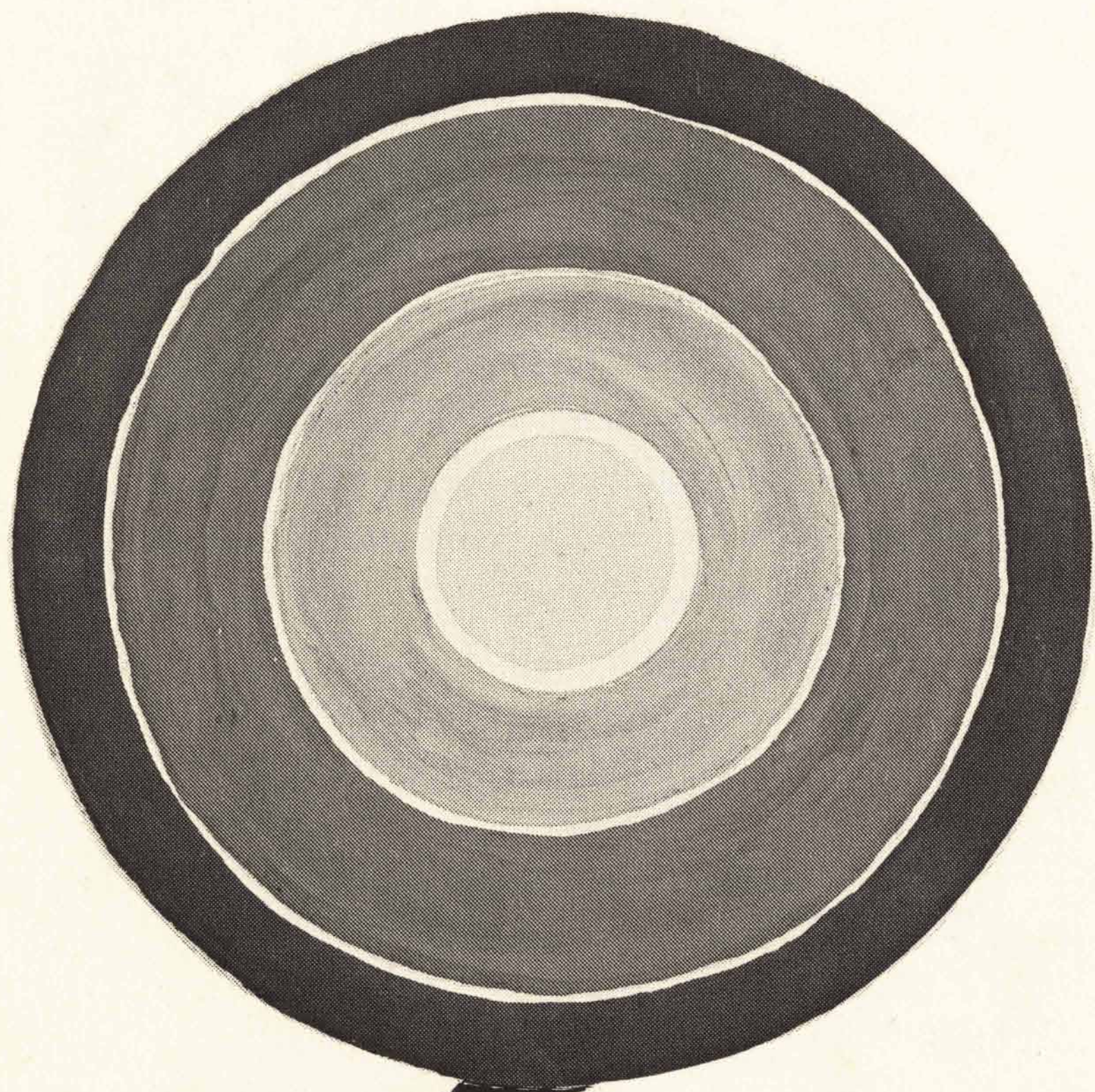


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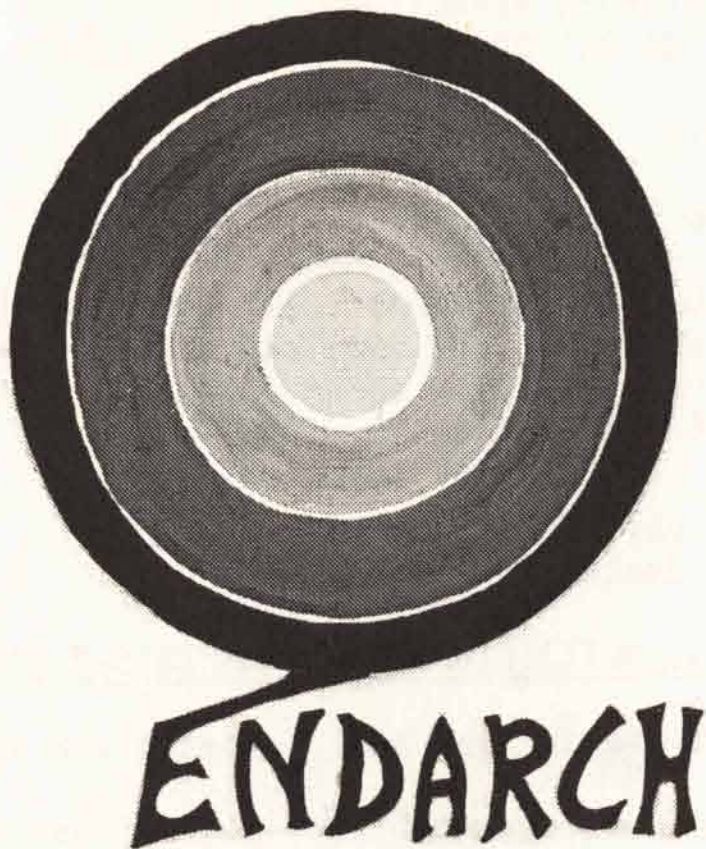
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CALIFORNIA DREAMING: ELDRIDGE CLEAVER'S EPITHET
TO THE ACTIVISM OF THE SIXTIES*

Alex Willingham

"I'm tired of getting kicked in the ass."

"The final shock came the day I saw Richard Nixon shaking hands with Chairman Mao. When you see Nixon and all that he stands for shaking hands with Chairman Mao and all that he supposedly stood for--well, it marks a turning point in history and a personal turning point for me.

--Eldridge Cleaver "THE ROLLING STONE INTERVIEW"
September 11, 1975

WAR BABIES AND THE CONSTRICTION OF PRAXIS

It was expected that War Babies--those born during the imperialist machinations of the early 40's--would create problems for American society when they came to young adulthood in the late fifties and early sixties. It was expected that the substantial increase in the number of young people moving toward adulthood would severely tax secondary schools, occupational training programs, and college classrooms as these levels of education attempted to cope. With due complacency though, it was only expected that the new generation would wait--as generations do--their appropriate turn at making a social impact outside these institutions. Calmly plodding through the ladder of socialization, it was expected that they were headed to a predetermined maturity not unlike that then enjoyed by their predecessors.

It was not to be! The generation was to become an ambivalent part of America striking immediately at the reigning patterns of social life and ridiculing the prejudices of the country over a fifteen year period (commonly referred to now as the "sixties") from the late fifties to the early seventies. During that time activism was the keyword such that by the mid-seventies a generation can be both young and tired and still point to seasoned veterans of political activity ranging from Stokley Carmichael to Julian Bond, the latter having been the object of an attempted nomination for Vice-President of the United States when he was constitutionally too young to occupy the office. The generation that threatened to stop the world at thirty is barely yet forty and has had more political involvement than is usual by fifty.

The key word of the generation was certainly activism. This activism no doubt

was a result of many things including even the "exuberance of youth" as one Yale University president put it in his defense of some students there that had been disruptive in conducting their panty raid in the fashion of the preoccupation of a previous generation.¹ How different from a latter president of that institution who released a public statement supporting campus protests of the trials of Black Panther Party members Bobby Seale and Erica Huggins and pointedly proclaimed his skepticism as to "the ability of black revolutionaries to get a fair trial anywhere in the United States."² The action of the one president defending his students against the trivia of undergraduate life and the other joining in righteous protest is graphic testimony to the differences between the two eras and underscores the centrality of social activism among the latter.

Yet perhaps the most significant source of that activism was the extent to which the politics of everyday life in the America of the fifties was tied to the grotesque. Thus successful politicians ran campaigns in which they charged that there was a Communist under every rug. In the American South it was common place that candidates for political office vied to outdo each other in insulting the Afro-American population and black people themselves held no authoritative office in a Southern state and were not at the time an active constituency.

In the face of such gross political discussion the new generation was little in need of thought. In 1960 some Greensboro A & T University students--without benefit of study group--provoked a challenge to the whole edifice of racial segregation through the simple act of requesting service at a lunch counter reserved "for members of the white race only." In due course other actions followed: against the charge that there was a communist behind every criticism of national policy, there arose a New Left which, though carefully constrained inside the a-theoretical American tradition, did begin to call for "radical" analysis and to directly criticize the country;³ against the effort to subordinate the Vietnamese people there arose a dynamic anti-war movement which provoked the wife of the U. S. Attorney General (Mitchell) to look at demonstrators in Washington and be reminded of "Russia in 1917" (though she admired neither event

and grossly overestimated the latter by comparison); against the claim of the inherent purity of the white race there arose black boys and white girls walking arm and arm in Mississippi! The compulsion to act outweighed the desire to think and was dramatic. The compulsion was pursued with such honest and persistent dedication that those most grotesque aspects of the era--which appeared so permanent then--passed onto the scrap heaps of history. The Cold War has been ended and racial segregation has come to an end.⁴

What then of the activists now grown older and yet still so much a part of youthful America? By and large the organizations that they founded have passed from the scene. SNCC, CORE and among whites especially the SDS have ceased to exist. Among blacks, individuals we do have are Carmichael, Seale, Amiri Baraka, Ron Daniels, Owusu Sadaukai, Imari Obedele, Haki Madhubuti, Jim Lee, Kalamu Salaam, Ron Karenga, Abdul Akalimat and for awhile Huey Newton and others continue as prominent activists and some organizations (e.g. the African Liberation Support Committee) persisted for awhile as a forum for these.

All these organizations were developed to fulfill programmatic goal-oriented tasks. In their modus operandi they typified a generation which took care of its business without much attention to philosophy. The decline of organizational formations has prompted a turn towards theory and we have had a succession of ideological changes which have attempted to captivate the activism of the sixties and graft it onto first this and then that ideological school. Through Black Power, Black Nationalism, Pan-Africanism, Panther Marxism, multinationalism and the rest the War Babies have testified to their conviction of the inadequacy of the activism thus far generated and to the need to go further if American society is to be finally constructed in accordance with human interests. Yet by the resort to ideology they have shunned analytic integrity in two respects: (1) they have refrained from cutting under previously aggregated ideology to acquire sensitivity about the philosophical base and (2) they have failed to confront the dynamics of the sixties as a specific historical phenomenon and thereby fail to identify the exact theoretical problems contingent on their own experiences.

ELDRIDGE CLEAVER: RECAPITULATION AND REEMERGENCE

At the age of 40 Eldridge Cleaver is a mite too old to be a War Baby but his political biography is almost completely tied to the activism they generated and, in his most recent statement,⁵ his theoretical tendency is the same as theirs. While the ideological changes occurring in other sections of the black community were ostensibly hostile to America and thus aimed at refining a critical perspective, Cleaver, in the present interview, makes an affirmation of the American state and, following Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn whom he quotes, sets the United States up as no less than the salvation of modern civilization! In terms more reminiscent of Woodrow Wilson than DuBois, Cleaver speaks of America as being "truly the force for democracy in the world." Yet there is a similarity in the status of ideology in the thought of Cleaver and the other activists and when this is coupled with the contradiction between their rightist and leftist orientations respectively, the publication of the interview is of more than passing interest and deserves some extended comment as an indication of the chaos in black social thought today.⁶

We had been hearing--since the publication of Lee Lockwood's CONVERSATION WITH ELDRIDGE CLEAVER⁷--that Cleaver was dissatisfied with treatment accorded him in Cuba. Then while in Algeria he attacked the decision to return some highjacked ransom money and incurred the wrath of that government. We knew that he subsequently went to Paris and took up residence. In due course it was reported that he was hoping to negotiate a return to the United States and that this was motivated by his disillusionment with Africa and communism as he had come in contact with these during his exile. Now in September 1975, we get a record of an interview and are presented with the opportunity to read Cleaver in his own words for the first time since the batch of articles that he published in BLACK SCHOLAR from late 1971 to early 1973.⁸

The Cleaver interview falls into five distinct parts. First the discussion of the exile experience covering his stay in Cuba and Algeria. Second there is his brief discussion of the viability of the concept of the "Third World," next there is the provocative assessment of the role of America in world affairs, fourth there is

a consideration of the new political status that the black elite has recently acquired in America and, fifth there is the discussion of the so-called Left Solution. In each section of the interview--which probably was edited though the paper makes no clear statement about it⁹--there are other subsidiary questions to which he addresses himself as a matter of course. Among these were Kitty, an American white woman whom Cleaver guesses was a "political groupie" that befriended him in Cuba, the matter of one Raymond Johnson an Afro-American said to typify the unfair treatment of political prisoners by the Castro government;¹⁰ the errors of the so-called white revolutionaries¹¹ especially the Weather people and the conflict with Timothy Leary in Algiers (the "Pope of Dope").

There is little information in this interview that is new. If anything some matters are left out.¹² What is of interest is so because it reveals the attitude of Cleaver or supplies some particular detail about his experience--in this latter category is the explicit reference to Raymond Johnson as opposed to the more indirect references in the Lockwood interview. The essentials remain what we already knew: he jumped bail and left the United States in 1968 ending up in Cuba (in spite of a direct question to the effect, Cleaver does not state the "actual mechanics" of how he got there. He does say that the exile was ordered by Huey Newton who thereby blocked an "ultimate confrontation" Cleaver was planning to have with police at Merritt College in Oakland);¹³ problems came up there and he went to Algeria where he opened what a New York Times article referred to as "a parallel diplomatic corps" among Third World liberation groups and functioned as legitimate revolutionaries.¹⁴

He was to be expelled from the Black Panther Party during this Algerian stay. For awhile after that he headed his own "international" section of the BPP based in Algiers and composed largely of persons previously expelled from the party especially East Coast people. The thing occurred with Leary ("he got more relaxed and less concerned about politics") and when he "busted" Leary such consummate New Leftists as Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, it is reported here, criticized him.¹⁵ The hijacked plane came with ransom and Cleaver strove to keep the dust--the Algerians refunded it.

