volunteers in the South.²

In 1966 Carmichael gave prominence to the words "Black Power" on the occasion of James Meredith's Mississippi "Walk Against Fear." An assailant had shot Meredith on the first day of his march. Carmichael and fellow SNCC volunteer Willie Ricks (b. ca. 1943) hurried to Meredith's side, addressing a rally in his support. Rather than voice the usual call for "Freedom," Ricks and Carmichael demanded "Black Power," to thunderous applause.

Black Power as Self-Definition and Self-Defense

Stokely Carmichael and the African-American sociologist Charles V. Hamilton (b. 1929) laid out the meaning of Black Power in 1967. In *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (1967), they stressed Black Power as self-defense as well as self-definition. They traced the need for Black Power to the weaknesses of the nonviolent Civil Rights movement. While the beating and murdering of civil rights workers and little girls in Sunday school angered black people everywhere, nonviolent civil rights workers "had nothing to offer . . . except to go out and be beaten again." Nonviolence may have led to sweeping federal legislation. But those laws failed to improve black lives because their scope was limited and because even with their limitations, they were not enforced on the local level where they would make a difference. The laws did not take aim at the *de facto* structural and economic inequities of Northern and Western cities.

According to Carmichael and Hamilton, Black Power meant that black people would no longer look to American institutions or try to gain entrance into the American mainstream. Middle-class white America had nothing to offer blacks, for its core value was "material aggrandizement." Black Power was to be all-black in nature. African Americans would do for themselves, by themselves. White supporters could be helpful, but too often their approach was paternalist or escapist: They wanted black people to provide meaning to otherwise sterile, middle-class American life.³ Some nonblack volunteers had played positive roles in the Civil Rights movement, but the assumptions of American society made it difficult for whites to work under black leadership. The national media focused on whites rather than blacks, even in a mass black movement. Therefore, according to Carmichael and Hamilton, whites needed to leave the black liberation struggle and work to reduce racism among whites.

Empowered black people would find new means of addressing their needs, beginning with their own identities, said Carmichael and Hamilton. They warned that "black people are going to use the words they want to use—not just the words whites want to

hear.”⁴ No longer would they accept the name “Negro,” which came from the oppressor. They would call themselves “black,” or “African American,” or “Afro-American,” “because that is *our* image of ourselves.” Black people must also reeducate themselves away from white American “cultural terrorism.” Reeducation would produce new ways of thinking and organizing, because the old ways simply had not worked. These new solutions did not need to be respectable or acceptable in the eyes of white Americans or of blacks who identified with the status quo. Black Power would give African Americans an entirely new value system. Black Power meant a total break with the past.⁵

For Carmichael and Hamilton, something new—Black Power—was needed to address the fundamental needs of African Americans for decent housing, decent jobs, and adequate education. They saw institutional racism as the major barrier to black equality. They gave institutional racism another name that echoed Malcolm X: “colonialism.” Carmichael and Hamilton termed African Americans colonial subjects, very much like the people struggling against imperialists in Southern Africa and Vietnam.⁶

One chapter of *Black Power* describes SNCC’s organizing black voters in Lowndes County, Alabama, under Carmichael’s leadership. Where there had been no black voters in 1964, there were nearly 4,000 in 1965. Black voters formed a Freedom Organization whose symbol was the black panther. Reminiscent of the South Carolina Progressive Democratic Party of 1944, the Freedom Organization held its own caucuses and ran its own candidates for county office.

Even more important, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization defended itself against white attack. In the short run, the poor black voters of Lowndes County proved economically vulnerable to the dictates of the white planters who employed them. But their organization inspired the creation of Black Panther Parties all around the United States. In 1966 a network of Lowndes County-related Black Panther groups existed in Chicago, New York, and San Francisco. The San Francisco Panthers were in contact with Robert F. Williams, the self-defense advocate from Monroe, North Carolina, by that time living in exile in Cuba (see chapter 12).⁷

Black Power immediately proved controversial. Young African Americans welcomed it as long overdue. Older and more conservative African Americans saw it as racial separation, a youth-led repudiation of the older generation. Virtually all white people rejected it, calling it black racism. Even black people sympathetic to Black Power values recognized its potential for misinterpretation. Martin Luther King, Jr., understood non-violent activists’ frustration with endless antiblack violence. He heard “Black Power” as “a cry of daily hurt and persistent pain.” But King also foresaw the inevitable public relations nightmare: in the context of American culture, “Black Power” would likely be misconstrued as an incitement to antiwhite violence. With an eye toward the rest of the American population—especially toward their nonblack allies—SCLC, the NAACP, and the National Urban League all denounced Black Power in 1966. At the same time, young men who cared nothing for white sensibilities organized around the manly symbol of the black panther.

The Black Panther Party

Two Oakland, California, students, Bobby Seale (b. 1936) and Huey P. Newton (1942–1989) founded the organization that became synonymous with Black Power. They created the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) in 1966 to address a series of black community needs ranging from economic to cultural to political. Seale and Newton identified more with colonized peoples in the Third World than with middle-class white Americans. They based much of their thinking on the work of anti-imperialist authors: Franz Fanon, the French West Indian psychiatrist of the Algerian war for independence; Mao Tse-Tung, the Chinese Communist leader; and Che Guevara, the Latin American Marxist revolutionary hero of the Cuban Revolution.⁸

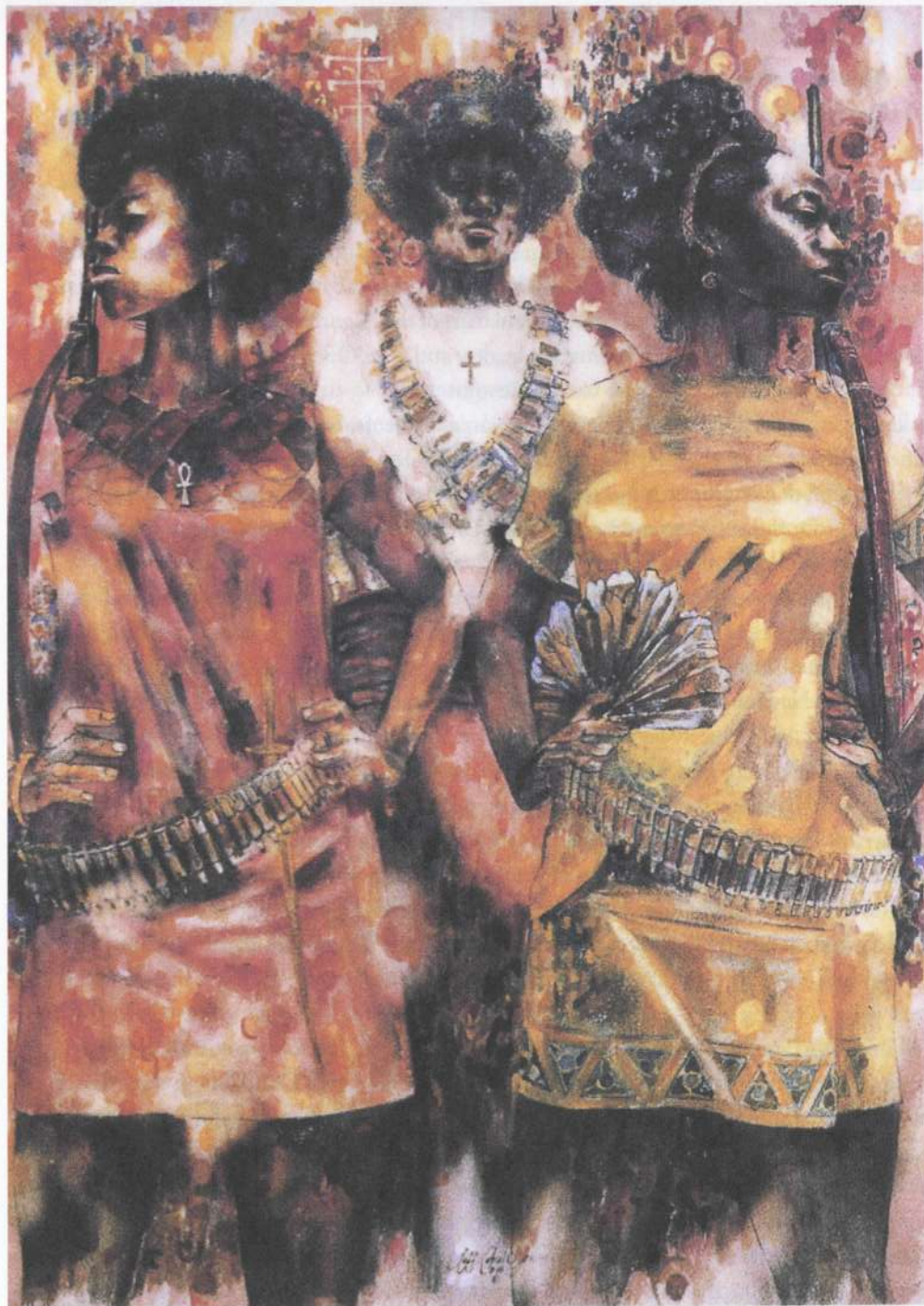
Envisioning urban black Americans as colonial subjects, Seale and Newton called for self-determination of the black ghettos. The BPP Ten-Point Program demanded full employment, decent housing and schools, and an exemption of black men from the U.S. military. From the very beginning, the Black Panthers opposed the Vietnam War as an exercise in colonial domination.⁹

