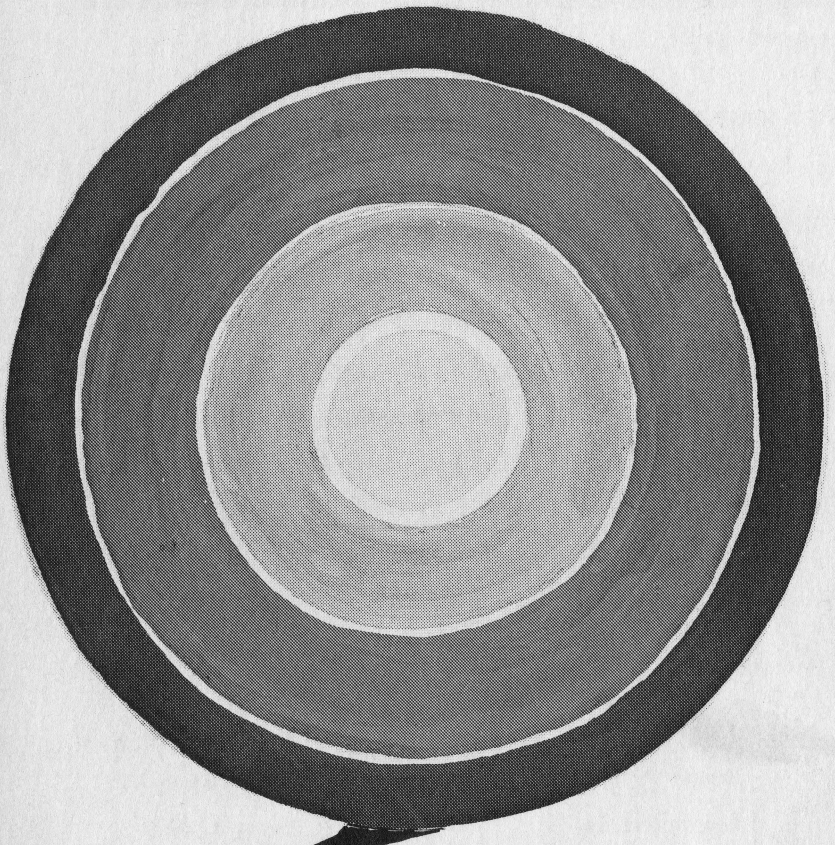
Volume 1, Number 2
Spring, 1975



ENDARCH

Journal of Theory

A Journal of Social Theory

Department of Political Science
Atlanta University

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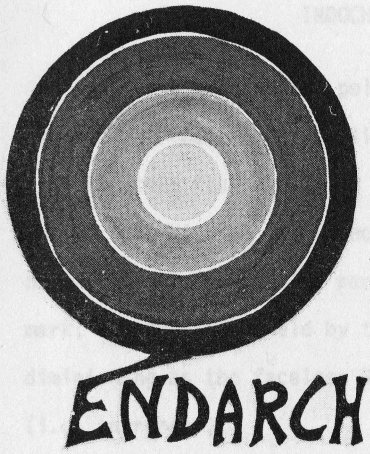

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INDOCHINA: "The Doomsday Defense"

At this writing the political landscape in Indochina is undergoing dramatic alteration. Cambodia, now liberated by the Khmer Rouge, is deftly and quietly consolidating its revolution seeming oblivious to the furor in the United States. In Vietnam the directional designates of "north" and "south" have been eliminated, the 17th parallel remains little more than an historical landmark, and territory held by the marionette South Vietnamese Army is fast diminishing as the faceless Siagon bosses grope for a political settlement (i.e. surrender).

The United States is being compelled to divest itself of its imperialist holdings in that area of the world and is now faced with an impossible task. They must, on the one hand, explicate recent events in Indochina so as to represent them as something other than a rout of United States Imperialism. And, they must, on the other hand, fashion a foreign policy which would be cognizant of, and conditioned by, that very defeat. The Ultimate Paradox.

The futility of the former task is evident in that liberal and conservative status quo'ers, media-mongers and high (if not mighty) politicians are incapable of devising explanations palatable to the often gullible American people. The standby explanations have proven impotent while new efforts at facade building have run the gamut. The finger pointing and blame-placing, initiated by Kissinger and Ford, and aimed at Congress,is reminiscent of events post-dating the Chinese Revolution of 1949. Then, as now, blame is unimportant since, even within the imperialist conceptual framework of the accusers and counter-accusers, there seems to be enough blame to go around. The intent, as we see it, is not so much

to place blame but to save (diplomatic) face.

On another front, imperialist jack-a-napes point to the undisciplined retreat of the A. R. V. N., their abandonment of countless weapons (eschewed by all excepting the munitions industry), and the non-existent morale of the South Vietnamese Army as the faux pas responsible for the present turn of events. In connection with the above, harbingers of treaty making and treaty breaking, crying foul, contend that the North Vietnamese Army and the National Liberation Front have committed massive violations of the Paris Peace Accords. Even Gerald Ford in his square-joined naivete is able to fathom the shallowness of any argument that neocolonial agents alone bear full responsibility for the fall of imperialism; or that the Paris treaty was other than a face-saving document entered in to facilitate a U.S. withdrawal "with honor."

As the United States languishes in its fit of self-delusion, diversions continually spring forth (i.e., Orphan Airlift, Refugee Flight, Communist Bloodbath, etc., etc.), and while their initial impact was profound, they have daily been exposed as subterfuge; more rational analyses have supplanted them. The failure to face squarely the defeat in Indochina has contributed to the present conceptual morass known as U.S. Foreign Policy.

So, for the foreign policy makers a number of avenues are closed. The Domino Theory totters under the weight of its internal contradictions; no realistic foreign policy would be founded on such a premise. Xenophobia and Isolationism do not take into account the imperatives of international capitalist economics and its concomitant politics. Big-Stickism is not only countered by the strength of the non-capitalist nations, but also by the increasing solidarity and unity of purpose of the developing world.

Hence, the "new" U.S. Foreign Policy will be more an unconscious

reaction to developments within the U.S. imperialist system, than a conscious and deliberate fashioning of that system. It will be a polyethylene foreign policy as hastily conceived and imprudently wrapped as John Gunther Dean's flag. It will, in fact, be a defensive foreign policy; a reactionary foreign policy; a foreign policy of retreat. To that extent it will be a failing foreign policy.

As the rising tide of anti-imperialist struggle reorders the priorities of the U.S., Kissinger, Ford and the "paste and sissors" crew at the State Department, are left with the unenviable task of formulating a foreign policy which progressive forces of the world will expose as a "Doomsday Defense."

IDEOLOGY AND POLITICS: THEIR STATUS IN AFRO-AMERICAN SOCIAL THEORY[1]

The great visibility accorded political struggle in the U.S. black community over the 1960's has obscured the fact that this group of people still lack a compelling model of themselves, of their purposes in North American society and of the kind of reasoning which can generate such a model. We see this among political activists when we examine recent controversies over a "race" or a "class" interpretation of the black community, the call to join traditional African customs, the attempts to prevent the rise of a "nationalism" within the black community, the effort to implant "scientific" analysis or the vain search for a glorious black history which has no present and for which nobody has demonstrated a need. The result has been a failure to develop a radical politics which can make unambiguous demands on the American state.

The times seem much like they were in the Age of Washington when social initiative passed from the hands of blacks into those of Southern and National spokesmen and industrial activists. Yet today as the corrective changes from the Civil Rights Movement have been given such wide attention it has been difficult to keep persistent theoretical problems in focus and to resolve them. The basis for a militant, self-confident critical assessement of American society was severely modified with the removal of racial segregation. Thus to discuss the problem of ideology and politics, even in terms of the remote future of the black community, challenges us to a new description of contemporary social structure accounting for extensive changes and estimating limits. In order to see the relationship between that strucutre and theoretical problems it will be useful to relate present

day trends to those prevalent during the previous "age."

My working assumption is that, as a matter of principle, the general population is directly confronted by social institutions and adjusts according to a survival criterion.[2] We can call this the most elemental force to all individual social action. In the prior historical epoch (circa 1877-1915) when those adjustments took the form of subordination behind the developing walls of racial segregation, individual leaders took it upon themselves to articulate a "theory" to affirm the adjustment. In another epoch, the post segregation era in which we are now, another adjustment is occuring also of massive proportions and, returning to form, other spokesmen are attempting to articulate this motion. Now as then those responsible for the ideology, while they may be condemned for many valid reasons, do stand close to actual changes that people are going through. Today the general black population seems to be readjusting after the upheavals of the Civil Rights Era.

