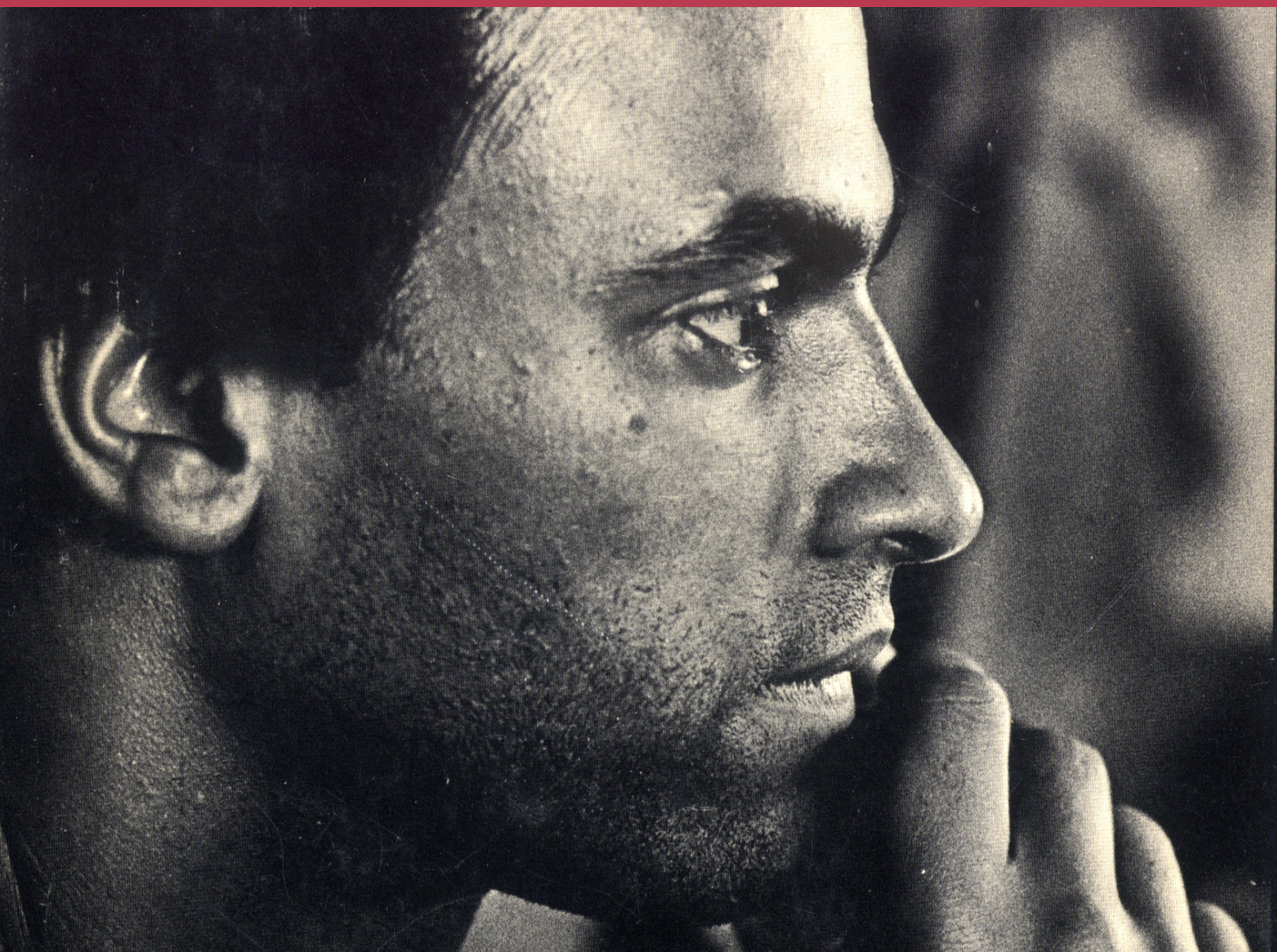




PROMINENT THINKERS DURING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT



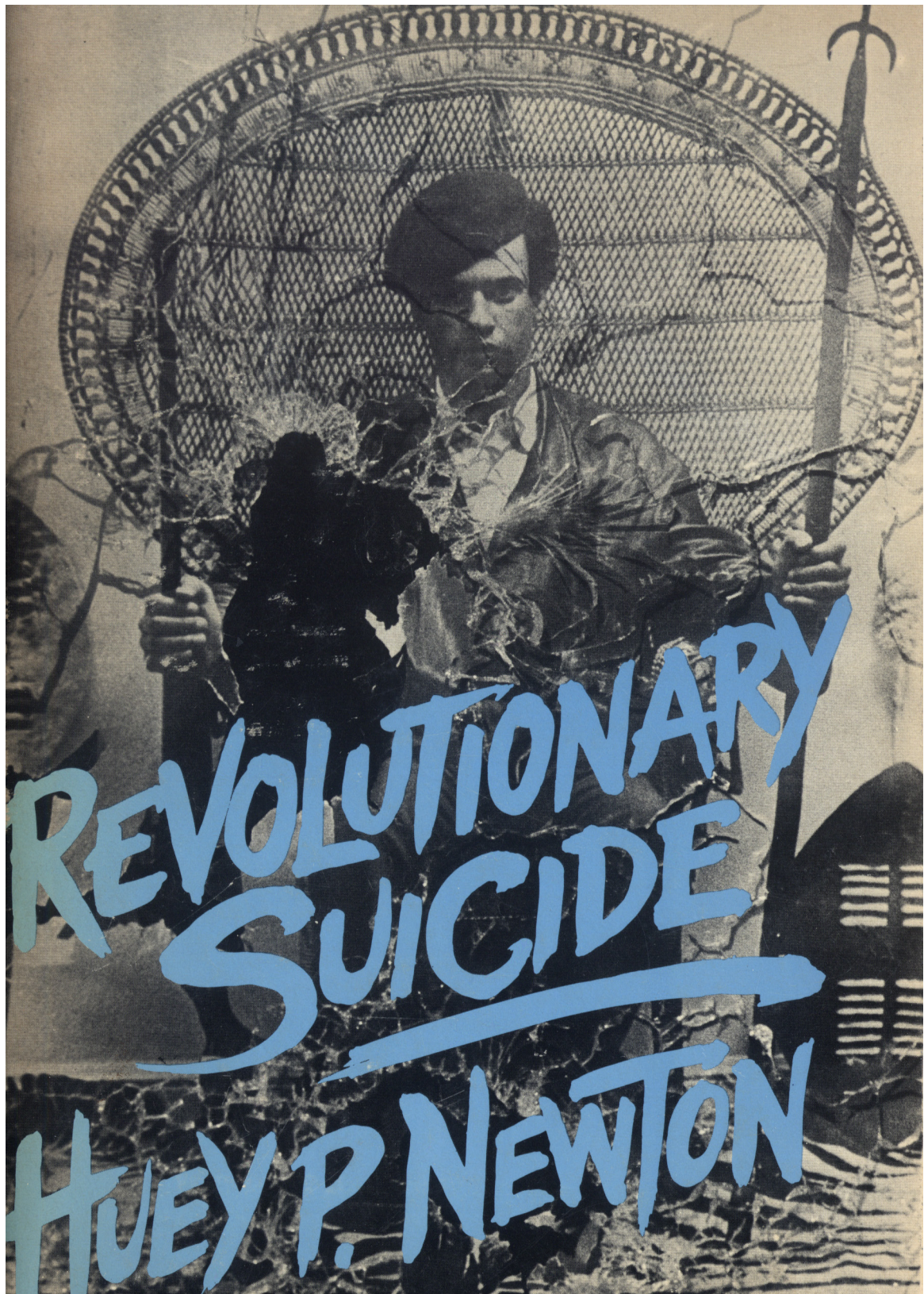
Amistad on the Go! is an interactive print and digital educational program that works in partnership with teachers servicing students from 6th to 12th grade to provide comprehensive lessons on the history of African Americans in the United States. Amistad on the Go! Toolkits include detailed curricula, student activities, and access to online resources all of which focus on the study of primary sources in and outside of the classroom. The Amistad on the Go! program also includes thematic traveling exhibitions and in-service training for teachers.

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Excerpts from
***Revolutionary Suicide* by Huey P. Newton (1973)**



Newton, Huey P. *Revolutionary Suicide*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973.
Amistad Research Center.

A MANIFESTO

Let a new earth rise. Let another world be born. Let a bloody peace be written in the sky. Let a second generation full of courage issue forth, let a people loving freedom come to growth, let a beauty full of healing and a strength of final clenching be the pulsing in our spirits and our blood. Let the martial songs be written, let the dirges disappear. Let a race of men now rise and take control!

– Margaret Walker, “For My People”

Revolutionary Suicide: The Way of Liberation

For twenty-two months in the California Men’s Colony at San Luis Obispo, after my first trial for the death of Patrolman John Frey, I was almost continually in solitary confinement. There, in a four-by-six cell, except for books and papers relating to my case, I was allowed no reading material. Despite the rigid enforcement of this rule, inmates sometimes slipped magazines under my door when the guards were not looking. One that reached me was the May, 1970 issue of *Ebony* magazine. It contained an article written by Lacy Banko summarizing the work of Dr. Herbert Hendin, who had done a comparative study on suicide among Black people in the major American cities. Dr. Hendin found that the suicide rate among Black men between the ages of nineteen and thirty-five had doubled in the past ten to fifteen years, surpassing the rate for whites in the same age range. The article had – and still has – a profound effect on me. I have thought long and hard about its implications.

The *Ebony* article brought to mind Durkheim’s classic study *Suicide*, a book I had read earlier while studying sociology at Oakland City College. To Durkheim all types of suicide are related to social conditions. He maintains that the primary cause of suicide is not individual temperament but forces in the social environment. In other words, suicide is caused primarily by external factors, not internal ones. As I thought about the conditions of Black people and about Dr. Hendin’s study, I began to develop Durkheim’s analysis and apply it to the Black experience in the United States. This eventually led to the concept of “revolutionary suicide.”

To understand revolutionary suicide it is first necessary to have an idea of reactionary suicide, for the two are very different. Dr. Hendin was describing reactionary suicide: the reaction of a man who takes his own life in response to social conditions that overwhelm him and condemn him to hopelessness. The young Black men in his study had been deprived of human dignity, crushed by oppressive forces, and denied their right to live as proud and free human beings.

