

Race, Reform, and Rebellion

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5. Black Power, 1965–1970

We are living in an era of revolution, and the revolt of the American Negro is part of the rebellion against the oppression and colonialism which has characterized this era. . . . It is incorrect to classify the revolt of the Negro as simply a racial conflict of black against white, or as a purely American problem. Rather, we are today seeing a global rebellion of the oppressed against the oppressor, the exploited against the exploiter.

Malcolm X, 1965

If a man hasn't found something he will die for, he isn't fit to live.

Martin Luther King

I

Walter Rodney, the noted Guyanese historian and political theorist, once observed that the slave revolts in his native land “had taught the lesson that slavery as a form of control over labor was proving uneconomical and unstable.”¹ The same can be said for the U.S. black nonviolent uprisings of the early 1960s as they related to the Jim Crow system of American caste and class oppression. Racial segregation had become an international embarrassment for the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Every world headline for George Wallace, and every citation of a fresh atrocity against blacks in the South destroyed the credibility of the U.S. as a nation committed to democracy and human equality. Domestically, racial unrest was costly to the private sector. Eastern U.S. capital and the multinational corporations had no direct historic commitment to the maintenance of rigid caste divisions within the American working class. They viewed the mild reforms proposed by Wilkins, Young and Randolph with no great anxiety. If desegregation could provide the necessary civil order to maintain private capital accumulation, why not ratify federal legislation to that effect? Racism itself—the systemic exploitation of black labor power and the political and cultural hegemony of capital’s interests over black labor—would still

remain intact. The fragile black middle strata could be absorbed into marginal levels of affluence in both the private sector and the government. This price was modest compared to the greater costs of permitting racial conflagration to continue as it had for five years and more. The rightist tendency of the desegregationist forces were amenable to this proposal. Dedicated anti-communists themselves, their goal had never been to overturn the political economy of capitalism. As integrationists, they simply desired an "equal opportunity" to compete within society and the labor force, without the debilitating restrictions of caste. They were opposed to the notions of black nationalists that blacks should concentrate their own numbers into a power bloc which would demand structural changes in the racist/capitalist order. Their dream of "freedom" was as American as Horatio Alger: social acceptance and upward mobility within the very centers of corporate power. Black radicals in SNCC had come to repudiate this dream; black nationalists had never shared it. As the civil rights united front gradually came unstuck, the only original voice which articulated an alternative vision for black Americans was that of Malcolm X.

It is difficult for historians to capture the vibrant essence of Malcolm X, his earthy and human character, his position as a revolutionary teacher for a generation of young militants, his total love for the dispossessed. Part of his greatness as a social figure was derived from his sordid urban origins. As we have seen, Malcolm rose from being a pimp, drug dealer and ghetto hustler into the most forceful proponent of nationalism since Garvey. His rhetoric, more so than even King's, was almost hypnotic upon black audiences. As the chief spokesperson for the Nation of Islam, he preached a militant message which changed the lives of thousands of poor and oppressed blacks. In any typical sermon, Malcolm might speak these words:

My beautiful, black brothers and sisters! Look at your skins! We're all black to the white man, but we're a thousand and one different colors. Turn around, look at each other! . . . During slavery it was a rare one of our black grandmothers who escaped the white rapist slavemaster. That rapist slavemaster who emasculated the black man with threats, with fear until even today the black man lives with fear of the white man in his heart!

Think of it—think of that black slave man filled with fear and dread, hearing the screams of his wife, his mother, his daughter being taken—in the barn, the kitchen, in the bushes! . . . And you were too filled with *fear* of the rapist to do anything about it! . . .

Every white man in America, when he looks into a black man's eyes, should fall to his knees and say "I'm sorry, I'm sorry—my kind has committed history's greatest crime against your kind; will you give me the chance to atone?" But

do you brothers and sisters expect any white man to do that? *No*, you *know* better! . . .

Every time you see a white man, think about the devil you're seeing! Think of how it was on *your* slave foreparents' bloody, sweaty backs that he built this empire that's today the richest of all nations—where his evil and his greed cause him to be hated around the world!²

As a devout organizer for the Nation of Islam, Malcolm had served in Detroit, Boston and Philadelphia before leading the powerful Temple Number Seven of Harlem. Word of his sermons brought in hundreds of "Southern migrant people" who in Malcolm's words "would go anywhere to hear what they called 'good preaching'." After hours on the speaking platform, Malcolm "would become so choked up sometimes I would walk in the streets until late into the night. Sometimes I would speak to no one for hours, thinking to myself about what the white man had done to our poor people here in America."³ As Malcolm began to become better known outside the Nation of Islam, he became the object of bitter attacks from the media and many Negro leaders. His teachings were described in newspapers as "fascist," "violent," "racist," "anti-Christian," and surprisingly, even "Communist-inspired." When white interviewers asked Malcolm, "Why do you teach black supremacy, and hate," Malcolm's response was "to pour on pure fire in return": "For the white man to ask the black man if he hates him is just like the rapist asking the raped, or the wolf asking the sheep, 'Do you hate me?' The white man is in no moral position to accuse anyone else of hate!"⁴ Even as a follower of Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm insisted at every opportunity that he opposed racial segregation "even more militantly" than the leaders of the NAACP and other integrationists. For the Muslims, segregation was a system which was "forced upon inferiors by superiors." Complete racial separation, however, would be a means for blacks to stop "begging" the system "for jobs, food, clothing and housing."⁵

In 1962 and 1963, Malcolm's personal prominence began to create tensions and organizational rivalries within the Nation of Islam. Malcolm began to speak out less on religious issues, and increasingly asserted himself on contemporary political questions. The Muslim newspaper he had founded, *Muhammad Speaks*, was ordered to print less about Malcolm. Muhammad's tight authoritarianism prohibited Malcolm and other more activist-oriented ministers from becoming involved in black political struggles. Finally, two events forced Malcolm to divorce himself from the Nation entirely. On 3 July 1963, two former secretaries of Muhammad filed paternity suits against him claiming that the 67-year-old patriarch had fathered their four children. Any other Muslim member or leader would

have been promptly expelled for the crime of adultery, yet Muhammad maintained his high post, even after admitting that the charges were true. Malcolm interviewed the women, and learned that Muhammad had described him privately as a "dangerous" threat to his own position. When President Kennedy was assassinated, Malcolm commented to the press that his death was a case of "the chickens coming home to roost . . . that the hate in white men had not stopped with the killing of defenseless black people, but that hate, allowed to spread unchecked, finally had struck down this country's Chief of State."⁶ Muhammad used this statement as a pretext to neutralize his chief spokesperson. Malcolm was ordered into "silence" for ninety days, not allowed to teach in his own mosque, nor to speak with the media. Returning to New York, Malcolm was shattered to discover that Muhammad might have authorized several Muslims to assassinate him. By March 1964, it was apparent that the Nation of Islam had no desire to reinstate Malcolm under any conditions of submission. Malcolm left the Nation, and announced the creation of a new organization on 8 March 1964, the Muslim Mosque, Inc. Malcolm informed the press that he was now "prepared to cooperate in local civil rights actions in the South and elsewhere and shall do so because every campaign for specific objectives can only heighten the political consciousness of the Negroes and intensify their identification against white society."⁷

