

Are the Revolutionary Techniques Employed in *The Battle of Algiers* Applicable to Harlem?

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In the past few years the works of Franz Fanon have become widely read and quoted by those involved in the "Revolution" that has begun to take place in the communities of Black America. If *The Wretched of the Earth* is the "handbook for the Black revolution," then *The Battle of Algiers* is its movie counterpart.

The problem of successful revolt in the U.S. is a difficult one that will be solved only in the actual process of trial and error during the course of struggle. It will not be solved on these pages or in this book. The fact that this material is printed is a direct indication of how deeply we are actually into the revolution.

The American society is a unique amoebalike structure that can not only absorb some of the most adverse elements in it but can also co-opt the ideas of those elements to such an extent as to make it profitable for the society as a whole. Co-optation includes having cigarette commercials in the latest Black jargon and a "revolution" taking place because people have changed their tastes in wine. America has the best shock absorbers of all the countries in the world. Her resiliency to the only civil war she has had, two world wars, the McCarthy era, and the Vietnam war protests has left her virtually unchanged from the time of her independence until now. The Constitution is the same, the government system of so-called checks and balances is the same. And the attitudes of the majority have changed painfully slowly. France does not have this same absorptive character. The independence of Algeria caused the downfall of the Fourth French Republic. Numerous factors would have to come into play before that would be true of the U.S.

Every revolution is different of course, but it is undeniable

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able that there are certain factors common to all that can be utilized by those seeking methods of implementation. The Chinese Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and even the Kenya Revolution labeled "Mau Mau" have not been given the attention that the Algerian Revolution has. This is primarily because of the great extent to which the public has been made aware of this specific revolutionary instance through the writings of Fanon and the more graphic motion-picture illustration, *The Battle of Algiers*.

One of the basic problems of this kind of mass aeration of the Algerian struggle has been to further over-romanticize the concept of struggle—real struggle. To read Fanon three or four times along with Mao to the extent of having paragraphs memorized is not the essential thing. When someone says "Freedom by any means necessary" and someone else suggests that the earnings of prostitutes be used for procuring guns—that's by any means necessary. Or "If the Administration does not accede to our demands, we're going to burn the motherfucker down!" How many state capitols, police stations, and college campuses have been burned down by Black people? These are clearly cases of our rhetoric being far, far in front of our actions.

Revolution—the overthrow of a government, form of government, or social system with another taking its place—is not an easy task or an eight-hour-a-day, five-days-a-week job. This is not an attempt to point out the best way to overthrow the U.S. government, but a study in the feasibility of revolution in this country based on the techniques evolved in the Algerian war on the part of the French and on the part of the Algerians. General talk on the subject has been in excess. What are some of the reasons for the success of the Algerian Revolution? Can those reasons be transported and used in the United States, Harlem, Watts, Howard University? What are the parallels between Algeria and Black America, between the French colonialist army's approach and that taken by the U.S. army and national guard?

The impression that the viewer gets from *The Battle of Algiers* is that the war was decided and waged in urban areas. It was not. The outcome of none of the major revolutions in this century has been decided in an urban setting as would be necessary in America. The bulk of the Black population is located in specific areas of the major cities. In the event of the beginning of an insurrectionary war,

the first steps taken by the federal government will undoubtedly be:

1. To cut the insurgents off from any type of foreign assistance.
2. To destroy larger guerrilla groupings and regular forces (cells). This is achieved through the use of torture. The cell setup is such that a person goes out and recruits two more people, persons two and three, who are not known to each other but only to person one whom they also know. Then persons two and three recruit persons four-five, and six-seven, without telling person one who the new guerrillas are. The line of command of this pyramidal-type structure starts at the top without the person at the top knowing precisely who is at the bottom of the pyramid. The advantage of this is that if number one is captured by the authorities, under torture he can only reveal two names and not the names of all those involved in the cell. The standard and probably the most important order of the FLN was that in the event you were captured and tortured, then you were to summon all of your spiritual and ideological strength to hold out for at least twenty-four hours. This would give the FLN time to render any information you might have relinquished useless.
3. Communications and essential administrative and economic centers will be under heavy guard.
4. The government may undertake the task of mass resettlement of communities in order to prevent these communities from becoming bases for the rebel forces.
5. The captured rebels will be re-educated (brainwashed).

The above were the cases in Algeria. Things may be very different in the United States.