In the end--expelled from the Party and criticized by the white Left--he has arrived in Paris reflecting on the role of America in foreign affairs, on the rise of the black politicians in America and on the Left Solution. "I plan to be back in the United States by July 4th, 1976," he said.¹⁶

In spite of the fact that there is much that is common place in the interview--and that so many questions are not asked at all--the publication of the interview has afforded the occasion for what ought to become a continuing critical discussion of what we referred to above as the integrity of social analysis among these activists. In this specific case two important problems are highlighted: (1) the status and behavior of Afro-Americans in the international context and (2) the factors associated with the tendency to engage in ideological thinking.

BACK TO "NATIONALISM:" FINDING IDENTITY ABROAD

The Afro-American in foreign places has been a source of interest at least since the settlement of Richard Wright in Europe in 1947.¹⁷ This matter has received new attention in recent years with the internationalization of the struggle by such people as Malcolm X and later the African Liberation Support Committee. During 1970 Cleaver traveled extensively visiting North Korea, North Vietnam and China. Interestingly enough no mention is made in the interview of any specific trips to other parts of Africa though in one question reference is made to "your travels throughout Africa." Still being based in Algeria and already having lived in Cuba, he had thus been in contact with some of the most important peoples in the Third World. In China he had the misfortune of being the guest of Lin Piao at the time Lin fell from grace with Mao and, as Cleaver put it, during that visit "poof, he was gone and Nixon was on his way."¹⁸

Cleaver's attitude about the Third World and socialist countries has undergone major change.¹⁹ He no longer views the developing world as a "homogeneous Third World," he is decidedly hostile towards individual countries (e.g. Cuba, China and Algeria) and he concludes that internationalism is a cynical myth. This perspective in turn leads him to offer criticisms of three kind: (1) the ill-treatment by the

various countries of him and other revolutionaries operating outside their respective home countries, (2) the arrogance and "jealousy" he sensed in the personal behavior of revolutionary officials and (3) a broad charge that these countries limit the political freedom of their people. Cleaver is definite about his changed attitude towards these places and his evaluations are in direct contradiction to other evaluations.²⁰ His criticism is bound to upset those in the black community who have insisted, since the mid-1960's on direct links with one or the other foreign country as a strategy to off-set the weakness of this group in the U. S. By revealing that he has had to travel the path of disillusionment, he may anticipate that his message will serve as an antidote to such romanticism.

Yet while Cleaver's remarks may be useful in terms of certain political strategies his observations are not on the whole a convincing basis for such a huge overhaul of international perspective as he apparently deems necessary. Though we do get hostile feelings expressed here against such saints of international romance as Fidel and Mao, we find the specific criticisms to be limited to their alleged treatment of revolutionaries (including Mao's problem with Lin and Castro's "split" with Che) and their foreign policy towards detente with the United States. There is no real discussion of the social structure of either of these countries. The failure to gauge his hostile judgments to specific aspects of the actual social structure of the various countries was probably influenced by his personal situation and may, of course, be simply the result of the way the interview was conducted. Perhaps too we will get the account missing here in a future book where he can record his considered analysis. At this point the focus is off base.²²

The third criticism--about political freedom--is particularly disturbing. For one thing such a charge might be confused with a commentary on social structure, for another Cleaver uses it to enage in a broad unrestrained attack against these countries. We have then a situation bound to cause skepticism: the absence of direct commentary on the social practice in these countries and the reliance on an abstract ideological criticism. The assumption logically follows that his personal experience

validates the observations rendered in ideological terms--yet this is a position not likely to be convincing either by virtue of the fact that the assumption is implicit or by the fact that the more gross statements are apparently given sometimes tongue-in-cheek.

Cleaver's attitude amounts essentially to a turnabout from international idealism to resignation with identity inside an American nationalism. Such a change calls attention to the traditional blinders fixed on Afro-Americans and revealed in their international activity. In fact to see the results again in this individual is further evidence of the tenacity of this cognitive pattern. In spite of the fact that Malcolm X did so much to break down the insularity of the Afro-American perspective, it is still probably him that represents this international naievete best--one example is a conversion he went through that was subsequently attributed to what was seen as interracial religious worship in North Africa; another was his naive assumption that the United Nations was a place to resolve the American race problem. Seen in light of this traditional pattern, Cleaver's remarks sound less like the personal tribulations of a sensitive individual and more like the historical response from Afro-Americans who have gone abroad. The education of Eldridge Cleaver was just as direct and specific as previous exiles and the lesson was the same!

Face it, people are nationalists more than they are internationalists and they use internationalism in a very cynical way in order to further their own nationalist aspirations. And when I began to understand that, I became less of an internationalist in the critical sense. Now, if you relate to people internationally, that's a different question because it's a human question, not a political question.²³

Now here and other places in this interview there is an elusive tendency in Cleaver's conversation in which he says less about what he is than what he used to be. In this case we may hesitate to proclaim that he is a "nationalist" because of the form of his remarks as quoted. Fortunately for us the significance of the shift in his position is far greater than the parameters of this interview. We know he is no longer an internationalist and that thus the function of that ideology has passed away. The significance of this I hope to make clear in the next few pages.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF BLACK INTERNATIONALISM

Black internationalism took two forms in the late sixties. One was Pan-Africanism and the other was proletarian internationalism.²⁴ Both came to reject domestically oriented black nationalism. The internationalist claim to world inclusiveness enabled it to append the label "narrow" to any specific efforts to address either the mounting problems of African-Americans, or the problem of nationality as a concrete aspect of the general interrelations among the peoples of the United States.

Yet these were just the problems most in need of resolution. Among the activists, the theoretical form of these problems was set by the ideological tactics of the dominant elements of the Civil Rights Movement. What the Civil Rights Movement had done through racial integration was to develop its critique of America on top of a certain patriotism. The peculiar regional character of racial segregation made this strategic because the attack on racially undesirable laws in, say, Alabama could always be done in the name of a reverence for "higher" laws in Washington. This was the ultimate practical justification for civil disobedience. The consequence then was to legitimate the real American state and thereby to do fortuitously what--for this people--had never done self-consciously.

A domestic black nationalism had grown in steady contention with the dominant ideology. It too came out of the praxis relied on to combat southern racial strictures. It attempted to gather within itself these sentiments of uneasiness and to initiate a different more critical legacy. It had been symbolized in the figure of Malcolm X but had had a firm basis among elements of the Movement who were not satisfied with the Civil Rights thrust. Unfortunately it was still-born. The success of the Civil Rights Movement made it increasingly unnecessary to mobilize mass actions and the dissidents--who had been able to rely on this resource--were not able to do it alone.

The crucial point to be made is that, for the Movement at large, the drift into internationalism was a tacit abdication by black militants of the struggle at home. The abdication was not isolated however. Not only would increasing clarity about the

state provoke systematic repression but, as Robert Allen and others have pointed out, there occurred a quite flexible response by the liberal state to the upheavals of the sixties.²⁵ By "flexible" I mean to include both the "repression" as practiced against Cleaver and Rap and others as well as the more benign programs which came into being then.

Internationalism--in either of its specific forms--looked away from that response and obscured the on-going breakdown of a viable praxis then occurring at home; in theory they worked to propagandize us to accept the international dimension, in practice political action here was determined to be relatively insignificant when compared to world events. In the one case we were to forego critical analysis of the Movement to learn the messages of Padmore, Lenin or Nyerere, in the other we were to direct our work toward the unification of Africa; the Return of Nkrumah; the struggle against social imperialism!

But to say that there was need for attention at homes does not express the full problem. Indeed, it has been and still is commonplace to criticize NeoPan-Africanism for its foreign focus. Cleaver does it again in this interview saying that "the Afro-American thing really should be like Italian-Americans or any other cultural group," and denying any real political importance of Africa to North American blacks.²⁶ Yet it was not merely a matter of "where our priorities should be" as the saying goes nor was it an error to move to engage the international dimension. The question had an undeniable theoretical aspect: how to develop a consciousness of the American state as coercive phenomenon.²⁷ It was necessary to break the bond of affection developed by the Civil Rights Movement and to explicate the real (alien) relationship between the group and the state.

"Nationalism" would have been--and some thought it would be--the way out of this because it took separatism as a point of departure and thus entailed a logical denial of the legitimacy of state allegiance. Two events prevented its theoretical success: one was the uncritical attachment of historical phenomena and the other was the generation of specified "principles" of blackness. In the first case black nationalism

was supposed to have a pre-existing substance stretching through history back to Paul Cuffe.²⁸ In the second place, what amounted to the same, it was supposed to be embodied in the Seven Principles of Nguzo Saba.²⁹ On the one hand the new thrust was vitiated through its reduction to ambivalent ideology espoused by nineteenth century black nationalists³⁰ and on the other hand the seven principles assumed an undialectical attitude toward the composition of social matter and elevated culture above politics as the priority of group activity. The active element that had demanded a black nationalism in the early sixties was thus eliminated by study and ritual. In an irony of history (or perhaps its repudiation) the leaders were teaching nationalism to the people!

So the problem facing the Movement in the late sixties was not merely the tactical question of sustaining motion but the very basic need to make the theoretical adjustment appropriate to the removal of racial segregation. It would have required a critique of the anti-segregation phase--rather than the simple-minded effort to "re-define" it as the demand for so-called democratic rights--and a call for direct analysis of political relationships. What we got instead was the resort to ideology which obscured the potential of the contradiction in the Movement. In the one case a "nationalism" that may have clarified the obligation intrinsic to citizenship was ideologized and burdened with paraphernalia unrelated to politics. In other cases the ideology selected was anti-nationalist per se (e.g. marxism-leninism as perceived but also Pan-Africanism--the latter being rather strange after its own fashion), and deemed the appropriate knowledge of our situation to have been decided someplace else. What is so painful now is that the ideologues apparently knew nothing of the substance of either of these ideologies as theoretical history and their actual analysis--as affirmation or rejection--was limited to the bogus nationalism that they themselves themselves had created from the mid-sixties on. By this circumstance the War Babies who had started out with such promise had now circumscribed their political discussion to themselves and a few white critics who took pains to raise every criticism against these trends except the ones that count.³¹

It is these troubling matters which are so significant to Cleaver's turnabout on the question of internationalism and the fact that they are not acknowledged reinforces skepticism about his analysis. Internationalism redirected the efforts to intensify the struggle away from a focus on the American state toward the vague international revolutionary movement. In the interview Cleaver fails to make the connection between the need for intensification and the international thing. He treats the turn to the Third World focus as a kind of unreal fantasy--abstract from the actual condition of the Movement then--and as so tangential that it can be wiped away as bad experience or, more appropriately, as a bad trip. Thus he is able to acknowledge the "error" in the abstract and to "return" to a position that we have already identified as the most reactionary aspect of the Movement, i.e. a benign attitude toward the American state. In so doing Cleaver not only confuses the real theoretical problem facing the Movement in the late sixties but also lays the basis for his own irresponsible shift to the right. When he says then that his thinking about the Third World "has come sort of full circle," he is misleading for that would at least allow us to return to the level of possibility existing in the late 1960's.

Cleaver's disengagement from internationalism results in a national identity but the "nation" he speaks of here is the American nation not black nationalism in any sense in which that term has been utilized in recent discourse. Cleaver skips back to Civil Rights days and fails to even acknowledge the potential of the late sixties or the damper placed there by simplistic internationalism. I see no reason to question that he had some experience which convinced him to constitute a new identity. I am sensitive to a tension between his position, which has its practical application in the United States but which he arrived at in consequence of the failure of an idealistic internationalism. Concern is justified about this kind of shift which, because it is such an extreme turnabout, is so typical of the trend in black social thought in the seventies. Concern is further justified because such a trend may be legitimated as the appropriate philosophic style among blacks. Cleaver does not provide a convincing analysis to address either of these concerns. What he says

seems not to matter at all. We are left with the statement of ideology pure and simple.

RETURN/RESORT TO COLD WAR IDEOLOGY

I noted that it has been characteristic of the theoretical changes among activists to depend on already aggregated ideologies developed prior to their political situations. Relying on varied extra-contextual assumptions about science, racial characteristics etc., they have shifted about among a number of critical attitudes about what America does wrong. In this sense they remain on the political left. Cleaver --in this respect admirably consistent with his former self--has dared them one better and selected a rightist ideology. The ideology he has chosen is that worked out during the late 1940's by American liberals then disturbed with the tactics and motives of the Soviet Union (though it was soon extended to "Red China" with the appropriate racial slurs--the "yellow peril"). It was operationalized in such programs as the Marshall Aid plan for Western Europe. The more moderate among its proponents were Douglas MacArthur, John Foster Dulles and Charles Wilson. Among its least reasonable partisans were Joseph McCarthy and Richard Milhous Nixon.

Commonly referred to as Cold War ideology,³² it was based on policies which called for an arms race against Russia in order to keep "strong" for the ultimate confrontation. This led to the shifting of resources from domestic programs to the arms race which resulted in the capacity to kill anybody on earth many times over! Further, those who argued for social change on the domestic level were tagged Communist--the capitalization signifying that they were agents of the Soviet Union--while the reigning Power Elite, as Mills called them,³³ co-opted the rhetoric of anti-Communism and appropriated it as a specific prop and camouflage for the order of privilege prevalent in American society.

The terms, personalities and slogans they relied on are memorable especially for those of us still made to feel uncomfortable by them. While Cleaver does not allude to all of these he uses enough to make clear his identification with the ideology and the limitation of his vision to the world they created. Recall the litany. The fear

of armageddon that they had, led them to talk of a "totalitarian world" versus a "free world." In order to denigrate those calling, for example, for a positive attitude toward the revolution in China they would conjure up, derisively, the image of Chamberlain's "appeasement" of Hitler; of being "soft" on Communism, or the danger that America would become a "Nation of Sheep." The real fear was what Robert Kennedy called, in a slightly different context though still one which exploited the ethos, the "enemy within." To the end the liberal way was to call for a country militarily strong in relation to Communism first in preparation for what Dulles called "massive retaliation" and later, in relation to Wars of National Liberation--what John Kennedy called a flexible response. So effective was the ideology of this era that the poor in America had to be "discovered" in the late 1960's and it took the Civil Rights Movement almost a decade to make an unambiguous statement against American plunder in foreign affairs. Though it has become fashionable to refer to America as imperialist,³⁴ what is not often recalled is the ideology which served to stabilize her status. We do find it here in Cleaver except that now it is the tail end of a declining star rather than the crutch, even, of a nervous bourgeoisie.