A section in Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* provides a good analogy. One of the characters, Marmeladov, a very poor man, argues that poverty is not a vice. In poverty, he says, a man can attain the innate nobility of soul that is not possible in beggary; for while society may drive the poor man out with a stick, the beggar will be swept out with a broom. Why? Because the beggar is totally demeaned, his dignity lost. Finally, bereft of self-respect, immobilized by fear and despair, he sinks into self-murder. This is reactionary suicide.

Connected to reactionary suicide, although even more painful and degrading, is a spiritual death that has been the experience of millions of Black people in the United States. This death is found everywhere today in the Black community. Its victims have ceased to fight the forms of

oppressions that drink their blood. The common attitude has long been: What's the use? If a man rises up against a power as great as the United States, he will not survive. Believing this, many Blacks have been driven to a death of the spirit rather than of the flesh, lapsing into lives of quiet desperation. Yet all the while, in the heart of every Black, there is the hope that life will somehow change in the future.

I do not think that life will change for the better without an assault on the Establishment¹, which goes on exploiting the wretched of the earth. This belief lies at the heart of the concept of revolutionary suicide. Thus it is better to oppose the forces that would drive me to self-murder than to endure them. Although I risk the likelihood of death, there is at least the possibility, if not the probability, of changing intolerable conditions. This possibility is important, because much in human existence is based upon hope without any real understanding of the odds. Indeed, we are all – Black and white alike – ill in the same way, mortally ill. But before we die, how shall we live? I saw with hope and dignity; and if premature death is the result, that death has a meaning reactionary suicide can never have. It is the price of self-respect.

Revolutionary suicide does not mean that I and my comrades have a death wish; it means just the opposite. We have such a strong desire to live with hope and human dignity that existence without them is impossible. When reactionary forces crush us, we must move against these forces, even at the risk of death. We will have to be driven out with a stick.

Che Guevara said that to a revolutionary death is the reality and victory the dream. Because the revolutionary lives so dangerously, his survival is a miracle. Bakunin, who spoke for the most militant wing of the First International, made a similar statement in his *Revolutionary Catechism*. To him, the first lesson a revolutionary must learn is that is a doomed man. Unless he understands this, he does not grasp the essential meaning of his life.

When Fidel Castro and his small band were in Mexico preparing for the Cuban Revolution, many of the comrades had little understanding of Bakunin's rule. A few hours before they set sail, Fidel went from man to man asking who should be notified in case of death. Only then did the deadly seriousness of the revolution hit home. Their struggle was no longer romantic. The scene had been exiting and animated; but when the simple, overwhelming question of death arose, everyone fell silent.

Many so-called revolutionaries in this country, Black and white, are not prepared to accept this reality. The Black Panthers are not suicidal; neither do we romanticize the consequences of revolution on our lifetime. Other so-called revolutionaries cling to an illusion that they might have their revolution and die of old age. That cannot be.

I do not expect to live through our revolution, and most serious comrades probably share my realism. Therefore, the expression "revolution in our lifetime" means something different to me than it does to other people who use it. I think the revolution will grow in my lifetime, but I do not expect to enjoy its fruits. That would be a contradiction. The reality will be grimmer.

I have no doubt that the revolution will triumph. The people of the world will prevail, seize power, seize the means of productions, wipe out racism, capitalism, reactionary inter-communalism – reactionary suicide. The people will win a new world. Yet when I think of individuals in the revolution, I cannot predict their survival. Revolutionaries must accept this fact, especially the Black revolutionaries in America, whose lives are in constant danger from the evils of a colonial society.

1 Many migrants like us were driven and pursued, in the manner of characters in a Greek play, down the paths of defeat; but luck must have been with us, for we somehow survived... -- Richard Wright, Preface to *Black Metropolis*

Considering how we must live, it is not hard to accept the concept of revolutionary suicide. In this we are different from white radicals. They are not faced with genocide.

The greater, more immediate problem is the survival of the entire world. If the world does not change, all its people will be threatened by the greed, exploitation, and violence of the power structure in the American empire. The handwriting is on the wall. The United States is jeopardizing its own existence and the existence of all humanity. If Americans knew the disasters that lay ahead, they would transform this society tomorrow for their own preservation. The Black Panther Party is in the vanguard of the revolution that seeks to relieve this country of its crushing burden of guilt. We are determined to establish true equality and the means for creative work.

Some see our struggle as a symbol of the trend toward suicide among Blacks. Scholars and academics, in particular, have been quick to make this accusation. They fail to perceive differences. Jumping off a bridge is not the same as moving to wipe out the overwhelming force of an oppressive army. When scholars call our actions suicidal, they should be logically consistent and describe all historical revolutionary movements in the same way. Thus the American colonists, the French of the late eighteenth century, the Russians of 1917, the Jews of Warsaw, the Cubans, the BLF, the North Vietnamese – any people who struggle against a brutal and powerful force – are suicidal. Also, if the Black Panthers symbolize the suicidal trend among Blacks, then the whole Third World is suicidal, because the Third World fully intends to resist and overcome the ruling class of the United States. If scholars wish to carry their analysis further, they must come to terms with that four-fifths of the world which is bent on wiping out the power of the empire. In those terms the Third World would be transformed from suicidal to homicidal, although homicide is the unlawful taking of life, and the Third World is involved only in defense. Is the coin then turned? Is the government of the United States suicidal? I think so.

With this redefinition, the term “revolutionary suicide” is not as simplistic as it might seem initially. In coining the phrase, I took knowns and combined them to make an unknown, a neoteric phrase into which the world “revolutionary” transforms the world “suicide” into an idea that has different dimensions and meanings, applicable to a new and complex situation.

My prison experience is a good example of the revolutionary suicide in action, for prison is a microcosm of the outside world. From the beginning of my sentence I defied the authorities by refusing to co-operate; as a result, I was confined to “lock-up,” a solitary cell. As the months passed and I remained steadfast, they came to regard my behavior as suicidal. I was told that I would crack and break under the strain. I did not break, nor did I retreat from my position. I grew strong.

If I had submitted to their exploitation and done their will, it would have killed my spirit and condemned me to a living death. To co-operate in prison meant reactionary suicide to me. While solitary confinement can be physically and mentally destructive, my actions were taken with an understanding of the risk. I had to suffer through a certain situation; by doing so, my resistance told them that I rejected all they stood for. Even though my struggle might have harmed my health, even killed me, I looked upon it as a way of raising the consciousness of the other inmates, as a contribution to the ongoing revolution. Only resistance can destroy the pressures that cause reactionary suicide.

The concept of revolutionary suicide is not defeatist or fatalistic. On the contrary, it conveys an awareness of reality in combination with the possibility of hope – reality because the revolutionary must always be prepared to face death, and hope because it symbolizes a resolute determination to bring about change. Above all, it demands that the revolutionary see his death and

his life as one piece. Chairman Mai says that death comes to all of us, but it varies in its significance: to die for the reactionary is lighter than a feather; to die for the revolution is heavier than Mount Tai.

Starting Out

Life does not always begin at birth. My life was forged in the lives of my parents before I was born, and even earlier in the history of all Black people. It is all of a piece.

I have little knowledge of my grandparents or those who went before. Racism destroyed our family history. My father's father was a white rapist. Both of my parents were born in the Deep South, my father in Alabama, my mother in Louisiana. In the mid-thirties, their families migrated to Arkansas, where my parents met and married. They were very young, in their mid-teens – some said too young to marry – but my father, Walter Newton, is a very good talker, and when he decided he wanted Armelia Johnson for his bride, she found him hard to resist. He has always known how to be charming; even today I love to see his eyes light up with that special glow when he gets ready to work his magic. They were married in Parkdale, Arkansas, and lived there for seven years before moving to Louisiana to take advantage of better employment prospects.

My father was not typical of southern Black men in the thirties and forties. Because of his strong belief in the family, my mother never worked at an outside job, despite seven children and considerable economic hardship. Walter Newton is rightly proud of his role as family protector. To this day, my mother has never left her home to earn money.

My father believed in work. He worked constantly, in a variety of jobs, usually holding several at one time to provide for us. During those years in Louisiana he worked in a gravel pit, a carbon plant, in sugarcane mills, and sawmills. He eventually became a railroad brakeman for the Union Saw Mill Company. This pattern did not change when we moved to Oakland. As a youngster, I well remember my father leaving one job in the afternoon, coming home for a while, then going to the other. In spite of this, he always found time for this family. It was always high-quality time when he was home.

In addition, my father was a minister. He pastored the Bethel Baptist Church in Monroe, Louisiana, and later assisted in several of the Oakland churches. His preaching was powerful, if a little unusual. The Reverend Newton planned his sermons in advance and announced the topic a week early, but he never seemed able to preach the sermon he had chosen. Eventually, he adopted the practice of stepping right into the pulpit and letting the spirit move him to deliver whatever message was appropriate. As a child I swelled up proud to see him up there leading church services, moving the congregation with his messages. All of us shared the dignity and respect he commanded. Walter Newton is not a particularly tall man, but when he stepped into that pulpit, he was the biggest man in the world to me.

My mother likes to say that she married young and finished growing up with her children, and this is true. Only seventeen years separate her from Lee Edward, the oldest child in the family. When my older brothers and sisters were growing up in Louisiana, Mother was one of their best playmates. She played ball, jackrocks, and hide-and-go-seek. Sometimes my father joined in, rolling tires and shooting marbles and keeping the rules straight. This sense of family fun and participation has helped to keep us close. My parents are more than the word usually implies; they are also our friends and companions.

My mother's sense of humor affected all of us. It was pervasive, an attitude toward life that led us to insight, affection, humor, and understanding with each other. She helped us to see the

light side in even the most difficult situations. This lightness and balance have carried me through some difficult days. Often, when others expect to find me depressed by difficult circumstances, and especially by the extreme condition of prison, they see that I look at things in another way. Not that I am happy with the suffering; I simply refuse to be defeated by it.

I was born in Monroe, Louisiana, on February 17, 1942, the last of seven children. Like other Black people of that time and place, I was born at home. They tell me that my mother was quite sick while she carried me, but Mother says only that I was a fine and pretty baby. My brothers and sisters must have agreed because they often teased me when I was young, telling me that I was too pretty to be a boy, that I should have been a girl. This baby-faced appearance doffed me for a long time, and it was one of the reason I fought so often in school. I looked younger than I actually was, and soft, which encouraged schoolmates to test me. I had to show them. When I went to jail in 1968, I still had the baby face. Until then I rarely shaved.