In open territory, as compared to city limits, it is a difficult military maneuver to maintain an electrified line of defense, but it can be done. In Algeria, the Morice Electrified Line was started by the French in 1957, to cut off the external rebel army in Tunisia. The line was made of two rows of electrified fencing and barbed wire with scattered minefields running from the coast some two hundred miles to the Sahara. It was defended by radar and scouting planes and flooded with light at night while troops patrolled in tanks and armored cars. In 1958 the effectiveness of the Morice Line was proven when a rebel leader attempted to get 1,200 men from Tunisia into Algeria, with the result of only ten, *ten*, reaching the destination. To increase the effectiveness of this line of defense, the population was evacuated from adjacent areas and these

areas were designated forbidden zones where civilians could be shot on sight. In an urban setting this same kind of defense system would probably be 100 percent successful. The Black population in these areas would in essence be living under concentration-camp conditions while in their own homes. The area is well known to the inhabitants just as the mountain terrain was known by the Algerians and Cubans. But knowledge of the area is not enough. Guerrilla warfare cannot be waged in a laboratory-type setup. It is based on the ability of the guerrillas to move undetected from one place to another. There must be freedom of movement.

If such a line were established around Harlem, with adjacent areas evacuated, the search for rebels would then become just a problem of systematic searching in a control area. The operation could be carried out apartment by apartment, block by block. Photographs of rooftops, streets, and layouts of the sewer system are probably already in the possession of New York City authorities.

The existence of an external army in Cuba, Canada, the Bahamas, and Mexico would have the dual purpose of winning international support through propaganda and being at readiness for invasion and receiving munitions. Algeria received her munitions and stationed her external forces in Tunisia and Morocco, two neighboring sister Moslem countries. The feasibility of the above mentioned countries as external bases (especially for Canada and Mexico) depends primarily on the developments within these countries within the next few years. At the present time they are outstandingly pro-American in their policies, foreign and internal. It must be pointed out that we are definitely without the type of support that the Moslems of Algeria received from the Moslems of Tunisia and the Moslems of Morocco. What is our common denominator with the countries in close proximity to the United States? We don't have common history, common culture, or common language. And why should they risk their lives and homeland for a people with which they hold nothing in common?

One of the few things ever gone into in detail about the Algerian Revolution is simply: Why was it successful? What was there about the Algerian people that made them undefeatable?

Tradition seems to have played the most important role. Traditional aspects common to all Algerians were: (a) religion, (b) a sense of community and (c) geography. Reli-

gion, since it was invented, has been a unifying force for war. When religion is added to nationalism, the fight is going to be a fierce one. Orthodox Islam in Algeria, unlike watered-down Christianity in America, has the property of making all else seem insignificant by comparison. Political parties and material wealth are subjugated to moral issues. When Moslem Algerians must have independence, the issue is not only a political one, but a moral and religious one. As someone once said: "There is no true war other than religious war." With a strong sense of religion "brother" becomes more than just a salutation. Guerrillas are to be assisted because they are patriots *and* Moslems. Inevitably, a sense of community is already present because of the common bond of religion, which makes the task of winning over the population that much easier.

As early as 1940 the groups who agitated for Algerian independence were in the main orthodox religious groups. In the forefront of the independence movement was the Algerian Association of Ulema (doctors of Islamic Law). Ferhat Abbas in 1935, the man who was to become President of the Algerian Provisional Government in 1958, was accused of treason to his own people because of his assimilationist ideas. In response he wrote: "If I had discovered the Algerian nation, I would be a nationalist and would not blush for my crime. . . . However, I will not die for the Algerian fatherland, because this fatherland does not exist." His career of struggle for Algerian independence is an excellent illustration of the various Moslem attitudes from 1930 to 1960. In the beginning he regarded independence as unthinkable and wanted Algeria to be aligned with France. After much disillusionment, he saw it as a possibility and then finally as the only way to achieve true dignity for Moslems. This same experience will happen to many of our people. But it is our duty to bring the realities of the situation to the Roy Wilkinses of Black America.