The attitude that Cleaver thus takes is especially incredible when viewed in relation to its original context. The discussion of why he changed is especially sketchy given that the numerous comments made are useful more as reflections of his new attitude than reasons why they obtain. We are left then with an interesting puzzle. Is this a question of a black man saying what the white man wants to hear? Should we thus assume that there is a "real" Eldridge Cleaver someplace engaging in a "put-on" -- I believe is the word Kilson and Baldwin and others use. Is it a hustle to get back to America and do radical work? Is it a matter of being "right in form but left in essence" -- implying a separation of politics and principle and the manipulation of the former while holding the latter in tact? Can we respect this man for what he really is and tolerate the game he is playing now? My own feeling is that this Cleaver is the real Cleaver and that each of the rationales enumerated

above are irrelevant by virtue of two factors which none of them address but which seem now to have determined a Cleaver whose political options, as they say, are wide open. The first matter is the problem of constituency and the second is his method.

By constituency I refer to that certain audience which writers and activists understand themselves to be communicating with and from which they expect final evaluation. In Cleaver's case the main point to be made is that he has always been marginal to the black community. His span of activism was hardly more than two years--primarily in California--and SOUL ON ICE³⁵ found its most receptive audience in that phenomenon then referred to as the "young whites." The problem of marginality is particularly interesting when it occurs as a fetter on a forthright critical (or affirmative for that matter) confrontation with theoretical problems proposed by Afro-American activism. The special character of Cleaver's audience is recalled in reading the present interview done by one Curtice Taylor who is apparently white (it is not specified in the magazine) but who, in any case, carries on the same fawning gratuity which was out of place even with Robert Scheer, Maxwell Geismar and Lee Lockwood though it may have been more understandable then.³⁶ In any case I would expect that Cleaver's changes would reflect the "discipline" of his real constituency.

In this regard the Left Solution which he proposes sounds familiar: "...a state-run economy with the wealth more evenly distributed."³⁷ Taylor refers to this as a "far-out solution" and wonders how a liberal Democrat could survive supporting it. Cleaver replies that it will result from pressure brought by new post-sixties groups like women and the unemployed. He concludes:

Remember how the truck drivers became violent amost at once
and how the government settled with them so quickly? That
is going to be the new radical leadership.³⁸

Roll over Hoffa and tell Allende the news!

My second concern is the concept of analysis implied in the interview. It is a formal approach. In the discussion of his disillusion with Mao he is particularly revealing about the formalistic way that he sees "socialists" and "capitalists"

and "the people" and perhaps if it were extended back into the past also "nationalists" "revolutionary nationalists," or "the Left," each of which have an existence in the world which is finite and in relation to each other are rather like checkers on a checker board. The basic purpose of analysis in such a situation is to strategize about how to out maneuver each other in relation to a set of game determining rules. Theory is ultimately then to be imprisoned within rationalist thought criteria and before long a strategy of forming coalitions with "any of the other players" sounds too reasonable to resist. In the end those who oppose such a strategy are the silly ones. In such a way Cleaver joined the Peace and Freedom Party in 1968 and today he is ready to join hands with the generals! The song has ended but the melody lingers on; epistemology is suffocated by ideology.

This pattern is illustrated in his discussion of the interrelations between the radical left and the military during the movement against the Vietnamese War. "Our" mistakes during the anti-war days in particular (e.g. "waving the Viet Cong flag," and encouraging young people not to go to the military, etc.) are treated as if they are different aspects of a game, now concluded, in which "we" are condemned because the wrong strategy was chosen. The difference between the victors and the vanquished is merely a matter of who won the game. Thus while the quote below is ostensibly an analysis of the way the world is supposed to be going today, with a few changes in terms it could be just as well an assessment of the possibilities of the UCLA basketball team in the NCAA playoffs:

I really think that things are lining up for a big showdown sometime between all of these islands of power: the socialists, the United States and most of North America, Europe, China, Western Europe. The Arabs are trying to form a center. And finally you have that unknown quantity, all of those elements which could be centers but they're all being fucked over by the big guys. I think in terms of these centers having showdowns and I think it is very important that the United States be militarily strong.

In the search for the real Cleaver I would suggest that, when viewed either from his constituency or his method, what we see is where he is. By neither measure is he anchored to a position and his analytic assumptions specifically encourage readiness

to adjust to a world according to the constellation of forces prevailing at the moment. Accordingly we have to reject more than the specific political choices he makes in the interview but also the perspective in terms of which they are allowed to become options. Developing the capacity to perform this analysis is a fundamental problem in critical analysis and is a major agenda item for Afro-American thinkers in the immediate future.

Having found himself abroad, Eldridge Cleaver now wishes to go home. Being an authentic figure of the late sixties, his own exile has heretofore brought to mind the many unnamed members of the black community who earned death by taking to the streets in the sixties to insure that the rest of us might exercise a right to the tree of life. Our commitment to them--and the condition of Rap Brown and of others exiled around the world--was a shining reminder that the real lull today is the comforts we enjoy and that we are obliged to continue the struggle. That was the Cleaver of yesterday, he brought to mind our proper obligations. There is a different Cleaver in this interview, he brings to mind Tony Bennett.

NOTES

*Three people -- Adolph Reed, Sr., Richard Long and Jewel Prestage -- gave me some help with matters related to this essay. I thank them by noting that the essay would have been measurably improved if time had allowed them to read the entire piece.

- 1
Quoted in Adolph Reed, Sr.'s open letter to Dr. Felton G. Clark (January 24, 1962)
Cf. the same author's "Crisis on the Negro Campus," 194 NATION (Feb. 10, 1962) 111-113.
- 2
Kingman Brewster, Jr. quoted in the New York Times, April 25, 1970.
- 3
An early document was "Tract for the Times," 1 LIBERATION (1963).
- 4
One evaluation of the ideology of the Cold War is Michael Parenti, THE ANTI-COMMUNIST IMPULSE (New York: Random House, 1969).
- 5
"The ROLLING STONE Interview with Eldridge Cleaver," by Curtice Taylor, ROLLING STONE (September 11, 1975).
- 6
This is currently illustrated in two strains of writing. The one aims at positive statement of ideological lines. Typical of these are Stokely Carmichael, "Marxism-Leninism and Nkrumahism," 4 BLACK SCHOLAR (February, 1973) 41-43; Muhammed Ahmed, "The Roots of the Pan-African Revolution," 3 BLACK SCHOLAR (May, 1972) 48-55; Amiri Baraka, "Toward Ideological Clarity" memo from Congress of African People, Newark, N. J. (1974) and "Why I Changed My Ideology," 24 BLACK WORLD (July, 1975), 30-42. Of all, the most didactic is Baraka, "The Congress of Africa People: A Position Paper," 6 BLACK SCHOLAR (January - February, 1975), 2-15. The temper of criticism among the more positivist polemics is illustrated in the exchange between Haki Madhubuti, "The Latest Purge," in 6 BLACK SCHOLAR (September, 1974), 43-56 and Mark Smith, "A Response to Haki Madhubuti," 6 BLACK SCHOLAR (January-February, 1975), 44-53. Another strain, less prominent before now, aims at the elucidation of the epistemological context in which current ideological debate occurs hoping to realize reliable critical standards. Examples of the latter include Adolph Reed, Jr., "Scientistic Socialism: Notes on the New Afro-American Magic Marxism," 1 ENDARCH (Fall, 1974), 21-39; Harold Barnette, "Criteria for Cultural Criticism," 1 ENDARCH (Spring, 1975), 37-43 and the author's "Ideology and Politics," in Ibid., 4-23. In general the former class of articles have come from activists and the latter from academia.
- 7
(New York: Delta Books, 1970).
- 8
In an error that illustrates what I discuss below as the character of Cleaver's constituency, the editors of ROLLING STONE claim that this interview is "Cleaver's first major public statement since his separation from the Black Panther Party," 1971. Several articles have in fact been published. Among these are the following by Cleaver: "Culture and Revolution: Their Synthesis in Africa," 3 BLACK SCHOLAR (October, 1971), 33-39; "On Lumpen Ideology," 4 BLACK SCHOLAR (November-December, 1972), 2-10; "The Crisis of the Black Bourgeoisie," IBID. (January, 1973), 2-11. BLACK SCHOLAR published "Education and Revolution," in November, 1969 prior to the split with Newton (Vol. 1, pp. 44-52). His earliest publications after leaving included a statement by his wife, Kathleen Cleaver, "On Eldridge Cleaver," 7 RAMPARTS (June, 1969) and Cleaver, "Three notes," 8 RAMPARTS (September, 1969) and "Black Mochie: A Novella," Ibid. (October, 1969) and Part II, Ibid. (November, 1969). These articles do anticipate the ideological position he finally reveals here. Cf. especially "On Lumpen Ideology" and the reaction to it by C. J. Munford in "The Fallacy of Lumpen Ideology," in 4 BLACK SCHOLAR (July-August, 1973).

9 Such editing should be considered a normal aspect of these. For some of the particular problems of the earlier interview see Lockwood's comments in op. cit. 26-27.

10 The discussion of "Raymond Johnson" creates some confusion. Cleaver describes this fellow as an escapee from a California prison and a former fellow inmate. It is known that Raymond Johnson, a former Southern University student, hijacked a plane to Cuba in November, 1968. "Hip Dude," as he was called, was a consummate 1960 black student activist and word came back that he had difficulties with the authorities and leveled some criticism against Castro. It is not thought that Hip Dude had been to California prisons and thus the reference by Cleaver is interesting especially because in the ROLLING STONE interview, he seems concerned to publicize this brother. Contrast this to the reference in Lockwood (p. 20) where no name is used although it appears the person referred to is the same. Similar confusion is created around the person "Kitty" whom Cleaver speaks fondly of in the interview but is apparently the same person that Lockwood called "mentally disturbed," in the earlier interview. She was involved in the revelation that Cleaver was in Cuba, but there is a direct contradiction between the two interviews about how and why that happened. The Reuter article first revealing his presence in Cuba is in the New York Times, May 25, 1969. It was written by James Prangle.

11 This is discussed in two phases. First, as criticism of the Cubans, he argues that "they totally nullified the effectiveness of the Weathermen," (p. 44) and later he enumerates the mistakes of the radicals in the late sixties (p. 60).

12 Several things could be mentioned here. I'll just note two: (1) there is no commentary on Africa in spite of the fact that Cleaver was, at one time, "actively involved in particular with the national liberation struggle in the People's Republic of the Congo, Brazzaville," (see editor's note in "Culture and Revolution," op. cit., p. 33); the (2) other is the general absence of any probing about the split in the party as historic phenomenon.

13 In the interview Cleaver dates his presence in Cuba from Christmas, 1969. In fact he left the U. S. sometime in 1968 and, by the Summer, 1969 he was already in Algeria. According to Lockwood he had originally disappeared on November 24, 1968. There is also some inconsistency concerning why he left. Heretofore it had been assumed that he chose exile over prison. Here it is revealed that Newton ordered him to leave. Of Cleaver's attitude during his early days in Algeria see Nathan Hare, "A Report on the Pan African Cultural Festival," 1 BLACK SCHOLAR (November, 1969), 2-10. Kathleen Cleaver, op. cit. does refer to "some sort of final confrontation" Cleaver was planning before he left. She thought it was unrealistic.

14 Sanche de Gramont, "Our Man In Algiers," NEW YORK TIMES-MAGAZINE (November 1, 1970) pp. 33ff.

15 "THE ROLLING STONE Interview," pp. 46-47.

16

Ibid., p. 40.

17

Perhaps the seminal essay on this is James Baldwin's "The Discovery of What it Means to be an American," in Baldwin, *NOBODY KNOWS MY NAME* (New York: Dell, 1961). Cf. Ernest Dunbar, *THE BLACK EXPATRIATES* (New York: Dutton, 1968), Leslie Lacy, *THE RISE AND FALL OF A PROPER NEGRO* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), Charlie Cobb, "Africa Notebook: Views on Returning Home," 21 *BLACK WORLD* (May, 1972), 22-37. Before Wright the expatriate experience was more common among fine artists. It may be, of course, that the exile experience had nothing to do with Cleaver and that the most appropriate analogue is George S. Schuyler. See his *BLACK AND CONSERVATIVE* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1966). Another interesting comparison would be to Robert Williams. See the discussion in Harold Cruse, *CRISIS OF THE NEGRO INTELLECTUAL* (New York: Morrow 1967).

18

"The Rolling Stone Interview," p. 46.

19

The change had been a long time coming though. In fact his 1972 essay "On Lumpen Ideology," is a major transition piece. Compare his thesis with Munford op. cit. Munford's criticism suffers though because it is tied too closely to the defense of the foreign policy of the states in the progressive camp.

20

Compare his assessment to Robert Chrisman and Robert L. Allen's "The Cuban Revolution: Lessons for the Third World," and "THE BLACK SCHOLAR Interview: A Black Expatriate in Cuba," in 4 *BLACK SCHOLAR* (February, 1973).

21

In his comments on Cuba in particular there may also be a concern about the plight of Afro-American exiles there.

22

Chrisman and Allen have a better focus but, in spite of some useful information, they convey an apologetic thrust. "Independent" types often look to the people at *MONTHLY REVIEW*. Cf. Paul Sweezy "The Nature of Soviet Society," Part I, 26 *MONTHLY REVIEW* (November 1974) 1-16 and Part II, *Ibid.* (January, 1975), 1-15 and "China's Economic Policy," a special issue of *MONTHLY REVIEW* (July-August, 1975).

23

"The ROLLING STONE Interview," p. 47.

24

I hesitate to use this term "proletarian internationalism" because it was not always the specific term used. This tendency has also been covered by such terms as "inter-communalism" and lately "anti-imperialism." The term also invokes specifics of party politics in Europe.

25

Robert L. Allen, *BLACK AWAKENING IN CAPITALIST AMERICA* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1968) and Alan Wolfe, "Political Repression and the Liberal Democratic State," 23 *MONTHLY REVIEW* (December, 1971).