In his last hectic year of life, Malcolm was attempting to develop a revolutionary ideology and program appropriate to the conditions confronting black Americans. In this search, Malcolm's greatest obstacle was his own earlier public image. "I was trying to turn a corner, into a new regard by the public, especially Negroes," he stated in his autobiography. "I was no less angry than I had been, but at the same time the true brotherhood I had seen" in a 1964 journey to the Middle East and Africa "had influenced me to recognize that anger can blind human vision."⁸ Renamed El-Hajj-Malik El-Shabazz after his visit to Mecca, Malcolm adopted Sunni Islam as his personal faith, but carefully separated his religious tenets from the political work in which he was engaged. In the summer of 1964, Malcolm and his growing cadre of followers formed the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), a militant black nationalist force based primarily in New York City. During these months, Malcolm restructured many of his older ideas into a clearly uncompromising program which was both anti-racist and anti-capitalist. Like DuBois before him, Malcolm and the OAAU planned to submit a list of human rights violations and acts of genocide against U.S. blacks to the United Nations. He criticized blacks for endorsing Johnson's 1964 presidential candidacy, predicting with grim accuracy that Johnson would stop far short of providing a meaningful economic and social program which benefited minorities. Criticizing the Negro middle

strata's commitment to private enterprise, Malcolm declared, "you can't have capitalism without racism. And if you find [anti-racists] usually they're socialists or their political philosophy is socialism."⁹ The actual program of the OAAU was reformist rather than revolutionary. Their program included the following: the election of independent black candidates for public office, voter registration drives, rent strikes to promote better housing conditions for blacks, the building of all-black community schools, the creation of cultural centers, and initiating black committees for community and neighborhood self-defense. At one point, Malcolm even suggested that his older apocalyptic vision of a race war was no longer viable. "America is the first country . . . that can actually have a bloodless revolution." Evoking some of the ideas of Henry Lee Moon, Malcolm stated, "the Negro holds the balance of power, and if the Negro in this country were given what the Constitution says he is supposed to have, the added power of the Negro in this country would sweep all of the racists and the segregationists out of office. It would change the entire political structure of the country."¹⁰

Malcolm's base of supporters cut deeply into the Civil Rights Movement. Robert Gore, the assistant community relations director of CORE, attended a debate between Malcolm and Bayard Rustin in 1962, with the intention of rooting "with Bayard all the way." Gore left the debate "applauding more for Malcolm X." Half-ashamed, he wrote that Malcolm's eloquence was so moving that "it did my heart a world of good to sit back and listen to [Malcolm X] list the sins of the white man."¹¹ By late 1963, Malcolm was having a direct impact upon many CORE chapters. While Farmer futilely attacked Malcolm, declaring that "we cannot leave the ghetto to the rabid nationalist," other local leaders in the organization championed his ideas.¹² In April 1964, Malcolm urged activists to start "rifle clubs" to defend the black community against police brutality and white vigilante violence. In a similar vein, Cleveland CORE activist Lewis Robinson initiated a proposal for creating a gun club. Malcolm's impact upon SNCC was even greater. White activist Howard Zinn urged SNCC members to repudiate revolutionary black nationalism. "Friendships, and love affairs, have crossed race lines in SNCC," Zinn wrote in early 1964. "Recent calls by Malcolm X and others for Negroes to use self-defense, and even retaliation, against acts of violence by whites," must not be condoned.¹³ Later that year, however, Hamer and SNCC's "Freedom Singers" attended an OAAU meeting in Harlem. In early February 1965, Malcolm was asked by SNCC to speak to black students and workers in Selma, Alabama. Malcolm's electrifying speech gave the radical nationalist tendency within SNCC another boost. Even John Lewis, now increasingly at odds

with more radical SNCC members, commented that Malcolm "more than any single personality" was able to "articulate the aspirations, bitterness, and frustrations of the Negro people."¹⁴

On 21 February 1965, Malcolm was assassinated by gunmen as he rose to address a black Harlem audience. For over a year, he had been followed by the specter of death: in a Cairo visit, he was severely poisoned; on 14 February 1965, his home was fire-bombed. There is now substantial documentation indicating that Malcolm's assassination may have involved the FBI and other agencies of the federal government.¹⁵ From the moment of his death, however, both the Nation of Islam and most of the mainstream civil rights leaders attempted to eradicate Malcolm's political influence among young blacks. Muhammad cynically attributed Malcolm's death to his advocacy of violence. "He seems to have taken weapons as his god. Therefore we couldn't tolerate a man like that. He preached war. We preach peace." Muhammad moved rapidly to isolate pro-Malcolm opponents and to win over key dissidents, including one of his own sons, the Islamic scholar Wallace D. Muhammad, who had briefly sided with Malcolm. Wilfred X and Philbert X, Malcolm's brothers, who had also become leading Muslim ministers, defended Muhammad. For every different reason, some integrationist leaders quickly seized the opportunity to join the Nation's attacks on Malcolm. A prominent journalist and black appointee in the Johnson Administration, Carl Rowan, described him as "an ex-convict, ex-dope peddler who became a racial fanatic . . . a Negro who preached segregation and race hatred." The most vitriolic yet articulate assaults on Malcolm came from Rustin. "Now that he is dead, we must resist the temptation to idealize Malcolm X, to elevate charisma to greatness," Rustin noted in March 1965. "Malcolm is not a hero of the movement, he is a tragic victim of the ghetto." Rustin insisted that Malcolm was a political failure; that "having blown the trumpet, he could summon, even at the very end, only a handful of followers"; that Malcolm's "central error" was his dedication "to the preservation of the ghetto, which he thought could either be transformed from within or transplanted to a happier environment." Rustin argued, "the movement we build . . . must be dedicated to [the ghetto's] destruction. White America, not the Negro people, will determine Malcolm's role in history."¹⁶

These sad attempts at blunting Malcolm's influence were ineffectual. In death, the dynamic black activist carried a greater effect upon the mood of black Americans and other non-whites than anyone in a generation. Newspapers across the Third World hailed Malcolm as "the militant and most popular of Afro-American anti-segregationist leaders." Black psychologist Kenneth Clark praised Malcolm for trying "to find a place in the fight for

civil rights"; author James Baldwin termed Malcolm's death "A major setback for the Negro movement." Widely quoted and long remembered were the remarks of black actor Ossie Davis at Malcolm's funeral:

Many will ask what Harlem finds to honor in this stormy, controversial and bold young captain—and we will smile. They will say that he is of hate—a fanatic, a racist. . . . And we will answer. . . . Did you ever talk to Brother Malcolm? Did you ever touch him or have him smile at you? Did you ever really listen to him? Did he ever do a mean thing? Was he ever himself associated with violence or any public disturbance? For if you did you would know him . . . Malcolm was our manhood, our living, black manhood! This was his meaning to his people. And, in honoring him, we honor the best in ourselves. And we will know him then for what he was and is—a Prince—our own black shining Prince!—who didn't hesitate to die, because he loved us so.

Dead at the age of 39, Malcolm quickly became the fountainhead of the modern renaissance of black nationalism in the late 1960s. His autobiography and published speeches were widely read; even millions of white radicals grew to respect and honor Malcolm's legacy. Black nationalist groups with very divergent political and economic programs all referred to Malcolm as their theoretical touchstone. Even among his bitterest opponents, Malcolm evoked a kind of grudging respect. Prophetically, Wilkins said of him, "Master spell-binder that he was, Malcolm X in death cast a spell more far-flung and more disturbing than any he cast in life."¹⁷

II

Even before the assassination of Malcolm, many social critics sensed that nonviolent direct action, a tactic of protest used effectively in the South, would have little appeal in the northern ghetto. Far more likely were a series of urban social upheavals which could not be controlled or channelled by the civil rights leadership. In 1963, James Baldwin predicted that race riots would soon "spread to every metropolitan center in the nation which has a significant Negro population."¹⁸ In the spring and summer months of 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967 and 1968, massive black rebellions swept across almost every major U.S. city in the Northeast, Middle West and California. In Watts and Compton, the black districts of Los Angeles, black men and women took to the streets, attacking and burning white-owned property and institutions. The Watts rebellion left \$40 million in private property damage and 34 persons killed. Federal authorities ordered 15,000 state police and National Guardsmen into Detroit to quell that city's uprising of 1967. In Detroit 43 residents were killed; almost 2,000 were injured; 2,700 white-owned ghetto businesses were broken into, and 50 per-

cent of these were gutted by fire or completely destroyed; fourteen square miles of Detroit's inner city were torched; 5,000 black persons were left without homes. Combining the total weight of socio-economic destruction, the ghetto rebellions from 1964 to 1972 led to 250 deaths, 10,000 serious injuries, and 60,000 arrests, at a cost of police, troops, other coercive measures taken by the state and losses to business amounting to billions of dollars.

