



liberation



will come



from a black thing

BY JAMES FORMAN

INTRODUCTION

Spurred by the intense rebellions of 1967, black people were groping with ways to heighten their struggle during the fall months of that year. As is the case today, there was much confusion then concerning the nature of the movement for black liberation. Many leading spokesmen continued to argue that the only problem which black people faced was a racial one. Others were denying the historical basis of the black liberation struggle, stating that until the advent of Black Power, black people had docilely accepted their oppression in the United States.

By November, 1967, Brother Forman decided that his correct ideological positions and beliefs had to be given a broad base in the black community, as opposed to merely being confined within the internal ranks of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

LIBERATION WILL COME FROM A BLACK THING

The only correct way to discuss those words is from a historical context. Too often we look at an event, a situation, a slogan, a life history, a rebellion, a revolution and assume that its present characteristics have always been its past. For instance, in Vietnam we see a heroic struggle occurring where the Vietnamese people are using revolutionary armed force to repel their aggressors. Sometimes we fail to understand that the South Vietnamese had a policy of self-defense for at least four years - from 1955 to 1960 - before they engaged in offensive armed struggle to liberate their country from the repression of the Diem regime and its United States backers. When the student movement started in February, 1960, many of the activists thought they had begun the black revolution. Many of us failed to understand the historical conditions which produced us and the actions we were taking against segregation in this country, especially, the deep South.

While it is beyond the limits of my time to go into a long discussion of the history of our people, it is absolutely essential to see our history as one of resistance. Our ancestors began to resist the enforced slavery long before they left the shores of Africa. Those of our brothers who sold their kinship into slavery found that there was resistance in the interior of Africa and willingly board slave ships that brought our forefathers to this alien land. They resisted in Africa.

They resisted the moment they were wrenched from the shores of Africa.

They resisted on the high seas.

They resisted in Virginia, Texas, Mississippi, South Carolina, whenever they were forced to work as slaves building the so-called great white civilization of the United States and the Western World.

We resist today!

We must continue at every step of the ladder of our liberation to view those previous rungs as battles for which we fought, as "battles" for which we paid dearly in our blood, sacrifice and toil, as battles which we could not win unless those below were willing to resist dead though they may be, unknown, unsung, many of those names no one knew. But they resisted and they died in the liberation struggle.

Those of us whose lives are obligated to keep the unknown martyrs before our consciousness and to dedicate ourselves to more resistance until there are no more rungs of resistance, no more ladders of resistance, but only the ravines, the field, the mountains, the inner cities and streets of revolution.

The opposite of resistance is accomodation. It is certainly true to day that many of our people are accomodating themselves to the system of capitalism in which we live. Personally, I do not view much of the history of our people as accomodation. There may have been a few who accomodated themselves to slavery, a few informers here and there. Even the period of Reconstruction, that of the twentieth century, in the efforts of the Niagara movement, the Garvey movement, and most of the actions of the civil rights movement must be seen, from my viewpoint, the history of a people who were and are resisting a form of neo-slavery that existed after the so-called Emancipation Proclamation.

It is true that much of the visible leadership in the past has often been characterized as accomodating leadership, but I am not discussing just the visible leadership. Leaving aside judgements on certain visible symbols of leadership, I am talking about the masses of our people who have never accomodated themselves to the United States.

And it is among the masses that our youth must work.

Only from the masses of Black people will there come revolutionary leadership, a leadership that will not accomodate itself, that will continue to resist as our ancestors resisted, a leadership that will not mind dying for independence and freedom not only of blacks but for all oppressed.

For those of us who consider ourselves freedom fighters it is imperative that we view our history in this manner, a history of resistance, not of accomodation. It is imperative that we realize that our culture and our people have been able to resist to survive and to make it possible for us to deal more death blows to our oppressors.

Why have I devoted so much time to interpreting our history as one of resistance? There are several reasons. First, I assume all of us have certain factual knowledge of our history and those of us who do not will soon acquire that. But I am convinced that many of us have not interpreted those facts correctly. Certainly my interpretation is open to debate, a debate in which I am prepared to engage, and defend. Secondly, I am convinced that a faulty interpretation of our history is often damaging to our cause. For instance, Johnny Wilson, a member of S.N.C.C. recently attended a conference in Czechoslovakia where there were many representatives of National Liberation Front and the government of the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam. The Vietnamese "assembled there", people who are fighting and dying daily by the hundreds for their freedom, asked the American representatives to sing the song, "We Shall Overcome." They stated that they had sung the song often, for it gave them inspiration and much hope. One of the brothers from Newark attending the conference who may or may not have participated actively in the rebellion, jumped up and said: "No. We don't sing that song. The people who sang

that song were crazy. They were nonviolent and we ain't." The Vietnamese were stunned. They are not crazy for singing it and I do not think all of us who sang it were crazy. People do not sing it today for many reasons. But the brother from Newark was only in Prague because there was a historical relationship between his presence there and the manner in which he got there. I am well aware that my presence here is due to many factors but if it had not been for the people who sang "We Shall Overcome" there is no question in my mind that I would not be here today.