26

"The ROLLING STONE Interview," p. 47. Cleaver relies on the old tired arguments in his rejection of Pan-Africanism. A more dynamic focus is Robert Chrisman, "Aspects of Pan-Africanism" and Franklin Alexander, "A Critique of Neo-Pan-Africanism," in 4 BLACK SCHOLAR (July-August, 1973). Their evaluations rely on Henry Winston in his STRATEGY FOR A BLACK AGENDA (New York: International, 1973). Adolph Reed, Jr. raised the earliest reservations about neo-Pan-Africanism in his prize winning essay "Pan-Africanism: Ideology for Liberation?," 3 BLACK SCHOLAR (September, 1971). In retrospect the character of the rise of this ideology in the late sixties has assumed an enormous importance. In form and content it now appears to have concretized a philosophic style among Afro-Americans theretofore only broached in the Black Power concept and thereafter a major determinate in the approach to social theory. One more effort to deal with this problem is the present author's forthcoming essay, "Black Social Thought and the Rise of Pan-Africanism in the U. S." (tentative title)

27

Here I will not dispute that "the introduction into English usage of the word 'state' ...was uniformly unfortunate." I do wonder whether American radicalism can contend through reliance on a juxtaposition of politics and "social problems." The quote is from George Sabine, A HISTORY OF POLITICAL THEORY (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 3rd. ed., 1961), 738.

28

In spite of the generally critical nature of Harold Cruse's work, it did contribute to this tendency. See CRISIS OF THE NEGRO INTELLECTUAL, op. cit.

29

They are listed in Ron Karenga, "A Strategy for Struggle," 5 BLACK SCHOLAR (November, 1973), p. 19.

30

See Ernest Barefield, "The Role of Black Convention Movements in Black Political Life," unpublished M.A. Thesis, Atlanta University, 1974, for a discussion of these moves.

31

For example, Theodore Draper, BLACK NATIONALISM IN AMERICA (New York: Viking, 1970).

32

Or just anti-Communism. See Parenti, op. cit.

33

C. Wright Mills, THE POWER ELITE (New York: Oxford, 1956).

34

"A Declaration Against Imperialism," National Planning Conference, Pull the Covers Off Imperialism Project, (Nashville, TN, 1975) reprinted in 6 BLACK SCHOLAR (January-February, 1975), 55-56.

35

(New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968).

36

Scheer, "Introduction" in Scheer (ed.) ELDRIDGE CLEAVER: POST PRISON WRITINGS AND SPEECHES (New York: Random House); Geismar, "Introduction" in Cleaver, SOUL ON ICE op. cit.; Lockwood, op. cit. specifically is the present political position presaged in Harry Swados, "Old Con, Black Panther, Brilliant Writer and Quintessential American," New York Times Magazine (September 7, 1969), p. 39ff.?

37 "The ROLLING STONE Interview," p. 64.

38 Ibid.

BLACK FOLK AND THE STRUGGLE IN 'PHILOSOPHY'

Lucius T. Outlaw

It is no accident that this issue of black folk and philosophy has emerged, neither in its form or at this particular time. Nor is the form in which the question ("Is there a 'Black' philosophy?") is put fortuitous, or the responses to it. Both have their bases in a discernible complex of historical factors coming together in a fashion to condition their emergence. For what is revealed in this struggle, i.e. the struggle to confront the issue of "black philosophy," is the expansion of the continuing historical struggles of African people in this country (and elsewhere) to achieve a progressively liberated existence as it is variously conceived. Even more concretely, this development reflects the increasing number of black folk entering the ranks of trained academics in the "field" of philosophy on the downturn of yet another wave of resurged "black nationalist consciousness,"¹ as many refer to it. While it is generally the case that particular historical tendencies or developments are not shared in all sectors of complex societies in the same way at the same time, that there is, in other words, a lag in the rates of development among the different sectors; again, while the absolute numbers of black folk involved in academic philosophy has shown a marked increase, for clearly discernible historical reasons which must be taken into full and proper account-while both of these factors are important elements in the situation conditioning the emergence of the question and the forms of the responses, there is yet another factor of even more importance which has conditioned both the putting of the question and the responses: the self conceptions of those of us involved in "academic" philo-

¹Cf. John Bracey, Jr., et.al., Black Nationalism in America, Bobbs-Merrill: New York, 1970.

sophy. To put it differently, that the debate itself has so far (though hopefully not in the future) remained for the most part academic (and meekly so, at that) is revealing with respect to both academic philosophy and black folk who in increasing numbers (though not necessarily with an increase in critical insight of sufficient radicality) are moving into this dimension of the thought enterprises of this country at this point in its historical development. It is with some of the aspects of this complex, yet extremely important historical situation that I wish to deal.

II

Philosophy itself, both as notion and as praxis, remains seriously problematic today, again for historical reasons. In sum it has become almost wholly "academic:" the activity of trained "professionals" whose primary function has been reduced to being overseers in museums of the history of ideas. In itself this is a valuable function, for it insures the preservation of valuable insights and strivings and their perpetuation via the practice of the mediation of tradition. Still, it does not represent a fulfillment of the larger historical and social function of philosophy understood as a dynamic enterprise unifying theory and praxis. As an enterprise, philosophy has suffered from the pervasiveness of the historical tendency, intensified with the intense developments of advanced capitalistic-technological society (in this country particularly as the highest form of this development to date), which lead to increasing specialization and the concomitant development of narrowness, overconcern with method and discipline imminent matters, and in many cases to scienticism itself. Moreover, as a response to the prevailing scheme of values of capitalistic-technological society, the study of philosophy (i.e. participation in studies in the history of some ideas, almost wholly

western) has increasingly suffered from the pervasiveness of the "performance principle" which would have us judge our primary activities, particularly formal education, in terms of their performance potentials, namely, the accumulation of capital. Thus are philosophy students constantly struggling with the question (and its implied criticism that philosophy is not useful for anything in terms of "making a living") "What are you/am I going to do with philosophy?" Like most else in our society, philosophy has become a commodity.

And we who "teach" it, its market managers, professionals at that, higher degreed and salaried. While this enterprise--the teaching of philosophy--has its rightful place in the overall scheme of things, it has none the less suffered from its professionalization, and we along with it. To the question "How do philosophers exist in the modern world?" William Barrett answers (Irrational Man²):

Philosophers today exist in the Academy, as members of departments of philosophy in universities, as professional teachers of a more or less theoretical subject known as philosophy...The profession of the philosopher in the modern world is to be a professor of philosophy; and the realm of Being which the philosopher inhabits as a living individual is no more recondite than a corner within the University...The price one pays for being a professor is... professional deformation...As a human being, functioning professionally within the academy, the philosopher can hardly be expected to escape his own professional deformation, especially since it had become a law of modern society that man is assimilated more and more completely to his social function. And it is just here that a trouble-³ some and profound ambiguity resides for the philosopher today.

This deformation reveals itself in other ways as well. It deforms the historical development of philosophical thought, evidenced by the degree to which the "problems" in philosophy continue to be, even in these very problematic times, discipline imminent, thus without foundation beyond the boundaries of the discipline itself. They

²William Barrett, Irrational Man (Garden City, N.Y.:Doubleday 1962).

³Ibid., pp. 4-5.

have not emerged from the generalized practice of life. Prior, therefore, to the resolution of the issue regarding "black Philosophy," the issue of philosophizing, its possibility and meaning today in the west, is in need of clarification.

III

The very debate itself is thus seen to rest on unclarified grounds. We black folk who would involve ourselves in it would be wise to be cognizant of this situation in its fullness: not only its present condition of deformation, and the deformation of those involved, but of the distorted historical development of the west in general. Our rush to uncritical intellectual integration in a situation of problematicity might prove to be our undoing, namely, our failure to be sufficiently aware of historical tendencies and possibilities which we might struggle with others to realize and in so doing condition a line of historical development which might lead to enhanced conditions of life for all, but for the presently "marginal" peoples, in the present order of life, in particular.

It might be asked, however, is it not the case that this very debate regarding "black philosophy," the struggle on the part of some black (and white) folk (with the sideline support of others, black, white, otherwise) to define such an enterprise, an attempt which aims at avoiding or correcting the pitfalls of deformation? My response: no, not necessarily. And judging by some of our present endeavors (and our history as a class of educated black folk), again, no. The adequacy of our involvement in the debate will/must be conditioned by a number of crucial factors the awareness of which must be reflected in our philosophizing.

We black folk must, first of all, be clear as to our own being,

not only individually but, most importantly, collectively, viewed in its historical sweep, and its cultural, socio-political, economic complexities, its future possibilities. Our reflections on our future possibilities as a people must be particularly insightful. The achievement of a seemingly integrated position within the ranks of professional academic philosophers and teachers of philosophy must not leave us blind to the generalized condition of black people in this country and elsewhere and, most importantly, to the realities of the basis of political-economic power in this country in various groupings which are not sufficiently grasped by traditional theory regarding the class structure of capitalistic society. An appropriate grasp of this situation must in turn be reflected in our struggle to come to grips with the activity which constitutes philosophy. Our personal situations as a class of black people characterized by our degree of formal study must not lead us into a form of philosophizing which would imply that reason had been realized in contemporary history, that reasonableness had come to pervade the relations among men and women, among different racial, ethnic, religious groups and economic classes in this society and relations among nations. We must not be guilty of a premature leap into universal peace and brotherhood without the historical realization of the same for all. Black people are still an oppressed ethnic group in this society, are still struggling against colonialism and neo-colonialism in other parts of the world. So too are other peoples. And there is not sufficient indication that major powers, particularly the U. S., are either moving or are willing or capable of moving toward a world of peace and increased liberation for all peoples grounded in a politics and ethics involving political, economic, cultural and social democracy. The struggle of our people continues to be that

seeking progressive liberation at a level capable of being shared given the level of development of the culture as a whole. It is too a continuing struggle for many who are non-black, including many whites. It is, overall, the struggle to harness and direct the capabilities of the society as a whole in the maximum utilization of resources with minimum waste and environmental destruction toward the satisfaction of essential human needs with minimum exploitation and oppression--toward the realization of a life based increasingly on reason democratically envisioned and realized. Toward this end, however, the concrete realities of the politics of the past, present, and foreseeable future demand that we approach the struggle from the level of a group i.e. ethnic (nationalistic, as some would say) position, the only viable position in terms of which to achieve limited goals within the present order of things. In order to struggle to realize ends beyond the present order of things, the pursuit of progressive tendencies and possibilities which might lead to the realization of greater reasonableness and thus to the radical transformation of the present order of life leading to greater benefits for greater numbers of people, it will be necessary to move beyond the limited program of group-centered politics as the prime mode of political activity. Still, we cannot be premature even with regard to this.

IV

A very serious phase of our preparation for our task of philosophizing in the interest of black people (and others) includes the need to come face to face with the history of the relationships of black thinkers to the historical thrust(s) of black people and, most importantly, with where this history leaves us today. We must, in other words, become transparent to ourselves as a class in terms of

our history, our responsibilities, our possibilities.

Many very significant insights into the history of black thinkers are to be had in the work by Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual.⁴ A controversial book, to say the least, still its uneven but very often penetrating analyses and its prescriptive projects harbor a core of truth (both historical and as future possibility) which is, in my judgment, very substantial. From the historical side there emerges from his analyses a picture of essential failure on the part of black intellectuals (i.e. writers, social critics, artists, etc.) in not having forged a collective vision for black people based on an appropriate grasp of the realities of the socio-politico-economic and cultural scheme. For Cruse this failure rests fundamentally on the erroneous commitment on the part of black intellectuals to the ideal (myth) of integration. Even more, the failure of left looking "radical" black intellectuals, in his judgment, has been/continues to be a non-critical commitment to Marxism-Leninism and to the sufferance of intellectual apprenticeship to white, particularly Jewish, liberal, left-wing intellectuals. The pervasive reality of American life, says Cruse, is that its politics, cultural systems, economics, are group based: power resides in ethnic/national groupings primarily. The struggle for integration on the part of black people without having developed, cultivated, and consolidated our own group (i.e. nationalistic or ethnic) solidarity has resulted in--and will continue to result in--the unsuccessful realization of the struggle for equality and "freedom" within the present scheme of things. The struggle for the most part has not been revolutionary either in separatist schemes (which, says Cruse,

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Harold Cruse, Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, (New York: William Morrow & Co. 1967.)

seek to avoid the problem via escape) or those seeking systemic reform.

These arguments advanced by Cruse call for serious critique. However, even now a number of things are clear. First our need to be clear as to our grounding as black thinkers. That ground, given present realities and the near and mediate future, is the historical struggle on the part of our people for an increasingly liberated existence. Out of this grounding emerges our first task: the struggle to achieve a critical understanding of our situation, our real needs, and the means by which they might be met. In struggling to meet the mediate responsibilities we must struggle against the tendencies leading to deformation and particularly must we be prepared to commit "class suicide" in order that our energies be given unequivocally in service to the historical struggles of our people, here and elsewhere. In this regard there is a particular turn which we must make in our development, a turn the importance of which is heightened by the debate of this occasion and its context. That turn of development and its ground of necessity is clearly set out by Cruse:

Every other ethnic group in America, a 'nation of nations', has accepted the fact of its separateness and used it to its own social advantage. But the Negro's conditioning has steered him into that perpetual state of suspended tension wherein ninety-five per cent of his time and energy is expended on fighting prejudice in whites. As a result, he has neither the time nor the inclination to realize that all of the effort spent fighting prejudice will not obviate these fundamental things an ethnic group must do for itself. This situation results from a psychology that is rooted in the Negro's symbiotic 'blood-ties' to the white Anglo-Saxon. It is the culmination of that racial drama of love and hate between slave and master, bound together in the purgatory of plantations. Today the African foster-child in the American racial equation must grow to manhood, break the psychological umbilical ties to intellectual paternalism. The American Negro has never yet been able to break entirely free of the ministrations of his white masters to the extent that he is willing to exile himself, in search of wisdom, into the wastelands of the American desert. That is what must be

done, if he is to deal with the Anglo-Saxon as the independent political power that he, the Negro, potentially is.⁵

The insights of Cruse thus uncover our historically conditioned vocation which is fixed for us even more specifically by Vincent Harding ("The Vocation of the Black Scholar," Education and Black Struggle⁶):

...the fact still remains that for the life and work of the black scholar in search of vocation, the primary context is not to be found in the questionable freedom and relative affluence of the American university, nor in the ponderous uncertainties of "the scholarly community," nor even in the private joys of our highly prized, individual exceptionalisms. Rather, wherever we may happen to be physically based, our essential social, political, and spiritual context is the colonized situation of the masses of the black community in America.⁷

The vocation of the black intellectual/scholar thusly grounded structures, in Vincent's words, our calling:

...to speak the truth to our people, to speak truth about our people, to speak truth about our enemies--all in order to free the mind, so that black men, women, and children may build beyond the banal, dangerous chaos of the American spirit, towards a new time.⁸

V

Still, the struggle to hear our calling, to respond, in part by taking a pilgrimage through the desert in search of wisdom, in part by speaking the truth, all directed by the concern to contribute to the historical movement toward the realization of a more reasonable life, takes us beyond the limited goals which emerge from group consciousness (i.e. nationalism, ethnicity). It will, in fact, drive

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Cruse, p. 364.