Sociologists and politicians alike were at a loss to explain the furor of these "twentieth century slave revolts." They tacitly had assumed that federal measures toward desegregation would lead to a lessening of racial tensions. Now they had to confront their own theoretical inadequacies. A few white liberals, reluctant as always to accept harsh realities, attempted to explain away the revolts, claiming that most blacks were satisfied with gradual, liberal reforms, and opposed the violence in their communities. Many others defined the rebellions as quasi-anarchistic "riots," which were grounded in an urban youth subculture of social deviance. Herbert J. Gans, a consultant to the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, claimed: "No one knows exactly what sets off the spiraling process [of urban rebellion]. However, most of the rebellious . . . takes on the mood of a carnival. This is not because the participants are callous, but because they are happy at the sudden chance to exact revenge against those who have long exploited and harassed them. The rebellion becomes a community event."¹⁹ Closer to the mark was black sociologist Kenneth Clark, author of *Dark Ghetto*, who suggested: "Human beings who are forced to live under ghetto conditions and whose daily experience tells them that almost nowhere in society are they respected and granted the ordinary dignity and courtesy accorded to others, will, as a matter of course, begin to doubt their own worth." The act of rebellion, the collective venting of long-held hostilities, was in a social and psychological sense a rejection of blacks' "pernicious self- and group-hatred" imposed by the white society.²⁰ Another important yet overlooked factor in understanding these rebellions was the growth of unfulfilled "rising expectations" among many blacks. In some respects, the 1960s brought an unprecedented improvement in the material, day-to-day conditions for the black working class. From 1964 to 1969, the median black family income in the U.S. increased from \$5,921 to \$8,074. The ratio between the median family incomes of blacks and whites narrowed from 54 percent to 61 percent. The percentage of black families below the U.S. poverty level declined from 48.1 in 1959 to 27.9 in 1969. Unemployment rates for non-white married males with families dropped from 7.2 percent in 1962, 4.3 percent in 1965, to a low 2.5 percent in 1969. But even these modest advances in jobs, civil rights, and other areas did not keep pace with the expectations of freedom

which had awakened the black masses during the decade. Non-white youth unemployment actually increased in these years, from 24.4 percent in 1960 to 29.1 percent in 1970. The quality of black urban life—poor housing, rat infestation, crime, high infant mortality rates, disease, poor public education—continued to deteriorate.

Against this volatile background of black urban rebellion, the Civil Rights Movement could not exist as it had in previous years. On 5 June 1966, the first black student to attend the University of Mississippi, James Meredith, began a march from Memphis to Jackson as an individualist act to assert all blacks' rights to move across the South unmolested. Within hours, Meredith was the victim of a shotgun attack. Promptly flying to Memphis, King, McKissick and Carmichael agreed to complete Meredith's symbolic march to Jackson. From the beginning, dissension filled the ranks. Charles Evers, the brother of the martyred NAACP leader, complained, "I don't see how walking up and down a hot highway helps: I'm for walking house to house and fence to fence to get Negroes registered."²¹ King was having an increasingly difficult time trying to keep SNCC's black nationalists in check. Carmichael pressured King to accept the request of the Deacons of Defense, a militant southern black organization, to provide paramilitary protection during the protest. As the march progressed, SNCC activist Willie Ricks began to promote the slogan, "Black Power." As a political expression, Black Power was nothing new: novelist Richard Wright and politician Adam Clayton Powell had used it before, as well as others. But combined with Ricks's infectious contempt for Mississippi's white authorities, and in the context of the Meredith march, the slogan captured the mood of the majority of CORE and SNCC activists and most rural blacks as well. On 16 June, Carmichael and several others were arrested and held for six hours in Greenwood, Mississippi. After his release, Carmichael informed a rally of supporters: "This is the twenty-seventh time I have been arrested. I ain't going to jail no more. What we gonna start saying now is "black power." Ricks perceptively picked up the phrase, demanding, "What do you want?" Blacks from the rural community and SNCC activists alike chanted, "Black Power!" Later, King desperately tried to keep others from using the phrase, describing it as "an unfortunate choice of words." It was too late.²² McKissick now sided firmly with Carmichael, explaining that "Black Power is not Black supremacy; it is a united Black Voice reflecting racial pride in the tradition of our heterogeneous nation. Black Power does not mean the exclusion of White Americans from the Negro Revolution; it means the inclusion of all men in a common moral and political struggle."²³ Within two weeks, "Black Power" sparked a national debate, dividing old friends and bringing to an abrupt halt the last vestiges of unity between the left and right wings of the desegregation movement.

Never had the Old Guard intergrationists moved so swiftly, even in battling the forces of racism. At the July 1966 NAACP convention, Wilkins led the assault. "No matter how endlessly they try to explain it, the term 'black power' means anti-white power," he declared. "It is a reverse Mississippi, reverse Hitler, a reverse Ku Klux Klan." Black Power was a "quick, uncritical and highly emotional" slogan that would culminate in "black death."²⁴ Whitney Young warned that the Urban League would denounce ties with SNCC, CORE, or any group that "formally adopted black power" or attached issues of "domestic civil rights with the Vietnam conflict." Johnson and Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey also condemned Black Power, as did the rising leader of the Democratic Party's liberal wing, New York Senator Robert Kennedy.²⁵ After decades of pursuing the goal of black independent political power, NAACP leader Henry Lee Moon was repelled to confront his own logic. Black Power is a "naive expression, at worst diabolical, in the sense that at worst it's designed to create chaos," Moon stated defensively. The most articulate attack came from the Old Guard's most authoritative intellectual, Bayard Rustin. The former radical declared that Black Power had no real social program or coherent political philosophy (like Garveyism, it depended on simplistic "slogan" politics) and that it was "utopian and reactionary—the former for the by now obvious reason that one-tenth of the population cannot accomplish much by itself, the latter because [it] would remove Negroes from the main area of political struggle. . . . " National media painted Carmichael, McKissick and other defenders of Black Power as "racist demagogues" who were "inching dangerously toward a philosophy of black separatism."²⁶ King also had little choice except to denounce Black Power, but in doing so, he strived to maintain some personal link with the young people who had once idealized him. In his last book, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, King admitted that there were "positive aspects of Black Power, which are compatible with what we have sought to do in the civil rights movement. . . ." On balance, however, Black Power's "negative values prevent it from having the substance and program to become the basic strategy for the civil rights movement. Beneath all the satisfaction of a gratifying slogan, Black Power is a nihilistic philosophy born out of the conviction that the Negro can't win."²⁷

In the movement's militant wing, Black Power simply completed the evolution from integrationist to black nationalist ideologies which had begun three years before. Setting the tone for CORE, McKissick announced, "1966 shall be remembered as the year we left our imposed status of negroes and became *Black Men* . . . when black men realized their full worth in society—their dignity and their beauty—and their power." CORE's 1966 convention was an inversion of the NAACP conference. Speaking at a CORE plenary session, Carmichael stated, "We don't need white liberals. . . .