My parents named me after Huey Pierce Long, the former Governor of Louisiana, assassinated seven years before I came long. Even though he could not vote, my father had a keen interest in politics and followed the campaigns carefully. Governor Long had impressed him by his ability to talk one philosophy while carrying out programs that moved Louisiana in exactly the opposite direction. My father says he was up front, “looking right into his mouth,” when Huey P. Long made a speech about Black men in the hospitals, “out of their minds and half naked,” had to be carried by white nurses. This was, of course, unacceptable to southern whites, and therefore a number of Black nurses were recruited to work in Louisiana hospitals. This was a major breakthrough in employment opportunities for Black professionals. Huey Long used this tactic to bring other beneficial programs to Blacks: free books in the schools, free commodities for the poor, public road- and bridge-construction projects that gave Blacks employment. While most whites were blinded by Long’s outwardly racist philosophy, many Blacks found their lives significantly improved. My father believed that Huey P. Long had been a great man, and he wanted to name a son after him.

In our family there was a tradition that each older child had particular responsibility for a younger one, looking after him at play, feeding him, taking him to school. This was called “giving” the newborn to an older brother or sister. The older child had the privilege of first taking the new baby outdoors. I was “given” to my brother Walter, Jr. A few days after I was born he took me outside, hauled me up onto the back of a horse, and circled the house while the rest of family followed. This ritual is undoubtedly a surviving “Africanism” from the age-old matriarchal-communal tradition. I do not remember that or anything else of our life in Louisiana. Everything I know about that time I learned from the family. In 1945, we followed my father to Oakland when he came West to look for work in the wartime industries. I was three years old.

The great exodus of poor people out of the South during World War II sprang from the hope for a better life in the big cities of the North and West. In search of freedom, they left behind centuries of southern cruelty and repression. The futility of that search is now history. The Black communities of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Newark, Brownsville, Watts, Detroit, and many others stand as testament that racism is as oppressive in the North as in the South.

Oakland is no different. The Chamber of Commerce boasts about Oakland’s busy seaport, its museum, professional baseball and football teams, and the beautiful sport coliseum. The politicians speak of an efficient city government and the well-administered poverty program. The poor know better, and they will tell you a different story.

Oakland has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, and for the Black population it is even higher. This was not always the case. After World War I, there was a hectic period of industrial expansion, and again during World War II, when government recruiters went into the South and encouraged thousands of Blacks to come to Oakland to work in the shipyards and wartime industries. They came – and stayed after the war, although there were few jobs and they were no longer wanted. Because of the lack of employment opportunities in Oakland today, the number of families on welfare is the second highest in California, even though the city is the fifth largest in the state. The police department has a long history of brutality and hatred of Blacks. Twenty-five years ago official crime became so bad that the California state legislature investigated the Oakland force and found corruption so pervasive that the police chief was forced to resign and one policeman was tried and sentenced to jail. The Oakland “system” has not changed since then. Police brutality continues and corruption persists. Not everyone in Oakland will admit this, particularly the power structure and the privileged white middle class. But, then, none of them actually lives in Oakland.

Oakland spreads from the northern border of Berkeley, dominated by the University of California with its liberal to radical life style, south to the Port of Oakland and Jack London Square, a complex of mediocre motels, novelty shops, and restaurants with second-rate food. To the west, eight miles across the bay, spanned by the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, is metropolitan San Francisco; to the east is a lily-white bedroom city called San Leandro.

There are two very distinct geographic Oaklands, the “flatlands” and the hills. In the hills, and the rice area known as Piedmont, the upper-middle and upper class – the bosses of Oakland – live, among them former United States Senator William Knowland, the owner of the ultraconservative *Oakland Tribune*, Oakland’s only newspaper. His neighbors include the mayor, the district attorney, and other wealthy white folks, who live in big houses surrounded by green trees and high fences.

The other Oakland – the flatlands – consists of substandard-income families that make up about 50 per cent of the population of nearly 450,000. They live in either rundown, crowded West Oakland or dilapidated East Oakland, hemmed in block after block, in ancient, decaying structures, now cut up into multiple dwellings. Here the majority of Blacks, Chicanos, and Chinese people struggle to survive. The landscape of East and West Oakland is depressing; it resembles a crumbling ghost town, but a ghost town with inhabitants, among them more than 200,000 Blacks, nearly half the city’s population. There is a dreary, grey monotony about Oakland’s flatlands, broken only by a few large and impressive buildings in the downtown section, among them (significantly) the Alameda County Court House (which includes a jail) and the Oakland police headquarters building, a ten-story streamlined fortress for which no expense was spared in its construction. Oakland is a ghost town in the sense that many American cities are. Its white middle class has fled to the hills, and their indifference to the plight of the city’s poor is everywhere evident.

Like countless other Black families in the forties and fifties, we fell victim to this indifference and corruption when we moved to Oakland. It was as difficult then as it is now to find decent homes for large families, and we moved around quite a bit in my early years in search of a house that would suit our needs. The first house I remember was on the corner of Fifth and Brush streets in a rundown section of Oakland. It was a two-bedroom basement apartment, and much too small to hold all of us comfortably. The floor was either dirt or cement, I cannot remember exactly; it did not seem to be the kind of floor that “regular” people had in their homes. My parents slept in one bedroom and my sisters, brothers, and I in the other. Later, when we moved to a two-room apartment at Castro and Eighteenth streets, there were fewer of us. Myrtle and Leola had married, and Walter had been drafted into the Army. On Castro Street, I slept in the kitchen. That memory returns often. Whenever I think of people crowded into a small living space, I always see a child sleeping in the kitchen and feeling upset about it; everybody knows that the kitchen is not supposed to be a bedroom. That is all we had, however. I still burn with the sense of unfairness I felt every night as I crawled into the cot near the icebox.

We were very poor, but I had no idea what that meant. They were happy times for me. Even though we were discriminated against and segregated into a poor community with substandard living conditions, I never felt deprived when I was small. I had a close, strong family and many playmates, including my brother Melvin, who was four years older than me; nothing else was needed. We just lived and played, enjoying everything to the fullest, particularly the glorious California weather, which is kind to the poor.

Unlike many others I knew, we never went hungry, although our food was the food of the poor. Cush was standard fare. Cush is made out of day-old corn bread mixed with other leftovers, such as gravy and onions, spiced very heavily and fried in a skillet. Sometimes we ate cush twice a day, because that was all we had. It was one of my favorite dishes, and I looked forward to it. Now I see that cush was not very nutritious and was downright bad for you if you ate it often; it was just bread – corn bread.

Life grew even sweeter when I was big enough – six or seven years old – to play outdoors with Melvin. Our games were filled with the joy and exuberance of innocent children, but even they reflected our economic circumstance. We rarely had store-bought toys. We improvised with the materials at hand. Rats were close at hand, and we hated rats because they infested our homes; one had almost bitten off my nephew's toe. Partly because of the hate and partly for the game of it, we caught rats and put them in a large can and poured coal oil into the can, then lighted it. The whole can would go up in flames while we watched the rats scoot around inside, trying to escape the fire, their tails sticking straight up like smoking grey toothpicks. Usually, they died from the smoke before the flames consumed them.

We also despised cats, because we were told that cats killed little babies by sucking the breath out of them. We tested the tale about cats always landing on their feet. When we caught cats and took them to the top of the stairs and hurled them down, they would land on their feet – most of the time.

Dirt was a favorite toy. We used it to play at being builders. The roof of the house was our building site. We would climb up there and pull up the dirt-filled buckets behind us with rope, hand over hand, to the top of the house, and then dump the dirt down on the other side. There were no swimming pools near us, but when we got a little older we began to wander down to the bay with the other kids and go swimming off the pier in the dirty water. Dirt, rats, cats: these are the games and toys of the poor, as old and cruel as economic reality.

My parents insisted that we learn to get along with each other. When there was a dispute, my father never took sides. He was always an impartial judge, listening to both parties and getting to the bottom of things before making a decision. He was a fair and careful judge about all disputes, and later, when we had trouble in school, my father went every time to the teacher or the principal to learn what had happened. When we were right, he stood up for us, but he never tolerated wrongdoing.

We were not taught to fight by our parents, although my father insisted that we stand our ground when attacked. He told us never to start a fight, but once in it to stand fast until the end.

This was how we grew up – in a close family with a proud, strong, protective father and a loving, joyful mother. No wonder we came to feel that all our needs – from religion to friendship to entertainment – were met within the family circle. There was no felt need for outside friends; we were such good friends with each other.²

2 The only way to police a ghetto is to be oppressive. None of the Police Commissioner's men, even with the best will in the world, have any way of understanding the lives led by the people they swagger about in twos and threes controlling. Their very presence is an insult, and it would be, even if they spent their entire day feeding gumdrops to children. They represent the force of the white world, and that world's real intentions are, simply, for that world's criminal profit and ease, to keep the black man corralled up here, in his place.

James Baldwin, "Fifth Avenue, Uptown,"
Nobody Knows My Name

In this way the days of our childhood slipped past. We shared the dreams of other American children. In our innocence we planned to be doctors, lawyers, pilots, boxers, and builders. How could we know then that we were not going anywhere? Nothing in our experience had shown us yet that the American dream was not for us. We, too, had great expectations. And then we went to school.

Patrolling

It was the spring of 1966. Still without a definite program, we were at the stage of testing ideas that would capture the imagination of the community. We began, as always, by checking around with the street brothers. We asked them if they would be interested in forming the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, which would be based upon defending the community against the aggression of the power structure, including the military and the armed might of the police. We informed the brothers of their right to possess weapons; most of them were interested. Then we talked about how the people are constantly intimidated by arrogant, belligerent police officers and exactly what we could do about it. We went to pool halls and bars, all the places where brothers congregate and talk.

I started rapping off the essential points for the survival of Black and oppressed people in the United States. Bobby [Seale] wrote them down and then we separated those ideas into two sections, "What We Want" and "What We Believe." We split them up because the ideas fell naturally into two distinct categories. It was necessary to explain why we wanted certain things. At the same time, our goals were based on beliefs, and we set those out, too. In the section on beliefs, we made it clear that all the objective conditions necessary for attaining our goals were already in existence, but that a number of societal factors stood in our way. This was to help the people understand what was working against them.