On the face of it these are commonplace remarks with which many would agree. Yet today we seldom hear an effort made to say who is supporting the adjustments and how that group should be approached theoretically. If we were to speculate we might conclude that they are the proverbial cultural or revolutionary nationalists, the new communists, the scientific socialists or the Pan-Africanists. We would be in error in each case. The problem of this essay is to discuss why this question has been so seldom asked or meaningfully answered. In the process it will be necessary to characterize the malaise which has undermined the critical forces in the black community and foisted on them a style of analysis which is escapist. It is my hope that by so doing we can push political discussion beyond mere ideological debate and restore to it both a capacity to criticize social practice and the potential

to engender, among black people, a receptive response to progressive politics. So while we may agree pro forma with the need to define the social character of the Post-Civil Rights black community, it should be remembered that this has special importance for those unhappy with the beast.

THE RISE OF A NEW ELITE

In order to identify those elites who are more intimately connected with mass adjustments, their politicking and their ideology, we can take a hint from a process of analysis used by Frantz Fanon in his evaluation of revolutionary Algeria.[3] There he identifies a group of native politicians aligned with the cosmopolitan sector of the settler politicians and occupying privileged positions relative to the mass of natives. This group assimilates and functions according to the ration list thought criteria prevalent among the settler bourgeoisie. Such principles ultimately lead it to serve a dynamic nationalist function starting from a class demand for larger participation in the present governing set-up, a demand which becomes increasingly extreme, provoking "repression," expulsion, a resort to independent party organizing, suppression of the elitist party, and finally a resort to the mass party out of which a movement is generated to reclaim the territory and expel the settlers.

This little group of native liberals thus carry through a process which eventuates in a self-determining situation in which a people are now confronted with all the problems and opportunities of an independent social existence. While the particulars of Algeria do not apply to North America, the way in which Fanon conceptualized decolonization there is useful methodologically if we focus on the discrete phases of the process. Thus in terms

of formal modeling, we can identify each phase, say what is positive or negative about it, the empirical indices which allow us to project the probability of proceeding beyond a given stage, the changing class dynamics[4] of each phase (e.g. the extent to which the internal strata maintain traditional or customary loyalties) and how the character of either phase predisposes the general movement towards more or less humane ends. Generally speaking Fanon's model would judge the movement more humane the extent to which prior, received class configurations are dialectically resolved into a new "nation."

In the Afro-American situation I think it is possible to apply Fanon's ideal type. We can identify an equivalent group of activists, relate them institutionally to cosmopolitan sectors of the American bourgeoisie and chart the conflicts or tension between the two groups. In terms of such a process the Civil Rights Movement can be understood in a historically specific sense. We find, however, that the Afro-American elite's function is less progressive than that imputed by the ideal type. Generally the character of the struggle perpetuated by the black elites of North America never set up a situation in which either that sector or any other in the black community could be transformed beyond their received social roles--unless it be toward closer approximations of the authentic models of such roles prevalent in white society. Two mechanisms had accounted for such transformation in the ideal model: (1) the generation, by the liberal activists, of absolute claims against the(settler) state--a condition forced on them by the nationalist demands of another more numerous stratum and concretized in a demand for the land, and (2) the total affirmation of violence which fastened a cover of seriousness onto the struggle and set a tough criterion of skepticism within

which any compromise would be evaluated.

In the United States, on the contrary, the state was looked upon as an object to get into and as nearly as it was possible to have an "official" black position on political conflict it was to be grounded in a so-called philosophy of non-violence. The result was an incomplete "black" revolution considered peculiar to North America in which the largely homogenous former slaves developed internal stratification and made peace with the American state.

A black status group then has come to occupy authoritative positions in America which leave them "more free" than during previous eras but closely tied and subordinate to the cosmopolitan sector of the American power elite. The major mechanism covering this tie is the Democratic party. The McGovern reforms were efforts to formalize a new status for this group of participants in the party. In other cases their strength comes from appointed positions in federal, state and local governments as well as actual offices held in the U.S. Congress, the state houses and local aldermanic councils. Indeed the group of big city mayors are just now probably one of the most glamourous political groups in the entire black world. The significance of these trends may inhere in the fact that probably none of these individuals would have any prominence were it not for politics (i.e. their actual cultural and economic work has been insignificant) giving credence to a charge by Booker T. Washington that "politics is parasitic." Still they exist as a going social force in contemporary America.

But to identify this process and to point to its end result creates a serious problem of taxonomy: what name is to be given the new elite or its behavior?[5] It is fashionable these days, in some circles at least, to identify

the above mentioned phenomenon and to condemn it as neo-colonialism. Thus Amiri Baraka has so concluded in terms of his discussion of Kenneth Gibson, Mayor of Newark, New Jersey:

> Newark, New Jersey, (is) a classic neo-colonial creation, where Black United Front of Blacks and Puerto Ricans moved through the late sixties to elect Kenneth Gibson black mayor.... Now some of the fruits born of the struggles of the sixties can be tasted in their bitterest aspect. These black faces in high places are simply objective agents of the rule of monopoly capitalism, as cold and as cynical as they have to be....[6]

Yet such neo-colonial analysis is fine only so far. To the extent that it affirms the need for criticism of the situation and of the antagonism there it is fine. Yet the analysis is misleading insofar as it implies that a "coherent" people stands juxtaposed to the new elite with a program of action that has been betrayed. Such might usually be the case in Third World situations where: (1) native culture can be distinguished from alien dominance and, perhaps, corruption, and (2)some kind of social independence has been experienced. In the case of the Afro-American there would be no need for a prefix on "colonialism."

At the very least we must start to focus on the continuity between the Age of Washington and the post-Civil Rights Era. Certainly it is the Gibsons et. al. who articulate the adjustment that the people have had to make. But like Booker T. Washington modern elite ideology is directly linked to real necessary living patterns and represent--and I see little reason to think this does not hold for the mass of black people--accurate depictions of some binding constraints of American life. Because the Civil Rights Movement compromised too drastically on the rearrangement of American institutions of order, it failed to modify the real relationship of black people to them and the black elite functions today in a situation in which the prior subordination of their constituency is accepted as a given.[7] Their honest articulation of this gives

them a credibility not to be found among those who play on variations of "blacks should take the lead" slogans.[8] Indeed such clarion calls can only be considered threatening when viewed by the potential agents themselves. As was true of Washington, modern leadership ideology has the positive aspect of being thus "realistic."[9] Yet because the subordination of the black community was not engineered by the handiwork of an indigenous class we get a paradox which allows this group to develop and accumulate a reservoir of sympathy. This paradox suggests the peculiar difficulty of applying traditional models to the situation.

To recapitulate: in order to develop a viable model to criticize the black situation it is necessary to have a conception of social structure covering American institutions, and the black masses & elite activists. A black left (i.e. the group engaging in and acting on the actual criticism) is possible only as it is conceptualized outside the Holy Family. Certainly there will be a few reading this who will notice and be disappointed at a definition of the left based on status rather than ideas. Such caution is warranted, but two things justify the definition: one is the absence of an authentic black radical praxis comprehensive enough to withstand the needs of modern political analysis and the other is the co-optation by liberalism during the Civil Rights Era, of the only black radical tradition available i.e. DuBoisian protest. Certain dynamics of the recent politics give further support to the status approach however. For example the uncomfortable suspicion persists that militant radicalization and criticism from the mid-sixties on is directly related to the status of the ideologues relative to the developing liberal establishment. As they have suffered personal exclusion, they have become disaffected with the Civil Rights settlement and open to radical ideas. These conditions set the context for a black left entity to develop. Increasing

self-consciousness about this is the key to generating a new criticism capable of withstanding the many rationalizations which legitimate American society today.

We may treat the question of ideology and politics as two phases of the same problem. To those still concerned about removing the fetters from left forces in the black community--and this means first and foremost establishing a dependable basis for criticism--it means close attention must be given to both phases: (1) the subtle but pervasive difference between "ideology" and social analysis or theory and (2) constraints imposed on radical politics by the new black experience which entails actual participation in authorative U.S. institutions. Neither of these have been recognized as problems previously even though historical changes have moved them to center stage now. Let us consider each in turn.