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Edited by The Institute of the Black World, Harvard Educational Review, Monograph No. 2, 1974.

7

Ibid., p. 6.

8

Ibid., p. 8.

us beyond the boundaries of the present order of life, and, necessarily, bring us into serious conflict with it. Again, many of the more fundamental needs of black people are shared by many others. And there are, on the other hand, needs to be met in the lives of others which, while we might not suffer them either at all or the same intensity, do require our concern and attention in the struggle to realize a life of progressive liberation. This world historical struggle thus draws us beyond limited peoplehood to a generalized peoplehood which recognizes peoples in their diversity. It makes for a struggle to achieve unity in diversity: reasonableness in life as a unity based on democratically agreed upon notions of "reasonableness" in a diverse, pluralistic yet finite world.

Judged against these goals, limited and generalized, the vocation of philosophizing, for those of us who would choose it, takes on decisive meaning: it is to share in the refinement and perpetuation of critical intelligence as a practice of life which has as its goal raising to consciousness the conditions of life, historical practices, and blocked alternatives which, if pursued, might lead to life experienced as qualitatively--progressively--different. So conceived, "philosophy explores and evaluates the totality of the human condition in society. It represents society's most general and most fundamental theoretical-critical self-consciousness. No other form of human intellect is as condemned to aspire to totality as is philosophy."⁹ Thus, the social function of philosophy is to develop critical, dialectical thought, according to Max Horkheimer: "Philosophy is the methodical and steadfast attempt to bring reason

⁹Svetozar Stojanovic, Between Ideals and Reality: A Critique of Socialism and its Future, trans. by Gerson S. Sher. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.)

into the world,"¹⁰ a crucial moment of this process being the radical critique of what is, at a given time, prevalent:

By criticism, we mean that intellectual, and eventually practical, effort which is not satisfied to accept the prevailing ideas, actions, and social conditions unthinkingly and from mere habit; effort which aims to coordinate the individual sides of social life with each other and with the general ideas and aims of the epoch, to deduce them genetically, to distinguish the appearance from the essence, to examine the foundations of things, in short, really to know them.¹¹

And the 'dialectical' aspect of critical thought? As Marcuse has characterized it:

Dialectical thought starts with the experience that the world is unfree; ...man and nature exist in conditions of alienation, exist as 'other than they are.' ...Dialectical thought thus becomes negative in itself. Its function is to break down the self-assurance and self-contentment of common sense, to undermine the sinister confidence in the power and language of facts, to demonstrate that unfreedom is so much at the core of things that the development of their internal contradictions leads necessarily to qualitative change: the explosion and catastrophe of the established state of affairs.¹²

VI

For us black folk who would philosophize, that is to say, who would live a life conditioned primarily by the activity of critical, dialectical thinking, a very first task is to bring this activity to bear on the practice of "philosophy" today to the extent that we are to have any contact with the tradition and practice of philosophy in the "academy." Beyond this, however, the need to be grounded in the

¹⁰"The Social Function of Philosophy," Critical Theory, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972,) p.268.

¹¹Ibid., p. 270.

¹²Herbert Marcuse, "A Note on Dialectic," Reason and Revolution, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968.) p. IX.

historical struggles of our people, in particular, and the struggles of men toward more reasonable forms of existence, in general, sets the tasks we must be about. While it is not possible to list exhaustively all particular tasks to be performed toward the realization of goals in either set of struggles, still it is possible to indicate some.

On the one hand, there is the need to be met in terms of hermeneutics of the experiences of black folk toward a number of ends: the recovery of history, historical meaning, as a means of radicalizing our own present and future possibilities as a people; the restoration and repair of broken communication among the various groupings of our people; the mediation of our people's traditions; and, most importantly, the achievement of increased self-transparency. In toto such hermeneutical endeavors would aim at the full disclosure of the life-world of black people, our life-praxes, and help in formulating our projects.

On the other hand there is the need, in terms of the struggles on the part of others in the world, to increase the degree of freedom, happiness, and well-being which they might enjoy, to be with these struggles in our own life-practices and our own historical struggles. The increasing disclosure of the interdependence of all our lives on this planet, an interdependence grossly and distortingly exaggerated by monopoly, imperialistic capitalism, reveals the broad directions we must take in the world historical struggles of oppressed peoples to increase the range of and quality of their well being. As beneficiaries of the level of cultural development of the west, in general, the U. S. in particular, based as it is in large part on the oppression and dehumanization of others, our responsibilities to ourselves and to these peoples are clear and immense.

In terms of all of this, our struggle as black folk involved in "philosophizing" is but a moment in the whole. We must be therefore clear where and how we come down in this debate. For in doing so--or in failing to do so--we will significantly condition our histories, as a class, as a people, as people in struggle in world history.

SCIENTIFIC METHOD AS A TOOL FOR IMPROVING
THE QUALITY OF VALUE JUDGMENTS WITH PARTICULAR
CONCERN FOR THE BLACK PREDICAMENT IN U. S.

Mack H. Jones

In our weak moments we may wonder about the merit of Hume's celebrated contribution to the philosophy of science; for even though Hume was categorically correct in distinguishing between questions of fact and questions of value and in arguing that normative choices cannot be deduced from facts, the sharp distinction between the two kinds of questions has served to obfuscate, in the minds of many, the relationship between facts scientifically gathered, aggregated and analyzed and normative choices. Such obfuscation, in turn, has led to a form of anti-intellectual know-nothingism predicated upon the assumption that normative choices are individual preferences not amenable to objective interpersonal assessment. The logical corollary of this assumption is the notion that everybody's opinion or normative choice is equal to everybody else's and that therefore questions of value are matters only of one's personal taste.

If one accepts such normative anarchism, social scientist qua social scientists and scientific methods of inquiry have no particular role to play in structuring value choices. We are simply faced with a garden of competing value judgments with no basis for distinguishing wheat from the chaff or sense from nonsense.

Further, this sharp distinction between questions of fact and questions of value has led to widespread acceptance of the view that social scientists must choose between being scientific practitioners or impassioned advocates. Generally speaking, conservative elements who are comfortable with the status quo have assumed the mantle of the former while the more progressive or radical scholars have accepted the latter role. Thus, we have a simplistic dichotomy of social scientists with one group arguing that they are scientific and value

free and the other arguing that to be scientific is to be irrelevant and that the essence of relevant scholarship is commitment and advocacy. The fact of the matter is that the dichotomy itself is the thing which is most irrelevant; and while both sides find succor and comfort in identifying with their particular group and in taking potshots at the perceived adversary; and while progressive and radical scholars who accept the oppressed as their clientele take particular delight in lampooning the "scientism" of status quo apologist mainstream social scientist, it is the cause of the oppressed which suffers most from this dichotomy. For in deprecating the need for, indeed, the possibility of, scientifically arrived at propositions the radical scholar who sees himself solely as an advocate undermines any claim of special competence he or she might have and corollarily any reason why his or her self proclaimed clientele should listen to him or her any more than to any other pied piper on the loose. More importantly, the acceptance of this facile dichotomy of the role of social scientists and the concomitant acceptance of the depreciation of scientific methods of inquiry often lead radical scholars to rely on assertions as opposed to arguments in their efforts to explain and predict. Qualitative distinctions among arguments can be made by analyzing their logical consistency and the extent to which the components of the argument are consistent with the empirical reality with which they purport to deal. Arguments are subject to scientific interpersonal verification. Assertions are a different matter. They are not stated in a form amenable to verification; they simply come ex cathedra. To question them is heresy. When explanations are based upon assertions as opposed to arguments, the quest for knowledge - the claim to know - degenerates into obscuran-

tism. Under such conditions the quality of a claim to know is not assessed in terms of its isomorphism with empirical reality but rather the quality of an individual is assessed in terms of his identification with ex cathedra assertions. Individuals are sorted out among the washed and unwashed and given the rewards/punishment appertaining thereto.

II

At this point it may be judicious to return to the argument with which this essay began lest I impose upon your patience and lose your interest. I set out to demonstrate how methods of scientific inquiry can enhance the quality of value judgments with particular reference to the black predicament in the United States. The foregoing brief detour was necessary to set the tone for the argument which follows.

The dichotomizing of the role of social scientists has not been without consequence for the black community and its struggle for liberation. During the last half decade or so, many young black social scientists, doubtlessly moved by arguments such as the ones found in Cruse's Crisis of the Negro Intellectual,¹ have become acutely aware of the extent to which their training in white social science departments by "scientifically oriented" white professors has alienated them from the struggle of their people. By reflex action, to atone for their sins and reduce the Crusian crisis, many black intellectuals renounced scientific inquiry while rushing pell-mell to place their academic talents at the disposal of those trying to make qualitative distinctions among competing goals and strategies extant in the black community. However, having dismissed scientific inquiry as either impossible or as a tool of the status quo, their efforts have generally taken the form of assertions as opposed to

arguments. Avant garde black social scientists have competed with polemicists for breezy descriptions of complex phenomena, and the roles of the two, polemicist and scholar, have become indistinguishable. This is tragic. The polemicist has a particular role to play in the struggle. It is his responsibility to put together convincing emotion laden arguments which put the struggle in the most favorable light and which can be used to organize and stimulate people for action. Polemicists may be excused for overstating an argument, playing down nuances, or even resorting to card stacking or an occasional half-truth. On the other hand the social scientist qua social scientist, as Vince Harding² and Ralph Ellison³ have so eloquently stated, must be about the truth with all its complexities and contradictions. It is the social scientist's task to reduce that element of reality with which we are concerned to intellectually manageable proportions without compromising its empirical truth. The only way to do that is by following time honed and time honored canons of scientific inquiry. This is not to say that social scientists should not be advocates or polemicists; but rather it is to argue that there are distinct differences between the two kinds of intellectual activity and that these distinctions must always be kept in mind; and further it is to argue that as social scientists qua social scientists, our role is to present the truth in a scientific manner. After we have presented the truth we should then become advocates and activists in the direction which that truth leads. If we do not proceed in such a manner, we do a disservice to our people for we encourage the substitution of mysticism for serious analysis. And we facilitate the development of strategies based upon myths and misleading propaganda. Such policies are, of course, doomed to failure. The bankruptcy of integrationism as a strategy and the decimation of the Black Panther

Party are cases in point.

Of course, most normative choices or value judgments are based upon common sense information. Questions of right or wrong, correct or incorrect are usually resolved by referring to such information. However, there are occasions when such information is inadequate for making the decisions which must be made. One good indication that the limits of the utility of common sense knowledge have been reached is when a plurality of reasonable, honest, and intelligent people who share a common worldview believe that diametrically opposed paths or strategies will get them to a commonly agreed upon goal. Another indication that the limits of common sense information has been reached would be a situation in which future outcomes predicted by a certain intervention strategy fail repeatedly to materialize. The black predicament in the United States qualifies on both counts. Presently Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People oriented nationalists, Roy Wilkins and NAACP integrationists, Roy Innis and CORE pluralists, the black capitalists, Jesse Jackson, the Panthers, The Nation of Islam ad nauseam, all claim to have the most promising solution for ameliorating the black condition. These competing strategies cannot be of equal worth. Some of them run counter to each other. Qualitative distinctions among them can and must be made - in terms of logically consistent scientific propositions and not as ex cathedra assertions. In short, we can narrow the number of competing alternative solutions by employing the canons of scientific inquiry. Black social scientists should and must take the lead in this inexpendable undertaking.

Before attempting to demonstrate how the scientific method may be used to enhance the quality of value judgments, it may be useful to pause and ask why is it that so many serious and committed

social scientists have been willing to accept this perverted interpretation of their role as social scientist qua social scientist and of the utility of scientific inquiry. The answer, I suspect, is connected in some way with two things: (1) the black social scientist's uneasiness over his/her objective class status in American society, and (2) failure to come to terms with some important questions regarding the philosophy of science.

On the first score, many of the serious socially committed black social scientists are a bit uneasy if not embarrassed with their middle class status and the salutary treatment and deference it affords them as compared to the treatment and deference given black rank and file. This feeling often manifests itself in self-effacing posturing by black academics who tend to romanticize the character and contribution of the masses and to raise common sense explanations to the level of scripture. The fact of the matter is, as Nagel has pointed out,⁴ systematic scientific inquiry begins where common sense leaves off (or runs out). Common sense knowledge constitutes the base upon which scientific information builds.

Such posturing, however, is not only unconvincing but borders on dishonesty. For if one is convinced of the abundant wisdom circulating among the masses in the form of common sense, one should quickly desert the cloistered corridors of academia and report to the nearest hiring hall, church or neighborhood joint; and one should similarly discontinue advanced study and systematic inquiry inasmuch as common sense explanations are strewn indiscriminately among the ecology and available to all passersby and may be gathered without the sacrifice of paying tuition, submitting to dull lecturers, or reading turgid treatises. Since these scholars voluntarily choose to pay such penance, we may be excused for not taking their fawning

self-effacing gestures seriously.

The other matter, a failure to come to terms with important questions regarding the philosophy of science is serious and deserves special attention, for it is this failure which has obscured the fact that while the scientific method is only one of several important phases in systematic inquiry it is the crucial phase, for it is the scientific method which facilitates the maximization of certainty in our attempts to deal with problems growing out of our subjective or normative considerations.

Most social scientist are socialized into their particular disciplines without ever raising the important questions to which the philosophy of science speaks, viz., what is the purpose of inquiry? How and why are frames of reference constructed? How and why do academic disciplines develop? How are concepts formed? Propositions derived? Theories developed? To be sure, most students are required to suffer through a "methods" course, but such courses usually serve simply to qualify the recruit for admission to the cathedral..