Initially, Seale and Newton called their party the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense and attacked police brutality in Oakland in fiery words and deeds. Seale said the only way to Black Power, “brothers and sisters, is to get our guns organized, forget the ins and shoot it out.” Huey Newton preached that “only with the power of the gun can the Black masses halt the terror and brutality perpetrated against them by the armed racist power structure. . . . Black people were forced to build America and if forced to we will tear it down.”¹⁰

Seale and Newton had studied California law and knew that carrying firearms openly was legal in California in 1966. In their patrols shadowing the police, the Panthers carried their weapons openly. Newton, Seale, and some thirty other Black Panthers brandishing rifles burst onto the national scene in 1967, demonstrating at the California state capitol in Sacramento. The image of armed Black Panthers captivated young black men all around the country. They flocked into the BPP, eager to take on abusive local police.

The Black Panthers’ attraction to guns inspired black artists to create images of black warrior heroes defending the black community. In 1963 Jeff Donaldson painted the Pillsbury doughboy as a policeman beating up Aunt Jemima (see chapter 13). By 1968 Donaldson’s images of women had become more militant and more diasporic. His “Wives of Shango” named the legendary *orisha* (deity) of thunder and lightning from the Yoruba tradition, who was also a legendary king, and showed his glamorous, well-armed wives in Afro hairstyles, mini-dresses, and bandoleers of bullets (14.2).

In the mid-1960s, the police and the Panthers saw themselves at war with one another. Both sought confrontation, which occurred regularly across the country. As the BPP became national, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as well as local police targeted Panthers for destruction. The FBI’s COINTELPRO (counter-intelligence program) used informants, disinformation, and rumors to pit Panthers against each other and against other black organizations.



14.2. Jeff Donaldson, "Wives of Shango," 1968

These wives (in the plural, to stress their African heritage) represent black women as warriors who retain their femininity by wearing fashionable mini-skirts. Shango is the Yoruba god of thunder.

In 1967 Newton exchanged gunfire with the Oakland police. In Los Angeles in 1969, two Black Panthers died at the hands of a rival Black Power group, the US Organization (see below). In California and elsewhere, local police attacked Panthers, who were eager and ready to fight. Between 1967 and 1969, twenty-seven Panthers died in attacks led or provoked by local police or the FBI. In the most shocking attack, police in Chicago killed Fred Hampton (1948–1969) and his colleague Mark Clark (n.d.) in their beds.¹¹ As a result of armed confrontations, some Panthers spent half their lives incarcerated, for example, Elmer Geronimo Pratt (b. 1947) of Los Angeles, a decorated Vietnam veteran. Pratt's conviction was reversed in 1997, after more than a quarter century of imprisonment.¹² The writer Mumia Abu-Jamal (b. 1954) is still on death row in Pennsylvania, and his conviction for shooting a policeman is the subject of continuing protest.

After a series of murders and much bloody internal dissent in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the BPP changed tactics. It became less macho and stopped brandishing guns and confronting police. The Panthers also toned down their rampant male chauvinism, although the Panthers never became feminists. BPP members also became more politically radical, calling themselves Marxist-Leninist and forging alliances with whites in the New Left. Huey Newton, the most visible Panther leader, was in and out of jail, exiled in Cuba, and evolving politically. Seeing the cost in lives of conflict with the police, Newton stressed class struggle and Marxist revolution. Newton argued that the Panthers should mobilize the hopeless black lower class, the "lumpenproletariat." He theorized the need for "revolutionary intercommunalism." Until the revolution, the Black Panther Party would salve some of the wounds of urban poverty through an ambitious program of community service.¹³

Bobby Seale created the free breakfast program, one of the Panthers' most successful ventures. The Panthers' free breakfasts began in Berkeley and spread quickly in churches throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. By late 1969, the Black Panther Party was serving breakfasts to more than twenty thousand poor children in nineteen cities throughout the United States.¹⁴

In Oakland and New Haven, the Panthers set up free medical and dental clinics. They also created freedom schools. The Oakland Community School became so successful that the California legislature gave it an award. The New Haven school attracted admiring bureaucrats from the Nixon administration. Around the country, but most effectively in Oakland, Panthers offered the urban poor of all races free clothing, free shoes, free transportation to prisons, screening for high blood pressure and sickle cell anemia, and day-care centers. The BPP also published *The Black Panther* newspaper publicizing its services and revolutionary theories.¹⁵

By the mid-1970s, however, the Black Panther Party had disintegrated. FBI harassment, police attack, self-inflicted murders, criminal justice convictions, imprisonment, and internal conflicts over ideology together destroyed the organization and scattered its leadership. From a high of 2,000 to 5,000 members in 1968, membership fell to 150 in 1974.¹⁶ Newton, in jail, theorized global economic revolution. Eldridge Cleaver (1935–



14.3. Carroll Parrott Blue, "Angela Davis in Los Angeles," 1972

Blue's photograph shows a pensive Davis at a political rally, most likely vindicating the rights of American prisoners. Davis wears the big Afro hairdo that became an emblem of Black Power.

1988), author of the best-selling autobiography *Soul on Ice* (1968), preferred armed struggle. Bobby Seale turned toward the political process, running (unsuccessfully) for mayor of Oakland in 1973. Ericka Huggins (b. 1948) ran the valuable free breakfast and school programs. Cleaver left the BPP in 1973; Newton fled to Cuba in 1974; Seale left the BPP in 1974. Huggins remained in Oakland, working with poor children.

Angela Davis (b. 1944), a California philosophy professor, worked with SNCC and the BPP in the late 1960s and early 1970s. She shared the Panthers' concern for the high level of incarceration of young black men. In 1970 she appeared on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted List. Young Jonathan Jackson (1954–1970) had used a gun registered in her name to try to free his brother George (1942–1971) from the Soledad State Prison in California. Like many others close to the Panthers, Davis was jailed for more than a year awaiting trial on charges of murder and conspiracy. On her release from prison, Professor Davis continued her activism. Photographer Carroll Parrott Blue (b. 1943) caught her at a political rally: "Angela Davis in Los Angeles." Davis wears her signature big Afro hairdo, which became a symbol of black radicalism (14.3).

Unlike so many Panthers, Davis was acquitted of all charges. She remains a college professor and continues to protest against the American "prison industrial complex" in which for-profit prisons make money off the incarceration of black and poor people.¹⁷ As an activist, Davis outlasted and outlived many of her comrades in the Black Panther Party.

For all their changing ideology and internal disagreements, the Black Panthers kept their focus on the political economy. They downplayed the adoption of African names, clothing, and ritual, and showed little patience with one dimension of Black Power: cultural nationalism.

Cultural Nationalism: Emphasis on African Roots

In 1964 Malcolm X saw culture as a crucial weapon in the struggle for black liberation, one as important as political action. Recognizing the psychological damage that oppression and minority status had inflicted, Malcolm called for "a cultural revolution to unbrainwash an entire people."¹⁸ Carmichael and Hamilton's *Black Power* echoed the need

for black people to free their minds of American “cultural terrorism” that reinforced feelings of inferiority. In the wake of the revolt of black people in the Watts section of Los Angeles and the assassination of Malcolm X, both in 1965, Black Power advocates around the United States saw cultural regeneration as a vital means toward black liberation.

The poet and playwright LeRoi Jones changed his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka (b. 1934). In New York in 1965, then in Newark, New Jersey, in 1966, Baraka created theaters and schools in which black people could express themselves freely. Baraka’s long career as a poet of black liberation has inspired black artists. “LeRoi?” by Lev Mills (b. 1940) pictures a transcendent, visionary Baraka, head in the sky, inspiring the black youth who run toward the future below him (14.4).