IDEOLOGY

First ideology. Again the main problem here has to do with the capacity to distinguish between "ideology" and effective social theory. What we have seen in the past and especially in the evolution during the 1960's through DuBoisian Protest, Black Power, black nationalism, Pan-Africanism, intercommunialism or Marxism-Leninism is the tendency to select already defined ideology and stipulate the black theoretical task as one of taking it to the people. The consequence of such an effort is to focus attention away from direct analysis of social practice toward "study." The failure of recent activists to take a direct approach to social analysis (consequently settling for previously aggregated "ideologies") may result from their continued and perhaps unconscious reliance on a model of thought developed concurrently with the practical subordination of black people through racial segregation.

Thinkers like W.T. Fontaine and L.D. Reddick raised some criticisms of developing black thought in the late 1930's which charged that, in the black community itself, there were tendencies to do analysis already circumscribed by

theoretical formulations.[10] A more direct statement of the tendency, albeit one that approved it, can be found in Gunnar Myrdal's classic work AMERICAN DILEMMA written after the American pattern of race relations had been set. Of black thinking he said:

> Negro thinking is almost completely determined by white opinions--negatively and positively. It develops as an answer to the popular theories prevalent among whites by which they rationalize their upholding of caste. In this sense it is a derivative, or secondary thinking. The Negroes do not formulate the issues to be debated; these are set for them by the dominant group. Negro thinking develops upon the presuppositions of white thinking. In its purest form it is a blunt denial and a refutation of white opinions.[11]

What is to be emphasized here is the withdrawal of the philosophic constraint[12] from this peculiar kind of thought by virtue that its "presuppositions" are set outside of any self-conscious epistemology. What it means is that for social theory to be meaningful for blacks (i.e. when done by black thinkers) it must answer a range of practical questions relevant to the world of immediate action or public policy. To the extent that such policy is developed by prejudicial reasoning then blacks have a special obligation to protest. C. Wright Mills isolated this as just one aspect of "political philosophy" and called it ideology.[13] I follow his usage although we cannot review all of his argument here. Suffice it to say that such "ideology" has as its fault the obscuring of basic criteria in terms of which the significance of practical questions are determined. Thus ideological work proceeds most smoothly when several other theoretical solutions can be taken for granted. Yet at least since the 1930's just such ideology has supposed to have been the special black approach to political theory.

I conclude that in order to provide integrity to social criticism in the Post-Civil Rights area it will be necessary to restore the philosophic constraint.

Perhaps some modern theorists will rephrase the danger stated by Myrdal especially to supplement the racialist part implied in his phrase "presuppositions of white thinking." Consequently we may relate the earlier model to recent changes in analysis and account for the continuing tendency to fail to evaluate pre-suppositions even when they bear no relationship to the thought of American racists. In any case it seems well established that past analysis by and about black people justifies the need for careful scrutiny of any proposed theoretical innovations put forth.

A negative point needs to be made here. It is in answer to the query: what is the specific danger of a "black" ideology which is unaware of its presuppositions? The point: it certainly is not an inability to put forth logically consistent descriptions of social actions. In fact political analysis shares with other non-philosophical modes of thought the drive for a systemic rendering of the real world. For example in recent black analysis what was more systematic than Kawaida nationalism or revolutionary intercommunialism? It is interesting though that when one thinks of the litany of European theorists usually relied on to illustrate model social analysis, the unique virtue of political theory may be an inability or unwillingness to explain every facet of the phenomenon as one is sure to find in more "mystical" systems like Christianity or astrology.

Further, as political thinkers our efforts to persuade people to an ideology may be self-defeating by tapping, perhaps indirectly, a residue of faith in finality first embeded by the Judeo-Christian tradition (operationally brought to African people by missionaries in one form or another) a continuing source of strength for bourgeois society and a prop for self-alienation ever since merry England first proclaimed herself the workshop of the world. Such I think, is the main consequence and danger of calling these ideologies "scientific" when in fact, like all social theory, they remain merely the not-to-successful

efforts of a particular people in one epoch. Scientistic[14] though predisposes us to rush to accept as "concrete" what is nothing more than the product of our wishes. If these are drawn from and set by the crass filth and unrelieved suffering that is American society today, then the function of the left ideologue is to reinforce the pattern of life prevalent in this country. Such primitivism must be overcome.

I call for an approach to social theory that is reflective, critical and purposive. Even use of the word ideology should be curtailed in social discourse except as it is used--as I do below--as a term to "translate" prior theoretical conclusions or to cover rationalization of privilege. We should think instead in terms of critical social theory which, following Cruse, dialectically relates political, cultural and economic matters into a theoretical form as they so interact in any specific social practice or in general behavioral systems. To paraphrase Plato: black ideologues must either become philosophers or remain the inadvertant purveyors of bourgeois reaction.

IDEOLOGY AND CRITICISM

To move now to the interplay of ideology and criticism. I have argued that current social trends call attention to the rise of the black bourgeoisie complete with glamorous politicians, mass constituencies and specific change ideologies. Their rise is an undeniable today as were those of yesteryear who amassed the material wherewithal to establish themselves as special among god's children and gave the Western world such slogans as "life, liberty and property," "equality, fraternity, liberty," and "cast down your buckets where you are." This same combination of accumulation and political advancement characterized our modern bourgeoise elite.

The character of the new criticism will be determined by the relationship of its practioners to this Bourgeoisie. Its personnel will include those who have not been included among, or saw fit to join, the reigning crowd. What ties the two factions of blacks irrevocably together is that we compete for the same constituency: the mass of black people. Those who miss this point and gaze off into a haven of a-racial revolutionary toiling masses are merely refusing to accept the real challenge and capitulating to reaction. The result is a bogus effort to separate what is really inseparable namely the sustained rise of the black bourgeoisie and the series of defeats inflicted on the black left at least since the persecution of Paul Robeson. The consequence of ideologizing has been most pernicious and misunderstood in relation to this process. Thus instead of developing a strategy to meet the real situation we shift ideologies and pretend that that was the problem.

In terms of ideology the criticism has been that the new elite is "neo-colonialist." Yet for reasons noted above, the Black Bourgeoisie constantly complains about America and the data they use--social welfare statistics--are the same ones that the would-be critics appeal to. In the long run the criticism will not clarify theoretical differences and reduces to a call by the black left that the elites go further and/or be sincere. The new critics are not sensitive enough to the changed character of the ideology of the new elite. Again a comparison to Washington is necessary because there has, since that gentleman's death, grown up a myth that his was a philosophy resigned to satisfaction with Negro life. He was, it came to be said, "against change." Yet such an interpretation is strained at best. The appropriate critique of Washington is precisely the image of change he

had a very practical one which called for the assimilation of the virtues of the American national bourgeoisie. American society during the Age of Washington was not a settled entity against which calls for change could be raised--rather it was at that time resettling itself and adjusting to new conditions. Everybody was for change. Thus in order to function critically against a change ideology a qualitative selection is necessary which calls for new data, claims and competes for definite constituencies, promulgates new models, and develops a fighting spirit vis-a-vis ascendent definitions of social ills. The new criticism in the black community suffers from an inability to transcend the categories of liberal ideology. Implicit in such a situation is an inadequate model of left praxis which is limited to sincerity and guided by a myth that there exists a quota of moral ideals which are accepted by all and only need application.

We do not get around this problem by selecting a new non-Bourgeois ideology of "new communism," "anti-imperialism" or by fanciful beliefs that America is falling under its own weight. On the contrary there must be a dialectical critique growing in contention with the specifics of the prior model directly linked to mobilizing in relation to the present social structure and grounded in a comprehensive vision of a liberated individual or people. The resolution of the question of the relation of black people to a viable socialist movement in America is dependent on such analysis. Without it socialism merely becomes one more ideology to annoy people with.

POLITICS

We can understand better the political obligations facing the new black left by tying its ideological and political changes to its increasing

elimination from mainstream Civil Rights activity since about 1966 or about the time of Black Power. Since that time criticism has been tied to ideology selected in increasing isolation from the new electoral/administrative experience developing in the black community. Nor has such ideology fared well in gaining mass support. The new black elite is now distinguished both by an actual devolution of authority and a community base. They accepted the constraints of that authority and became legitimate participants in America in the name of black people generally. Those who rejected these constraints longed for a different settlement but have taken a round about route since 1966 to the confusion of the mid-70's in which impotence threatens to become a permanent condition of left criticism.