We have to make integration irrelevant." Harlem leader Roy Innis pushed through a successful resolution which stated officially that CORE no longer favored integration. CORE proclaimed that nonviolent direct action was "a dying philosophy," and whites were told that they were no longer welcome in the formation.²⁸ As a result of the convention's actions, almost all white liberal patronage of CORE ceased. Several locals with white members vehemently opposed Black Power, and left the organization by the autumn of 1966. In two years, McKissick was replaced by the more militant nationalist, Innis. Inside SNCC, most white veterans had left, or were soon to resign. Lewis and SNCC's former field secretary Charles Sherrod quit the group in 1966. In public image, SNCC became more violent and revolutionary. When a Carmichael appearance at Vanderbilt University accidentally coincided with an urban rebellion in which 94 persons were jailed, Tennessee legislators demanded that Carmichael be deported from the U.S. Radical nationalists even attacked the much respected Fannie Lou Hamer for not accepting the necessity to expel whites, charging that she was "no longer relevant" to the cause of black liberation. SNCC activities in Houston were involved in a May 1967 campus demonstration in which two police and one student were shot and 481 were jailed. On 7 February 1968 former SNCC leader Cleveland Sellers organized a student demonstration at South Carolina State College which later culminated in a white police riot, leaving 3 students killed and 33 others wounded.

By 1967 and early 1968, Black Power had become the dominant ideological concept among a majority of black youth, and significant portions of the black working class and middle strata. But "Black Power" itself still remained as elusive and imprecise as it had been when Ricks chanted the phrase on a rural Mississippi highway. What was Black Power? Most radical blacks disagreed among themselves. In the 1967 book *Black Power*, co-authors Carmichael and political scientist Charles V. Hamilton declared that the concept was "a political framework and ideology which represents the last reasonable opportunity for this society to work out its racial problems short of prolonged destructive guerrilla warfare." Black Power would permit blacks to "exercise control over our lives, politically, economically and psychically. We will also contribute to the development of a viable larger society . . . there is nothing unilateral about the movement to free black people."²⁹ One militant CORE leader from Brooklyn, Robert Carson, related Black Power to a socialist transformation of the U.S. "I believe that capitalism has to be destroyed if black people are to be free," Carson told CORE's 1968 convention in Columbus, Ohio. "We don't want anything to do with the white power structure as it is now."³⁰ SNCC staff member Julius Lester wrote that Black Power was "only another manifestation of what is transpiring in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. People are reclaiming their

lives on those three continents and blacks in America are reclaiming theirs. These liberation movements are not saying give us a share; they are saying we want it all!"³¹ Further to the right, Julian Bond described Black Power as simply a natural extension of the work of the civil rights movement. . . . From the courtroom to the streets in favor of integrated facilities; from the streets on backwoods roads in quest of the right to vote; from the ballot box to the meat of politics, the organization of voters into self-interest units."³² Perhaps the most radical interpretation of Black Power was made by black socialist theorist James Boggs, a former Detroit autoworker. The U.S. was a "fascist" state with a "master majority race," Boggs wrote in early 1967. Black Power was first the "scientific" recognition that "there is no historical basis for the promise, constantly made to blacks by American radicals, that the white workers will join with them against the capitalist enemy." As a political ideology, it represented

the new revolutionary social force of the black population concentrated in the black belt of the South and in the urban ghettos of the North—a revolutionary social force which must struggle not only against the capitalists but against the workers and middle classes who benefit by and support the system which has oppressed and exploited blacks. To expect the Black Power struggle to embrace white workers inside the black struggle is in fact to expect the revolution to welcome the enemy into its camp.

Other black radicals, in the Communist Party and elsewhere, tended to view Black Power as an anti-capitalist slogan.³³

These lofty theoretical constructs had no direct impact upon African-American reality. For as the black left sought to reconstruct itself, after the harsh vacuum imposed by years of McCarthyism and Cold War liberalism, Black Power quickly became the cornerstone of conservative forces. The first major Black Power Conference was held in Newark, New Jersey, in July 1967, and was organized by a black Republican, Nathan Wright. The conference was housed in a plush, white-owned hotel, and a stiff registration fee (\$25) held down the number of black poor peoples' activists and working-class progressives who wished to attend. The conference attracted 1,300 mostly middle-class black professionals, and concluded with a statement to the effect that Black Power connoted getting a "fair share" of American capitalism. The subsequent Black Power Conference, held in Philadelphia in June 1968, was formally co-sponsored by a white corporation, Clairol Company. Clairol's president spoke before the black gathering and gave a hearty endorsement for Black Power. The phrase in his words meant black "ownership of apartments, ownership of homes, ownership of businesses, as well as equitable treatment for all people." In short, Black Power was Black Capitalism. Quickly perceiving this, Richard

Nixon, who was running again for the presidency in 1968, took an aggressive pro-Black Power posture. As Nixon defined the term in a Milwaukee, Wisconsin, speech on 28 March 1968, Black Power was "the power that people should have over their own destinies, the power to affect their own communities, the power that comes from participation in the political and economic processes of society." Nixon spelled out his thesis at greater length in a subsequent address:

. . . Much of the black militant talk these days is actually in terms far closer to the doctrines of free enterprise than to those of the welfarist thirties—terms of "pride," "ownership," "private enterprise," "capital," "self-assurance," "self-respect." . . . What most of the militants are asking is not separation, but to be included in—not as supplicants, but as owners, as entrepreneurs—to have a share of the wealth and a piece of the action. And this is precisely what the Federal central target of the new approach ought to be. It ought to be oriented toward more black ownership, for from this can flow the rest—black pride, black jobs, black opportunity and yes, black power . . .³⁴

Nixon's endorsement of Black Power as Black Capitalism was applauded by major corporations and the financial sector's chief organ, the *Wall Street Journal*. It was also supported and praised by McKissick and Innis.

The only major social theorist who understood the fundamentally pro-capitalist thrust of many Black Powerites by 1967 was Harold Cruse. Cruse drafted an essay "Behind the Black Power Slogan," which was prepared for a U.S. Socialist Scholars' Conference. In his characteristically abrasive style, Cruse argued with socialists that Black Power had absolutely nothing to do with revolutionary demands or Marxism:

Black Power is nothing but the economic and political philosophy of Booker T. Washington given a 1960's militant shot in the arm and brought up to date. The curious fact about it is that the very last people to admit that Black Power is militant Booker T-ism are the Black Power theorists themselves. . . . The Black Power ideology is *not* at all revolutionary in terms of its economic and political ambitions; it is, in fact, a *social reformist* ideology. It is not meant to be a criticism of the Black Power movement to call it "reformist"; there is nothing wrong or detrimental about social reforms. But we must not fail to call reformism what it in fact is. The Black Power theorists who believe their slogan is in fact a revolutionary slogan are mistaken. . . . What *does* have a revolutionary implication about Black Power is the "defensive violence" upheld and practiced by its ultra-extremist-nationalist-urban guerrilla wing, which is a *revolutionary anarchist* tendency. Thus we have a unique American form of black revolutionary anarchism with a social reform economic and political "program."

Cruse also dismissed the socialists' now-popular interpretation of Malcolm as becoming a revolutionary "internationalist socialist" in the months be-

fore his assassination. Tracing his theoretical roots from the traditional black nationalism of Garvey, and then back into the political accommodationism of Washington, Cruse argued that Malcolm "was headed toward what became the Black Power position—which is *not* a revolutionary position. None of Malcolm's views on economics, politics, and self-defense was original with him. Malcolm X remained a militant black nationalist until the moment he died."³⁵

Thus, from its origins, Black Power was not a coherent ideology, and never developed a unitary program which was commonly supported by a majority of its proponents. As the radical theoreticians and conservatives laid claims to the mantle of Malcolm, the notion of Black Power was transmitted to all strata of black society as a contradictory set of dogmas, platitudes, political beliefs, and cultural activities. Cruse noted with biting cynicism, "many of the rebellious urban youth think Black Power means 'Get the cops!' 'Burn, baby, burn!' 'Down with Whitey!' or 'Let's get the loot!'"³⁶ Debbie Louis explained that Black Power's popularity was a product of its inherent ambiguity. In the late 1960s, the "the black community stood as a conglomeration of often contradictory interests and directions, dubiously tied together by a common mood which combined centuries of anger with new hope, increasing desperation with new confidence." Black Power was diluted and expressed popularly in divergent ways: "black people were addressing each other as 'brother' when they passed in the streets; 'soul food' restaurants became a matter of community pride; 'black history' the all-consuming topic, Malcolm X the authoritative source. Even seven-year-old black children seemed to know a phrase or two of Swahili. Was this black power?"³⁷

III

Black Power was not the only issue which divided black America in the mid- and late 1960s. Concurrent with the domestic unrest over the present and future position of the Negro was a growing public debate over the government's involvement in Southeast Asia. During the Cold War, the Eisenhower Administration assisted in the establishment of a corrupt, pro-U.S. dictatorship in South Vietnam. Under Kennedy, the number of U.S. military advisers increased steadily. In January 1965, 25,000 U.S. troops were stationed in Vietnam, and were actively fighting both communist North Vietnamese regulars and the popular organization of the South's workers and peasants, the National Liberation Front. In 1966, the U.S. forces in the country increased to 184,000; by January 1969, 536,000 U.S. troops were stationed in Vietnam. For black Americans, the war had a direct impact upon every community.