In Los Angeles Maulana Karenga (b. 1941) formed the US Organization (*Us* as opposed to *them*) in 1966 as a means of regenerating the Los Angeles black community after the people of Watts exploded in frustration against police brutality and political neglect. The Watts uprising graphically revealed the community’s desperation, which Karenga believed a reconnection with African roots would address.

Karenga wanted black people to see themselves as Africans in the United States, not second-class Americans. He mandated the study of Swahili, a non-tribal African language spoken in several East African countries by many different peoples. He and his co-workers created the Kwanzaa holiday and celebrated it for the first time between December 26, 1966, and January 1, 1967.¹⁹ “Kwanzaa” means “first fruits” in Swahili. The holiday is an invented tradition. It draws upon the harvest celebrations of several different African peoples and is purposely situated near the American Christmas holiday.²⁰ Kwanzaa was created as a critique of American materialism. For Black Power advocates, including Carmichael and Hamilton, materialism (along with racism) is a prime characteristic of corrupt American culture. Roland L. Freeman’s (b. 1947) “Kwanzaa Quilt” shows the African-inspired apparatus of Kwanzaa against a backdrop of African fabric (14.5).

Karenga and Baraka, allies in the late 1960s, had revolutionary Black Power goals. They believed that cultural nationalism would overcome black Americans’ colonial mentality and transform feelings of inferiority into pride.

Black Power ideals had first emerged in the 1950s. They became more widely known with the 1965 assassination of Malcolm X and the publication of his autobiography. Black Power as a phrase broke into American national consciousness in 1966 with Stokely Carmichael. It produced organizations such as the Black Panther Parties in 1966 and 1967. In the mid-1960s, cultural nationalists and Black Panthers were beginning to convince some black people they needed to separate psychologically from middle-class white America. Then the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., the apostle of nonviolence, opened a deep chasm between black and white Americans. The triumph of conservative, antiblack politics later that year convinced many black people that the majority of whites opposed their aspirations for first-class citizenship. In the face of white opposition, many African Americans concluded they could count only on themselves.



14.4. Lev Mills, "LeRoi?" 1972

The genius of a pensive Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones), an inspiration to young black people, is so towering that his head touches the clouds.



14.5. Roland L. Freeman, "Kwanzaa Quilt," 1989

Freeman wishes his viewers a "Happy Kwanzaa" and lists the seven principles of Kwanzaa. The quilt combines several different motifs from the African-American Kwanzaa celebration and traditional African art.

Black Power After 1968

Throughout the 1960s, many African Americans were coming to doubt the ability of nonviolent protest to tear down the walls of racial segregation and make black people first-class American citizens. Until the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968, these doubts mostly remained just doubts. The assassination of the minister of the gospel who symbolized nonviolence seemed to show that America would kill any black person with aspirations, no matter how Christian, no matter how unwilling to use violence himself. King's assassination seemed both to express America's hatred for black people and to vindicate all those calling for self-defense. The King assassination gave the idea of Black Power a tremendous boost.

Assassination and Aftermath

The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968 shook hundreds of thousands whom Black Power had not yet reached. In the immediate aftermath of King's assassination in April 1968, black people in 125 cities revolted out of anger and anguish. African-American artists paid homage to King's sacrifice in a variety of ways. In her 1968 "In Memoriam: Martin Luther King, Jr.," the Black Power poet June Jordan (1936–2002) expressed the shrinking from America that many African Americans felt. It begins:

honey people murder mercy U. S. A.
the milkland turn to monsters teach
to kill to violate pull down destroy
the weakly freedom growing fruit
from being born

America²¹

Like many other black visual artists, Archibald Motley, Jr., (1891–1981) put together black and white martyrs. John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr., often appear together in American art dealing with the 1960s. Motley's "The First One Hundred Years: He Amongst You Who Is Without Sin Shall Cast the First Stone: Forgive Them Father For They Know Not What They Do" shows the head of slain President John F. Kennedy on the upper left. The head of Martin Luther King, Jr., figures in the center, on a tree branch, as though lynched. A Confederate flag hangs just below King's head, and Ku Klux Klansmen parade at the bottom left (14.6).

Richard Hunt's (b. 1935) "I've Been to the Mountaintop" echoes King's last speech, to striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee. It features an Egyptian motif reminiscent of the work of early African-American artists like Edmonia Lewis and Meta Warrick Fuller. Hunt's King is monumentally royal (14.7).

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14.6. Archibald Motley, Jr., "The First One Hundred Years: He Amongst You Who Is Without Sin Shall Cast the First Stone: Forgive Them Father For They Know Not What They Do," ca. 1963-1972

Motley makes King and Kennedy (whose heads appear in the center and upper left) the victims of white supremacy, as symbolized in the Confederate flag and a Ku Klux Klansman. Before the haunted house are many emblems, including the Statue of Liberty, a woman who combines a fugitive slave and Rosa Parks being marched off to jail, the three crosses of Jesus's crucifixion, a snake, a scene of police brutality, and a "whites only" sign.



(Above) 14.7. Richard Hunt, "I've Been to the Mountaintop," 1977

The title of this sculpture echoes the speech King delivered just before his assassination. Using an ancient Egyptian sphinx motif, it makes King into a sage for the ages.

(Opposite) 14.8. Glenn Ligon, "Malcolm, Martin," 1991

This painting repeats the names of the two martyred heroes again and again, until they blur into one another as a joint black sacrifice.

Glenn Ligon's (b. 1960) "Malcolm, Martin" repeats the names of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., again and again, with less and less clarity from the top to the bottom. Ligon often uses words in his work. Here the blurring of the names mourns two tragic, early deaths (14.8).

Dovie Thurman, a welfare rights activist, spoke for masses of African Americans when she said King's assassination "changed things":

I got so angry. What was King saying? What was he talking about? Here he is so nonviolent, always praying, and they beat him up and they put him in jail and now they killed him. I was saying, "Give me a gun, give me a gun, give me something . . ."

I just broke loose from all my white friends. I didn't want to see them. I didn't want to talk to them. All I wanted to do was get the one who killed Dr. King.²²



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Whitney Young (1921–1971), head of the normally conservative National Urban League, voiced kindred sentiments. Young said he did not care how white people felt or whether they were sorry about the assassination. “*There are no moderates today*,” he said. “Everybody is a militant.” Young took part in the 1968 National Black Power Conference in Newark and the Congress of African People in Atlanta in 1970.²³

The barbarity of the King assassination radicalized many moderates, such as Whitney Young. Like King, Young deplored the Vietnam War’s drain of resources from the War on Poverty and was already beginning to doubt white America. Young and King were certainly warming up to Black Power. The month before his assassination King spoke in Newark, New Jersey, urging his audience to “stand up with dignity and self-respect.” King uttered the Black Power phrase: “Now I’m Black, but I’m Black and beautiful!” In a show of black solidarity, King visited Amiri Baraka at his Spirit House headquarters in Newark’s inner city.²⁴

Newark emerged as one of the centers of Black Power after 1968, in large part due to the cultural and political work of Amiri Baraka. In the mid-1960s, Baraka had already come out for black solidarity. His tone hardened after the King assassination. At the 1968 Newark Black Power convention, Baraka demanded black institutions for black people. Interracial institutions, he contended, offered nothing to African Americans: “We mean the freeing of ourselves from the bondage of another, alien, people,” Baraka said. “These pigs are no kin to us. We are trying to destroy a foreign oppressor. It is not ‘revolution’ but *National Liberation*.”²⁵

After 1968, black artists portrayed African Americans in struggle against their native land. Such a notion broke with the assumptions of the 1950s and early 1960s. In the earlier period, black civil rights usually appeared as the fulfillment of American democracy. After the King assassination, many African Americans doubted they would ever become full-fledged American citizens. Many questioned whether they even wanted to belong to a country they saw as fundamentally repressive. Black athletes winning medals at the 1968 summer Olympic Games in Mexico City expressed black pride, rather than American pride.²⁶ John Carlos (b. 1945) and Tommie Smith (b. 1944) raised their fists in Black Power salutes rather than placing their hands over their hearts at the playing of the American national anthem. They stood barefoot in remembrance of black people’s poverty and wore black armbands for Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the other martyrs to the struggle for black liberation.

The assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as those of the two Kennedy brothers, came to seem like natural products of warped American values. To be sure, the murderers of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., were not representatives of American power. Yet the fact of official harassment and attack on Black Panthers and other black radicals was widely known and deeply resented. In the work of many black artists, Nation of Islam (NOI) gunmen striking down Malcolm X and a crazed assassin killing King became emblematic of the United States.