When these important philosophical questions are addressed, several things become clear. The first thing is that the purpose of inquiry is to allow people to anticipate future events and to develop strategies to maximize our control over them.⁵

This means that social science inquiry is idiosyncratic to the people being served. Every significant researchable problem occurs within a web of thought or network growing out of a people's anticipation and control needs. This web includes, first of all, a people's worldview which, among other things, answers the questions: Who are we? Where did we come from? How did we get here? Where do we wish to go? What alternative strategies have been tried and what results were obtained and why? Who are our friends and enemies? Closely

connected with the worldview is the second part of the web, a set of normative assumptions which summarizes a people's perception of the nature of the good life and the political, economic and cultural forms necessary for its realization. Academic disciplines develop within the context of these two.

The establishment of academic disciplines, then, is a normative purposeful exercise; the content of which is determined by a people's worldview and normative assumptions. It is the process by which it is determined what facts from the universe of facts should be selected and aggregated for study. The content of disciplines is determined by the third dimension of the web, the frame of reference. The latter serves as the lens through which we perceive the experiential world. The frame of reference structures the rules for reducing ineffable pure fact to described fact, the rules of concept formation, as it were, and gives rise to the major concepts, propositions, and theories; which in turn prescribe which questions are considered legitimate areas of study.

All of the foregoing processes, it should be noted, are subjective and grow out of the history and culture of the people being served. It is only after these processes have unfolded that the scientific method comes into play. The scientific method is the sum of rules for gathering and presenting interpersonal information in a fashion amenable to validation. These rules are objective and applicable to all systematic inquiry, ideology notwithstanding.

I am aware of the argument that the scientific method is irredeemably bound to materialistic Western culture and places undue emphasis on rank empiricism. However, I am in no way inhibited by that admonition for at least two reasons. First of all, the scientific method, especially in the context of verification, is

nothing more than a set of rules for uncovering, organizing and presenting information in a fashion which would be convincing to skeptics. This practice is of course timeless and universal. To be sure, there have always been elements in all societies which would have others accept their assertions simply because "I said so." Religious and other unenlightened cults are based upon such blind acceptance. Intelligent people without regard to culture however, prefer that assertions or claims to know be presented in a fashion which allows for disproof. Indeed even when we make common sense arguments the assumption is that the predictions implied by the propositions may be validated by referring to empirical phenomena. The scientific method simply introduces greater precision and minimizes error while strengthening the element of certainty.

My second reason for discounting the argument that the scientific method is unduly deferential toward empiricism is that social scientist's primary concern should be matters empirical. Matters of metaphysical essence should be left to philosophers and preachers. They are much more adept in circumventing the wise words of Sir Stevie Wonder regarding the perils of believing in things which are not understood.

Thus our problem with American social science lies not with the scientific method but rather with the normatively determined "problems" to which the method will be applied. This point may be dramatized by focusing briefly on the process of concept formation. A concept is simply a word to which a meaning has been signed; the word is meant to stand for, and evoke in the mind of persons being communicated with, some regularity which we perceive to exist empirically. Yet prior to the assignment of concepts the world of

pure fact is an unintelligible seamless web of energy expending happenings and phenomena in a state of stasis. One's perspective imposes order and gives meaning to the world of pure fact. As someone has said a fact is nothing more than a particular ordering of reality in terms of a theoretical interest.⁶ That is to say that the reduction of the pure fact world to described fact is a highly subjective process governed by a people's anticipation and control needs.

Thus, the problem with white social science lies not so much with its lack of objectivity or its unscientific character, though both may be valid criticisms, but rather with the fact that the anticipation and control needs of white society as defined by the ruling elite leads social scientists to organize the world of pure fact around categories which are trivial in light of the anticipation and control needs of the black community. For example, Moynihan, Banfield, et al serve the interests of their clientele quite well.

This fundamental point, in spite of its obviousness, has eluded black academics on both the left and the right. On the right persons such as Martin Kilson seem to think the rules which white academia follows in reducing pure fact to described fact are part of the scientific method and consequently see neither the need for, nor the possibility of, developing a perspective to impose order on the world of pure fact consistent with black anticipation needs.

On the left, progressive black social scientists who clearly understand the inappropriateness of white social science have not shown equal clarity on how do we move toward building the new social science. Lerone Bennett's call for a "new frame of reference which transcends the limits of white concepts" and for creating "a new pool of clarifying concepts which will permit us to see and handle

our own reality" has really not been answered.⁷ Instead of returning to the world of pure fact and using our own anticipation and control needs to decide what regularities from among the infinite number of regularities out there should be abstracted out for analysis, we have simply engaged in word games by suggesting new labels for regularities which white scholarship identified as being consequential. We debate the Moynihan's around their reduction of pure fact. For example, Preston Wilcox, Ronald Walters, and Abdul Alkalimat⁸ all seem to think changing labels, i.e. substituting words neo-colonialism for tokenism, freedom for equality, Negro removal for urban renewal, etc., represents important changes in concept information.

The important question, of course, is to what empirical regularities do the labels refer. Substituting new labels for the same regularities changes nothing. Analysis is still based upon white reduction of the world of pure fact to described fact.

Failure to understand this can lead to questionable black radical scholarship. My favorite example of this is dramatized by what I call Robert Staples' "Rooster Theory of the Black Male." In trying to forge a response to the notion of the "emasculatation" of the black male Staples argues that:

The difference between black men and white men in sexual response may be explained by realizing that for white men sex has to be fitted into time not devoted to building technological society, whereas for black men it is a natural function, a way of life. An example of this is that white men when confronted with their woman's state of readiness may say business first, pleasure later. The black male when shown the black woman's state of sexual excitation manages to take care of both the business and pleasure task. If one task is left unfinished, it is unlikely that the black woman is left wanting.

Sure this statement is an absurdity, but such absurdities always result when we take someone else's reduction of pure fact and try

to "get a better deal" from the analysis. Had Staples begun with his own reduction of pure fact I doubt that he would have found it important to discuss the difference between black men and white men in sexual response.

III

Value judgments, like any other explanation, consist of three essential elements (1) a description of an empirical situation (factual base), (2) a prediction of future developments, and (3) a statement of operations which must occur or be performed (intervention strategy) if the future developments are to occur as predicted. An explanation says based upon what we already know, we can expect X to occur providing A, B, C, ..N are done. The structure of a value judgment is no different except for the fact that the predicted or desired future development is selected first and then a determination is made (of the proper intervention strategy) as to what operations must occur or be performed to insure the realization of the predicted future. The quality of an explanation is determined by the accuracy of the description or factual base and the logical consistency of the argument which connects the intervention strategy with the descriptive base on the one hand, and with the predicted future on the other. Explanation says given the regularities which have been observed over time (and discussed in the factual base) if we alter the environment (intervention strategy) in a particular way we can expect Y (normative choice) to occur. Once the argument is stated in this way its utility becomes subject to interpersonal assessment. Whether or not the description is accurate becomes an empirical question which can be resolved by scientific inquiry; whether or not the suggested alterations in the environment are

likely to yield the predicted future becomes a problem of logical consistency which can also be dealt with through procedures of scientific inquiry. Let us return to the question of the black predicament. Whenever a group or individual give their view of the optimum strategy for liberation, it carries with it a description of the black predicament (factual base) and a definition of liberation along with an argument as to why their proposed intervention strategy will lead logically from the described reality to the desired future. Of course, all of this is usually stated in an unsystematic common sense fashion. Perhaps one should not expect Roy Wilkins, Amiri Baraka, or Huey Newton to do more. However until their arguments are stated in a fashion which makes them amenable to reasoned criticism, we cannot separate sense from nonsense.

This is where social scientists come in. It is our responsibility to convert the positions of the various factions into propositions which lend themselves to disproof. Let me hasten to point out that this is not an argument for uninvolved social scientists who eschew practice while engaging in antiseptic theorizing. Social scientists if they are to be creative must be immersed in social problem situations, but their contributions as social scientists should be measured in terms of their ability to clarify social reality so that the masses and their leaders can make more intelligent choices among competing alternatives. We would begin by examining the description of reality upon which a particular group bases its analysis. Once that description is examined thoroughly and broken down into relevant propositional statements, the validity of these propositions can be determined by applying them to the empirical reality with which they purport to deal. The description of, say, the NAACP, Panthers, Congress of African People, etc.,

cannot all be correct or accurate. The extent to which a description is accurate is, again, an empirical question amenable to scientific inquiry.

The descriptive or factual base from which competing groups proceed may be clarified by discerning its answers to the following questions:

1. What is its Weltanschauung or world view?
2. How does it describe the political history of Blacks in the U. S.?
 - a. Importance of economic factors.
 - b. Importance of racial factors.
 - c. Importance of cultural factors.
3. What does it say about the nature of political power in the U. S.?
 - a. Relationship between formal and informal political structures and its implications for black life.
 - b. Relationship between government and business and its implications for black life.
 - c. Locus of political decisionmaking.
4. What does it say about the nature of economic power in the U. S.?
 - a. How are economic decisions made and in whose interest?
 - b. What are the most crucial economic decisions?
 - c. Who makes crucial economic decisions and under what conditions?
5. What is the pattern of wealth distribution in the U.S.?
 - a. What is the percentage of national income going to various social classes?
 - b. What percentage of national income takes the form of transfer payments?
 - c. What is distribution of transfer payments by social class and race?
 - d. What would be systemic implications of altering these patterns?
6. What is the present level and scope of black political power in U. S.?

Once the group's position on the above and other related questions, (which are meant to be suggestive and not exhaustive) is clarified, we can move to evaluate its intervention strategy in terms of its internal consistency and its logical consistency with its

descriptive base. We would need to assess both the long run and short run strategies of the groups in terms of the following,

inter alia:

1. Political Strategies
 - a. What is its position on the role of, and recruiting and maintaining mass support?
 - b. What is its position on the role of, recruitment, accountability, and circulation of leadership?
 - c. What is its position on coalitions? With whom? Under what conditions?
 - d. What is its position and practice regarding participation in electoral politics?
2. Economic Strategy
 - a. What is to be done regarding unemployment and under employment of black workers?
 - b. What is its position on the role of the state in providing social welfare services?
 - c. What is its long run perception of the good economic life?
3. Cultural Strategies
 - a. What is the nature of its propaganda?
 - b. To whom is it addressed?
 - c. Does it have a cultural apparatus? By whom is it supported?

When we have clarified the descriptive base and the strategies of a particular faction we can juxtapose them with the faction's stated goals and make at least a tentative determination of the probability that a given intervention strategy will yield the predicted results. For example, Bayard Rustin's argument that a black labor coalition will yield certain payoffs toward the realization of black goals is a probability statement subject to empirical clarification. The same can be said regarding intervention strategies of the Panthers, Nation of Islam, and other groups.

Of course the paramount normative question - the question of the good life or the ideal future we would like to see, be it integration into the American Capitalist order, an independent black nation here or elsewhere, revolution and an ecumenical socialist state or whatever cannot be determined by scientific analysis. One simply has to

make a choice; however scientific analysis can shed light on the question by indicating the likelihood that a particular intervention strategy is or is not likely to get one there.

IV

Finally, before we can begin to use scientific analysis to make qualitative distinctions among the various factions and individuals competing for public support, considerable preparatory work in the area of concept formation will be necessary. Presently there are no commonly agreed upon definitions, not even common sense ones, of the major concepts which are used in describing the black predicament and in offering solutions. It is an elementary point that useful dialogue/debate can occur only if there is a common vocabulary. Nonetheless, heated debate about the nature and direction of the struggle has been and continues to be waged with vague and ambiguous concepts. Such debates, more often than not, tend to be circular as opposed to cumulative, primarily because the antagonists never know if they have real disagreements or when evidence presented by one party or the other is sufficient to disprove or validate a particular argument.

Just to make that point at issue here, what are the accepted definitions of the following concepts: integration, nationalism, cultural nationalist, black middle class, petty bourgeois, revolutionary nationalist, or pan-Africanism? None of these concepts has been defined with sufficient clarity to facilitate serious dialogue among contending forces. Instead they are all used as in-house condensation symbols provoking uncritical obeisance among true believers and equally uncritical negative responses among adversaries.

Adherents to deterministic (which is to say tautological?) explanations, particularly Marxist, may take exception to my call

for the use of scientific analysis beginning with serious attention to concept formation. They might argue with some justification that their analysis is based upon a set of concepts which have been honed across time and cultures and are acknowledged to have universal validity. Moreover, Marxists are fond of debunking social science concepts as non-contentious petty bourgeois abstractions with little or no empirical utility. Anticipating such a response, let me say here and now that in spite of their pretensions toward scientific analysis, black Marxists have done little to introduce clarity to the debate about, or to the struggle itself.

Rather than taking the traditional Marxian concepts and giving them the particular content which would surface from a natural history description of black life in the United States and then using concepts so constructed in propositions about political existence in the United States, Marxists have resorted to foreign analogies in their efforts to explain.¹⁰ In the process, scientifically developed Marxian concepts are reduced to non-contentious slogans which may arouse or induce acquiescence - depending upon the disposition of the listener - but which do little to facilitate enlightened discussion. For example, to what extent have concepts such as class, proletariat, petty bourgeois, surplus value, alienation, exploitation, profits, colonialism, neo-colonialism, etc. been used to develop insightful proposition about contemporary black existence. Very little, I am afraid.¹¹ The seminal works of the late Oliver Cox remain a lonely crowd.

To summarize, until we begin to define terms clearly and precisely and include operational definitions to link our concepts to the empirical phenomena which they purport to represent, we are doomed to wander in the well beaten circular, non-cumulative path

of civil rights frustration with our peregrination marked only by
instant yet unrewarding conversion to the newest ideology.

FOOTNOTES

- 1
Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (New York : William and Morrow Company, 1967).
- 2
Vincent Harding, "The Vocation of the Black Scholar and the Struggles of the Black Community." (forthcoming)
- 3
Ralph Ellison, "The World and The Jug," Shadow and Act, (New York: Signet, 1966).
- 4
Ernest Nagel, The Structure of Science (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), especially Chapter 1.
- 5
The argument which follows is greatly influenced by that found in Eugene Meehan's Value Judgment and Social Science, (Homewood, Illinois Dorsey Press, 1969).
- 6
David Easton, The Political System, (New York: Alfred Knopf), p. 53.
- 7
See Challenge of Blackness, Black Paper No. 1, Institute of Black World, Atlanta, Georgia, 1970.
- 8
See Alkalimat's "The Ideology of Black Social Science," and Walter's "Toward a Definition of Black Social Science" in Joyce Ladner's The Death of White Sociology, (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), and Wilcox's "Black Studies as An Academic Discipline" Negro Digest, (March, 1970) pp. 75-85.
- 9
Robert Staples, "The Myth of the Impotent Black Male," The Black Scholar, (June, 1971), pp. 8 - 9.
- 10
Arguing by analogy is probably the most serious intellectual error for it allows one to use both the logical consistency and the raw data of one situation to validate a proposition which may be not at all isomorphic to the matter being discussed. How many factual errors have we made by relying on analogies from U.S.S.R., Cuba, Algeria, or China?
- 11
Stanley Arnowitz in his recent work False Promises, The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973) uses contemporaneous development to give body to traditional Marxian concepts. His work is worthy of emulation and extension.