In the two decades after World War II, the number of blacks in all ser-

vices almost tripled, from 107,000 in 1949 to 303,000 in 1967. Even after the desegregation of the armed services, blacks were poorly represented in the officers' ranks, and grossly over-represented among enlisted personnel. For example, in 1967, in the Marine Corps, 9.6 percent of all enlisted men were black, while only 0.7 percent were officers; in the army, 13.5 percent of all enlisted personnel were black, and only 3.4 percent of the army's officers were black. African Americans comprised one out of every seven U.S. soldiers stationed in Vietnam, and because blacks tended to be placed in "combat units" more often than middle-class whites, they also bore unfairly higher risks of being killed and wounded. From January to November 1966, 22.4 percent of all army casualties were black. Black leaders in the NAACP and Urban League viewed the Vietnam War as a tremendous opportunity to ingratiate themselves with the Johnson Administration. In one polemic against Black Power, drafted in November 1966, and signed by Rustin, Wilkins, Young, A.M.E. Church Bishop Carey A. Gibbs, Dorothy Height (leader of the National Council of Negro Women), and others, they reminded white Americans that most blacks eschewed domestic violence in favor of fighting abroad to protect U.S. interests. "For every Negro who tosses a Molotov cocktail, there are a thousand fighting and dying on the battlefields of Vietnam," they stated.³⁸ To their black critics, they warned that Vietnam had nothing to do with domestic politics and civil rights. Both the NAACP and the Urban League concluded that the mounting black casualty totals from Southeast Asia were irrelevant to the struggle to win racial reforms at home.

Malcolm X understood that the Old Guard's position was both politically stupid and morally bankrupt. Even before 3,000 black troops had been stationed in Vietnam, he analyzed the issue and had condemned both the Johnson Administration and the Negro elite. Malcolm argued that the French had not been able to defeat the Vietnamese nationalists, and that the U.S. would also have to admit failure within a few years. The war itself 'shows the real ignorance of those who control the American power structure . . . [their] ignorance and blindness.'³⁹ SNCC was the first civil rights group to denounce the Vietnam War in uncompromising terms. In a press release of 6 January 1966, SNCC declared that the U.S. government "has been deceptive in its claims of concern for the freedom of the Vietnamese people." The Johnson Administration was "pursuing an aggressive policy in violation of international law. We maintain that our country's cry of "preserve freedom in the world" is a hypocritical mask behind which it squashed liberation movements which are not bound and refuse to be bound by the expedience of the United States cold war policy."⁴⁰ The SNCC statement was bitterly attacked by Wilkins. Clifford Alexander, one of Johnson's chief black assistants, began to organize black U.S. representa-

tives and others to blunt the effect of the statement. But SNCC continued its attack on Johnson's Vietnam policies. When SNCC decided to demonstrate in front of the White House during the wedding of Johnson's daughter, in symbolic protest against the Vietnam War, Wilkins, King, Randolph and Young pleaded with the group to cancel the action. SNCC activists challenged black youth to oppose the war. At Baltimore's Morgan State University, Carmichael insisted, "the war in Vietnam should interest you not only personally, but also because it is very political for black people." Black students were urged to resist the draft. "Either you go to the Leavenworth Federal penitentiary in Kansas or you become a killer. I will choose to suffer," Carmichael stated. "I will go to jail. To hell with this country."⁴¹

Black progressives in electoral politics began to speak in opposition to the war. Julian Bond, elected to the Georgia state House of Representatives, defended the right of "the Vietnamese peasants who . . . have expressed a real desire to govern themselves." The "gunboat diplomacy of the past" had little place in contemporary world affairs.⁴² The most articulate opponent of the U.S. war effort, black or white, was U.S. Representative Ronald V. Dellums. From the floor of Congress, Dellums declared:

I consider our involvement in Indochina illegal, immoral, and insane. We are in a war which is the greatest human and economic drain on American resources in modern times—a war disproportionately waged on the backs of blacks and browns and reds and yellows and poor and working class whites, a war resulting in an untold number of deaths of the Vietnamese people, a war that is justified only by the notion that we, as a nation, must save face . . . the only way this nation can save face with respect to our involvement in Indochina is to stand up and admit to the world we made a tragic mistake in Southeast Asia and then to get out of Vietnam. . . . Millions of people in the country are no longer willing to engage in such folly and be cannon fodder, and go across the water to spill their blood on foreign soil in a cause many of them do not even understand.⁴³

Black activists and intellectuals, who were part of the Black Power movement, had grave reservations about participating in anti-war organizations dominated by white liberals and leftists. But almost all of them, including CORE's proponents of Black Capitalism, had little to say in favor of black participation in the war effort. In April 1968, SNCC activist John Wilson organized a national anti-war conference in New York City which brought together hundreds of black nationalists and community militants. Baldwin lent his considerable talents as a polemicist to the anti-war cause. "Long, long before the Americans decided to liberate the Southeast Asians, they decided to liberate me: my ancestors carried these scars to the grave, and so will I," Baldwin wrote. "A racist society can't but fight a racist war—this is the bitter truth. The assumptions acted on at home are

also acted on abroad, and every American Negro knows this, for he, after the American Indian, was the first 'Viet Cong' victim." Black literary critic Addison Gayle, Jr., praised the "large number of black men [who] would prefer to die fighting tyranny, oppression, hunger and disease in the black ghettos of America than to die in the jungles of Vietnam." Black poets were also among the most effective critics of America's war. S. E. Anderson's "Junglegrave" was written as an ode to the black soldiers overseas:

Send me no flowers, for they will die
before they leave America
Send me home, no matter how far strewn
I am across this rice-filled land
Send me home, man, send me home
even if I am headless or faceless
Keep my casket open and my grave uncovered . . .
Vietnam: land of yellow and black genocide
Send the President my flowers cremated and
scented with the odors
Of my brothers' napalmed flesh and my
sisters' bombed out skulls
Send me no flowers . . .