To view our history as one of resistance is to recognize more clearly the colonial relationship that we have with the United States. Traditionally, when one thinks of colonialism images of foreign powers occupying another land and subjecting its people are the kinds of mental pictures we form. But our colonial status is unique in that we are the descendants of people enslaved and transplanted into a colonial status. The rhetoric, the false claims, the meaningless phrases, all these try to tell us that we are citizens. We are Americans. I will not dwell on the absurdity of that, for we all know too well that the internal rebellions in this country, led by Watts, would not occur if in fact that was the case.

The serious conditions in which we find ourselves as a people demands that we begin talking more of the colonized and the colonizer. If we begin to use, those terms more and to describe their inner workings, especially the economic base on which colonialism is founded and the industrial military complex of Western countries which sustain it, we shall definitely advance the cause of our liberation. Any colonized people are exploited people. But all exploited people are not colonized. That is to say, we can have in certain situations, as we do in many countries around the world, people exploited because of their class positions in society. Within the United States there are many exploited whites, but they are not colonized. In most instances they form a part of the colonizing class. That is to say, we have in certain situations, as we do in many countries around the world, people exploited because of their class positions in society. When Fanon says we must stretch a Marxist analysis when we look at colonial situations, he is referring to this condition, even though he didn't explain it. Here is my contribution to theory.

Unless my historical understanding is incorrect, the colonial relationships since the fifteenth century have all involved white Europeans and their American white descendants colonizing the darker people of the world. Therefore race is intimately involved in the colonizing experience. My own experience in various situations with my brothers and sisters have led me to conclude that it is necessary to view ourselves in these terms, the colonized and the colonizer, if we are not to fall into the trap of seeing the cause of our problems as merely skin causes, black skin versus white skin. A purely skin analysis of the cause and continuing responsibility for our condition is not only theoretically incorrect but because it is

theoretically incorrect, it will lead to some serious mistakes in programming.

When we view our colonial situation in the United States, it is easy, it is emotionally satisfying at times, and it may be the first step in nationalism, which we must promote to view the cause as solely of skin. But if our analysis remains there and if we do not work to broaden our understanding, we are headed for a trick, a frustrating pit of despair.

A purely skin analysis for instance makes it very difficult to guard against reactionary nationalism. For instance, Dr. Hastings Banda of Malawi would undoubtedly and without question tell you that he is an African nationalist. A man with black skin, yet he visits Taiwan, tells us the United States is right for fighting in Vietnam, and is willing to open diplomatic relations with South Africa.

There is an aspect of our colonial experience, however which we often fail to examine, to look at, to determine its meaning for today and tomorrow, and which may help to shed light on the skin analysis. Hence, too often we overlook that our enslavement involved a duality - an alliance by some of our African ancestors with white slavers. The ruling class of many African territories and nations, the African visitors in many skirmishes and wars with other Africans cooperated with the white ruling class and their merchants to get us to this country. This examination should in no way imply that I do not place the greatest burden upon Western Civilization for our enslavement, but I do not think it does much good to overlook that many Africans were willing to make a profit off of our bodies.

Today in many instances we see similiar situations - exploitation of blacks by blacks, especially in parts of Africa, and I could call a list of countries, and here in the United States. This exploitation has its own historical roots and any effective programming which we will do in the future must be aware of this current fact from its historical and class basis. A more profound analysis of this problem, the cooperation of the ruling class Africans with the slaving white merchants, has been made by a young historian, Walter Rodney, whom we met in Tanzania.

Brothers and Sisters, bold analysis of the last six or seven paragraphs of this paper places into sharp focus three ways of looking at the fundamental causes of our problems: One, we can take the position that says we are exploited solely because of our skin color. This I call skin analysis. Two, we can take a second position that says our exploitation is solely due to our class position in this society. This I call exclusive class analysis. We can take a third position that says that our exploitation results both from class positions as well as from our race. Given all that I said, it is obvious that I hold to the third position.

The absolute necessity for me to raise this as a discussion item arises from my own experience within the movement. Once during a discussion with one of my brothers, I used the word Marxism. He jumped up and pounded on the table and yelled: "But Motherfucker, Marx was not black. He was not black, do you hear! He was a white writer."

Just recently we have come through some painful discussions in the New York area and we have seen some very deep tensions in the black community resulting from conflicts on this issue. And this is very important because one brother was kidnaped based on this issue and three other brothers had to go get him and they almost got killed in the process of doing it, so that the situation is very pressing on my consciousness. For instance, the march on the Pentagon was advertised in the Inner City Voice, a revolutionary journal that started in Detroit after the rebellion. This journal called upon blacks to join the confrontation at the Pentagon. In the meantime, there had been all sorts of discussion among some black militants on the East coast about what should be the relationship of black militants to the March. The brothers and sisters from Detroit did not know about these conflicts and therefore came to Washington to participate in the demonstration. They wanted the National Liberation Front, so they said, to know that there were blacks opposed to the war and who were ready to confront the imperialist war makers.