CROCODILE TEARS & THE AUTOCRITIQUE OF THE
BOURGEOISIE IN ITS POPULAR ART (A REVIEW OF
"ROLLERBALL")

Adolph Reed Jr.

The negative utopia is, in Norman Jewison's "Rollerball", the vehicle by which the "serious" popular film appears to express a critique of advanced capitalist society. The critique, however, is more apparent than it is real. Ultimately "Rollerball" affirms what it claims to attack, as it seeks to state the fallacy of bourgeois society by evoking as truth another phase of the bourgeois myth. Thus, an ostensibly critical effort becomes in the end a concealed weapon in the ideological arsenal of the capitalist order.

Nevertheless, the importance of the film lies precisely here, in its failure. Jewison's failure in "Rollerball" exhibits similarities to the failures of the contemporary Left in this society to develop radical critique of capitalist social order; like Jewison the Left adopts one bourgeois illusion as the model from which it criticizes another. To that extent "Rollerball" is significant in a historical sense as it reflects, although it was hardly intended to do so, a serious problem in contemporary politics.

Moreover, the film is historically significant in that it is the nearest thing to an explicitly anti-capitalist film yet produced in the country for mass consumption. That circumstance alone suggests something about the spirit of the times, and the film - even down to its ruthless portrayal of the multinational corporation - reflects the currently popular unpopularity of the giant institutions of capital. Indeed, the film suggests modes of consciousness into which that unpopularity might be organized, as the capitalist film industry authorizes a critique of capitalism. That paradoxical behavior has a rationality which lies deeper than the allegorical willingness of the bourgeoisie to offer the shovel of its burial for sale on the market.

Over the last decade particularly it has been possible to watch time and again as potentially critical forces have arisen in this society only to have their critical

perceptions 'clarified' and reconstituted in a form that is no longer hostile to the order. Perhaps "Rollerball" provides clues to a likely mode of integration of a strain of anti-capitalism into the bourgeois ideological apparatus. Again, a notation of the theoretical and political bleakness prevalent among the Left underscores the importance of those clues for an effectively oppositionist praxis in this country.

The historical aptness of "Rollerball", though, exists along two related but different dimensions. On the one side its story has a message; in fact it has at least two of them - one stated and self-conscious, the other unstated and perhaps unconscious. This dimension is the one in which the pedestrian Left critic typically looks for ideological statements or functions when engaging in culture critique.

Yet there is another dimension which is no less ideological in content than is the bias of the story portrayed. This second dimension is the mode in which the story is presented, its aesthetic form. As the critique of mature capitalist society has proceeded, the ideological functions of societal forms and processes - as distinct from their explicit content - have become key points of analytic focus among post-Leninist Marxists in this country.² In this connection, then, "Rollerball"'s meaning is to be sought not only in what the film says, but just as much in the way in which it says it. Put another way, its historical significance has both general and specific aspects.

In its most general aspect "Rollerball" represents a current genre of the popular film, one that is equally represented by offerings such as "The Wild Bunch", "Straw Dogs", "Day of the Locust", and for that matter "Jaws" and all the disaster movies which pretend to no greater aspiration than trite morality play and non-surgical lobotomy. The commonality of form which all these films share rests on employment of special effects and alternation of pace in order to orchestrate a cycle of generation and release of intense emotion and involvement among the audience. Because involvement is orchestrated, the audience is reduced to no more than a group of pure spectators who place themselves in an overall mood of passivity; they objectify themselves before the film. The film alternates periods of high and low intensity, and

the audience assumes a role which calls for nonreflective acceptance of stimuli.

This cession of critical and existential consciousness to the film-maker constitutes the essence of what is referred to as entertainment. It forms the essential condition for the existence of the 'popular art' by which bourgeois culture seeks to resolve what has been identified as the contradiction between "the 'beauty' of culture and the 'ugliness' of human existence"³ in capitalist society. The result, however, is neither "beauty" nor "ugliness", for those concepts require a degree of consciousness. Rather, the result is a vicarious libidinal exercise accompanied by the negation of the humanity of the participants in that exercise. The ideological character of this phenomenon is readily observable; a vicariously orgiastic, sham gratification in the theater is offered as a substitute for the human gratification which is denied in the alienated labor process.

That "Rollerball" is part of this film genre seems paradoxical since the loss of existential autonomy in administrative-capitalist society is the core of the film's critical statement. The problem is that this general type, the popular film, must be divided into two sub-types: the film which has no pretensions beyond 'entertainment' and the film which strives in addition toward artistic statement. The latter sub-type, that to which "Rollerball" belongs, is trapped by contradictory objectives. And the source of the antagonism lies both in the contradiction of a capitalist film industry which alienates artistic production by forcing it into the commodity-form and in the contradictions of a bourgeois cultural ideology which 'popularizes' culture by eliminating the consciousness of the 'consumers' of the cultural product. The "serious" popular film must somehow be at the same time creative (in the sense that it provokes consciousness and self-reflection) and banal (in the sense that it is entertainment).

Although this conflict of objectives appears to defy solution, quite the opposite is the case. The contradiction in fact exists for the film-maker only because it already exists in the society in general and thus by extension in the

movie market. The contradiction between artistic statement and entertainment corresponds to that phenomenon referred to above as the contradiction between beauty of culture and ugliness of human existence, which in turn originates in the contradiction between classes in the social order.

Those human segments of the society who have the least control over their quotidian existence, whose lives are almost totally administered and dominated, whose labor-power is spent in execution of tasks which have been conceptualized entirely by others and who simply are given directives - these people comprise one moment of a cultural contradiction which presents itself to the capitalist film industry as a marketing problem. The productive and ideological dynamics of the order act to reduce these segments to a passive 'mass', recipients of programmed stimuli which organize both what is called 'work' and what is called 'leisure'. These segments constitute, at least in principle, the entertainment market. To this market "Rollerball" is presented as no more than two hours of vicarious brutality and a handful of brief platitudes; in newspaper ads, for example, the film is billed as "Science fiction's answer to 'Jaws'".

At the same time, there are always people who show signs of trying to extricate themselves from the fog which hangs over everyday life; their historical presence has been affirmed by all the spontaneous protest movements which developed over the last decade. Yet each of these movements has been relieved of its contentiousness and integrated into the bourgeois social-administrative structure. A pattern begins to appear whereby a partial and particularized (but nonetheless hostile) critique arises at some point in the society, and the weight of the bourgeois cultural/ideological apparatus moves to recast the critique in coherent form, but with a coherence that does not challenge going social arrangements. So the critique becomes no critique at all.

It is in this sense that I shall argue that "Rollerball" is most profoundly a weapon of bourgeois ideology. Clearly, the film is ideological in a number of respects. For example, the fact that it accepts and caters to the dual market and

hence adopts the desensitizing 'crescendo-release-reconstitution' entertainment formula of the popular film is itself no minor ideological attribute. However, the attribute which sets "Rollerball" off from other films of its genre is the fact that Jewison's film provides what is in effect an attack on corporate capitalism that is endorsed by the corporate capitalist film industry; in a sense, then, the film is a bourgeois autocritique. How this autocritique occurs and what it means can be determined only by discussion of the specific content of the film itself.

So far in this essay "Rollerball" has been discussed entirely in terms of what it does rather than what it says. The film thus has been treated only in an exterior sense, as a subset of a larger class of films. To that extent the film really has not been discussed as a discrete cultural entity. The basic question remains: what is the internal logic of the vision of life projected in "Rollerball" and where does that logic locate the film in the ideological battleground of current bourgeois society? It is at this point that the content of Jewison's effort assumes prominence.

The broad story line of the film can be summarized quickly. Some time in the early decades of the next century, after a great deal of human suffering which had been climaxed by especially lethal corporate wars, the world came to be governed by a directorate comprised by the group of multinational corporations which had gained absolute control over the global economy. This direct corporate hegemony is characterized, as domination usually is in futurist films, by thorough penetration and virtual elimination of the sphere of personal autonomy among the populace. Extirpation from the human personality of any significant capacity for independent, individual choice is accomplished through an aggregation of mechanisms whose effects amount to what Andrew Feenberg in a very thoughtful 1971 essay described as "pacifying human existence through total administration."⁴

The 'game' of rollerball is one of those mechanisms; we learn that it had been invented and directed by the corporations themselves for the explicit purpose of pacification. Rollerball is a brutal, gladiatorial sport which in its psychology harkens images of both football and hockey. However, its organizational content

is best described as a partly mechanized and generally intensified version of what the present roller derby would be if it were played rather than play-acted.

The sport enjoys immense global popularity. When matches are played, all business and other activities are curtailed as billions of people lose themselves in voyeuristic frenzy. Thus rollerball summarizes the social-administrative success of the meta-bourgeoisie of the future. If leisure time is completely colonized, then one can hardly imagine how thoroughly the work situation must be pacified! A problem, though, is that for critical understanding the extent of this pacification must be imagined, for the work process is after all the lifeblood of a social order.

The film suggests strongly that inhabitants of the future realm of corporate despotism have consented to an exchange of all claim to autonomy in return for security from material privation. A telling oversight of Jewison's effort, however, is that there is no indication how the result of this exchange looks in regular practice. Although two characters state the existence of and their satisfaction with the arrangement, one of those characters is Moon Pie, the ill-fated team mate of the protagonist; the other is Ella, the wife who had left Jonathan for marriage to a corporation executive. Wealth, fame and privilege might indeed render domination sufferable, but defenses of the acceptability of the status quo advanced by the wealthy, famous and privileged clearly do not imply pandemic satisfaction. Similar defenses are made very often in the present by star athletes and upper class wives. Yet they are not taken seriously because it is generally understood that opulence and extraordinary daily environment shield both groups from experience of the reality of domination. For them domination is realized as an ultimate fetter, but what of all those people who work jobs and whose dominated existence is defined by overt, tangible regimentation of daily life by alien forces as a pre-condition for material survival?

We have glimpses which reveal that the world of "Rollerball" includes, among others, stable grooms, clerk/receptionists, helicopter pilots, nurses and ambulance attendants. While Moon Pie and Ella conceivably could go through a lifetime without practical confrontation of their loss of autonomy - so long as they stay within the

wide boundaries of their ordinary behavior - it is impossible to imagine how those other people could do so. Their daily existence is characterized by taking directives with very little latitude to vary the ways in which they act out their unfreedom. Moreover, it is inconceivable that a very large proportion of the populace lives on a scale of comfort which in any sense approximates that enjoyed by anyone whose lifestyle is shown in the film. What rewards, then, apart from rollerball enthusiasm are given to ordinary people for abdication of their humanity?

The core of this particular problem is that unlike the bourgeois film, in life domination is grounded in the work process. And the idea that great numbers of human beings can work daily under thoroughly suppressive and alienating conditions without ever exhibiting any kind of antagonistic behavior has to proceed from assumptions about human nature which are unacceptable philosophically to anyone committed to freedom as a possibility.

"Rollerball" apprehends the new order from a vantage point which obviates consideration of quotidian existence among the general populace. As a result, the film skirts some of the thorniest problems raised by the basic 'bread and circuses' (or car and television) thesis that it presents. How, in the totally pacified order, are the tensions which naturally arise within a hierarchic division of labor either superseded or resolved? Unfortunately, it is only through the life of Jonathan E., rollerball star, that the film explores the dynamics of the corporate despotism of which it warns, and Jonathan's life does not yield a satisfactory picture of what is invoked as the automatically self-regenerative dialectic of mature capitalist society.

Jonathan E. is "Rollerball"'s central character. He has been the top individual player in the sport for over a decade, the longevity of his tenure alone being no mean accomplishment. While still at his peak and on the eve of the championship play-offs, Jonathan is told by the corporate executives to retire from rollerball. It is this demand which begins Jonathan's quest and initiates the critique of the order. The protagonist sets out to ascertain why his retirement has been ordered

and simultaneously exposes the evils of corporate totalitarianism

Through Jonathan's search we learn that rollerball is intended to be more than a circus, an avenue for vicarious libidinal release. While that function is clearly important, the corporate directorate finds a way - much as the present bourgeoisie has done with football⁵ - to maximize its utilities by fostering certain didactic properties of the sport. The primary lesson to be imparted is the inferiority of individual motivation and independent action to submersion in collectivity. Individual identity is pathetically ephemeral, or, as demonstrated by every rollerball match, life is cheap. Players are killed with the regularity of honks of the buzzer on the scoreboard; yet the teams go on and on.

Jonathan is being pressured to retire, then, because he is rollerball's self-generated opposite. As a star, his very success at the sport thrusts him into an antagonistic relation with its purpose. In a way, therefore, Jonathan represents the indomitable human spirit, the species-being which can be suppressed to the point of total concealment but which can not be destroyed in society. Jonathan is sort of an existential Spartacus reincarnate; by his resolve he suggests that total pacification of human existence in a context of domination never really can be more than a naive pipe dream of corporation executives or an insipid masturbatory fantasy of marketers and social scientists.

So Jonathan sets out to affirm himself. However, his efforts exhibit a considerable irony. The vehicle which Jonathan selects for his self-affirmation is performance in the rollerball playoffs. This choice is natural enough since his participation constitutes a direct slap at corporate power. Yet rollerball is nonetheless a chief agency for perpetuation of corporate domination. When Jonathan decides to play, he chooses an expression of rebellion which actually is not rebellious at all. Given what rollerball is, to participate in the game is to participate in the continued dehumanization of himself and a world full of spectators.

Jonathan participates with zest. Never once does he question what the game is all about, not even after all rules have been eliminated and the 'game' is transformed

before his eyes into a spectacle of pure human slaughter. At the end, when he has made his existential statement, he has the opportunity to walk away and expose rollerball for what it is. Instead, he staggers to score the winning point, and he thereby underscores what has been the reality all along: that his apparent rebellion is acted out within a context of much more profound submission. Jonathan's rebellious objectives are thwarted by the character of his rebellion, and in the end he affirms the circus spectacle.