All in all, our ten-point program took about twenty minutes to write. Thinking it would take days, we were prepared for a long session, but we never got to the small mountain of books piled up around us. We had come to an important realization: books could only point in a general direction; the rest was up to us. This is the program we wrote down:

OCTOBER 1966

BLACK PANTHER PARTY PLATFORM AND PROGRAM

WHAT WE WANT WHAT WE BELIEVE

1. *We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.*
We believe that Black people will not be free until we are able to determine our destiny.
2. *We want full employment for our people.*
We believe that the federal government is responsible and obligated to give every man employment or a guaranteed income. We believe that if the white American businessmen will not give full employment, then the means of productions should be taken from businessmen and placed in the community so that the people of the community can organize and employ all of its people and give it a high standard of living.
3. *We want an end to the robbery by the capitalist of our Black community.*
We believe that this racist government has robbed us and now we are demanding the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules were promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass murder of Black people. We will accept the payment in

currency which will be distributed to our many communities. The Germans are now aiding the Jews in Israel for the genocide of the Jewish people. The Germans murdered six million Jews. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of over fifty million Black people; therefore, we feel that this is a modest demand that we make.

4. *We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.*
We believe that if the white landlords will not give decent housing to our Black community, then the housing and the land should be made into co-operatives so that our community, which government aid, can build and make decent housing for its people.
5. *We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.*
We believe in an education system that will give to our people a knowledge of self. If a man does not have knowledge of himself and his position in society and the world, then he has little chance to relate to anything else.
6. *We want all Black men to be exempt from military service.*
We believe that Black people should not be forced to fight in the military service to defend a racist government that does not protect us. We will not fight and kill other people of color in the world who, like Black people, are being victimized by the white racist government of America. We will protect ourselves from the force and violence of the racist police and the racist military, by whatever means necessary.
7. *We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of Black people.*
We believe we can end police brutality in our Black community by organizing Black self-defense groups that are dedicated to defending our Black community from racist police oppressions and brutality. The Second Amendment to the Constitution of the United States gives a right to bear arms. We therefore believe that all Black people should arm themselves for self-defense.
8. *We want freedom for all Black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.*
We believe that all Black people should be released from the many jails and prisons because they have not received a fair and impartial trial.
9. *We want all Black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their Black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.*
We believe that the courts should follow the United States Constitution so that Black people will receive fair trials. The Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives a man a right to be tried by his peer group. A peer is a person from a similar economic, social, religious, geographical, environmental, historical, and racial background. To do this the court will be forced to select a jury from the Black community from which the Black defendant came. We have been are being tried by all-white juries that have no understanding of the “average reasoning man” of the Black community.
10. *We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace. And as our major political objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the Black colony in which only Black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of Black people as to their national destiny.*
When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes

which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and, accordingly, all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right...³

The Defection of Eldridge and Reactionary Suicide

A revolutionary is under continual stress from both internal and external forces. By its very nature a political organization dedicated to social change invites attack from the established order, constantly vigilant to destroy it. This danger is taken for granted by the committed revolutionary. Indeed, oppression first shaped the spirit of resistance within him, and so it can neither defeat nor destroy his resolve. But he has two far greater enemies – the failure of vision and the loss the original revolutionary concept. Either of these can lead to alienation from those the revolutionary seeks to set free. Eldridge Cleaver was guilty of both.

When I came out of prison in August, 1970, the Party was in a shambles. This was understandable for a number of reasons: Bobby [Seale] and I had been off the streets and in jail for a long time, and it had been difficult to direct the Party on a day-to-day basis from prison cells. Then, too, the Party was harassed and beleaguered. Intelligence organizations throughout the country had become obsessed with the desire to destroy the Black Panther Party. Many of the brothers had been hunted down, imprisoned, or killed.

These external assaults were formidable. But there was a fair more serious reason for the Party's difficulties, one that threatened its very *raison d'être*: the Party was heading down the road to reactionary suicide. Under the influence of Eldridge Cleaver, it had lost sight of its initial purpose and became caught up in irrelevant causes. Estranged from Black people who could not relate to it, the Black Panther Party had defected from the community.

The Party was born in a particular time and place. It came into being with a call for self-defense against the police who patrolled our communities and brutalized us with impunity. Until then, there had been little resistance to the occupiers. We sought to provide a counter-force, a positive image of strong and unafraid Black men in the community. The emphasis on weapons was a necessary phase in our revolution, based on Frantz Fanon's contention that the people have to be shown that the colonizers and their agents – the police – are not bullet-proof. We saw this action as a bold step in making our program known and raising the consciousness of the people.

But we soon discovered that weapons and uniforms set us apart from the community. We were looked upon as an ad hoc military group, acting outside the community fabric and too radical to be a part of it. Perhaps some of our tactics at the time were extreme; perhaps we placed too much emphasis on military action. We saw ourselves as the revolutionary "vanguard" and did not fully understand then

³ We must undoubtedly criticize wrong ideas of every description. It certainly would not be right to refrain from criticism, look on while wrong ideas spread unchecked and allow them to monopolize the field. Mistakes must be criticized and poisonous weeds fought wherever they crop up. -- Chairman Mai, *Little Red Book*

that only the people can create the revolution. At any rate, for two or three years, our image in the community was intimidating. The people misunderstood us and did not follow our lead in picking up the gun. At the time, there was no clear solution to this dilemma. We were a young revolutionary group seeking answers and ways to alleviate racism. We had chosen to confront an evil head on and within the limits of the law. But perhaps our military strategy was too much of “a great leap forward.”

Nonetheless, I believe that the Black Panther approach in 1966 and 1967 was basically a good and necessary phase. Our military actions called attention to our program and our plans for the people. Our strategy brought us dedicated members, and it gained the respect of the struggling people of the Third World. Most important, it raised the consciousness of Black and white citizens about the relationship between police and minorities in this country. It is difficult to realize now how much police relations with the Black community have changed in six short years. Our communities are still not free from brutal incidents and corruption, but it is nonetheless true that police departments have become more sensitive to the problems of urban minorities. Today, it is the rare police commissioner who has not tried to establish some form of public relations between police and Blacks. The average citizen, too, has a greater awareness of police abuses that once were systematically overlooked. This advance in consciousness is due in large part to our military phase. Ho Chi Minh said that military tactics made public for military reasons are unsound, while military tactics made public for political reasons are perfectly correct. We have done as he said. Our military strategies are now known for political reasons.

But revolution is not an action; it is a process. Times change, and policies of the past are not necessarily effective in the present. Our military strategies were not frozen. As conditions changed, so did our tactics. Patrolling the community was only one step in our ten-point program and had never been regarded as the sole community endeavor of the Black Panther Party. As a matter of fact, the right to bear arms for protection appeared near the end of our program, as Point 7, and came only after those demands we considered far more urgent – freedom, employment, education, and housing. Our community programs – now called survival programs were of great importance from the beginning; we had always planned to become involved in Black people’s daily struggle for survival and sought only the means to serve the community’s needs.

But the Party was sabotaged from within and without. For years the Establishment media presented a sensational picture of us, emphasizing violence and weapons. Colossal events like Sacramento, the Ramparts confrontation. What appealed to him were force, firepower, and the intense moment when combatants stood at the brink of death. *For him, this was the revolution.* Eldridge’s ideology was based on the rhetoric of violence; his speeches abounded in either / or absolutes, like “Either pick up the gun or remain a sniveling coward.” He would not support the survival programs, refusing to see that they were a necessary part of the revolutionary process, a means of bringing the people closer to the transformation of society. He believed this transformation could take place only through violence, by picking up the gun and storming the barricades, and his obsessive belief alienated him more and more from the community. By refusing to abandon the position of destruction and despair, he underestimated the enemy and took on the role of the reactionary suicide.

Long before Eldridge’s actual defection from the Party he had taken the first steps of his journey into spiritual exile by failing to identify with the people. He shunned the political intimacy that human beings demand of their leaders. When he fled the country, his exile became a physical reality. Eldridge had cut himself off from the revolutionary’s greatest source of strength – unity with the people. A shared sense of purpose and ideals. His flight was a suicidal gesture, and his continuing

exile in Algeria is a symbol of his defection from the community on all levels – geographical, psychological, and spiritual.

From a dialectical point of view, something positive has arisen out of Eldridge's defection. While he and his followers still identify with aspects of the Party that once alienated us from the community, the Party has moved in a different direction. He has taken the media's image squarely upon his own shoulders. We are glad to be free of the burden. What little we lost in credibility we have gained in a wider acceptance of the Party by the community. We have reached a more advanced state. There has been a qualitative leap forward, a growth in consciousness.

Camus wrote that the revolutionary's "real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present." This, he says, grows out of an intense love for the earth, for our brothers, for justice. The Black Panther Party embraces this principle. By giving all to the present we reject fear, despair, and defeat. We work to repair the breaches of the past. We strive to carry out the revolutionary principle of transformation, and through long struggle, in Camus' words, "to remake the soul of our time."

EPILOGUE

I Am We

There is an old African saying, "I am we." If you met an African in ancient times and asked him who he was, he would reply, "I am we." This is revolutionary suicide: I, we, all of us are the one and the multitude.

So many of my comrades are gone now. Some tight partners, crime partners, and brothers off the block are begging on the street. Others are in asylum, penitentiary, or grave. They are all suicides of one kind or another who had the sensitivity and tragic imagination to see the oppression. Some overcame; they are the revolutionary suicides. Others were reactionary suicides who either overestimated or underestimated the enemy, but in any case were powerless to change their conception of the oppressor.

The different lies in hope and desire. By hoping and desiring, the revolutionary suicide chooses life; he is, in the worlds of Nietzsche, "an arrow of lounging for another short." Both suicides despise tyranny, but the revolutionary is both a greater despiser and a great adorer who longs for another shore. The reactionary suicide must learn, as his brother the revolutionary has learned, that the desert is not a circle. It is a spiral. When we have passed through the desert, nothing will be the same.

You cannot bare your throat to the murderer. As George Jackson said, you must defend yourself and take the dragon position as in karate and make the front kick and baby kick when you are surrounded. You do not beg because your enemy with the butcher knife in one hand and the hatchet in the other. "He will not become a Buddhist overnight."

The Preacher said that the wise man and the fool have the same end; they go to the grave as a dog. Who sends us to the grave? The unknowable, the force that dictates to all classes, all territories, all ideologies; he is death, the Big Boss, to free himself, to control when and how he will go to the grave.

There is another illuminating story of the wise man and the fool, found in Mao's *Little Red Book*: a foolish old man went to North Mountain and began to dig; a wise old man passed by and said, "Why do you dig, foolish old man? Do you not know that you cannot move the mountain with a little shovel? But the foolish old man answered resolutely, "While the mountain cannot get any higher, it

will get lower with each shovelful. When I pass on, my sons and his sons and his son's sons will go on making the mountain lower. Why can't we move the mountain? And the foolish old man kept digging, and the generations that followed after him, and the wise old man looked on in disgust. But the resoluteness and the spirit of the generations that followed the foolish old man touched God's heart, and God sent two angels who put the mountain on their backs and moved the mountain.