The Association of Ulema was the first to attack Ferhat Abbas' assimilationist position. "We have examined the past and the present and have found that the Algerian nation has taken shape and exists. This nation has its history marked by deeds of the highest order. It possesses its culture, its traditions, and its characteristics, good and bad, as do all nations of the earth. We maintain further that this Algerian nation is not France, cannot be France, and does not wish to be France." The Association of Ulema was in the forefront with the slogan "Islam is my religion, Arabic

is my language, Algeria is my fatherland." This was in 1936; independence was not achieved until 1962 (March, 1962). Religion can also be considered as the source of strength and convictions that the guerrillas exhibited. Religion can give a man that inner strength which is necessary to survive and not break under torture. What do Black Americans have that would be a strong ideological base for everyone from New York to Atlanta to Los Angeles?

The major problem of any revolutionary movement is getting the backing of the population. As Peter Parot puts it: partisan warfare and psychological warfare = revolutionary warfare. The FLN, by taking the position that its leaders were responsible for the moral and spiritual wellbeing of the inhabitants of the country as well as their physical safety, immediately got those people who were vehemently opposed to the presence of the French on the grounds that the moral fiber of Algeria was being eaten away by the corruption of European ways. The Casbah was to be made a decent place again. There was to be no consumption of intoxicating beverages; drugs were to be outlawed as well as the occupation of prostitutes eliminated. The theory behind this was (1) we must clean up ourselves before we begin to clean out the French effectively; (2) no true Moslem would be against the return to the true values of orthodox Islam; (3) the most important in influential groups in the population, namely the religious leaders, stood behind this new approach. Everyone remembers two scenes from *The Battle of Algiers*: the first one showing children dragging a drunk down a flight of stone steps and the second showing a drug pusher being shot in the streets. At the top of our priorities list should be removing those obstacles to Black unity. Manpower is desperately needed. It's the one commodity that we must make sure we have plenty of. This means that our young brothers cannot go off to war in another part of the world. We must do everything in our power to protect their lives. The best way to do that is to make sure that they don't go. (By any means necessary.) This salvaging or stabilizing of our numbers has to include the eradication of those who would make us slaves to heroin. Eliminate them or their means to do business. "Off the pig" in this case means dope pushers.

For those who are so fond of speaking of "armed revolution," "armed struggle," and "protracted struggle" a war between Black people and those elements of the Mafia who control the drug traffic in our communities would offer all three of these. And if we cannot effectively deal

with the Mafia and that organization's killing off of our most precious resource, our youth, within the next five years, then we had better forget about taking on the most militarily advanced nation in the history of the world. Coming to terms with organized crime in our communities would be a sort of apprenticeship for those who still have romantic notions about war. Messing with the Mafia is serious shit. And if we don't have it together, we won't live to tell about it. They don't take prisoners of war.

Religion is a key factor not only for unifying those of different political persuasions, but in the case of Algeria was influential in the type of insurrectional war that was waged. The French in their pacification effort put up a facade of respect for Islamic law and customs, such as the prohibition of foreign men touching the persons of Moslem women. This way women could go unaccosted through the checkoff points with concealed weapons to be used outside for terrorist activities. Islam also states that the woman must obey the wishes of the man to whom she is charged, thus if ordered to carry guns, hide insurgents, etc., she did so. Not necessarily because she was so politically aware, but because she was told to.

The major religion of Black people in the U.S. is diluted Christianity. Perhaps fifty years ago religion may have proved to be a good rallying point, but not today. Particularly among young Blacks. What then will our major unifying idea be? The combating of racism in America? Racism has become so subtle in most parts of the country that one must almost remind himself on a daily basis that it does indeed exist. It will be necessary in the near future to come up with a viable alternative to religion that will have the same unifying effect. The matter of geography is common to all revolutions. The land issue is inevitably linked with the independence issue. The land fought for is the same area that is in the hand of the colonialists. The problem is ridding the land of the colonizers, sending them back to where they came from with the revolutionaries remaining. In the cases of Kenya and Algeria, it was first the rightful owner of the land who had occupied it for centuries, then the coming of the settlers (the colonizers), and after the struggle, the return of the land to the natives. In the case of this country, this usual pattern would be broken. Which block of land are we fighting for? The northeastern United States? The southeastern United States? All of it? Then comes the problem of deporting so many whites to "where they came from."

I have tried to show thus far that the idea of importing the techniques of revolution that were successful in one place may prove disastrous in another place. That the main reasons for the success of the Algerian Revolution were (1) religion; (2) a sense of community; (3) land base; and (4) outside basis of support. And that none of these elements has emerged to any large degree among Black people in this country.