The relations between these two sectors has been wrought with interest in the last several years of the sixties and early seventies. When the left adhered to various make-shift racial pride-type ideologies, the black bourgeoisie rode chitterlings right into the Waldolf-Astoria to consolidate things with cosmopolitan America. Yet as the black militant has shifted to an ostensible anti-bourgeois stance it has come only to the social welfarism already monopolized by the black liberals. When the black left tried a sort of crypto-terrorist tactic ("off the pig") it found itself resorting to the black liberals to negotiate their "demands" for amnesty or to shorten jail sentences. In 1972, desiring to meet in general session, the critics had to go to the liberals to call a National Black Political Convention.

In those places where confrontations have occurred we see the same pattern. In the black universities--from Southern University, Texas Southern Jackson State, Orangeburg, Howard--the liberals are in smooth command and

much more enlightened now about their roles; black studies programs are rapidly confirming the most dire predictions of Martin Kilson. The pragmatists control the labor unions. While all American liberals shout hosannah about the way the system worked to "free" Angela Davis, the black left is burdened with the painful reality that H. Rap Brown remains in jail (and faces still further prosecution) and numerous others are exiled in Cuba, Tanzania etc. while lives have been lost, and uncompensated for, from the university campuses to otherwise obscure apartments in Chicago. With all of this it is amazing that that same left would propagandize itself into locating the "left" and the "right" of the black community on the central committee of the African Liberation Support Committee! It was a tacit admission that they did not want to join the real battle and had conceded a war that never really was declared. In the face of it all we are supposed to turn to the latter day Deweyites in the blue collar sector of America.

In terms of constituency the criticism has been that the black bourgeoisie has none. They lack, so it goes, a "mass base." Yet in terms of the one unambiguous index of support for leadership among blacks--the vote--liberals have taken the day in every case. The rallies, demonstrations, etc. called by the left have, on the contrary been paltry by comparisons. The failure to recognize this basic fact prompts two observations: (1) that the call for principled ideological debate did not correct earlier errors calling for "operational unity" or "unity without uniformity." Those slogans had obscured the fact that the assembled constituency was really accountable to the liberals. Yet the call for principled debate was naive by virtue that it promoted internecine conflict. (2) It is the critical sector which lacks

a competitive base and there seems little reason now not to expect that the black left would join any movement generated if it had a few people participating (and some media coverage). This seems certainly to be the case in the Boston school demonstrations of 1974-75. Long gone are the days when intra-racial contentions were such that Washington was shouted off the speaker's podium or Malcolm was relegated to the role of spectator at the 1963 March on Washington! Thus the Black Bourgeoisie has a monopoly on the vote and enliven any given protest demonstration through their selective participation. Such a situation is vivid testimony to the hegemony of this sector of the black community and to the squalor of the negro left.

Several specific tactics have been tried by the left to impact on the black community. We can identify the following five for discussion: (1) the forming of counter-institutions, (2) the move to rejoin allegedly mass-based community institutions, (3) the tactic of "unity without uniformity," (4) the resort to incest, and (5) electoral competition. There are several others that we could identify including independent party organizing a la the Black Panther Party (BPP), continuing protest demonstrations, and specific campus movements including the demand for Black Studies. However, the character of the overall strategy can be illustrated by reference to the basic five.

The first tactic was that of building counter-institutions. It is symbolized by Malcolm X Liberation University (MXLU) started in North Carolina. Other examples include the Center for Black Education and the Institute of the Black World, in Washington and Atlanta respectively. Of all the tactics this one provides the most direct link with the Civil Rights dissidents because of the close relationship then between Owusu Sadaukai,who organized MXLU, and Stokely Carmichael and Willie Ricks both of whom were on the Meredith March

in 1966.[16] The counter institution tactic illustrates the danger of undialectical shifts among the black left. For in spite of the fact that confrontations had occurred at both A and T State and Duke Universities suggesting the limits of traditional black and white schools for significant social action, MXLU always stood as an entity whose authenticity was to be determined by the purity of its ideology rather than any engaged relationships with institutions in which blacks were actually being socialized. Thus the struggle for counter institutions directed attention away from adjustments people were forced to make on a daily basis. Political party building could be included here but there were few cases of that outside the BPP.

It was during the demise of the BPP however, that we get an articulation of the second tactic: the return to mass based black institutions. Huey Newton concluded that the Panthers had become isolated from the people. His correction for that problem was to have a Grand Return. He suggested two tactics: a focus on the American South and a return to the black church. Such a suggestion was useful insofar as it explicated the isolationism of the counter-institution strategy. What it did not address was the problem of gaining support from the people in these institutions,nor the reactionary basis on which these institutions are maintained. The black preachers in the National Baptist Convention, the Roman Church and, increasingly, the Nation of Islam illustrate the elites operative there and none seem anxious to subordinate themselves to secular politics.

The third tactic, closely related to the previous one, was that of "unity without uniformity." It is symbolized by the Pan-racial movements such as the Congress of African People-Atlanta, the National Black Political Convention, Gary, Little Rock and the first African Liberation Day-Washington,

1972. In one sense it might be seen as the corruption of the prior tactic of returning to the people. For in effect the Return was used as a rationalization to form questionable coalitions with elite elements who claimed to have mass constituencies yet pursued reactionary politics. The experience under "unity without uniformity" certainly illustrates the relative ineffectiveness of the left in these coalitions, however.

A fourth tactic is incest. This tactic resembles the earlier counter-institutional but can be distinguished from it both by the time and ideology involved. It focuses essentially on internal purification. The two most recent examples were the purges in the BPP and the "principled ideological struggle" on the African Liberation Support Committee. What happens is the increasing circumscribing of political discussion to smaller factions. Such incest eventually developed in each of the other organizations formed under the "unity without uniformity" tactic i.e. the Black Assembly or the NBPC and the Congress of African Peoples. To the extent that Post Civil Rights criticism aimed to make use of the most effective anti-capitalist critique available (i.e. marxism) there must be disappointment that such analysis has been so closely associated with black incest. It is in just such situations that political discussion can take on an increasing significance.

The final tactic is electoral competition. Here the left competes with the new black elite in direct challenge for public office. This tactic has not occurred too often where there is a real chance of winning. Two outstanding examples continue to be Bobby Seale's campaign in Oakland and the efforts of Baraka in Newark. The related tactic of nominating a candidate who has no chance of winning (historically associated with the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party) is not significant enough to be considered. In assessing

the tactic of electoral competition the results are mixed. It is clearly important because such competition is a possible way of placing contrasting ideologies before the people, and to get a "realistic" feel for the practical adjustments that they have made. How effective either of the actual campaigns have been is open to question. On the other hand, the electoral arena is a briar patch for the rabbits of the new black elite, and any oppositional candidate or party starts with a major disadvantage.

The future political behavior of the black left will be dependent on rethinking those past tactics. It seems to me that such rethinking should be disciplined by two concerns. First that the black Bourgeoisie not be allowed to monopolize the experiences now available to the black community for the first time. Secondly in the process of reversing this pattern structural situations need be identified where "anti-bourgeois" analysis can be effectively generated in relation to the new adjustment patterns. In this regard the only solution is the development of a secular party instrument. It is the obligation of the black left to retrigger the Fanonist process and carry it through. To fall back, at this time, on unimaginative slogans, is, to paraphrase the opening paragraphs of the EIGHTEENTH BRUMAIRE, more farce than tragedy!

CONCLUSION

This then is the key problem suggested by the title "ideology and politics." It suggests that in the first place for all practical purposes the problem of the left among blacks has been the artificial separation of social criticism and politics and the limiting of discussion to a caricature of the former. Secondly it calls our attention to the possibility that real politics

is now a matter outside of such discussion having to do with the adjustment of the masses. From the Gary and Little Rock NBPC's, the Congress of African Peoples, The African Liberation Support Committee, etc., black political discussion has lost its capacity to be dangerous by disconnecting itself from the real adjustments of the people and occupying, instead, an incestuous world in which are manufactured a "left" and "right," bitterly in contention between themselves, but impervious to living conditions except as these are filtered through Bureau of Labor data. When we speak of the problem of "ideology and politics" for the present or future of black people it is this problem of separation which we must find a way to resolve and integrate, as it were.