This is the story Mao told. When he spoke of God he meant the six hundred million who had helped him move imperialism and bourgeois thinking, the two great mountains.

The reactionary suicide is "wise," and the revolutionary suicide is a "fool," a fool for the revolution in the way that Paul meant when he spoke of being "a fool for Christ." That foolishness can move the mountain of oppression; it is our great leap and our commitment to the dead and the unborn.

We will touch God's heart; we will touch the people's heart, and together we will move the mountain.

A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood

A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood

'The message of the Black Movement was that any signs of aggressiveness or independence would mean I'd be denied, deserted.'



"I discovered my voice, and when brothers talked to me, I talked back. My social life was like guerrilla warfare."

VOICER: Fred W. McDarrah

Wallace, Michele. "A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood" *The Village Voice*, July 28, 1975: 6-7."

A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood (1975)

Michele Wallace

When I was in the third grade I wanted to be president. I can still remember the stricken look on my teacher's face when I announced it in class. By the time I was in the fourth grade I had decided to be the president's wife instead. It never occurred to me that I could be neither because I was Black. Growing up in a dreamy state of mind not uncommon to the offspring of the Black middle class, I was convinced that hatred was an insubstantial emotion and would certainly vanish before it could affect me. I had the world to choose from in planning a life.

On rainy days my sister and I used to tie the short end of a scarf around our scrawny braids and let the rest of its silken mass trail to our waists. We'd pretend it was hair and that we were some lovely heroine we'd seen in the movies. There was a time when I would have called that wanting to be white, yet the real point of the game was being feminine. Being feminine *meant* being white to us.

One day when I was thirteen on my bus ride home from school I caught a brief but enchanting glimpse of a beautiful creature – slender, honey brown, and she wore her hair natural. Very few people did then, which made her that much more striking. *This* was a look I could imitate with some success. The next day I went to school with my hair in an Afro.

On my way out of my building people stared and some complimented me, but others, the older permanent fixtures in the lobby, gaped at me in horror. Walking the streets of Harlem was even more difficult...In 1968 when I was sixteen and the term Black consciousness was becoming popular, I started wearing my hair natural again. This time I ignored my "elders." I was too busy reshaping my life. Blackness, I reasoned, meant that I could finally be myself. Besides recognizing my history of slavery and my African roots, I began a general housecleaning. All my old values, gathered from "playing house" in nursery school to *Glamour* magazine's beauty tips, were discarded.

No more makeup, high heels, stockings, garter belts, girdles. I wore T-shirts and dungarees, or loose African print dresses, sandals on my feet. My dust-covered motto, "Be a nice well-rounded colored girl so that you can get yourself a nice colored doctor husband," I threw out in the grounds that it was another remnant of my once "whitified" self. My mind clear now, I was starting to think about being someone again, not *something* – the presidency was still a dark horse but maybe I could be a writer. I dared not even say it aloud: my life was my own again. I thanked Malcolm and LeRoi – wasn't it their prescription that I was following?

It took me three years to fully understand that Stokely was serious when he'd said my position in the movement was "prone," three years to understand that the countless speeches that all began "the Black man..." did not include me. I learned. I mingled more and more with a Black crowd, attended the conferences and rallies and parties and talked with some of the most loquacious of my brothers in Blackness, and I as I pieced together the ideal that was being presented for me to emulate, I discovered my newfound freedom being stripped from me, one after another. No I wasn't to wear makeup but yes I had to wear long skirts that I could barely walk in. No I wasn't to go to the beauty parlor but yes I was to spend hours controlling my hair... No I wasn't to watch television or read *Vogue* or *Ladies' Home Journal* but yes I should keep my mouth shut. I would still have to iron, sew, cook, and have babies.

Only sixteen, I decided there were a lot of things I didn't know about Black male female relationships. I made an attempt to fill myself in by reading – *Soul on Ice*, *Native Son*, *Black Rage* – and by joining the National Black Theatre... So I was again obsessed with my appearance, worried about

the rain again – the Black woman’s nightmare – for fear that my huge, full Afro would shrivel up to my head. (Despite Blackness, Black men still didn’t like short hair.) My age was one thing I had going for me. “Older Black women are too hard,” my brothers informed me as they looked me up and down.

The message of the Black movement was that I was being watched, on probation as a Black woman, that any signs of aggressiveness, intelligence, or independence would mean I’d be denied even the one role still left open to me as “my man’s woman,” keeper of house, children, and incense burners. I grew increasingly desperate about slipping up – they, Black men, were threatening me with being deserted, with being *alone*. Like any “normal” woman, I eagerly grabbed at my own enslavement.

In 1968 I had wanted to become an intelligent human being. I had wanted to be serious and scholarly for the first time in my life, to write and perhaps get the chance Stokely and Baldwin and Imamu Baraka (then LeRoi Jones) had gotten to change the world – that was how I defined not wanting to be white. But by 1969, I simply wanted a man. When I chose to go to Howard University in 1969, it was because it was all Black. I envisioned a super-Black utopia where for the first time in life I would be completely surrounded by people who totally understood me. The problem in New York had been that there were too many white people.

Thirty pounds overweight, my hair in the ultimate Afro – washing and left to dry without combing – my skin blue-black from a summer in the sun. Howard’s students, the future polite society of NAACP cocktail parties, did not exactly greet me with open arms. I sought out a new clique each day and found a home in none. Finally I found a place of revelation, if not of happiness, with other misfits in the girls’ dorm on Friday and Saturday nights... When I first became a feminist, my Black friends used to cast pitying eyes and say, “That’s whitey’s thing.” I used to laugh it off, thinking, yes there are some slight problems, a few things white women don’t completely understand, but we can work them out. In *Ebony*, *Jet*, and *Encore*, and even in *The New York Times*, various Black writers cautioned Black women to be wary of smiling white feminists. The women’s movement enlists the support of Black women only to lend credibility to an essentially middle-class, irrelevant movement, they asserted. Time has shown that there was more truth to these claims than their shrillness indicated...

One unusually awkward moment for me as a Black feminist was when I found out that white feminists often don’t view Black men as men but as fellow victims. I’ve got no pressing quarrel with the notion that white men have been the worst offenders but that isn’t very helpful for a Black woman from day to day. White women don’t check out a white man’s bank account or stock-holdings before they accuse him of being sexist – they confront white men with and without jobs, with and without membership in a male consciousness-raising group. Yet when it comes to the Black man, it’s hands off...I started a Black women’s consciousness-raising group around the same time...Despite a sizable number of Black feminists who have contributed much to the leadership of the women’s movement, there is still no Black women’s movement, and it appears there won’t be for some time to come. It is conceivable that the level of consciousness feminism would demand in Black women wouldn’t lead to any sort of separatist movement, anyway – despite our very separate problems. Perhaps a multicultural women’s movement is somewhere in the future.

But for now, Black feminists, of necessity it seems, exist as individuals – some well-known, like Eleanor Holmes Norton, Florynce Kennedy, Faith Ringgold, Shirley Chisholm, Alice Walker, and some unknown, like me. We exist as women who are Black who are feminists, each stranded for the moment, working independently because there is not yet an environment in this society remotely congenial to our struggle – because, being on the bottom, we would have to do what no one else has done: we would have to fight the world.

A Black Feminist Statement

THE COMBAHEE RIVER COLLECTIVE

A Black Feminist Statement

We are a collective of black feminists who have been meeting together since 1974.¹ During that time we have been involved in the process of defining and clarifying our politics, while at the same time doing political work within our own group and in coalition with other progressive organizations and movements. The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As black women we see black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.

We will discuss four major topics in the paper that follows: (1) The genesis of contemporary black feminism; (2) what we believe, i.e., the specific province of our politics; (3) the problems in organizing black feminists, including a brief herstory of our collective; and (4) black feminist issues and practice.

1. The Genesis of Contemporary Black Feminism

Before looking at the recent development of black feminism, we would like to affirm that we find our origins in the historical reality of Afro-American women's continuous life-and-death struggle for survival and liberation. Black women's extremely

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Combahee River Collective. "A Black Feminist Statement." From Zillah R. Eisenstein (ed.). *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979.

A Black Feminist Statement (1977)
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1. The Genesis of Contemporary Black Feminism

Before looking at the recent development of Black feminism, we would like to affirm that we find our origins in the historical reality of Afro-American women's continuous life-and-death struggle for survival and liberation. Black women's extremely negative relationship to the American political system (a system of white male rule) has always been determined by our membership in two oppressed racial and sexual castes. As Angela Davis points out in "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," Black women have always embodied, if only in their physical manifestation, an adversary stance to white male rule and have actively resisted its inroads upon them and their communities in both dramatic and subtle ways. Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frances E.W. Harper, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell, and thousands upon thousands unknown – who had a shared awareness of how their sexual identity combined with their racial identity to make their whole life situation and the focus of their political struggles unique. Contemporary Black feminism is the outgrowth of countless generations of personal sacrifice, militancy, and work by our mothers and sisters.

A Black feminist presence has evolved most obviously in connection with a second wave of the American women's movement beginning in the late 1960s. Black, other Third World, and working women have been involved in the feminist movement from its start, but both outside reactionary forces and racism and elitism within the movement itself have served to obscure our participation. In 1973 Black feminists, primarily located in New York, felt the necessity of forming a separate Black feminist group. This became the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO).

Black feminist politics also have an obvious connection to movements for Black liberation, particularly those of the 1960s and 1970s. Many of us were active in those movements (civil rights, Black Nationalism, the Black Panthers), and all of our lives were greatly affected and changed by their ideology, their goals, and the tactics used to achieve their goals. It was our experience and disillusionment within these liberation movements, as well as experience on the periphery of the white male left, that led to the need to develop a politics that was antiracist, unlike those of white women, and antisexist, unlike those of Black and white men.

There is also undeniably a personal genesis for Black feminism, that is, the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual Black women's lives. Black feminists

and many more Black women who do not define themselves as feminists have all experienced sexual oppression as a constant factor in our day-to-day existence. As children we realized that we were different from boys and that we were treated differently – for example, when we were told in the same breath to be quiet both for the sake of being “ladylike” and to make us less objectionable in the eyes of white people...