Black Power advocates saw the needs of black and white Americans as fundamentally

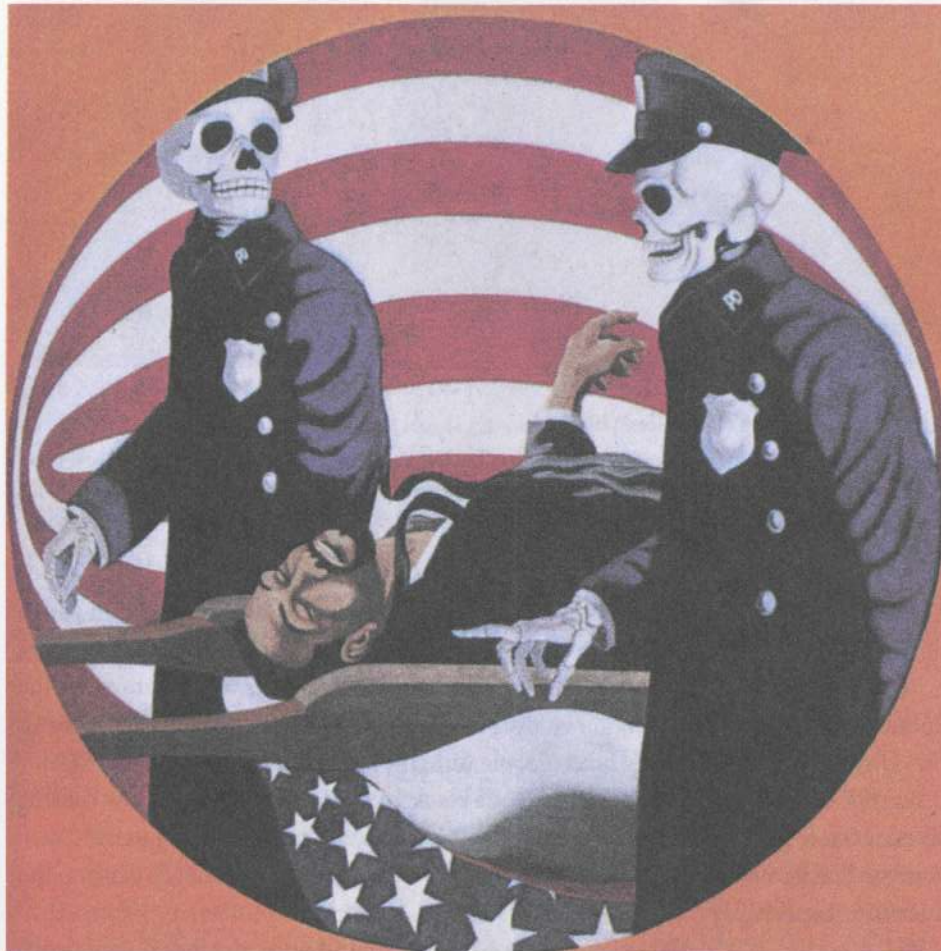
in conflict. Whatever or whoever gained white approval became suspect. White disapproval earned Black Power points. For instance, the word “bad,” spread as an index of the good or admirable when applied to African Americans.

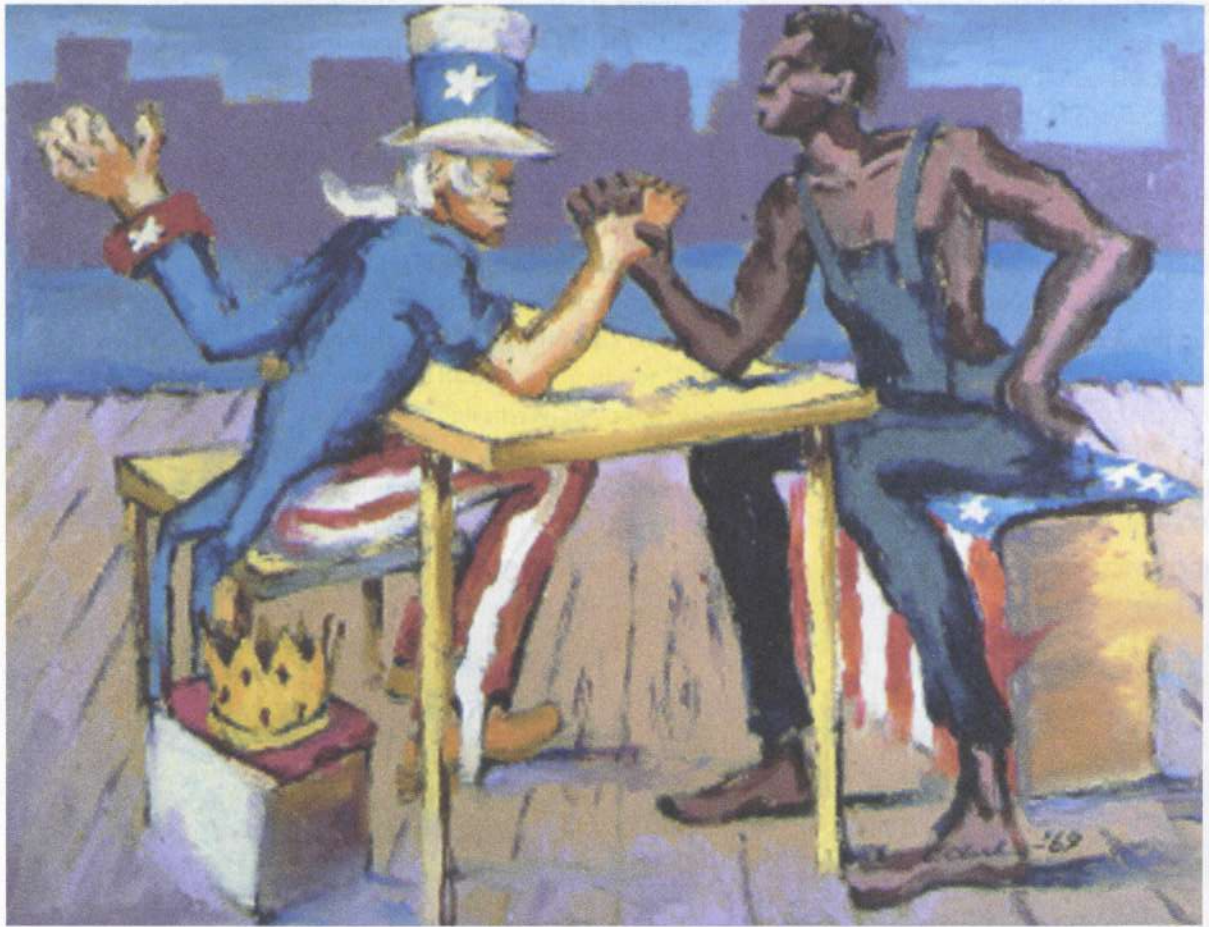
In much black art from the late 1960s and 1970s, the American flag functioned as a symbol of black people’s oppression. Phillip Lindsay Mason’s (b. 1939) “Deathmakers” shows police, surrounded by the American flag, as the agents of black death (14.9).

Claude Clark’s (1915–2001) “Polarization” recalls Malcolm X’s frequent reference to field-workers as the authentic embodiment of African Americans (14.10). Clark shows the black man in overalls arm wrestling Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam, who has given himself the powers of royalty (a crown sits beneath his chair) cheats by not placing his hand on

14.9. Phillip Lindsay Mason, “Deathmakers,” 1968

This protest against police brutality, shows white police and life in the United States (symbolized in the American flag) as the killers of black people.