A FINAL COMMENT ON OUR SOCIAL SCIENTISTS

Through it all we can only lament the cringing role of the social and political scientists in these changes. Their refusal to fulfill the promise of social analysis has had two consequences: (1) their own models of the world remain stagnant reflections of the social science developed by the white petty bourgeoisie and (2) impassioned social criticism has passed increasingly to activists and poets and other literati of the black community whose ideologizing remain embarrassing indications of their innocence of the constraints of political analysis. Withal because of the servility of the social scientists, academia stands even more in opposition to our people contributing nothing nor giving respite from the reigning ideologues who take advantage of the splendid possibilities of our cultural ambiguity.

[1] This essay is developed from comments first prepared for presentation at the fifth annual Conference of the Association of African Historians, Center for Inner City Studies, Chicago, IL, Feb., 13-16, 1975. Because the subject matter of this essay is seldom evaluated in terms used here I had projected numerous extended substantive footnotes. These have been kept to a minimum both for reasons of time and to limit digressions from the argument.

[2] Generally I use this term "social institutions" to cover three distinct forms of institutions; political, economic and cultural which may be isolated for purposes of analysis but which interact dialectically to create a given social situation. The epistemological basis for this procedure is in the work of Harold Cruse. See his CRISIS OF THE NEGRO INTELLECTUAL (New York: William Morrow, 1967), passim.

[3] Frantz Fanon, A DYING COLONIALISM (New York: Grove, 1965), trans, by Haakon Chevalier with intro. by Adolfo Gilly. Cf. E.J. Hobsbawn, "Passionate Witness," 20 NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS (Feb., 22, 1973), 6-10 and Jack Woddis, THE NEW THEORIES OF REVOLUTION (New York: International, 1972).

[4] The significance of class categories are tied to the productive relationships in modern capitalist soceity. Yet the advantages such a society maintains in relation to other societies (e.g. neo-colonialism) depends on politically significant groups who may have no economically productive role. "Class" then is a strained use which, in these cases, may depend more on status or custom and have a different functional significance than is usually the case. I continue to use "class," though without any "scientific" pretentions and consider it part of the broader problem of taxonomy that I briefly discuss below at p. 6.

[5] If it is the outgrowth of prior historical trends, probably a bias this author would support, we might use black bourgeoisie as developed in E. Franklin Frazier, BLACK BOURGEIOISE: THE RISE OF A NEW MIDDLE CLASS (1957). Cf. however, the reservations stated in Oliver Cox, "Introduction" in Nathan Hare, THE BLACK ANGLO-SAXONS (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

[6] Amiri Baraka, "Newark Seven Years Later: !Unidad y Lucha!," 26 MONTHLY REVIEW (Jan., 1975), 16-24

[7] Alex Poinsett, "Class Patterns in Black Politics," 28 EBONY (August 1973), 35ff.

[8] The tendency is associated with Grace and James Boggs in their conception of the new American Revolution. Most recently it took the form of a slogan on black workers for the African Liberation Support Committee. See Abdul Akalimat and Nelson Johnson, "Toward the Ideological Unity of the African Liberation Support Committee: A Response to Criticisms of the A.L.S.C. Statement of Principles," (1974).

[9] In contemporary circles of "scientific" analysts it might be called "materialist." Thus we could emphasize the actual impact of the adjustments on the daily lives of the people and exorcise attempts to make this just happy-go-lucky survivalism. But the resort to so-called materialism among this group hardly reassures me

[9] that they will be able to grasp reality any better than Alice in Wonderland! In fact their application of the materialist method, in spite of numerous formal definitions, is consistent with the opening statement in chapter 11 of Paul's letter to the Hebrews as recorded in Chapter 11, verse 1 of the King James version of the Holy Bible. For help in locating this citation I am indebted to Rosa Lee Johnson and Viola Young.

[10] W.T. Fontaine, "An Interpretation of Contemporary Negro Thought From the Standpoint of the Sociology of Knowledge," 25 JOURNAL OF NEGRO HISTORY (1940) 6-13 and "'Social Determination' in the Writings of Negro Scholars," 49 AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY (January, 1944); L.D. Reddick, "A New Interpretation for Negro History," 22 JOURNAL OF NEGRO HISTORY (1937), 17-28.

[11] Gunnar Myrdal, AN AMERICAN DILEMMA (New York: Harper, Row, 1944)

[12] Here I utilize some suggestions from Sheldon Wolin, POLITICS AND VISION: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN WESTERN POLITICAL THEORY (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960)

[13] C. Wright Mills, THE MARXISTS (New York: Dell, 1962) pp. 12-13.

[14] Adolph Reed, Jr., "Scientistic Socialism: Notes on the New Afro-American Magic Marxism," 1 ENDARCH (Fall, 1974), 21-39.

[15] See Louis R. Harlan, "The Secret Life of Booker T. Washington," 37 JOURNAL OF SOUTHERN HISTORY (August, 1971), 393-416; Judith Stein, "'Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others': The Political Economy of Racism in the United States," 38 SCIENCE AND SOCIETY (Winter, 1974-75), 422-463.

[16] Stokely Carmichael, STOKELY SPEAKS: BLACK POWER BACK TO PAN-AFRICANISM edited with an intro. by Ethel Minor (New York: Random House, 1971).

A RECURRING MALADY: THE POVERTY OF BOURGEOIS CRITICISM

by Chuck Hopkins

In his piece[1] on the malaise of Amiri Baraka's recent change from a kind of narrow nationalism to revolutionary nationalism in which scientific socialism is espoused, Norman Harris undertakes a criticism of the apparent lack of serious analysis which could justify and explain this ideological transformation. After setting forth his own commentary on the matter, Harris concludes that due to the lack of systematic analysis, "in itself," the change represents "a qualitative move backwards."[2] While this writing is not intended to be a defense or explanation of the various political manifestations we have witnessed in Baraka over the last several years, I do feel the need to make some comments on Harris' method of critique.

Karl Marx was fond of pointing out that if the appearance of things coincided with their essence then there would be no need for science. In fact, it was this assumption which led him to undertake his massive work we know as Capital. In his day, bourgeois social scientists, confining themselves to a study of phenomena which only appeared to represent reality, claimed that there was no expoiltation in capitalist society. In their view profit did not come from the exploitation of workers, but resulted from capital itself invested by the capitalist in production.

This explanation, of course, did not satisfy Marx. Employing the dialectical materialist method and drawing from his own experiences in workers' struggles, he rejected what appeared to be an equitable purchase-and-scale transaction between the worker and the capitalist. Marx discovered that behind the phenomenon, the semblance of an equal exchange, was the very

essence of exploitation under capitalist production. He showed that human labor power was a unique kind of exchange commodity in that it was capable of creating/producing material values. In addition, he demonstrated that the values human labor power produces are worth a great deal more than the wages paid by the capitalist. Thus, that unpaid for surplus value the capitalist appropriates as profit.

The results which Marx derived from his study were, of course, very important. In fact, they are still being felt all over the world. But equally important was the methodology he employed. In his attack upon the bourgeoisie, he could not utilize bourgeois methodology. It was necessary to go beyond superficial appearances and discover the real essence of capitalist political economy, its material basis and inner workings. And, of course, after taking capitalism apart this way, he was able to turn around and put it back together, but with the knowledge to explain/justify each part. It was the utilization of this methodology, then, that led Marx to conclude that because of the material contradiction between the worker and capitalist, working people as a conscious revolutionary class must be the leading agent in the overthrowing and transformation of the capitalist system.

From the standpoint of methodology, social theorists today are faced with the same problem that confronted Marx, i.e., resolving the contradiction between appearance and essence. Particularly for Afro-American theorists, the task is a difficult one. Confronted with the material reality of both racism and exploitation, we have had great difficulty in trying to plow through the layers of phenomena monopoly capitalism places in our path, and

locating its inner workings, its fundamental contradictions. But this difficulty will be made impossible if we expect to resolve the appearance/essence contradiction through the use of bourgeois methodology. We cannot succeed as black social theorists in realizing a theoretical totality (which is the task before us) by employing the methodology of bourgeois social science.

In his article, Harris does in fact pose the correct question regarding Baraka's ideological change. He asks: What occurred in the real world to cause this shift?[3] If we are to be successful in explaining the change we will have to focus upon "the real world." But after having raised what essentially is the correct question, Harris immediately takes flight from the world, i.e., from the material base. Before leaving, however, he does mention one phenomenon which might have been fruitful had he pursued it. This was the question on whether the change was due to the National Black Political Assembly's inability to attract more black elected officials.[4] This would have been at least a starting point for trying to get at the essence of the problem.