Black feminists often talk about their feelings of craziness before becoming conscious of the concepts of sexual politics, patriarchal rule, and, most importantly, feminism, the political analysis and practice that we women use to struggle against our oppression. The fact that racial politics and indeed racism and pervasive factors in our lives did not allow us, and still does not allow most Black women, to look more deeply into our own experiences and define those things that make our lives what they are and our oppression specific to us. In the process of consciousness-raising, actually life-sharing, we began to recognize the commonality of our experiences and, from the sharing and growing consciousness, to build a politics that will change our lives and inevitably end our oppression.

Our development also must be tied to the contemporary economic and political position of Black people. The post-World War II generation of Black youth was the first to be able to minimally partake of certain education and employment options, previously closed completely to Black people. Although our economic position is still at the very bottom of the American capitalist economy, a handful of us have been able to gain certain tools as a result of tokenism in education and employment which potentially enable us to more effectively fight our oppression.

A combined antiracist and antisexist position drew us together initially and as we developed politically we address ourselves to heterosexism and economic oppression under capitalism.

2. What We Believe

Above all else, our politics initially sprang from the shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's but because of our need as human persons for autonomy. This may seem so obvious as to sound simplistic, but it is apparent that no other ostensibly progressive movement has ever considered our specific oppression a priority or worked seriously for the ending of that oppression. Merely naming the pejorative stereotypes attributed to Black women (e.g. mammy, matriarch, Sapphire, whore, bulldagger), let alone cataloguing the cruel, often murderous, treatment we receive, indicated how little value has been placed upon our lives during four centuries of bondage in the Western hemisphere. We realize that the only people who care enough about it to work consistently for our liberation is us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters, and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work.

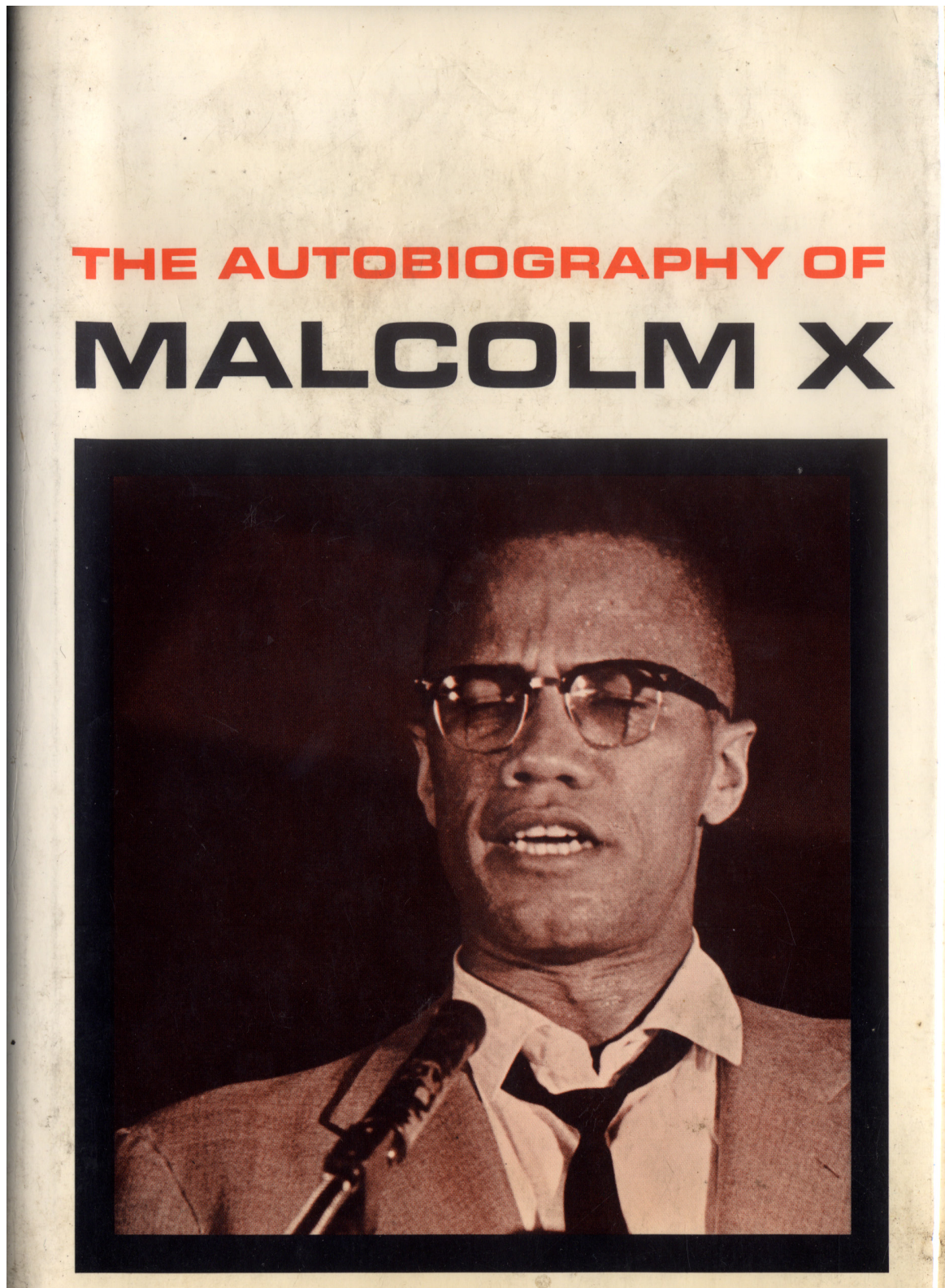
This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression. In the case of Black women this is a particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves. We reject pedestals, queen-hood, and walking ten paces behind. To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough... We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously.

Although we are feminists and lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism.

We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe that work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products and not for the profit of the bosses. Material resources must be equally distributed among those who create these resources. We are not convinced, however, that a socialist revolution that is not also a feminist and antiracist revolution will guarantee our liberation. We have arrived at the necessity for developing an understanding of class relationships that takes into account the specific class position of Black women who are generally marginal in the labor force, while at this particular time some of us are temporarily viewed as doubly desirable tokens at white-collar and professional levels. We need to articulate the real class situation of persons who are not merely raceless, sexless workers, but for whom racial and sexual oppression are significant determinants in their working economic lives. Although we are in essential agreement with Marx's theory as it applied to the very specific economic relationships he analyzed, we know that this analysis must be extended further in order for us to understand our specific economic situation as Black women.

A political contribution which we feel we have already made is the expansion of the feminist principle that the personal is political. In our consciousness-raising sessions, for example, we have in many ways gone beyond white women's revelations because we are dealing with the implications of race and class as well as sex. Even our Black women's style of talking, testifying in Black language about what we have experienced, has a resonance that is both cultural and political. We have spent a great deal of energy delving into the cultural and experiential nature of our oppression out of necessity because none of these matters have ever been looked at before. No one before has ever examined the multilayered texture of Black women's lives.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X



X, Malcolm, and Alex Haley. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965.
Amistad Research Center.

Excerpt from Chapter Nineteen, "1965"

I kept having all kinds of troubles trying to develop the kind of Black Nationalist organization I wanted to build for the American Negro. Why Black Nationalism? Well, in the competitive American society, how can there ever be any white-black solidarity before there is first some black solidarity? If you will remember, in my childhood I had been exposed to the Black Nationalist teachings of Marcus Garvey – which, in fact, I had been told had led to my father's murder. Even when I was a follower of Elijah Muhammad, I had been strongly aware of how the Black Nationalist political, economic and social philosophies had the ability to instill within black men the racial dignity, the incentive, and the confidence that the black race need today to get up off its knees, and to get on its feet, and get rid of its scars, and to take a stand for itself.

One of the major troubles that I was having in building the organization that I wanted – an all-black organization whose ultimate objective was to help create a society in which there could exist honest white-black brotherhood – was that my earlier public image, my old so-called "Black Muslim" image, kept blocking me. I was trying to gradually reshape that image. I was trying to turn a corner, into a new regard by the public, especially Negroes; I was no less angry than I had been, but at the same time the true brotherhood I had seen in the Holy World had influenced me to recognize that anger can blind human vision.

Every free moment I could find, I did a lot of talking to key people whom I knew around Harlem, and I made a lot of speeches, saying: "True Islam taught me that it takes *all* of the religious, political, economic, psychological, and racial ingredients, or characteristics, to make the Human Family and the Human Society complete.

"Since I learned the *truth* in Mecca, my dearest friends have come to include all kinds – some Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, agnostics, and even atheists! I have friends who are called capitalists, Socialists, and Communists! Some of my friends are moderates, conservatives, extremists – some are even Uncle Toms! My friends today are black, brown, red, yellow, and *white*!"

I said to Harlem street audiences that only when mankind would submit to the One God who created all – only then would mankind even approach the "peace" of which so much talk could be heard... but toward which so little action was seen.

I said that on the American racial level, we had to approach the black man's struggle against the white man's racism as a human problem, that we had to forget hypocritical politics and propaganda. I said that both races, as human beings, had the obligation, the responsibility, of helping to correct America's human problem. The well-meaning white people, I said, had to combat, actively and directly, the racism in other white people. And the black people had to build within themselves much greater awareness that along with equal rights there had to be the bearing of equal responsibilities.

I knew, better than most Negroes, how many white people truly wanted to see American racial problems solved. I knew that many whites were as frustrated as Negroes. I'll bet I got fifty letters some days from white people. The white people in meeting audiences would throng around me, asking me, after I had addressed them somewhere, "What *can* a sincere white person do?"

When I say that here now, it makes me think about that little co-ed I told you about, the only who flew from her New England college down to New York and came up to me in the Nation of Islam's restaurant in Harlem, and I told her that there was "nothing" she could do. I regret that I told

her that. I wish that now I knew her name, or where I could telephone her, or write to her, and tell her what I tell white people now when they present themselves as being sincere, and ask me, one way or another, the same thing that she asked.

The first thing I tell them is that at least where my own particular Black Nationalist organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity, is concerned, they can't *join* us. I have these very deep feelings that white people who want to join black organizations are really just taking the escapist way to salve their consciences. By visibly hovering near us, they are "proving" that they are "with us." But the hard truth is this isn't helping to solve America's racist problem. The Negroes aren't the racists. Where the really sincere white people have got to do their "proving" of themselves is not among the black *victims*, but out on the battle lines of where America's racism really *is* – and that's in their own home communities; America's racism is among their own fellow whites. That's where the sincere whites who really mean to accomplish something have got to work.

Aside from that, I mean nothing against any sincere whites when I say that as members of black organizations, generally whites' very presence subtly renders the black organization automatically less effective. Even the best white members will slow down the Negroes' discovery of what they need to do, and particularly of what they can do – for themselves, working by themselves, among their own kind, in their own communities.