Robert Hayden's "Words in the Mourning Time" evoked echoes of Du-Bois's yearnings for peace a generation before:

Vietnam bloodclotted name in my consciousness/
recurring and recurring/ like the obsessive thought
many midnights/ now of my own dying
Vietnam and I think of the villages/
mistakenly burning the schoolrooms
devouring/ their children and I think
of those who/ were my students/
brutalized killing/ wasted by horror/
in ultimate loneliness/ dying/
Vietnam Vietnam.⁴⁴

During the bitter national debate on Vietnam, all public leaders within black America were forced to choose sides. As a dedicated pacifist, King could not look upon the conflict benignly without taking some kind of public stand against the war. At the annual SCLC executive board meeting held in Baltimore on 1-2 April 1965, King expressed the need to criticize the Johnson Administration's policies in Southeast Asia. His old colleagues, fearful that King's support for the anti-war would hurt the SCLC

financially and politically, voted to allow him to do so only as a private person, without organizational endorsement. Rustin, who still maintained close ties with King, tried to pressure the SCLC leader into a position of neutrality on Vietnam. On 10 September 1965, Rustin, King, and SCLC aides Andrew Young and Bernard Lee met with United Nations ambassador Arthur Goldberg. Goldberg convinced King, for the moment, that the Johnson Administration had every intention of bringing the conflict to a peaceful resolution. For several months, King watched patiently as the number of U.S. troops increased. Finally in January 1966, King published a strong attack on the Vietnam War. "Some of my friends of both races and others who do not consider themselves my friends have expressed disapproval because I have been voicing concern over the war in Vietnam," King stated. But as a Christian, he had no choice except to "declare that war is wrong." Black leaders could not become blind to the rest of the world's issues, while engaged solely in problems of domestic race relations. "The Negro must not allow himself to become a victim of the self-serving philosophy of those who manufacture war that the survival of the world is the white man's business alone."⁴⁵ The negative response to King's statement was swift. SCLC leaders in Chattanooga, Tennessee, severed relations with the organization in protest. Whitney Young replied that blacks were not interested in the issue. King lobbied hard among his allies in SCLC to back his position on Vietnam, and in the spring of 1966 the organization's executive board came out officially against the war.

The SCLC's primary national focus shifted to Chicago in 1966, in an effort to gain jobs and housing desegregation in a major northern city. Chicago's political machine, led by the city's tough and unscrupulous mayor Richard Daley, was more than a match for the SCLC. Unlike the southern segregationists, Daley had the full support of the Johnson Administration and the Democratic Party. The meager anti-racist concessions which King and other top aides, notably Jesse Jackson, James Bevel, and Andrew Young, were able to extract from the "Northern segregationists" did not justify the financial and personnel expenditures of the long and hard campaign. Increasingly, King's attention was drawn to the Vietnam issue, and also to the necessity for black Americans to devise a more radical strategy for domestic reforms. "For years I labored with the idea of reforming the existing institutions of society, a little change here, a little change there. Now I feel quite differently," King admitted in 1966.⁴⁶ Quietly, King was beginning to articulate a democratic socialist vision for American society: the nationalization of basic industries; massive federal expenditures to revive central cities and to provide jobs for ghetto residents; a guaranteed income for every adult American. King had concluded, like Malcolm X, that America's political economy of capitalism had to be transformed, that

the Civil Rights Movement's old goals of voter education, registration, and desegregated public facilities were only a beginning step down the long road towards biracial democracy. And like DuBois, King recognized the correlation between his democratic socialist ideals and the peace issue. Massive U.S. military spending and the bloody war effort in Vietnam meant that the nation as a whole had less revenue to attack domestic poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. These new ideas forced King to conclude that the Vietnam conflict had to end immediately. On 4 April 1967, speaking at New York City's Riverside Church, King announced: "It would be very inconsistent for me to teach and preach nonviolence in this situation and then applaud violence when thousands and thousands of people, both adults and children, are being maimed and mutilated and many killed in this way."⁴⁷ Eleven days later, in New York City's Central Park, King led a rally of 125,000 in protest against the war.

Just as the Truman Administration had sponsored a "political assassination" of DuBois's influence during the 1950s, another Democratic president was now ready and quite willing to take steps towards reducing King's reputation. Johnson's black epigones did whatever they could to destroy the image and popularity of King. Ralph Bunche urged King either to cease his attacks on the Johnson Administration, or to relinquish his role as a civil rights leader. Rustin, who was appointed director of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, vilified King's stance on the war. NAACP and Urban League officials privately and publicly attacked King and defended Johnson. Black Republican Edward Brooke, elected to the Senate from Massachusetts on an anti-war platform, swung behind the Vietnam War in 1967 and joined the anti-King chorus. Carl Rowan drafted a vicious, brutal essay against King which appeared in *Reader's Digest* magazine. King's response was identical with that of DuBois—he moved even further to the left. Defiantly, King announced an SCLC-sponsored campaign against poverty, the Poor Peoples' March, which would bring thousands of the unemployed and the oppressed of all races into Washington, D.C. in April 1968. Their demands for legislative action would include a federal guaranteed incomes policy. On 23 February 1968, the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of DuBois, King gave the keynote address honoring him in New York City. "So many would like to ignore the fact that DuBois was a Communist in his last years," King noted. In an obvious reference to Vietnam, King added, "Our irrational, obsessive anti-Communism has led us into too many quagmires."⁴⁸ When black Memphis sanitation workers voted to strike on 12 February, to protest against low wages and the accidental deaths of two black garbage men twelve days before, they asked the SCLC for help. King and his closest associates—Abernathy, Young, Jackson, Bevel—arrived in the southern city to help mobilize popular support for the strike. The pacifist minister who once struggled for desegregated buses,

was now, thirteen years after Montgomery, organizing militant black urban workers, building a national poor peoples' march, and defying a president. He had come a long way; so had his vision for reconstructing America.

Speaking before a black audience in Memphis on 3 April, King was predicting that their struggle would succeed. Then, abruptly and rather strangely, he began to talk about himself in the past tense:

I don't know what will happen now. But it really doesn't matter to me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. I won't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the promised land. . . . I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land. So I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."⁴⁹

King's assistants were bewildered and even a little angry with him. What was the meaning of the speech? Perhaps King sensed something that no one else could possibly know. At 6:08 P.M., that next day, he was assassinated by a white man, James Earl Ray, in Memphis. Strangely, the police who had been guarding King were absent at the time of his death. Blacks across the country, even the militant nationalists, felt a grievous loss to the cause for racial freedom. White anti-war activists had lost their most effective and prominent representative; poor people and the black working class had lost a major spokesperson. More than anyone else in the period 1945-82, King would come closest to bringing together a biracial coalition demanding peace, civil rights, and basic structural changes within the capitalist order. King's assassination meant that any linkages between these vital reform movements would be much more difficult to achieve. And in the light of subsequent congressional testimony and historical research on his death, King's unfinished search for more radical reforms in America may have been the central reason he was killed.

IV

King's assassination was only one more indication to black nationalists that white capitalist America had no intention of resolving racial conflicts "non-violently." By 1968, the black nationalist renaissance had begun to inspire a tremendous outpouring of literary criticism, poetry, music and art, all of which served to reinforce Black Power and the uneven nationalist movement, in politics. In their myriad voices, the new black aestheticians played a critical role in forging a popular nationalist consciousness. Post-Harlem Renaissance poets Dudley Randall, Margaret Walker and Gwendolyn Brooks, all of whom were over 50 years old, acted informally as patrons

and inspirations for the younger artists. Hoyt W. Fuller, editor of the *Black World*, used his magazine to introduce to black America a growing list of poets and playwrights: Etheridge Knight, author of *Poems From Prison* (1968); Naomi Madgett, author of *Star by Star* (1965); Carolyn M. Rodgers, whose poems appeared in *Paper Soul* (1968); and *Songs of a Blackbird* (1970); Mari Evans, author of *Where Is All the Music?* (1967) and *I Am A Black Woman* (1970); Sonia Sanchez, author of *Homecoming* (1969) and *We are a BaddDDD people* (1970); Don L. Lee, founder of the Institute of Positive Education in Chicago, Third World Press, and author of *Black Pride* (1968) *Think Black* (1969), *Don't Cry, Scream* (1969), and *We Walk the Way of the New World* (1970); and essayist June Jordan, whose collected poems appeared in *Some Changes* (1970). Perhaps the two most popular black poets of the period were LeRoi Jones (Imamu Amiri Baraka) and Nikki Giovanni. Born in 1934, Jones was first part of the "beat generation" of essayists and critics in America's version of the Left Bank, Greenwich Village, New York. In the mid-1960s he became actively involved as a nationalist in Harlem and nearby Newark, New Jersey. Changing his name, renouncing his white wife and liberal associates, Baraka established Spirit House, a center for the black arts and culture in Newark. Baraka won acclaim as a prolific nationalist writer: *Home: Social Essays* (1966); *Black Music* (1970); *Raise, Race, Rays, Race* (1971); *It's Nation Time* (1970); Kawaïda Studies: *The New Nationalism* (1972); *Afrikan Revolution* (1973). His political poetry and plays were recited and performed by thousands of young blacks in secondary schools and colleges across the country. Ten years Baraka's junior, Giovanni's emergence was especially meteoric. In her popular poetry collection *Black Feeling, Black Talk, Black Judgment* (1970), Giovanni spoke uncompromisingly of the necessity for violence:

Nigger

Can you Kill

Can you Kill

Can a nigger kill

Can a nigger kill a honkie . . .