But rather than pursuing this kind of question, i.e., one which would necessarily involve some knowledge of his subject's practice, Harris chooses to simply examine some of Baraka's ideas as reflected in several of his political writings. In his paragraph on methodology he clearly indicates how restricted his analysis will be. He states that he will look at Baraka's "philosophical offerings" and his "political writings." He also states that a part of his methodological approach will involve looking at how the ideas

of Marx, Nkrumah, Nyerere, and Cabral influenced Baraka in his "new position."[5] This, then, is Harris' method. He does not examine Baraka in the material world, in struggle, in his practice. We see nothing of a Baraka in process interacting with the world through various programs and organizations. We see nothing of the successes and failures of the practice which has been informing Baraka's ideology over the last decade or so.

Without a doubt, subjecting the evolution and development of Baraka to some real theoretical examination is one of the necessary tasks we have before us, but little of anything can be gained by merely following the methods of bourgeois social science, accumulating "objective facts" and manipulating them to deduce some preconceived conclusion. But we are still left with the question of why Harris chooses such an idealist and subjective method of his study.

Perhaps it is possible to gain some understanding from a statement he makes in the beginning of the piece.. "From a utilitarian point of view," he states, "the role that objective, quantifiable analysis play in this shift is crucial."[6] Well, what is an "objective, quantifiable analysis?" Does this statement indicate a belief on Harris' part that "out there," standing alone are neutral phenomena waiting to be collected, quantified, categorized, and analyzed, thereby revealing truth? Can we snatch a handful of Baraka's writings out of their social context, select some quotes and then claim that we have explained why his political stance has changed? Can we then go ahead, based upon these selected and abstracted data, and pass judgement as to the regressive/reactionary nature of Baraka's new position? Harris says yes, and this is exactly what he has done.

The main reason, then, for the invalidity of Harris' critique is the impoverishment of the analysis resulting directly from his methodology. Why is this so? As I alluded to in the beginning of this essay, one of the cardinal principles of bourgeois social theory is that everything is exactly as it appears. From this assumption flows the rampant empiricism we find in much of bourgeois writing. In fact, under the rule of the bourgeoisie and through their universities in particular, the great task of creating social theory is reduced to a mere gathering in of what is named "objective facts" leading to the accumulation and manipulation of abstract data to deduce some (desired?) conclusion. Such a mystification of the world under the guise of being "scientific" and "objective" can only serve to protect the profiteers of the status quo, the bourgeoisie. Because if we are prevented from understanding the society in which we live, then what possibility is there for us to change it?

We have in Harris' critique a clear example of the poverty of bourgeois criticism. The methodology is so imbued with a positivist empiricism that the resulting piece is merely a simple accumulation of decided upon "facts" and conclusions. In his attempt to provide a theoretical explanation of Baraka, Harris is apparently unaware of his own biased presuppositions. His empiricist search for "objective facts" itself is illusionary in that it is theory (in this instance his own) that names certain phenomena, and not others, "objective" in the first place. For example, would the incorporation of Baraka's interactions with his environment, his practice, into Harris' methodological scheme result in a different conclusion regarding the regressive nature of the new position? I think it would.

Before concluding, I have a few comments on the question of the regressive nature of Baraka's new position. I have argued that Harris' position on this is invalid. But I do not wish to stop at this point without suggesting what I believe to be a more positive approach to the question. In other words, I do not believe that it is merely enough to level negative critiques, but we (the black left, activists, human beings, etc.) must also try to come together to unify ourselves.

First of all, in order to decide the question of whether or not the new position/movement is progressive or regressive, we would have to have some common understanding of criteria for indicating the terms. In my view, as change and development takes place in the world, the consciousness of human beings, i.e., our ideas, theories, etc., change also. For example, in America during the 1800's the changes which were taking place as far as the growing industrialization in the North led to a change in many people's consciousness regarding their ideas about slavery. And if we can agree that wage labor is a step above slave labor as far as human social relations are concerned, then we would have to conclude that the anti-slavery people, the Union army, etc. represented progress. The Civil War was progressive.

So, when is a phenomenon progressive? In my view it would be progressive when it has its basis in the changing and developing material world and corresponds to the new conditions of the material world. By progressive I mean one who, when confronted with a changing and new situation, is able to grow and develop, improve oneself, and become viable in the new situation. In opposition to this stipulation, of course, would be regressive--the inability to locate oneself in one's material environment and to grow and develop as the material environment grows and develops.

Thus, in order to adequately explain the change in Baraka's political stance and to decide upon its progressive or regressive character, we would have to focus upon, first, change and development in America (its inner workings), change and development in people's consciousness and the relationship between Baraka's changes to all of this. Next, we would identify his new practice and attempt to ascertain whether or not it is enabling him as a black revolutionary to be a more viable force in his environment. I end with a question: Is there anything to be learned from the practice of the United Brotherhood of Newark during the sixties and the present situation wherein black Mayor Kenneth Gibson has no qualms about turning racist policemen loose on black and Puerto Rican communities?

Footnotes

[1] Norman Harris, "A Recurring Malady: Imamu Baraka's Move to the Left," Endarch: Journal of Theory, Vo., 1, No. 1 (Fall 1974), pp. 5-20

[2] Ibid., p. 18

[3] Ibid., p. 5

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., pp. 5-6

[6] Ibid., p. 5

A REJOINDER

Chuck Hopkins' criticism of my analysis of Baraka's move to the left is an interesting collage of jumbled and false starts resulting from an adopted and thinly appropriated Marxist framework. The criticism is of my methodology and has three aspects: (1) criticism of my inability to distinguish between appearance and essence; (2) criticism of my not dealing with Baraka's practice; and (3) criticism of my selective labeling of criteria as objective. To be sure, I must comment on what Hopkins might mean by "narrow nationalism" and "revolutionary nationalism." Additionally, I will comment on his criteria for progressive and reactionary.

Hopkins correctly indicates the intent of my critique: to present the apparent lack of any serious analysis by Baraka as regards his move to the left. Thus it was to Baraka's word I went to find out what he had to say about his shift. Having done that,it was clear that he had not critically treated changes (if indeed there have been any changes in existing power relations) in the existing order. The esssence, as Hopkins puts it, was not revealed in Baraka's recent "leftist" writings. Nor was it my purpose to reveal and analyze the essence: the existing socio-political and economic arrangements (material base). My purpose, quite simply was to indicate that Baraka's new position as presented in his writings did not indicate any changes in said essence as much as it indicated a change in Baraka's thinking. An analysis of existing socio-political and economic arrangements is necessary, though it was not my purpose to do that in the piece herein defended. Importantly, an analysis of the essence must occur on some fundamental level prior to advocating one position or the other. This was and is Baraka's "Recurring Malady." Thus, Hopkins' assertion as regards to appearance and essence might find Baraka a better target.

Hopkins asserts that I did not deal with Baraka's practice. Insofar as Hopkins means that I did not trail Baraka around, taking notes on his every involvement in a first hand manner, he is correct. Again, it was my assumption that the man's practice insofar as it had any effect on his move to the left would be presented in his writing that concerned the change. Such a presentation was not forthcoming at the time my critique was written. His more recent piece in Monthly Review[2] about Newark is an attempt to indicate the limits of his former position as regards the desirability of having black faces in previously all white places. I will not further comment on the Monthly Review piece. The point here is that there is a dialectical relationship between theory, i.e. his writing. When said relationship is not revealed in the writing (the relationship between theory and practice or put on a broader scale, the relationship between the material base and the superstructure) one of at least two conclusions can be drawn: (1) it does not exist; (2) and if it does exist, the writer is unaware of it. In Baraka's case the latter was suggested in my critique. None of this lessens the necessity to analyze the essence apart from the appearance of particular politicans. Again, however, my criticism was that Baraka, the politician, became an advocate, most recently a "leftist," prior to analyzing the essence.

The whole question of labeling material conditions as objective is not as straight forward as Hopkins would have us believe. That is, to analyze material conditions, which usually means those time honored categories of the means of production and the ownership and relations to the same. Harold Cruse points out that the advent of the mass cultural (media) apparatus[3] has significantly altered the capitalism that Marx dissected a century ago. As a partial result the material base might not determine the superstructure. Or on the existential level, one's material being (relationship to the means of

production) might not determine consciousness. Thus the superstructure may very well determine the material base and consciousness determine being. Thus the whole concept of "cultural revolution" in China becomes more understandable. That is, even after the material base is altered, corresponding attitudes do not automatically follow. To be sure, the existing relations to the means of production of white workers (even in this depression) has not produced, in the maximum sense, the corresponding consciousness. Minimally this means that Marx's ontology, epistemology as well as his categories for analysis must be re-thought.