I sure don't want to hurt anybody's feelings, but in fact I'll even go so far as to say that I never really trust the kind of white people who are always so anxious to hang around Negroes, or to hang around in Negro communities. I don't trust the kind of whites who love having Negroes always hanging around them. I don't know – this feeling may be a throwback to the years when I was hustling in Harlem and all of those red-faced, drunk whites in the after-hours clubs were always grabbing hold of some Negroes and talking about "I just want you to know you're just as good as I am –" And then they got back in their taxicabs and black limousines and went back downtown to the places where they lived and worked, where no blacks except servants had better get caught. But, anyway, I know that every time that whites join a black organization, you watch, pretty soon the blacks will be leaning on the whites to support it, and before you know it a black may be up front with a title, but the whites, because of their money, are the real controllers.

I tell sincere white people, "Work in conjunction with us – each of us working among our own kind." Let sincere white individuals find all other white people they can who feel as they do – and let them form their own all-white groups, to work trying to convert other white people who are thinking and acting so racist. Let sincere whites go and teach non-violence to white people!

We will completely respect our white co-workers. They will deserve every credit. We will give them every credit. We will meanwhile be working among our own kind, in our own black communities – showing and teaching black men in ways that only other black men can – that the black man has got to help himself. Working separately, the sincere white people and sincere black people actually will be working together.

In our mutual sincerity we might be able to show a road to the salvation of America's very soul. It can only be salvaged if human rights and dignity, in full, are extended to black men. Only such real, meaningful actions as those which are sincerely motivated from a deep sense of humanism and moral responsibility can get at the basic causes that produce the racial explosions in America today. Otherwise, the racism explosions are only going to grow worse. Certainly nothing is ever going to be solved by throwing upon me and other so-called black "extremists" and "demagogues" the blame for the racism that is in America.

Sometimes, I have dared to dream to myself that one day, history may even say that my voice – which disturbed the white man’s smugness, and his arrogance, and his complacency – that my voice helped to save America from a grave, possibly even a fatal catastrophe.

The goal has always been the same, with the approaches to it as different as mine and Dr. Martin Luther King’s non-violent marching, that dramatizes the brutality and the evil of the white man against defenseless blacks. And in the racial climate of this country today, it is anybody’s guess which of the “extremes” in approach to the black man’s problems might *personally* meet a fatal catastrophe first – “non-violent” Dr. King, or so-called “violent” me.

Anything I do today, I regard as urgent. No man is given but so much time to accomplish whatever in his life’s work. My life in particular never has stayed fixed in one position for very long. You have seen how throughout my life, I have often known unexpected drastic changes.

I am only facing the facts when I know that any moment of any day, or any night, could bring me death. This is particularly true since the last trip that I made abroad. I have seen the nature of things that are happening, and I have heard things from sources which are reliable.

To speculate about dying doesn’t disturb me as it might some people. I never have felt that I would live to become an old man. Even before I was a Muslim – when I was a hustler in the ghetto jungle, and then a criminal in prison, it always stayed on my mind that I would die a violent death. In fact, it runs in my family. My father and most of his brothers died by violence – my father because of what he believed in. To come right down to it, if I take the kind of things in which I believe, then add to that the kind of temperament that I have, plus the one hundred percent dedication I have to whatever I believe in – these are ingredients which make it just about impossible for me to die of old age.

I have given to this book so much of whatever time I have because I feel, and I hope, that if I honestly and fully tell my life’s account, read objectively it might prove to be a testimony of some social value.

I think that an objective reader may see how in the society to which I was exposed as a black youth here in America, for me to wind up in a prison was really just about inevitable. It happens to so many thousands of black youth.

I think that an objective reader may see how when I heard “The white man is the devil,” when I played back what had been my own experiences, it was inevitable that I would respond positively; then the next twelve years of my life were devoted and dedicated to propagating that phrase among the black people.

I think, I hope, that the objective reader, in following my life – the life of only one ghetto-created Negro – may gain a better picture and understanding than he has previously had of the black ghettos which are shaping the lives and the thinking of almost all of the 22 million Negroes who live in America.

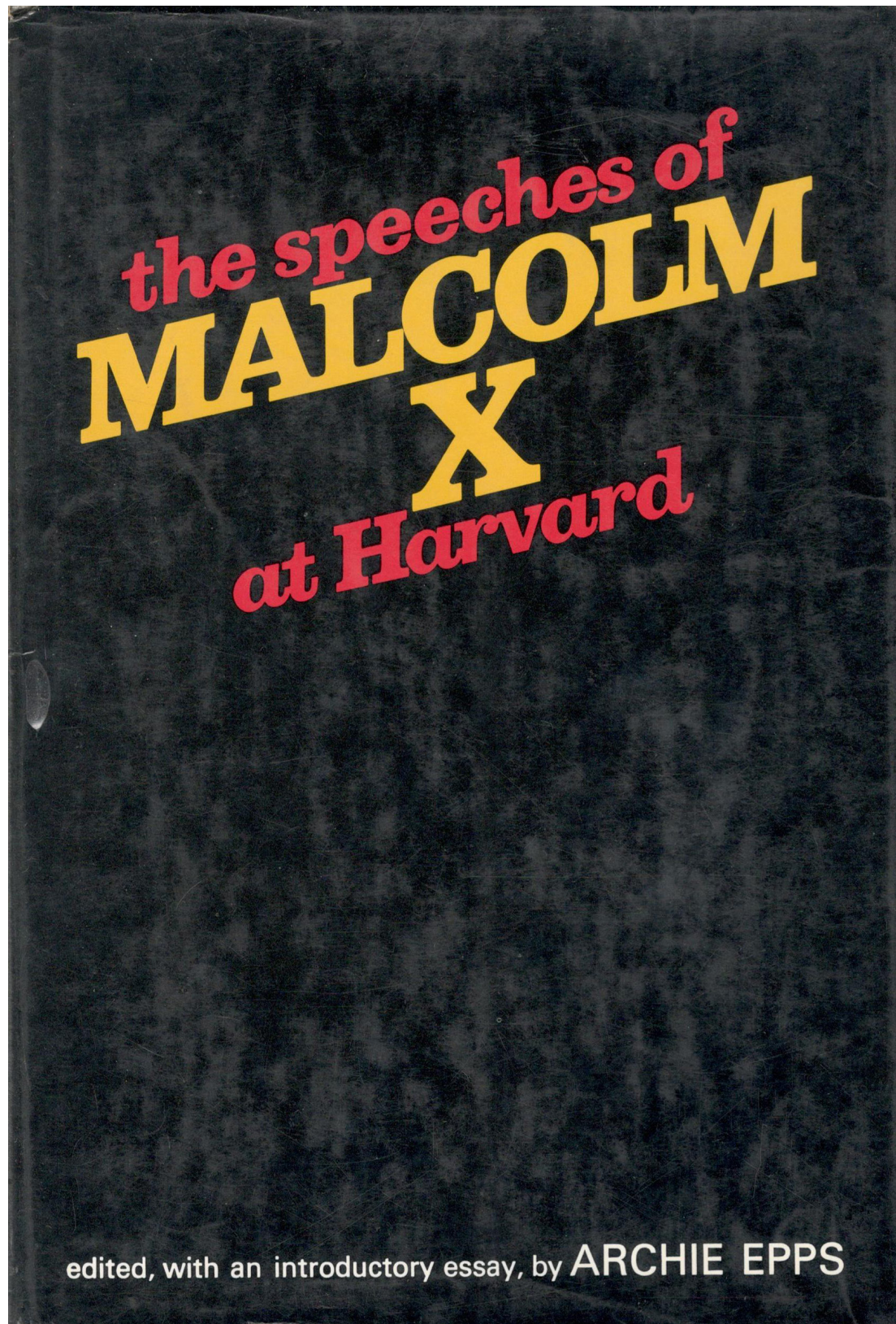
Thicker each year in these ghettos is the kind of teen-ager that I was – with the wrong kinds of heroes, and the wrong kinds of influences. I am not saying that all of them become the kind of parasite that I was. Fortunately, by far most do not. But still, the small fraction who do add up to an annual total of more and more costly, dangerous youthful criminals. The F.B.I. not long ago released a report of a shocking rise in crime each successive year since the end of World War II – ten to twelve percent each year. The report did not say so in so many words, but I am saying that the majority of

that crime increase is annually spawned in the black ghettos which the American racist society permits to exist. In the 1964 “long, hot summer” riots in major cities across the United States, the socially disinherited black ghetto youth were always at the forefront.

In this year, 1965, I am certain that more – and worse – riots are going to erupt, in yet more cities, in spite of the conscience-salving Civil Rights Bill. The reason is that the cause of these riots, the racist malignancy in America, has been too long unattended.

I believe that it would be almost impossible to find anywhere in America a black man who has lived further down in the mud of human society than I have; or a black man who has been any more ignorant than I have been; or a black man who has suffered more anguish during his life than I have. But it is only after the deepest darkness that the greatest light can come; it is only after extreme grief that the greatest joy can come; it is only after slavery and prison that the sweetest appreciation of freedom can come.

The Speeches of Malcolm X at Harvard



Epps, Archie (ed.). *The Speeches of Malcolm X at Harvard*.
New York: William Morrow & Company, 1968. Amistad Research Center.

The Leverett House Forum of March 18, 1964

Nineteen hundred sixty-four will probably be the most explosive year that America has yet witnessed on the racial front; primarily because the black people of this country during 1963 saw nothing but failure behind every effort they made to get what the country was supposedly on record for. Today the black people in the country have become frustrated, disenchanted, disillusioned and probably more set for action now than ever before—not the kind of action that has been set out for them in the past by some of their supposedly liberal white friends, but the kind of action that will get some kind of immediate results. As the moderator has pointed out, the time that we're living in now and that we are facing now is not an era where one who is oppressed is looking toward the oppressor to give him some system or form of logic or reason. What is logical to the oppressor isn't logical to the oppressed. And what is reason to the oppressor isn't reason to the oppressed. The black people in this country are beginning to realize that what sounds reasonable to those who exploit us doesn't sound reasonable to us. There just has to be a new system of reason and logic devised by us who are at the bottom, if we want to get some results in this struggle that is called "the Negro revolution."