Can you shoot straight and

Fire for good measure

Can you splatter their brains in the street

Can you kill them

Can you lure them to bed to kill them

We kill in Viet Nam for them . . .

Can we learn to kill WHITE for BLACK

Learn to kill niggers

Learn to be Black men.⁵⁰

Integration was a bogus illusion; the liberation of “the black nation” would not be achieved via the ballotbox:

... this second reconstruction is being aborted as was the first ...
 if we vote this season we ought to seek to make it effective
 the barrel of a gun is the best voting machine
 your best protest vote is a dead honkie. . . .⁵¹

The rejection of integration as a social and cultural ideal sparked the development of a new interest in Africa. The writings of Martinique’s revolutionary social theorist Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist who took part in the Algerian revolution of the 1950s, were popularly read by black Americans. Books by African socialists and leaders such as Tanzania’s Julius Nyerere, Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah, and Guiné-Bissau theorist Amílcar Cabral became an integral part of the African-American revolutionary nationalists’ lexicon. It is not altogether clear that black Americans adopted the insights of African and Caribbean revolutionaries in constructive and appropriate ways. West coast nationalist Maulana Ron Karenga developed a black cultural catechism, the “nguzo saba,” and a black holiday, “Kwanzaa,” which employed the Swahili language and cultural imagery of Tanzanian traditional society. Karenga argued that black revolution was not a class struggle, but a battle to change “racist minds” and the patterns of black culture. “The international issue is racism, not economics,” he suggested in 1967. “Race rules out economics because whites are racists, not just capitalists.”⁵² Yet Nyerere’s *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism*, make the point that “socialism and racialism are incompatible. The man or woman who hates ‘Jews,’ or ‘Asians,’ or ‘Europeans,’ or even ‘West Europeans’ and Americans, is not a socialist,” Nyerere argued. “He is denying the equality and brotherhood of man. Those who stand for the interests of the workers and peasants, anywhere in the world, are our friends.”⁵³ Carmichael declared that Fanon was one of his “patron saints,” and after the summer rebellions of 1967, one radical editor declared that “every brother on a rooftop can quote Fanon.” Militant nationalists praised Fanon’s advocacy of revolutionary violence, and his polemical thrusts aimed at the Negro petty bourgeoisie in colonial Africa. But what did Fanon think about the African-American struggle? “The test cases of civil liberty whereby both whites and blacks in America try to drive back racial discrimination have very little in common in their principles and objectives” with African liberation efforts. For Fanon, the struggle to destroy white oppression was not in essence a racial dialectic, but an anti-racist movement that welcomed the participation of committed whites. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon’s most “nationalist-oriented” work, he explained that his ultimate vision for the U.S. was the liberation of all exploited people: “I

can already see a white man and a black man hand in hand.”⁵⁴ The question here is not so much that of intellectual dishonesty, but a failure of many Black Powerites to relate their eclectic versions of nationalism to the actual material needs and aspirations of the black working class and the poor. Addison Gayle characterized many of these dogmatic black separatists as “black fascists” in 1970:

The Professional Nationalist [has] a “more militant than thou” attitude. He has read Fanon—although he does not understand him . . . and quotes Malcolm verbatim. This superficial machinery is designed to prove his militancy; yet, in effect, it allows him to serve as a liaison between the black community uptown and the [white] Man downtown. . . . The [black] fascist is not interested in persuading men to accept his point of view through reason and logic—since his point of view differs little from The Man’s. Instead, he hopes to establish a totalitarian apparatus wherein all proposals will be subject to his authority. . . . If the fascists are allowed to take over a movement begun by sincere and honest people, then we will have not Black Power but Black Fascism, differing in no respect from the white fascism against which Blacks have fought and died throughout our history in this country.⁵⁵

Nationalists of every kind, from the nihilistic “cultural nationalists” or “black fascists” which Gayle described, to the socialist-oriented nationalists on the left, to Black Capitalists, rapidly created institutions and groups which influenced electoral politics. In Michigan, many nationalists were involved in the Freedom Now Party, which in 1964 placed 39 black independent candidates on the ballot. In 1968, two black independents were presidential candidates, former prisoner and black revolutionary writer Eldridge Cleaver and social critic Dick Gregory. Cleaver, endorsed as the Peace and Freedom Party candidate, received 195,135 votes nationally, mostly from black revolutionary nationalists and white leftists. In a campaign marked more by political satire than actual political content, Gregory totalled 148,622 votes. At municipal levels, many black nationalists simply endorsed black middle-class candidates who ran independently from traditional, white-controlled business and political interests. Within the Democratic Party, middle-class Black Powerites supported the nominations of the Reverend Channing Phillips of Washington, D.C. for president and Julian Bond for vice president at the Chicago national convention in August 1968. In the South, nationalists and integrationists alike supported several independent electoral efforts, including the black National Democratic Party of Alabama and Georgia’s Party of Christian Democracy, both formed in 1968.

The most provocative challenge to white liberal politics was generated by the Black Panther Party, founded in Oakland, California, in October 1966, by two black college students, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale.

Using the name of SNCC's formation from Lowndes County, Alabama, Newton and Seale developed a political cadre of militant young blacks. Their political philosophy, despite their revolutionary rhetoric, was basically that of radical reform. In their original "Ten Point Program," the Black Panthers demanded from the American state the following reforms:

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our black community.
2. We want full employment for our people.
3. We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our black community.
4. We want decent housing, fit shelter for human beings.
5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society.
6. We want all black men to be exempt from military service.
7. We want an immediate end to *police brutality* and *murder* of black people.
8. We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county, and city prisons and jails.
9. We want all black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.
10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.⁵⁶

The Panthers recruited from the black working-class and poverty-stricken districts of East Oakland, California, organizing armed patrols to defend the black community against police attacks. Newton, who had considerable knowledge of state and local laws, monitored police arrests of black inner city citizens, armed with a shotgun to ensure his own protection. In late 1967 the Panthers initiated a free breakfast program for black children, and offered free health services to ghetto residents. Many white critics viewed the Black Panthers as a dangerous ultra-leftist group and a threat to social order. But the Panthers pointedly affirmed their commitment to the American tradition of social change by quoting slaveholder Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, in their own program:

Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, [but] whenever any form of government becomes destructive . . . it is the right of people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Unlike many nationalists, the Black Panthers quickly established organizational and programmatic relations with radical whites, and sought to lead a progressive coalition of Third World and white groups to battle the "Establishment."⁵⁷

By the late 1960s, the Black Panthers had become the most influential revolutionary national organization in the U.S. Eldridge Cleaver joined the Panthers as their minister of information, and soon began to attract his own left tendency within the formation, oriented around his questionable thesis of "lumpenproletarian revolution." Cleaver married SNCC activist Kathleen Neal, who soon became the organization's communication secretary. By early 1968, other SNCC veterans had become Panthers. Bob Brown, a close ally and friend of Carmichael, became director of the Chicago branch of the Black Panther Party; SNCC leader Chico Neblett served as the Panther's "Field Marshal" for the western states of the U.S.; Forman briefly assisted the Panther's organizational efforts, and in February 1968, Carmichael was named the party's prime minister. By 1969, Carmichael and his successor as head of SNCC, Hubert "Rap" Brown, had broken with the Black Panthers because of Newton's and Cleaver's close ties with white leftists and the biracial Peace and Freedom Party. Other cultural nationalists viewed the Black Panther Party's emphasis on class struggle with great suspicion. Karenga's cultural nationalist formation, called *US*, bitterly opposed the Black Panthers' actions in California. Nationally, however, the Panthers succeeded in organizing chapters in several dozen states, and had at least 5,000 members by the end of 1968.