Hopkins' use of "narrow nationalism" and "revolutionary nationalism" raises a time honored controversy in black social thought: the duality of integrationist and nationalist thought. "Narrow nationalism" is nationalistic in that it focuses on Afro-Americans, Baraka once proclaimed, as a people together with a common past, a common present and hopefully a common future. "Revolutionary nationalist," not denying the role of racism in the capitalist system, tend to focus on class differences and antagonisms which result from varying relations to the means of production.

Hopkins asserts that what is progressive is that which corresponds to conditions in the material world. Conversely that which does not correspond to conditions in the material world is reactionary. I have already suggested that the material world in the Marxian sense (the means of production and the realtions to and ownership of the same) might not be the best way to get at the most important variables in existing power relationships because in America the material being of white workers does not shape their consciousness in the Marxian sense, i.e. their relations to the means of production has not imputed any revolutionary consciousness to them.

Thus if Hopkins means by the material world what Marx meant by the material

world I am doubtful that thinking corresponding to century old categories is progressive especially given the fact that Marx's predictions, almost to a letter, have proven wrong. Harold Cruse writes:

> According to Marx, the revolution he predicted had to come about in a highly industrialized nation which had necessarily created a large, industrial class of workers, well organized and well trained in the production skills of capitalist industry... such did not happen. There was a revolution in Russia... every social revolution that has taken place since the Russian revolution has also developed out of industrially backward, agrarian, semi-colonial or colonial conditions while the working classes of the advanced white nations became more conservative, pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist.[3]

What I would suggest is that the analytical accomplishments of Karl Marx not be the Alpha and Omega of black social theory. To be sure his methodology (dialectical materialism) has some lessons. But to adopt his ontology, epistemology and critical categories, indeed to adopt Marx, i.e. a dubious yardstick to label current phenomena reactionary or progressive. The use of the concepts "narrow nationalist" and "revolutionary nationalist" and Hopkins' clear preference for the latter is one result.

Insofar as Hopkins criticism of my critique argues that said critique was not a definitive analysis of Baraka's move to the left he is quite correct.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Norman Harris, "A Recurring Malady: Baraka's Move to the Left," Endarch. Fall, 1974, Vol. 1. No. 1

[2]Amri Baraka, "Newark Seven Years Later," Monthly Review. January, 1975, Vo. 26, No. 8

[3]Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (New York: William Morrow 1967), p. 64

[4]Harold Cruse, Rebellion or Revolution (New York: William Morrow, 1968), p. 143.

CRITERIA FOR CULTURAL CRITICISM

One of the most arresting features of intellectual life in the United States is the distinct absence of a continuous and coherent body of radical social criticism. At first glance it seems strange that a society so overdeveloped economically, whose incredible private fortunes have been wrought so mercilessly from the living flesh of its largest minority as well as other oppressed peoples of the world, is also the society which seems most immune to the troublesome germs of radical infestation. But a more than superficial assessment of these circumstances may perhaps yield some clues as to areas of vulnerability in America's steel-and-glass armour. It is even conceivable that such an effort may engender ideological and theoretical activity which will contribute ultimately to the human transformation of this, the perfect predatory plastic society.

I propose in this essay to take the function of cultural criticism as an area in which at least some preliminary work can be done which may be important for subsequent political theory and social action. And I should make it clear right away that by cultural criticism I do not mean the fanciful preoccupation with hidden themes in novels. Nor do I mean sterile bantering about the merits (or more likely demerits) of this or that form of popular entertainment. Cultural criticism here refers to a comprehensive critique of everyday life in America, and an analysis of the particular relationship which everyday life has to creative imagination, aesthetic theory, and the diversity of cultural expressions.

I begin from the premise, suggested by a colleague, that a basic responsibility of the critic is "to make explicit, in the process of analysis of social life, our assumptions and preferences about fundamental philosophical problems having to do with the nature of human society" (emphasis added).[1] The above quote originally alluded to "black social life" rather than to social life in

general, as I've altered it to read. But I hesitate to refer to a "black social life" in the reality of monopoly capitalist America. In the consumer society, social life is essentially standardized.

The folk culture of a once rural black populus has increasingly been transformed as the urbanization of our people enters its final stages. The result has been an increasing universalization of aspects of that culture as commodities and a non-regeneration of those features not appropriate to urban life. It is no wonder then that popular music has effected the merger of black and white trends and that the same banalities are evident in both black and white oriented movies. It is no wonder because in consumer society the tendency is toward the universalization of every particularity, the mode of that universalization being the commodity.[2]

The responsibility of the critic under these cultural conditions is to agitate for a return to true particularity of expression and hence, to cultural diversity. This return cannot, obviously, be a reactionary kind of (literal) reversal to agrarian folk culture (nor to African mythology) which characterizes the positions taken by most of our "leading" cultural spokespeople. Instead, the return to cultural diversity must be on a higher level than any previous form. It must negate the universalizing effect of commodity production and the entire social structure upon which it is based. Thus the responsibility of the critic of culture is but a specialized reflection of the function of any revolutionary. He must be cognizant of his individual contribution to the transformation of society.

The Critique of Everyday Life

One of the most glaring contradictions of life under the bourgeois regime is the absolute opposition between the "beauty" of culture and the "ugliness" of human existence. This opposition, which we all acknowledge daily, even if

unconsciously, forms the cornerstone for bourgeois theories of aesthetics and is the most important factor in unrevolutionizing the social impact of art. Because art, in its general sense of culture, is so different from everyday real life, it must also be separated from everyday life.[3] But the separation of the strictly artistic from the strictly social[4] is a temporary phenomenon. and "should not be made into an ontological fact; it is not eternal but rather represents the form taken by the historical development of repressive civilization."[5] From this unnatural separation develops a strange dialectical relationship between human beings and their relationship to reality and illusion, respectively. Marcuse has captured the essence of this dialectic succinctly:

> When the reproduction of material life takes place under the rule of the commodity form and continually renews the poverty of class society, then the good, beautiful and true are transcedent to this life.

And further,

> What is of authentic import to man, the highest truths, the highest goods, and the highest joys, is separated in significance from the necessary by an abyss.[6]

This is why, to paraphrase Marcuse, when one steps off the streets of Manhattan into the Metropolitan Museum of Art one has the feeling of entering another world. And similarly, it is why when one attends an exposition of "revolutionary" Afro-American art or when one hears a poetry reading by one of our new-found literary stars, one also has the feeling of being in a foreign place. Not only is the content of modern black art not revolutionary, but its very relationship to the society it supposedly addresses is predicated upon bourgeois principles. Those principles, as stated above, assume the separation of culture, the realm of artistic creation, from work-a-day life under capital.

The reconciliation of culture and society, the reunification into an organic whole of artistic production and enjoyment and social production is not possible under the cannibalistic conditions of capitalism. The responsibility of the critic is, in my view, to initiate the reconciliation of these estranged spheres precisely by pointing to the nature of their estrangement, i.e., that it facilitates the functioning of a repressive social structure. This is a theoretical activity which necessarily involves creation of criteria by which truly revolutionary art may be evaluated.