The danger to the order that is implied by the spectators' ovation at Jonathan's victory on the track is a sham danger. If they cheer heroic individualism, it is still a fully vicarious heroism which they cheer. Jonathan is the repository of heroic action which the fans 'share' by watching, not by emulating. His effort is applauded as a master performance, not as political or existential critique. The rebellion of Jonathan E. is scarcely more likely to stimulate social revolution (or any other substantive activity) than are the accomplishments of Johnny Bench, O. J. Simpson, Muhammad Ali or any of the legions of make-believe heroes who parade across contemporary television screens nightly.

Clearly Jewison's implication of a transformative impact of Jonathan's defiant play stands in stark contradiction to what the film already has shown rollerball to be. However, the confusion hardly ends there.

A large theoretical question mark looms after one of the film's central propositions: the repressiveness of collectivism and subversiveness of individualism. In fact the proposition has the stench of bourgeois ideology all over it. There is individualism, and there is individualism. An entity that can be identified as individualism in abstractio exists only as an aspect of bourgeois illusion. The antinomic representation of abstract 'collectivism' and abstract 'individualism' only eludes comprehension.

How does it come to pass, one might ask confusedly, that a social order which from its earliest origins has beatified individualism as one of its central ideologies should arrive at a point at which that same individualism is considered a threat to

the order's survival? The answer is simply that it does not; no such point is reached. In reality the bourgeoisie always has seen fit to suppress certain forms of individualism as well as to anoint certain forms of collectivism. The criteria for valuation are based on assessment of the likely impact of a given form on the ability to accumulate capital. The order is reproduced ideologically through transformation of its human victims simultaneously into atomized individuals who exist entirely apart from any sense of tangible community and a wholly depersonalized collectivity which exists as a "mass" and a "labor force" whose discrete members are stripped of sense of purpose and capacity to initiate meaningful action. In daily life this dialectic is manifest in the antagonistic unity of the five days of non-purposive, alienated drudgery that is work and the two days of non-purposive, alienated boredom that is leisure. The difference between them is that the former is organized through the depersonalized production process, and the latter is organized by the atomized psyche.

Presently, as the nineteenth century-type capitalist states of the West and the twentieth century-type capitalist states of the Soviet bloc converge in substance, the dynamic unity of collectivist and individualist elements in bourgeois society and its ideology does not seem so abstract a thesis as it once might have. Laissez-faire capitalism never has been simply individualist nor statist/developmentalist capitalism ('socialism') simply collectivist in either ideology or actual organization. Eventually, the formulae for resolution of conflict between the two capitalist forms were found in Max Weber, Keynes, and Frederick W. Taylor.⁶

Moreover, in the contemporary capitalist order in the West-which clearly is the world depicted in "Rollerball" in a state of becoming-the demands for individual autonomy which are generated spontaneously and in incoherent form by the 'massification' of the populace are seized upon by the bourgeoisie and given coherent, albeit irrational, definition by its ideological apparatus. These demands then become dual agencies for reproduction of the domination and frustration which had generated them in the first place. On the one hand, the demands are translated into market terminology, rendering them apparently satisfiable by commodities and reproducing the

bourgeois order directly, through increasing the accumulation of capital. On the other hand, the demands become part of the network of false consciousnesses which, as ideology, insulate bourgeois domination. Uneasiness over absence of fulfilment or identity is reduced to an exhortation to do one's "own thing", and this reduction diverts, if only by its chaotic eclecticism, the uneasiness away from the incipient critique which it contains. At the same time, the "things" that one can "do" are continually devised and regimented by the consumer commodity and labor markets thereby guaranteeing that whatever activity results will be thoroughly banalized and - of course - innocuous.

Jonathan E.'s spontaneous rebellion in quest of autonomy is defeated, just as have been the political protest movements of the 1960's and early 1970's, because he allows the agenda of his struggle to be set by the corporate directorate against which he rebels. The apparent choices which he perceives - 'play' rollerball and be fulfilled or retire and accept domination - are false choices. Neither playing nor retiring offers the key to Jonathan's disalienation; nor, for that matter, is there any solution which is at his command as an isolated individual.

Jonathan's sense of victory at the end shows only that he has succumbed to the false consciousness which sees individual and collective action as antinomic principles of human life. He thinks he has found freedom by 'doing his thing' and making a real decision in the face of the pressures of massification, the mechanism of domination, but what does he do when he leaves the arena? What happens next? To the extent that Jonathan believes himself freed he is mistaken; to the extent that we are to believe him freed we are being propagandized by bourgeois illusion.

"Rollerball" is of interest because it captures and reflects much of the consciousness of the present period in the West. The proof that it does is that much of the scenario painted by the film is currently visible at least in outline form. The similarity of rollerball and football already has been noted. Massification presently is a popular theme among many left-liberal reform circles, and the increasing power of multinational corporation seems to be the vogue concern of all left-

liberal reformers, both "scientific socialist" and otherwise.

The film also hints that the populace of the future will be fully integrated ethnically, with the homogenizing factor doubtless being the reduction of all people to recipients of stimuli from the administrative apparatus. This view suggests therefore that the bourgeoisie will succeed with a strategy apparently begun when it initiated the Civil Rights Movement, one which at least so far as blacks are concerned is successful on one of two fronts and partly successful on the second. First, the specific content of black life - aspirations, assumptions about the world, mode of daily existence and its reproduction - seems to have been assimilated to that of social life in the United States in general rather conclusively over the past two decades. Second, although the expressive forms of black life have not been broken down, they have been largely standardized; the result has been a black variant of massification manifested in black popular art and ritual behavior. (The same thing seems to be going on vis-a-vis Puerto Ricans, Chicanos and other non-European groups in the society and to a limited extent among Southern and Eastern European groups.) The question is whether the disparateness of forms can be overcome to produce a truly homogenized population.⁷

The basic problem has come up once before in discussion of the significance of work processes for the likelihood of universal and final pacification. How malleable are human beings? What are the limits to what people can be convinced to believe and how they can be convinced to act if those beliefs and actions are contradicted by those people's daily practice? Can antagonistic response - even if it is always peripheral and intuitive - ever be eliminated, or must the ideological apparatus perpetually be prepared for defensive mobilization? The answer which Norman Jewison proffers through "Rollerball" is that human beings are totally and infinitely subject to external manipulation by anyone and for any purpose. One need only provide the proper stimuli and the appropriate responses will follow. Antagonism can be rooted out completely by the proper conditioning.

This answer reflects Jewison's awe of and fundamental commitment to bourgeois

ideology. He accepts the Skinnerian (and among the "scientific socialists" Pavlovian) determinist objectivism that is the core assumption on which all the empiricist and scientific and determinist ideologies of capitalism are based, including "scientific socialism".⁸ Conversely, as evidenced by his solipsistic definition of Jonathan's freedom, Jewison embraces the idealist subjectivism which takes the source of human motivation and actions entirely out of history and society and introduces reified entities and other suprahuman spirits as motive forces in the world. With these two philosophical assumptions Jewison - and by extension "Rollerball" - reflects the two most basic and necessarily related assumptions of bourgeois thought.

From the base of these two assumptions Jewison attempts critique of present culture by projecting it into the future. The critique fails, though, because it is no real critique. "Rollerball" accepts and proffers a characteristically antinomic conception of the individualist and collectivist moments of bourgeois ideology. Thus the film seeks to criticize a bankrupt, abstract collectivism by appeal to an equally abstract individualism. The result is atavism. For critical vision Jewison substitutes exhortation to return to a pre-monopoly capitalist individualism which never really existed anyway. Jewison's protagonist is a hero, a throwback to the individualist ideal in whose name we are told to buy Camel Filters, drive miniature Cadillacs and to strive to fabricate status out of meaningless, alienating jobs.

So it is when the bourgeois engages in self-criticism through its mass consumption art industry. Even as critique of life in capitalist society is approached - though in a partial and very much distorted form - the alternative vision provided is only a scarcely re-cycled version of an illusion which lies at the cornerstone of the oppressive and exploitative social system itself. To paraphrase Gil Scott Heron, if bourgeois ideology don't get you in the wash, Lord knows it'll get you in the rinse. Just as the mythical crocodile mourns having devoured one victim while preparing for his next meal, so the bourgeoisie sheds an ideological tear in order to lure and disarm its potentially critical quarry.

NOTES

- ¹The film actually is an adaptation of "Roller Ball Murder", a short story by one William Harrison and which appeared in ESQUIRE LXXX (September, 1973), film, though, is substantially the more complex of the two.
- ²An exemplary recent effort in this regard is Stanley Aronowitz, FALSE PROMISES: THE SHAPING OF AMERICAN WORKING CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS. (Hightstown, N.J., 1973). Aronowitz in general seeks to establish the socialization and propaganda functions of what otherwise appear to be mundane, neutral processes and behavior. While he discusses those functions in several spheres of activity - school, work, leisure time, maturation - his discussion of the new film-making techniques is most significant for the immediate objectives of this essay. The interpretation which ensues here draws heavily on Aronowitz's observations.
- ³Harold Barnette, "Criteria for Cultural Criticism", ENDARCH I (Spring, 1975), p.38.
- ⁴Andrew Feenberg, "Technocracy and Rebellion", TELOS #8 (Summer, 1971), p. 21. Feenberg with much insight discusses this process as cinematic theme, marketing device and historical condition.
- ⁵On this topic see Ike Balbus, "Politics as Sports: The Political Ascendancy of the Sports Metaphor in America," MONTHLY REVIEW XXVI (March, 1975), pp. 26-39; Dave Meggyesy, OUT OF THEIR LEAGUE (San Francisco, 1970); or for that matter watch a game on television.
- ⁶While Weber and Keynes functioned mainly to provide the administrative framework required by consolidation of the hegemony of monopoly organization in the West, Taylor's function in this regard was rather different in so far as his work had 'practical' utility to both capitalist variants. For discussion of Taylor's impact on Lenin and in Marxism generally, see Louis Fischer, THE LIFE OF LENIN (New York, 1965), pp. 258-605; and Harry Braverman, LABOR AND MONOPOLY CAPITAL: THE DEGRADATION OF WORK IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY (New York, 1974), pp. 10-14.
- ⁷It should be noted, however, that the present situation is not one that is especially threatening to the social-administrative status quo. The combination of a universalized cultural content and a diversity of ossified, banalized forms might call for multiple marketing strategies, Affirmative Action programs and similar 'inefficiencies'. However, that combination is likely to be productive of any number of false consciousnesses which do far more to strengthen the present order than those inefficiencies do to weaken it.
- ⁸For a critical discussion of the bourgeois determinist elements of 'scientific socialism' see especially two essays by Russell Jacoby, "Towards a Critique of Automatic Marxism: The Politics of Philosophy From Lukacs to the Frankfurt School," TELOS #10 (Winter, 1971), pp. 3-34; and "The Politics of the Crisis Theory: Towards the Critique of Automatic Marxism II", TELOS #23 (Spring, 1975), pp. 3-52. My own fragment, "Scientistic Socialism: Notes on the New Afro-American Magic Marxism", ENDARCH I (Winter, 1975), pp. 21-39, attempts to discuss the manifestations of bourgeois Marxism among the 'independent' black scientific socialist of the current period.

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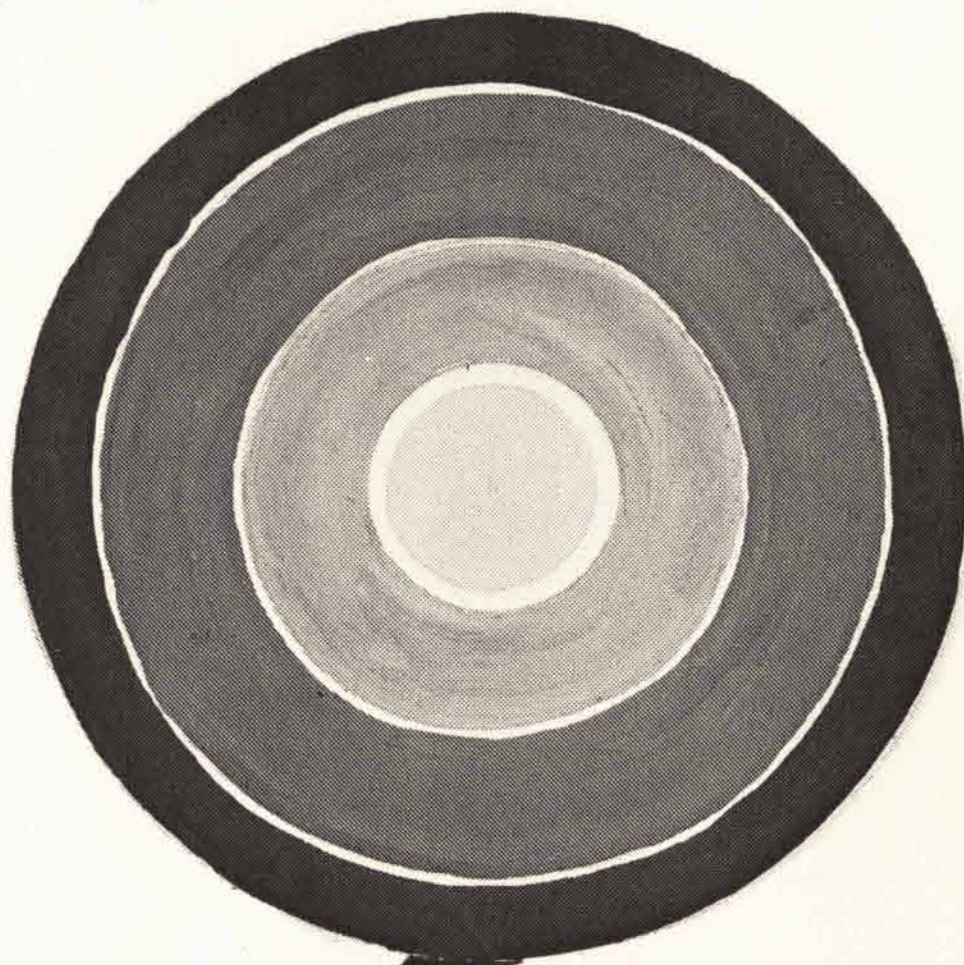
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