Not only is it going to be an explosive year on the racial front it is going to be an explosive year on the political front. This year it will be impossible to separate one from the other. The politicking of the politicians in 1964 will probably do more to bring about racial explosion than any other factor, because this country has been under the rule of the politicians. When they want to get elected to office they come into the so-called Negro community, and after the politicians have gotten what they are looking for, they turn their back on the people of our community. This has happened time and time again. The only difference between then and now is that there is a different element in the community; whereas in the past the people of our community were patient and polite, long-suffering and willing to listen to what you call reason, 1964 has produced an element of people who are no longer willing to listen to what you call reason. As I said, what's reasonable to you has long since ceased to be reasonable to us. And it will be these false promises made by the politicians that will bring about the BOOM.

During the few moments that I have I hope that we can chat in an informal way, because I find that when you are discussing things that are very "touchy," sometimes it's best to be informal. And where white people are concerned, it has been my experience that they are extremely intelligent on most subjects until it comes to race. When you get to the racial issue in this country, the whites lose all their intelligence. They become very subjective, and they want to tell us how it should be solved. It's like Jesse James going to tell the Marshall how he should come after him for the crime that Jesse committed.

I am not a politician. I'm not even a student of politics. I'm not a Democrat. I'm not a Republican. I don't even consider myself an American. If I could consider myself an American, we wouldn't even have any problem. It would be solved. Many of you get indignant when you hear a black man stand up and say, "No, I'm not an American." I see whites who have the audacity, I should say the nerve, to think that a black man is radical and extremist, subversive and seditious if he says, "No, I'm not an American." But at the same time, these same whites have to admit that this man has a problem.

I don't come here tonight to speak to you as a Democrat or a Republican or an American or anything that *you* want me to be. I'm speaking as what I am: one of twenty-two million black people in this country who are victims of your democratic system. They're the victims of the Democratic politicians, the victims of the Republican politicians. They're actually the victims of what you call democracy. So I stand here tonight speaking as a victim of what you call democracy. And you can understand what I'm saying if you realize it's being said through the mouth of a victim; the mouth of one of the oppressed, not through the mouth and eyes of the oppressor. But if you think we're sitting

in the same chair or standing on the same platform, then you won't understand what I'm talking about. You'd expect me to stand up here and say what you would say if you were standing up here. And I'd have to be out of my mind.

Whenever one is viewing this political system through the eyes of a victim, he sees something different. But today these twenty-two million black people who are the victims of American democracy, whether you realize it or not, are viewing your democracy with new eyes. Yesterday our people used to look upon the American system as an American dream. But the black people today are beginning to realize that it is an American nightmare. What is a dream to you is a nightmare to us. What is hope to you has long since become hopeless to our people. And as this attitude develops, not so much on Sugar Hill [in Harlem]—although it's there too—but in the ghetto, in the alley where the masses of our people live...there you have a new situation on your hands. There's a new political consciousness developing among our people in this country. In the past, we weren't conscious of the political maneuvering that goes on in this country, which exploits our people politically. We knew something was wrong, but we weren't conscious of what it was. Today there's a tendency on the part of this new generation of black people (who have been born and are growing up in this country) to look at the thing not as they wish it were, but as it actually is. And their ability to look at the situation as it is, is what is primarily responsible for the ever-increasing sense of frustration and hopelessness that exists in the so-called Negro community today.

Besides becoming politically conscious, you'll find that our people are also becoming more aware of the strategic position that they occupy politically. In the past, they weren't. Just the right to vote was considered something. But today the so-called Negroes are beginning to realize that they occupy a very strategic position. They realize what the new trends are and all of the new political tendencies.

...

Many of you have probably just recently read that I am no longer an active member in the Nation of Islam, although I am myself still a Muslim. My religion is still Islam, and I still credit the Honorable Elijah Muhammad with being responsible for everything I know and everything that I am. In New York we have recently founded the Muslim Mosque, Incorporated, which has as its base the religion of Islam, the religion of Islam because we have found that this religion creates more unity among our people than any other type of philosophy can do. At the same time, the religion of Islam is more successful in eliminating the vices that exist in the so-called Negro community, which destroy the moral fiber of the so-called Negro community.

So with this religious base, the difference between the Muslim Mosque, Incorporated, and the Nation of Islam is probably this: We have as our political philosophy, Black Nationalism; as our economic philosophy, Black Nationalism; and as our social philosophy, Black Nationalism. We believe that the religion of Islam combined with Black Nationalism is all that is needed to solve the problem that exists in the so-called Negro community. Why?

The only real solution to our problem, just as the Honorable Elijah Muhammad has taught us, is to go back to our homeland and to live among our own people and develop it so we'll have an independent nation of our own. I still believe this. But that is a long-range program. And while our people are getting set to go back home, we have to live here in the meantime. So in the Honorable Elijah Muhammad's long-range program, there's also a short-range program: the political philosophy which teaches us that the black man should control the politics of his own community. When the black man controls the politics and the politicians in his own community, he can then make them produce what is good for the community. For when a politician in the so-called Negro community

is controlled by a political machine outside, seldom will that politician ever do what is necessary to bring up the standard of living or to solve the problems that exist in that community. So our political philosophy is designed to bring together the so-called Negroes and to re-educate them to the importance of politics in concrete betterment, so that they may know what they should be getting from their politicians in addition to a promise. Once the political control of the so-called Negro community is in the hands of the so-called Negro, then it is possible for us to do something towards correcting the evils and the ills that exist there.

Our economic philosophy of Black Nationalism means that instead of our spending the rest of our lives begging the white man for a job, our people should be re-educated to the science of economics and the part that it plays in our community. We should be taught just the basic fundamentals: that whenever you take money out of the neighborhood and spend it in another neighborhood, the neighborhood in which you spend it gets richer and richer, and the neighborhood from which you take it gets poorer and poorer. This creates a ghetto, as now exists in every so-called Negro community in this country. If the Negro isn't spending his money downtown with what we call "the man," "the man" is himself right in the Negro community. All the stores are run by the white man, who takes the money out of the community as soon as the sun sets. We have to teach our people the importance of where to spend their dollars and the importance of establishing and owning businesses. Thereby we can create employment for ourselves, instead of having to wait to boycott your stores and businesses to demand that you give us a job. Whenever the majority of our people begin to think along such lines, you'll find that we ourselves can best solve our problems. Instead of having to wait for someone to come out of your neighborhood into our neighborhood to tackle these problems for us, we ourselves may solve them.

The social philosophy of Black Nationalism says that we must eliminate the vices and evils that exist in our society, and that we must stress the cultural roots of our forefathers, that will lend dignity and make the black man cease to be ashamed of himself. We have to teach our people something about our cultural roots. We have to teach them something of their glorious civilizations before they were kidnapped by your grandfathers and brought over to this country. Once our people are taught about the glorious civilization that existed on the African continent, they won't any longer be ashamed of who they are. We will reach back and link ourselves to those roots, and this will make the feeling of dignity come into us; we will feel that as we lived in times gone by, we can in like manner today. If we had civilizations, cultures, societies, and nations hundreds of years ago, before you came and kidnapped us and brought us here, so we can have the same today. The restoration of our cultural roots and history will restore dignity to the black people in this country. Then we shall be satisfied in our own social circles; then we won't be trying to force ourselves into your social circles. So the social philosophy of Black Nationalism doesn't in any way involved any anti-anything. However, it does restore to the man who is being taunted his own self-respect. And the day that we are successful in making the black man respect himself as much as he now admires you, he will no longer be breathing down your neck every time you go buy a house somewhere to get away from him.

That is the political, social, and economic philosophy of Black Nationalism, and in order to bring it about, the program that we have in the Muslim Mosque, Incorporated, places an accent on youth. We are issuing a call for students across the country, from coast to coast, to launch a new study of the problem—not a study that is in any way guided or influenced by adults, but a study of their own. Thus we can get a new analysis of the problem, a more realistic analysis. After this new study and more realistic analysis, we are going to ask those same students (by students I mean young people, who having less of a stake to lose, are more flexible and can be more objective) for a new approach to the problem.

Already we have begun to get responses from so-called Negro students from coast to coast, who aren't actually religiously inclined, but who are nonetheless strongly sympathetic to the approach used by Black Nationalism, whether it be social, economic, or political. And with this new approach and with these new ideas we think that we may open up a new era here in the country. As that era begins to spread, people in this country—instead of sticking under your nose or crying for civil rights—will begin to expand their civil rights plea to the plea for human rights. And once the so-called Negro in this country forgets the whole civil rights issue and begins to realize that human rights are far more important and broad than civil rights, he won't be going to Washington, D.C., anymore, to beg Uncle Sam for civil rights. He will take his plea for human right to the United Nations. There won't be a violation of civil rights anymore. It will be a violation of human rights. Now at this moment, the governments that are in the United Nations can't step in, can't involve themselves with America's domestic policy. But the day the black man turns from civil rights to human rights, he will take his case into the halls of the United Nations in the same manner as the people in Angola, whose human rights have been violated by the Portuguese in South Africa.

You'll find that you are entering an era now where the black man in this country has ceased to think domestically, or within the bounds of the United States, and he's beginning to see that this is a world-wide issue and that he needs help from outside. We need help from our brothers in Africa who have won their independence. And when we begin to show them our thinking has expanded to an international scale, they will step in and help us, and you'll find that Uncle Sam will be in a most embarrassing position. So the only way Uncle Sam can stop us is to get some civil rights passed—right now! For if he can't take care of his domestic dirt, it's going to be put before the eyes of the world. Then you'll find that you'll have nobody on your side, whatsoever, other than, perhaps, a few of those Uncle Toms—and they've already out-lived their time...

The Amistad Research Center's History

The Amistad Research Center was established by the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries at Fisk University in 1966 to house the historical records of the American Missionary Association. In 1969, Amistad became an independent non-profit organization, and the following year, it relocated to New Orleans. The Center was housed at various institutions before finding its permanent location on the campus of Tulane University, where the Center has resided since 1987.

From its beginnings as the first archives documenting the modern civil rights movement, Amistad has experienced considerable expansion and its mission continues to evolve. The history of slavery, race relations, ethnic communities, and the social justice movements have received new and thought-provoking interpretations as the result of scholarly and community research using Amistad's resources. The holdings include the papers of artists, educators, authors, business leaders, clergy, lawyers, factory workers, farmers and musicians. At Amistad, you will find more than 800 collections, including 15 million original manuscripts and rare documents, 250,000 photographs, 25,000+ books, periodicals, and newspapers; 8000+ sound recordings and moving images, and 400 works of art.

Mission

The Amistad Research Center is committed to collecting, preserving, and providing open access to original materials that reference the social and cultural importance of America's ethnic and racial history, the African Diaspora, human relations, and civil rights.



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