Affirmative Culture: The Bourgeois Tradition of Black Art

Marx's well known assertion that the real task of philosophy is to change the world rather than interpret it provides a useful assumption for our consideration of the relationship between art and society. The measure of durability which any work of art achieves, the basis of its ability to withstand passing time, is its closeness to the people which it represents, its ability to convey "a profound ideological content."[7] For this reason, art always exhibits a bias, a "tendentiousness:"

> ...art is profoundly tendentious because it expresses the highest interests of a people in a determinate historical stage, but this does not mean that art can be dissolved in the political.[8]

This is what Imamu Baraka (then Leroi Jones) means when he refers to Melville's MOBY DICK as serious white literature.[9] Unfortunately, Baraka has not been able to provide for black America of his day a work of the same level of importance which MOBY DICK had for white society of Melville's time. The reason for this failure--in part at least-- is that the relationship of culture to society in Melville's day did not hinder the ideological impact his novel was designed to have. The tragic metaphor of the great white whale and Melville's heavy moralizing easily fit into the framework of affirmative culture. On the other

hand, the "revolutionary theatre" which Baraka helped spawn was never able to develop an ideological thrust which lived up to its name because it relied upon the same mode of cultural apprehension which suited Melville's purposes in the 18th century. Since the "highest interests" of the great majority of black folk are not represented by the ritualized moralizing of a Baraka play, the ephemeral existence of "black revolutionary theatre" is clearly understood.[10]

Because, as I have maintained, black cultural workers (artists and critics alike) accept the functional separateness, the non-identity of culture and social life, there arises the idea of black culture as a sovereign realm. This in turn removes the criteria for aesthetic valuation from the social sphere. The repository of aesthetic judgement then becomes the soul, that final refuge of spiritual existence in a world otherwise dominated by the relentless demands of capital accumulation. The following quotation from Marcuse should ring a familiar note:

> In the realm of culture spiritual education and spiritual greatness overcome the inequality and unfreedom of everyday competition, for men participate in culture as free and equal beings. He who looks to the soul sees through economic relations to men in themselves. Where the soul speaks, the contingent position and merit of men in the social process are transcended.[11]

The popular black ideological slogan which epitomizes this kind of thinking is the call for UNITY WITHOUT UNIFORMITY. We need not dwell upon that slogan here though since its bankruptcy has been demonstrated by the recent demise of ALSC. Looking further at spirituality, at this business of the soul, we see that,

> Culture belongs not to him who comprehends the truths of humanity as a battle cry, but to him in whom they have become a <u>posture</u> which leads to a mode of proper behavior: exhibiting harmony and reflectiveness even in daily routine. Culture should ennoble the given by permeating it, rather than by putting something new in its place.[12] (emphasis added)

The idea of the beautiful, in affirmative culture, does not have a concrete reflection in material life, in everyday social existence. The beautiful is instead "affirmed" by the individual's emotional acknowledgement of its worth. That worth is judged primarily by the basic contrast which the "beautiful" has to real life. The spiritual affirmation of beauty, which occurs in the sovereign and transcendent realm of culture, therefore relieves the individual of responsibility for changing social reality. Instead, the "spirit" the "soul" exhorts individuals to love each other, to become "beautiful" qualities which are possible only in spite of the predatory social intercourse which marks everyday life. So for the vast majority of the people, the impact of affirmative culture results in the apprehension of many social relations as magnificent illusions. We therefore are confronted with the spectacle of groups and individuals acting out a make-believe world of blackness, of collective African spirituality; a posturing which is facilitated by the prodigious creation of "black" oriented products by white American capitalists.

Because the acting out of affirmative precepts in everyday life manifests itself ultimately as delusion, this mode of cultural apprehension is particularly susceptible to rightist (fascist) exploitation. Marcuse, writing in Germany in 1937 observed that,

> The idealist cult of inwardness and the heroic cult of the state serve a fundamentally identical social order to which the individual is now completely sacrificed. Whereas formerly cultural exaltation was to satisfy the personal wish for happiness now the individual is to disappear completely in the greatness of the folk.[13] (emphasis added)

Criteria For A New Critical Perspective

The pretentiousness of Old School Negro cultural criticism may be traced partly to the social importance which black folk formerly ascribed to persons of

their kind who earned a living by literary work.[14] The sense of "knightly obligation" which Blyden Jackson attached to the "development of an energetic scholarly criticism" among black literary types seems to proceed directly from the presumption that work in the world of culture was somehow superior or more noble than mundane pursuits.[15] It is just this propensity toward separating cultural and social functions which must be abrogated by a truly revolutionary culture.

The development of a revolutionary culture among black people in this society requires that (as a starting point) both the artist and critic grasp the reality of total social existence. That totality embraces life in its political/economic, ideological, aesthetic/linguistic and emotional fullness. The revolutionary culture must have a critical approach to the real, the concrete and the actual in order to be able to ferret out the illusory, encourage creative imagination, and visualize a more humane existence. From the critique of everday life of the everday man, woman and child it must develop its ideological essence--that natural tendentiousness.

No revolutionary culture can retreat to the ethereal world of bourgeois spirituality without abandoning its potentially transformative expressions to the boiling caldrons of capitalism.

And finally, there is no contradiction between the contemplation of social transformation and the maintenance of a distinctive, self-defining <u>national</u> mode of cultural expression. It is the failure of such contemplation which will result in the abolition of national distinctions as the realm of culture becomes more and more estranged from our lives only to reappear hideously, as the ubiquitous commodity.

Harold Barnette

NOTES

1. Alex Willingham. "Notes Toward Clarifying the Function of Culture In Social Life," (Unpublished), p.3

2. Samir Amin. "In Praise of Socialism," (MONTHLY REVIEW, September 1974)- Amin does a good job of differentiating between culture as that sum of artifacts and creative expressions produced by a people in the course of their daily existence, and the "culture" of capitalist society which is no more than the commercial manufacture and exchange through market relations of songs, utensils, etc. In the former case there is no basis for the alienation and reification of culture. Therefore there is no basis for the separation of artistic production and social production, no separate and self contained cultural and social spheres respectively.

3. Bruce Brown, MARX, FREUD, AND THE CRITIQUE OF EVERYDAY LIFE, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973). Chapter 1, "Marxism The New Left And Everyday Life" and 2, "Toward A New Critical Theory" contain good discussions of this problem. Also for a liberal view of this same problem (and this view is important since the liberal presence in the black struggle still dominates) see Philip Slater THE PURSUIT OF LONELINESS: AMERICAN CULTURE AT THE BREAKING POINT, (Boston: Beacon Press 1970). Chapters 1-3.

4. For an analysis of the discussion that has raged between black artists and critics over the years concerning this question see Willingham, op. cit.

5. Brown, op. cit., p. 71.

6. Herbert Marcuse. NEGATIONS, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) pp. 90-91

7. Adolfo Sanchez Vazquez, ART AND SOCIETY, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973) p. 269.

8. Ibid., p. 269

9. Leroi Jones. HOME, (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1966). In the essay "Myth Of A Negro Literature" it is suprising how perceptively Jones is able to spell out the quandary in which black "protest" literature found itself without being able to deal with that problem in his own creative work.... See his comment on page 112 about the emotionalism of Negro protest writing...

10. See BLACK WORLD (June, 1973) for an interesting article by Richard Wesley who admits the black theatre never had a meaningful following among the people. He attributes this to the fact that playwriting is a Western (or white) art form. He then goes on to suggest that money being plowed into that worthless project go instead into a black movie industry. One only has to recall that photography is also a basically white artistic area to see the silliness with which

black creative artists argue the relative merits of different art forms when the deeper question has to do with the nature of art itself.

11. Marcuse. op. cit., p.110

12. Ibid., p. 103

13. Ibid., p. 129

14. See for example the tone of much of the "early" criticism and especially that designated as representative of the "Phylon Group" in Willingham, op. cit.

15. This seems to be the criticism leveled at black writers by Richard Wright, who noted the "hiatus" which existed between black workers and black writers. In spite of the evident "line walking" which shades Wright's political program the criticism seems to retain its validity. See Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Literature", in J. Williams, ed., Amistad II (New York: Vintage, 1971)

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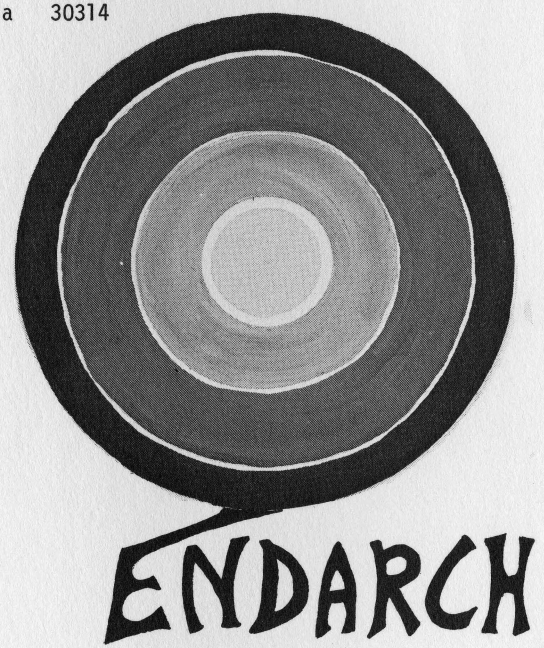

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