14.10. Claude Clark, "Polarization," 1969

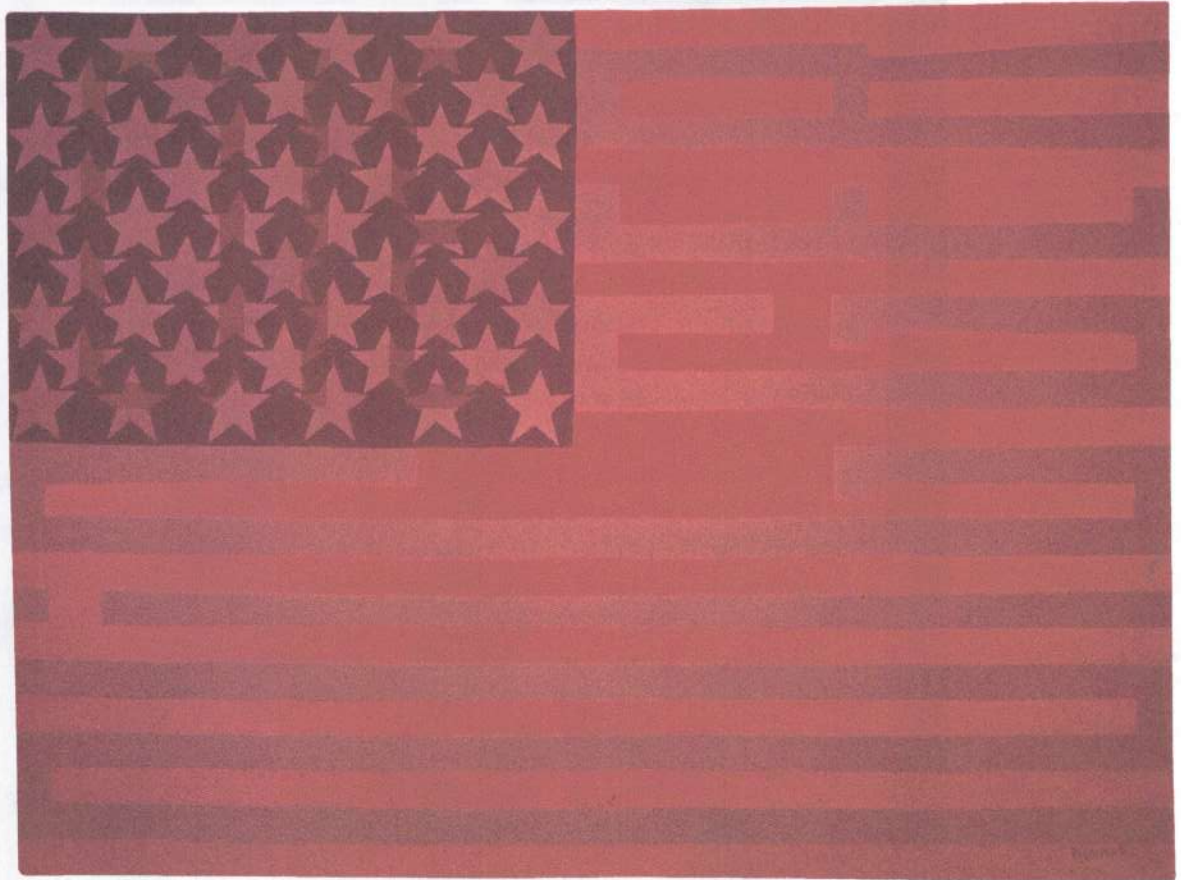
Clark depicts the fundamental conflict of the cities: Uncle Sam wears an American flag, the black American sits on another, but they struggle against, not beside, each other in a city by the sea.

his side as does the black man. Only one of them can win this rigged contest, in which white America and the black man are pitted against one another.

Faith Ringgold's "Flag for the Moon: Die Nigger" interprets the meaning of the American flag planted on the moon landing in 1969. Embedded in the flag are the words "Die Nigger," as though killing black people were the core American value (14.11).

Playing on the long-standing pattern of black men's incarceration and reflecting the concern for the many who were imprisoned, David Hammons's "Injustice Case" shows a black man—Hammons himself—shackled within a frame depicting the American flag (14.12).

Well into the 1990s, black artists echoed the conflict between African Americans



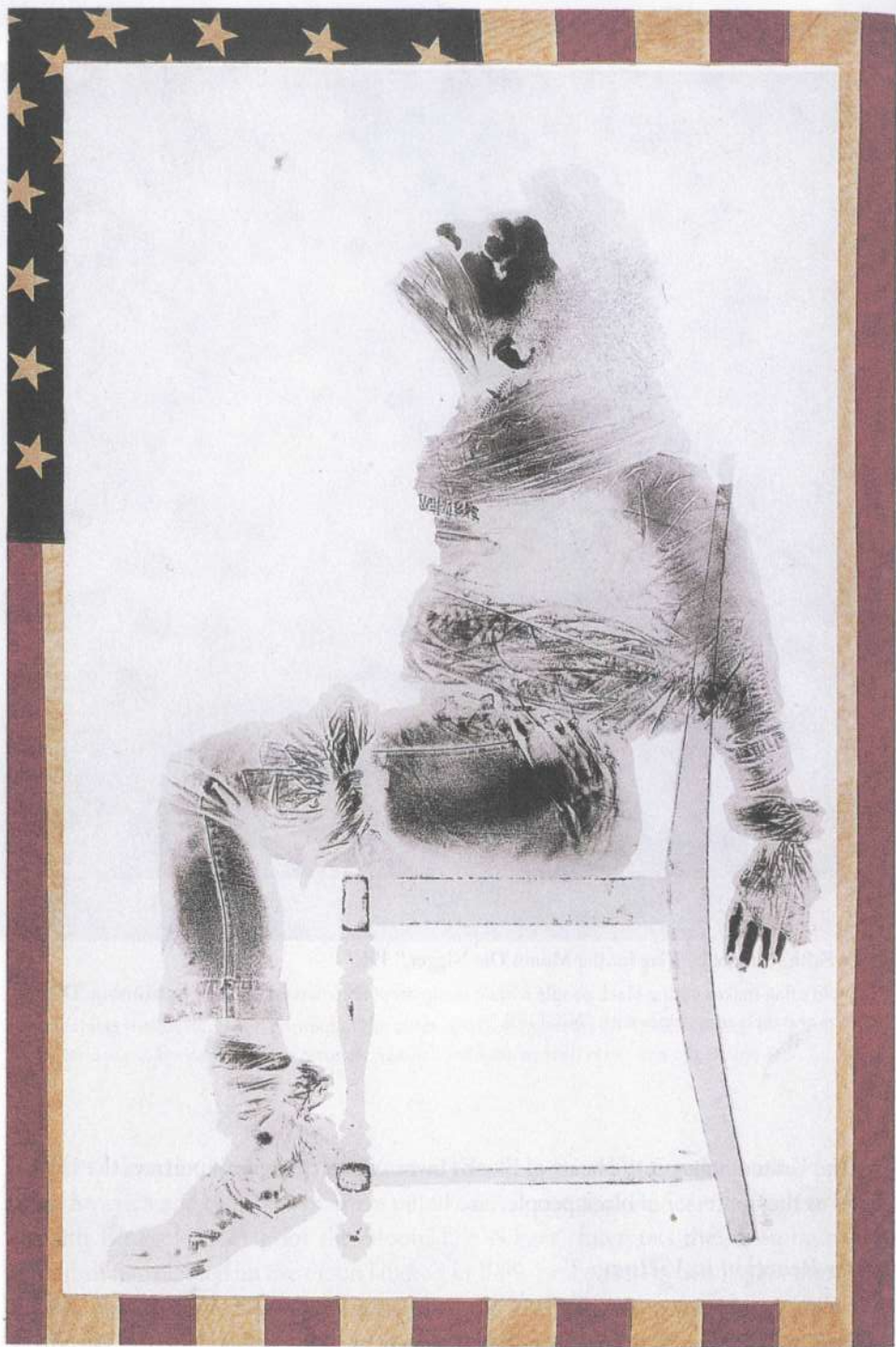
14.11. Faith Ringgold, "Flag for the Moon: Die Nigger," 1969

Ringgold's flag makes hating black people a basic component of American identity by painting "DIE" in the stars and replacing stripes with "NIGGER."

and the United States at the heart of Black Power. Much of their art portrays the United States as the oppressor of black people.

Angry Reaction in Vietnam

The King assassination occurred at a time of intense fighting in Vietnam. As always, African-American armed service personnel faced two kinds of opponents. The Army base at Cam Ranh Bay had an active Ku Klux Klavern, and Confederate flags were a familiar sight. Racist graffiti, such as "I'd rather kill a nigger instead of a gook," appeared in latrines and enlisted men's clubs. Some white base personnel greeted the news of King's assassination with an impromptu, celebratory Klan rally.²⁷



14.12. David Hammons, "Injustice Case," 1970

The ghostly black man (Hammons himself) is bound and gagged within the frame of the American flag. Once again, the oppression of black people appears as a basic component of American culture.

At the same time, 1968–1969 witnessed the deadliest hostilities in the war. The proportion of black casualties had dropped from the high of nearly 25 percent in 1965 to 13 percent in 1968. Nevertheless black men and women continued to be significantly underrepresented among the people making decisions. Less than 2 percent of the officers were black in 1962. In 1968, the proportion was only slightly more than 2 percent: out of a total officer corps of 400,000 only 8,325 were black.²⁸ This racial disparity took its toll on troop morale.