The black nationalist upsurge was viewed by the American government with considerable alarm. Remarkably few black nationalists and Black Powerites had advocated violence against white-owned property, the subversion of authority, or the seizure of state power. Most Black Power spokespersons came from upwardly mobile working-class or middle-class backgrounds, were trained at universities, and had been groomed for ultimate assimilation into the existing system. Forman was an economics and management major at Chicago's Roosevelt University, president of his student body, and had done graduate work in African affairs at Boston University in the 1950s; Bevel was a ministerial student in Nashville's American Baptist Theological Seminary; Rap Brown was a student at Southern University; SNCC's Ralph Featherstone was an elementary school-teacher; Carmichael and Baraka were graduates of Howard University; Giovanni, Lester, Nash and Barry were trained at Fisk University; Karenga was the first black student body president at his junior college in Los Angeles, and was at work on a master's degree in politics at the University of California; Newton was the principal student leader at Oakland's Merritt College, and would later work towards a Ph.D. degree. Only one small fraction of the

major proponents of Black Power had the gritty background of Malcolm X, whose actual ordeal as part of the ghetto underworld served as a crucible for his ultimate political trajectory. But federal and state authorities, after years of inaction or, at times, active co-operation with racists and white supremacists, could not listen to the rhetoric of blacks with anything except severe trepidation. Black Power defined as Black Capitalism seemed harmless enough. But black nationalism, either in its most radical tendency as expressed by the Black Panthers, or in its more inchoate and chauvinistic manifestation as cultural nationalism, was seen as a direct threat to the survival of the republic. It was not enough to buttress the Old Guard integrationists, for they had lost much of their respectability in the eyes of millions of blacks. A more effective means to thwart black nationalism was to employ illegal and covert methods of repression against its proponents.

SNCC was the first radical black group targeted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the U.S. Justice Department for surveillance, disruption, and suppression. In late 1960, FBI agents began to monitor SNCC meetings. Johnson's attorney general, Nicholas Katzenbach, gave approval for the FBI to wiretap all SNCC leaders' telephones in 1965. In August 1967, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover ordered the extensive infiltration and disruption of SNCC, as well as other Black Power-oriented formations, such as the Militant Revolutionary Action Movements, the Deacons of Defense, and CORE. Hoover also included for federal scrutiny and repression non-revolutionary nationalist groups, such as the SCLC and the Nation of Islam. FBI agents spread the rumor that Carmichael was an agent for the CIA, creating severe rifts between SNCC activists. FBI agents were sent to monitor Carmichael and Brown wherever they went, seeking to elicit evidence to imprison them. Brown was charged with inciting a race riot in Maryland, and was eventually sentenced to five years in a federal penitentiary for carrying a rifle across state lines while under criminal indictment. Featherstone and SNCC activist Ché Payne were murdered on 9 March 1970, when a bomb exploded in their automobile in Bel Air, Maryland. Sellers was indicted for organizing black students in South Carolina and for resisting the draft. Newton was shot in a 1967 confrontation in which one white police officer was killed, and was sentenced to prison for three years. Cleaver was forced to flee the U.S. in late 1968 for violating parole restrictions, and went into exile. Seale was tried with several white radicals for inciting a riot in Chicago, and in the courtroom the judge ordered that he be bound and gagged. Local police and federal marshals raided Black Panther offices across the country. By July 1969, the Panthers had been targeted by 233 separate actions under the FBI's COINTELPRO, or Counter Intelligence Program. In 1969 alone, 27 Black Panthers were killed by the

police, and 749 were jailed or arrested. Whenever possible, the FBI provoked violence between cultural and revolutionary nationalists. In 1969, the FBI was directly or indirectly responsible for engineering several murders, shootings and bombing attacks between US and the Black Panther Party. In Hoover's words, any illegal acts of suppression were justified, because the Panthers were "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country." The federal authorities would resort to political assassinations and any other gross violations of civil liberties to "prevent a coalition of militant black nationalist groups" and to "prevent the rise of a messiah" who could lead the black masses.⁵⁸

The possibility for greater political repression increased with the presidential election of 1968. The three major candidates did not inspire enthusiastic support among many blacks or progressive whites: George Wallace, running as an independent on a platform of "law-and-order" and racial bigotry; Democrat Hubert Humphrey, a Cold War liberal who had defended the Vietnam War during his undistinguished tenure as Johnson's vice president; and Republican nominee Richard Nixon. The assassination of Robert Kennedy in June 1968 left liberal Democrats bickering with unpopular Johnson's handpicked successor, Humphrey, and Wallace was able to mount a major effort, winning sizeable shares of the white working-class vote across the country. Blacks overwhelmingly supported Humphrey in the end, but by a margin of only one-half million votes out of 73.2 million cast, Nixon emerged as the winner with only 43.4 percent of the popular vote. Nixon sought to placate the black middle class by appointing Farmer to his administration as assistant secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, and by continuing his advocacy of Black Capitalism. Towards progressives in the black movement, however, Nixon was absolutely ruthless. Nixon's vice president, former Maryland governor Spiro T. Agnew, was well known for his orders for police to "shoot-to-kill" black urban rebels in Baltimore; for his statement that Rap Brown should be arrested—"pick him up soon, put him away and throw away the key"; and for his blatant racism—"when you've seen one ghetto, you've seen them all."⁵⁹ Nixon's attorney general, John Mitchell, co-operated with Hoover and the FBI to exterminate the Black Panthers and other militant black organizations. Nixon made it perfectly clear to the NAACP and other Negro moderate groups that he had no intention of pursuing desegregation goals. Within one year after taking office, Leon E. Panetta, the director of civil rights for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, resigned to protest against Nixon's reinstatement of Jim Crow directives. In the spring of 1970, 125 staff members in the Office of Civil Rights sent an open letter to Nixon, declaring "bitter disappointment" over Panetta's departure and criticizing the president's lack of "strong moral leadership that we feel is

now essential to avoid a reversal of the nation's long-standing commitment to equal opportunity." For openly expressing views favorable to desegregation, Nixon's U.S. commission of education, James A. Allen, was fired in 1970.⁶⁰

The forces of racial inequality had won a major victory with the election of Richard Nixon. Yet the Black Power movement had not been checked. As the Black Panther Party was being destroyed as a national organization by the FBI, other lesser known black activist groups were arising from community centers and colleges across the country. As the militant defenders of Black Power were silenced—either through imprisonment, exile, or assassination—newer, younger voices were still being heard. The integrationist Old Guard had been temporarily forced into retreat, buffeted by the massive popularity of black nationalism and under attack by the racist policies of the Nixon Administration. The number of black elected officials in the U.S. had climbed from 100 in 1964 to 1,400 in 1970; many of these men and women were also sympathetic to one or more variants of the Black Power trend. Thus, after the assassinations of Malcolm and Martin, the modern black movement for biracial democracy had been crippled, to be sure, but it was by no means destroyed. Yet the absence of a widely shared theory and strategy for black liberation was still missing; the political goal of black equality was still murky and ill-defined; the opportunism and accommodation of many black militants and political leaders still raised unresolved questions for future struggles; and the programmatic relationship between democracy and racial justice, socialism and peace that DuBois and King had strived to attain was becoming ever more distant.