After King's assassination, black soldiers grew impatient with the racism in the armed forces. African-American students in the Air Force Academy formed a Malcolm X society. Enlisted men in bases in the Southern United States and in Vietnam formed a variety of Black Power organizations: the Black Mau Mau, the Blackstone Rangers, the Black Panthers. Black Marines at Da Nang designed a Black Power flag in red and black, with crossed spears and a Swahili legend. Versions of the flag circulated in South Korea, Germany, and throughout Vietnam. Black Power canes topped by clenched fists and slave bracelets woven of bootlaces further manifested African-American soldiers' black pride.

Black soldiers spent their leisure time with other blacks, no longer disguising their distaste for white people: "Look," said one black soldier, "you've proven your point when you go out and work and soldier with Chuck [the white man] all day. It's like you went to the Crusades and now you're back relaxing around the round table—ain't no need bringing the dragon home with you."²⁹ "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud," the 1968 hit record by James Brown (b. 1933), the "Godfather of Soul," was as wildly popular in Vietnam as it was stateside.

Black assertiveness led to outright brawls and race wars. In 1971 the newly formed Congressional Black Caucus held hearings on racism in the military. By the early 1970s, the U.S. Armed Forces were recognizing their serious racial problems. They began cracking down as hard on the symbols of white nationalism as on black pride and educating whites on black concerns. Affirmative action policies sought to make sure that the names of qualified black as well as white candidates appeared on previously lily-white promotion lists. Colin Powell became a major in 1968. In 1975 Daniel "Chappie" James, Jr. (1920–1978), a former Tuskegee airman, became the first black four-star general ever. And in 1979 Hazel Winifred Johnson (b. 1927) became the first black woman army brigadier general as chief of the Army Nurse Corps.³⁰

Black Power advocates drew parallels between the African-American situation and that of other oppressed peoples. The most common analogy likened black Americans to colonized people in the Third World fighting for their independence. Huey Newton of the Black Panther Party compared the American "police action" in Vietnam to the wars on black people in Newark and Detroit. For Newton, Seale, and many others, African Americans were not fellow citizens to white Americans. African Americans' true brethren were to be found in the revolutionary movements in Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, and South Africa.³¹ For some, this identity with the underdog extended to identification with the Palestinians of the Middle East.

Black Power Workers, Artists, Feminists, and Intellectuals

The nationally recognized Black Panther Party was only one facet of the huge, decentralized Black Power movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. African Americans in many walks of life formed Black Power organizations. For the most part these new organizations centered around work, whether in auto plants, churches, or colleges. In addition, black women formed groups to protect their interests as people subject to both racism and sexism.

Black workers, especially men in the auto industry, became more militant in 1967. In Mahwah, New Jersey, 500 African Americans walked off the assembly line of a Ford plant after a foreman called one of them a "black bastard." The workers stayed off the job three days, resisting their union, until the foreman was removed. They formed the United Black Brothers of Mahwah Ford.³²

Detroit was the center of workers' Black Power. After police followed shoot-to-kill orders during the uprising of 1967, workers at the Dodge main plant formed the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) to fight discrimination in the plant and the union. DRUM inspired similar Revolutionary Union Movements (RUMs) in Ford, General Motors, and International Harvester.³³ The various RUMs joined together in the League of Revolutionary Black Workers that was most active between 1968 and 1969. Like the BPP, the RUMs split into factions that were either more black nationalist or more concerned with class oppression.

The Black Arts movement included a wide array of artists working in words, images, and sound. Hundreds of artists of all sorts heeded Black Power's call to create art to further the black liberation struggle. The images that appear in this chapter represent only a few drops in the flood of art on black themes. Readers will have noticed that much of the art in this book dates from the mid-1960s and later, when the numbers of black artists increased dramatically. In addition, themes of black history became attractive to artists who saw themselves as part of the Black Arts movement.

Some of the outpouring took the form of public art. Murals depicting the heroes of black history appeared on buildings in American inner cities. One of the best known and frequently emulated was Chicago's "Wall of Respect," painted in 1967 by several artists under the guidance of Sylvia Abernathy (n.d.) and Jeff Donaldson. It shows Malcolm X, Fannie Lou Hamer, and a series of other heroes of black American history and culture (14.13).

In Boston black construction workers commissioned a mural by Nelson Stevens (b. 1938) to honor African-American workers and their families. It reads: "Work to Unify African People" (14.14). The black family has remained a popular theme in African-American murals.

Like wall art, Black Power poetry also functioned as public art. Amiri Baraka of Newark, the "Malcolm X of Literature," has been writing liberation poetry for more than forty years.³⁴ For Baraka, as for Malcolm X, culture is a tool for liberating black people: "BLACK ART IS CHANGE, IT MUST FORCE CHANGE, IT MUST BE CHANGE."³⁵ Bara-



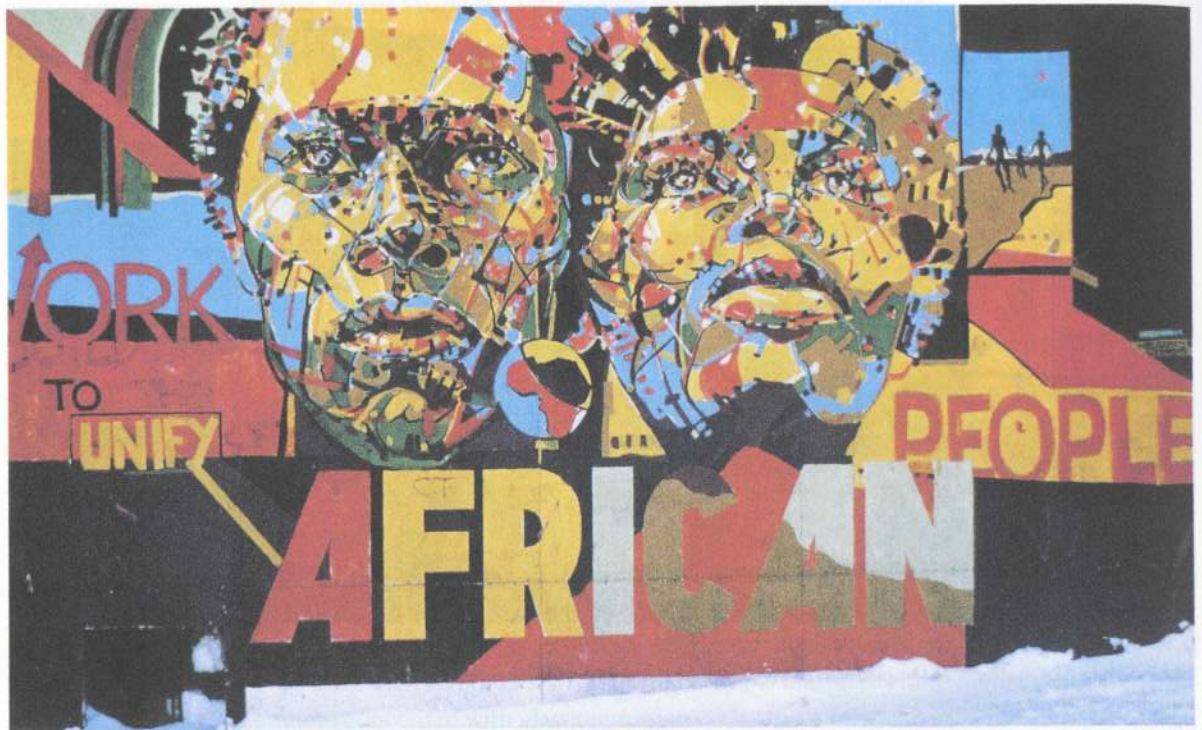
14.13. Sylvia Abernathy, Jeff Donaldson, et al., "Wall of Respect," 1967 (original version), 43rd and Langley, Southside Chicago

One of the first great black history murals, the "Wall of Respect" features several African-American heroes, Malcolm X most prominently.

LeRoi Jones's poetry uses black English as the national language of African Americans for his black art relates to the people in black communities, not academics or literary critics. It uses black people's words and reflects their values, speaking as they speak about lives in poverty that may not be aesthetically pretty. Nonetheless, black art sees beauty in the poor urban black people whom the rest of America would rather ignore.

Sonia Sanchez (b. 1934) joined Amiri Baraka in Harlem in 1965 and remains active as a Black Power poet in Philadelphia. Her 1969 "Summer Words of a Sistuh Addict" addresses drug addiction without judging the user. Sanchez's lowercase letters close the space between the poet and the young woman in the poem:

the first day i shot dope
was on a sunday.
i had just come
home from church
got mad at my motha
cuz she got mad at me. u dig?
went out. shot up
Behind a feelen against her.



14.14. Nelson Stevens, "Work to Unify African People," mural, 1973, United Community Construction Workers Labor Temple, Roxbury, Boston, Massachusetts

Stevens's mural portrays a black working couple and reads "Work to Unify African People" in the red and black colors associated with black nationalism.

It felt good.

gooder than doing it. yeah. . . .³⁶

Sanchez's poem ends with the young sister in tears.

Spoken poetry was the most popular art form of the Black Arts movement. Poets like Sanchez, Baraka, and Haki Madhubuti (b. 1942) read their poems aloud, often outside, often to jazz accompaniment. Their audiences participated in the performance, in the call-and-response so familiar to black music and religion. The Last Poets, a changing mix of African-American and Latino poets in New York, began rapping after the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965 and became popular in the late 1960s. The Last Poets saw themselves as portents of revolution—hence "last" poets. Their records, such as "Black People What Y'all Gon' Do?" urged race unity and discipline. Gil Scott Heron (b. 1949), another Black Power performance poet, was not a Last Poet. But Heron's spoken poetry, like theirs, inspired the rap and hip-hop spoken music that appeared in New York in the late 1970s.

With its black subject matter, black language, and black concerns, black art disregarded the conventions of American literature. Because the American publishing industry was dominated by whites who did not grasp its beauty or value, black art needed new outlets. Independent black publishers sprang up across the country, including Dudley Randall's (1914–2000) Blackside Press of Detroit, W. Paul Coates's (b. 1945) Black Classic Press of Baltimore, and Haki Madhubuti's Third World Press of Chicago. Third World Press has published the poets Gwendolyn Brooks (1917–2000), Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, the historian John Henrik Clarke (1915–1998), and the legal theorist Derrick Bell (b. 1932).³⁷ Black Classic Press has published the novelist Walter Mosley (b. 1952). Of the ten or so Black Arts publishing houses founded in the late 1960s and early 1970s, only Third World Press and Black Classic Press are still in business. Large, white-owned publishing houses now issue the work of black writers, seldom the case when the black presses began.

The Black Power movement gave rise to an array of new institutions and turned existing institutions like churches in new directions. Black churches that had sought civil rights began to offer more community services ranging from housing, youth tutoring, to credit unions. These services blossomed in the last two decades of the twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries. Among Black Power's new institutions were African-American museums. Black teachers in cities including Philadelphia, Boston, and Chicago remedied the absence of black history in existing museums by creating their own institutions, such as the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago. As in publishing, the success of black museums in reaching African Americans eventually changed the way white institutions conducted their own business. By the 1990s largely white museums were including black history and black artists in their collections. They held Kwanzaa celebrations as a way to reach out to the people of their cities.

Black Power had further intellectual repercussions. In academia, where with few exceptions black history and culture were ignored, black students demanded the creation of black studies programs and departments in 1968 and 1969. In religion, black theologians created "Liberation Theology" to address the experiences of black Christians. Both developments produced whole new bodies of scholarship. The student movement attracted a great deal of attention in the late 1960s.

Some black students and their white allies occupied campus buildings in an attempt to force reluctant administrations to create something entirely new: black studies. Most but not all demonstrations were peaceful, demanding the admission of more African-American students, the hiring of black faculty, and various services for black students. Some students demanded exclusively black dormitories and programs. Some students insisted that students play a part in the organization of black studies programs and faculty hiring. Tragedy marked the birth of black studies in Los Angeles. At the University of California, Los Angeles, disagreements between students associated with the Black Panthers and with the US Organization ended in the murder of two Panthers by US gunmen. At Cornell, black students armed themselves Panther-style

before occupying a building. By the 1970s black studies programs and departments had been established at San Francisco State University, Cornell, the University of California at Berkeley, Harvard, Princeton, and many other large institutions. For the first time, traditionally white institutions contained centers that specialized in the study of African Americans.

Black theologians refashioned American Christianity. The Reverend Albert B. Cleage (1911–2000) rejected the imagery of white religion in his Shrine of the Black Madonna, founded in 1954 in Detroit. Cleage taught black Christian nationalism and published *Black Power and Urban Politics* in 1968. Whether or not they followed Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and the Reverend Cleage in making God, Jesus, and Mary black, liberation theologians made racial justice a core tenet of their belief. Womanist (black feminist) theologians like Katie Cannon (b. 1950), Jacquelyn Grant (b. 1948), Cheryl Townsend Gilkes (b. 1947), and Renita Weems (b. 1954) reshaped Christianity around the lives of black women.

In Newark, New Jersey, Oakland, California, and many other U.S. cities and towns, Black Power had an unexpected outcome: The election of black women and men to public office led to their incorporation into state and local partisan political systems. Black Power, after all, began with separation. But separation by itself left political and economic power in nonblack hands. Separation perpetuated black powerlessness, as manifested in inferior services in black communities. In 1970, with the backing of Amiri Baraka and his Congress of African People, and a few white allies, Kenneth Gibson (b. 1932) became the first black mayor of Newark and the first black mayor in a major Northeastern city. The movement toward elective office took place at all levels of U.S. society.

In 1972 Shirley Chisholm (1924–2005), the first black woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1968, ran for president. She complained later that her sex as much as her race had crippled her candidacy. Black men did not take women seriously and so had not supported her. Chisholm's campaign revealed yet again the sexism rampant in the Black Power movement. Black male chauvinism had an illustrious ancestry in the Nation of Islam and the thought of Malcolm X. Cultural nationalists inclined toward a family-oriented male dominance, in which black women were idealized as wives and mothers. The militarism of the Vietnam War era reinforced the macho urban guerrilla ideals of groups like the Black Panthers. The image of the Black Panthers often included armed women like Elaine Brown (b. 1943), who headed the BPP while Huey Newton was incarcerated, and Kathleen Cleaver (b. 1945). But in practice, the group usually treated women like domestic servants. Other Black Power organizations also equated "the black man" with black people in general. Black women's concerns were not considered racial issues.

At the same time that black was equated with men, the women's movement generally saw women as white. Even though the black Civil Rights movement had directly inspired 1960s feminism, black women's concerns were not considered "women's" issues.

The title of one of the classic books of black women's studies by Gloria T. Hull (b. 1944), Patricia Bell Scott (b. 1950), and Barbara Smith (b. 1946) summed up the matter: *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (1982). In the 1960s and 1970s, black women organized as black women and as poor black women.

The National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), founded in 1967, gave voice to poor women on welfare. The group was not exclusively black or female: its first director was a black man. But the NWRO furthered Black Power by organizing a group of mostly black women who had been disempowered and invisible. It pressed for respect, child care, and medical care for women and their children. Like the NWRO, the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO), founded in 1973, refused to make black women choose between being black and being female. In consciousness-raising sessions for black women, the NBFO rescued black women's issues from oblivion.³⁸ Its theme song might well have been "Respect," the first big hit on Atlantic Records of Aretha Franklin (b. 1942), the "Queen of Soul," in 1967.

Like the more highly visible Black Power organizations, the National Welfare Rights Organization and the National Black Feminist Organization collapsed in the mid-1970s. The recession following the oil crisis, a hostile national political climate, internal dissension, and police and FBI harassment all took their toll. In its most obvious manifestations, Black Power had wound down by 1976. However Black Power did not disappear. It persisted in the guise of black caucuses and professional organizations.

Black Power Lives On

In the 1970s African Americans began to enter institutions and vocations that had been virtually all-white. The governmental policy of affirmative action made most of the difference. Growing out of the enforcement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Opportunity Act of 1972, affirmative action mandated the inclusion of blacks in institutions receiving federal funding. As black people entered new occupations, they discovered that everyday habits worked against the interests of black people as a whole and the black people in that particular occupation. In the 1970s, especially, black professionals created a wide array of organizations within organizations and vocations to advance black interests (Table 14.1). These organizations have become means of black empowerment along occupational lines.

Conclusion

The Black Power era of the 1960s and 1970s began as a controversial repudiation of the nonviolent movement for black civil rights. Black Power deeply affected African Americans whether or not they subscribed to its separatist ideals, its stress on African clothing, languages, and ritual, or its macho posturing. The 1968 assassination of the symbol of nonviolence, Martin Luther King, Jr., convinced masses of African Americans that the

Table 14.1. African-American Organizations Founded Since the Civil Rights Movement, a partial selection

Date Founded	Organization Name	Date Founded	Organization Name
1965	A. Philip Randolph Institute	1970	National Black Child Development Institute
1966	New York State Black, Puerto Rican and Hispanic Legislative Caucus	1970	National Black MBA Association, Inc.
1967	California Legislative Black Caucus	1970	Northwest Conference of Black Public Elected and Appointed Officials
1967, 1986	Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund	1970	Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus
1967	Missouri Legislative Black Caucus Foundation, Inc.	1971	Association of Black Foundation Executives
1967	Ohio Legislative Black Caucus	1971	Conference of Minority Transportation Officials
1968	African-American Women's Clergy Association	1971	National Black Nurses Association, Inc.
1968	Association of Black Psychologists	1971	National Urban Affairs Council
1968	National Association of Black Social Workers, Inc.	1971, 1985	Rainbow/PUSH Coalition
1968	National Black Law Students Association	1972	Coalition of Black Trade Unionists
1969	African Heritage Studies Association	1972	National Black Police Association
1969	National Association of Black Accountants, Inc.	1972	National Black United Fund, Inc.
1969	National Association of Minority Contractors	1972	National Naval Officers Association
1969	National Conference of Black Political Scientists	1973	National Brotherhood of Skiers
1969	Virginia Legislative Black Caucus	1974	Alabama Legislative Black Caucus
1969	Congressional Black Caucus	1974	American Association for Affirmative Action
1970	Association of Black Admissions and Financial Aid Officers of the Ivy League and Sister Schools, Inc.	1974	Black Flight Attendants of America, Inc.
1970	Association of Black Anthropologists	1974	National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice
1970	Black Caucus of the American Library Association	1974	National Conference of Black Mayors, Inc.
1970	International Association of Black Professional Fire Fighters	1974	North Carolina Legislative Black Caucus
1970	Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies	1975	Black Data Processing Association
1970	Maryland Legislative Black Caucus	1975	National Association of Black County Officials
1970	National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials	1975	National Association of Black Journalists
		1975	National Black Women's Consciousness-Raising Association
		1975	National Society of Black Engineers
		1975	South Carolina Legislative Black Caucus
		1975	Tennessee Black Caucus of State Legislators
		1976	Association of Black Women Historians
		1976	Michigan Legislative Black Caucus
		1976	National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters
		1976	Organization of Black Airline Pilots, Inc.

Table 14.1. (continued)

Date Founded	Organization Name	Date Founded	Organization Name
ca. 1976	Kansas Black Legislative Caucus	1983	National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners
1977	Afro-American Historical & Genealogical Society	1983	National Alliance of Black SalesMen and SalesWomen/Black Sales Institute
1977	American Association of Blacks in Energy	1984	National Political Congress of Black Women, Inc.
1977	Black Women's Agenda	1985	Caribbean American Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Inc.
1977	Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus	1985	National Trust for the Development of African-American Men
1977	National Black Caucus of State Legislators	1986	Miss Black USA Foundation
1977	New Jersey Legislative Black and Latino Caucus	1986	100 Black Men of America, Inc.
1977	TransAfrica, Inc./TransAfrica Forum	1987	Alliance of Black Entertainment Technicians
1978	Black Filmmaker Foundation	1987	National Black Arts Festival
1978	National Black Association for Speech-Language & Hearing	1988	Black Women Mayors' Caucus
ca. 1978	Illinois Legislative Black Caucus	1989	National Black Graduate Student Association, Inc.
1979	Black Women's Network	1992	National Association of African-American Studies
1979	Indiana Black Legislative Caucus	1993	National Black Chamber of Commerce
1980	National Black United Front	1994	Filmmakers and Actors of Color, Inc.
1981	National Black Women's Health Project	1996	Ronald H. Brown Foundation
1982	Associated Black Charities	1998	Black Radical Council
1982	Association of African-American Women Business Owners		
1982	Florida Conference of Black State Legislators		
1982	National Black Public Relations Society, Inc.		

United States was fundamentally antiblack and that they would have to depend upon themselves to overcome racial oppression. Black Power emancipated African Americans, psychologically. It freed them from the negative characterization prevailing in American culture. Black Power created a counternarrative of American culture, in which black people are prized and beautiful and possess a glorious history. Black Power focused attention on ordinary black people living in poor, inner cities and sought to address their needs. Black Power unleashed the extraordinary force of artistic creativity expressing black pride. It endowed the individuals who embraced it with a powerful, positive group identity.

TIMELINE

- 1965 ♦ Publication of *Autobiography of Malcolm X* and "Message to the Grass Roots."
- 1966 ♦ SNCC chairman Stokely Carmichael and Willie Ricks (b. ca. 1943) call for Black Power on James Meredith's "Walk Against Fear" in Mississippi.
- 1966 ♦ Black Panther Party for Self-Defense founded in Oakland, California. Later drops "Self-Defense" from its name.
- 1966 ♦ Maulana Karenga (b. 1941), head of US Organization, creates the African-American holiday Kwanzaa ("First Fruits") in Los Angeles.
- 1967 ♦ Urban revolts in Newark, New Jersey, and Detroit, Michigan.
- 1967 ♦ Stokely Carmichael (1941–1998) and Charles V. Hamilton (b. 1929) publish *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*.
- 1968 ♦ Tet offensive by Vietnamese Communists reveals weakness of U.S. and South Vietnamese troops.
- 1968 ♦ Martin Luther King, Jr., assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. Revolts in more than 100 cities around the United States.
- 1968 ♦ SCLC's multiracial Poor People's Campaign.
- 1968 ♦ Poet and playwright LeRoi Jones (b. 1934) changes his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka. He had founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School in Harlem in 1965 and the Spirit House Players in Newark in 1967.
- 1968 ♦ Richard Nixon elected president. Running as a third-party candidate, George Wallace carries five Southern states.
- 1968–1969 ♦ Initial Black and Afro-American studies programs and departments in colleges around the United States.
- 1968–1972 ♦ Black Arts movement.
- 1969 ♦ Founding of the Congressional Black Caucus.
- 1970 ♦ Angela Davis (b. 1944) drawn into the Soledad Brothers' cases in San Quentin, California. She is acquitted of all charges in 1972.
- 1970 ♦ Toni Cade Bambara (1939–1995) publishes *The Black Woman*.
- 1971 ♦ Melvin Van Peebles (b. 1932) produces the feature film *Sweet Sweetback's Badass Song*, the first "blaxploitation" movie.
- 1972 ♦ Coalition of Black Trade Unionists founded.
- 1972 ♦ National Black Political Assembly meets in Gary, Indiana.
- 1972 ♦ Shirley Chisholm (1924–2005) runs for president of the United States.
- 1972 ♦ Richard Nixon reelected president of the United States. He resigns from presidency in 1974.
- 1973 ♦ Founding of the National Black Feminist Organization in New York City.
- 1975 ♦ Elijah Muhammad (1897–1975) dies in Chicago. Son Wallace Muhammad reorganizes NOI as World Community of al-Islam in the west and admits whites.
- 1975 ♦ North Vietnamese conquer South Vietnam, ending Vietnam War.

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|--|---|
| <p>1976 ♦ Jimmy Carter elected president of the United States.</p> <p>1977 ♦ Television series based on Alex Haley's (1921–1992) best-selling novel, <i>Roots</i>, attracts 130 million viewers as a miniseries and inspires Americans to investigate their genealogies.</p> <p>1980 ♦ Robert Johnson (b. 1946) founds Black Entertainment Network (BET).</p> | <p>1980 ♦ Urban revolt in Miami, Florida, after police who killed unarmed black motorist are acquitted.</p> <p>1980 ♦ Ronald Reagan elected president of the United States after launching campaign in Philadelphia, Mississippi, and advocating "states' rights."</p> <p>1980 ♦ National Black Independent Political party founded.</p> |
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Review Questions

1. What was the relationship between the nonviolent civil rights movement and the Black Power movement in Mississippi in 1966?
2. What caused the rise and what caused the collapse of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense?
3. What is cultural nationalism? Give two examples that still exist today.
4. What and who made Newark, New Jersey, a Black Power center after 1968?
5. In what ways was black participation in the Vietnam War different from black participation in the Second World War, the First World War, and the Civil War? How was it similar?

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the title of Elizabeth Catlett's "Negro es Bello II" (1969) in Portuguese?
2. What does "Black Power" mean? Should all black Americans have embraced it?
3. Black Power poets like Sonia Sanchez (b. 1934) use Black English in their work. Is this a good idea?
4. What is the role today of black publishing houses such as the Third World Press and the Black Classic Press, both founded during the Black Power era?
5. Does the election of black men and women to political office further or limit black power?