However, at the march they were torn asunder because there were brothers and sisters who began to say: Black people are not relating to that thing. That's a white thing. And one so-called spokesman for a Black power Committee said: black people are interested in their communities. And I'm still quoting him. The whites started this war so let them end it. We're tired of marching. We're headed for a black thing and that thing don't include marching on the Pentagon. We're concerned this Black power spokesman said, about the cutbacks in the poverty program. We want jobs and better communities.

Within SNICK today, we are discussing revolutionary black power as opposed to reactionary black power, for we have seen instances where conservative forces have tried to explain away or excuse the revolutionary aspect of Black Power. But an understanding of what is meant by revolutionary Black Power hinges upon how one sees the fundamental causes of our condition today. Resulting from this analysis will flow many things and many decisions and many ways of solving our problem.

Within the concept of the colonized we must begin to speak more of the dispossessed, those who do not have. This is important for it determines where alliances are made. The dispossessed unite with the dispossessed. It must be clearly understood that the nature of the colonial experience is that racism is inherent in all its manifestations, even though the dispossessed unite with the dispossessed or even if the exploiters who are responsible for the colonizing are kicked out, the legacy of racism and remnants of the colonial experience remain and

must be uprooted. The Chinese are saying in part through their cultural revolution that even though one eliminates the structural forms of capitalism, there are capitalistic ideas and thoughts that still remain and must be combatted.

As Chairman H. Rap Brown stated to the Black Caucus at the National Conference on New Politics, the dispossessed in the United States are the people of African descent, the Puerto Ricans, the Mexican Americans, and many poor whites. We are the vanguard of that group because of our historical oppression and racism inherent in it. Whether we live up to our historical role and lead forward that revolution remains to be seen.

It is our job to go forth from this conference using whatever means necessary to liberate ourselves and other oppressed people, not only in the United States but throughout the world. In order to do this we must wage an unrelenting struggle against racism and exploitation of man. We must work, not for ourselves but for the unborn generations that will carry humanity and our people to new heights, to a world without racism, to a world of no more resistance, but only a community of concern. For this world, we must be prepared to fight and to die. And we must believe that we will win. We must believe that our fight and our deaths are not in vain.

How do we organize and what do we organize? As of one year ago, within SNICK, we have called for the formation of all-inclusive political units, independent of the Democratic and Republican parties. We have called for the formation of the Freedom Organizations. You can choose any name so long as it is an independent political organization that will service the needs, the total needs of the people. These organizations must build within themselves committees to deal with the economic, political, social, cultural, education and welfare needs of the people. They must have youth organizations, and it is up to us, those of us with the commitment to total change, with energy and time to go to the masses and organize them to do this work. One may well speak of revolution, but unless there is day to day, block to block, city to city and nationwide organizing there can be no fundamental changes in our lives. Those of us who consider ourselves politically hep, those of us who feel we have a consciousness, those of us who are prepared to take care of business - must recognize that unless there is mass participation by black people in efforts to bring about revolution, then that revolution will not occur, no matter how long we talk about it, Rhetoric is not a substitute for work.

In fact, brothers and sisters, I do not mean to sound pretentious or presumptuous, or to degrade anyone's effort - but the reality is that there are so few people willing to do work among the masses of the people. That is why this conference is very important and we should all thank the organizers, for they have been willing to work, willing to mimeograph, to arrange meetings, to stay up late in order to organize. Blueprints for revolution have been around for a long time. And everyone that

I have read has stressed the importance of active political organization. And in fact, man, you got to work in order to do any of that.

We are distributing at this conference a pamphlet prepared for a programmatic workshop of SNCC, entitled, "Don't Shut me Out", or How to Become a Good Political Organizer, selling for 50 cents. The pamphlet is not perfect, nothing is. But there are some valuable suggestions in that pamphlet that may help you in your work. I repeat and I speak out of experience. There is much to do and few to do it. We must work, work, work.

And as we work in the inner cities and in the rural areas we must be prepared to guard against the sabotaging of our work, the infiltration of our cadres by the FBI and the CIA and local police agents. We must not allow the McClellan Committee, the Eastland Committee, the House Un-American Activities Committee to isolate SNCC, to destroy the Panthers, to arrest and imprison other militants because the man is afraid of RAM. We have to build visible defense committees and link all the militants in some confederation so that it will be more difficult to isolate and destroy any of us. Inner City newspapers must be established to provide alternative methods of communication, for all of us know that the man is not going to print anything but negative news of our movement.

Finally, we must protect our brothers and sisters and even as I say this there are some brothers in jail about whom there is not much active concern because we have allowed our own internal contradictions to divide us. This brother may not have done that the way some brothers would have done it. Therefore, he is left isolated. And to the degree that this occurs all of us stand to be destroyed. Granted that the forward thrust of the movement cannot be stopped, it can be halted and set back. Time and energy, the two most important assets we have can be uselessly spent if we are not immediately responsive to a crisis or even to take legal action in behalf of brothers that are arrested. This last point cannot be overstressed, for the man is picking up brothers all over the country and sometimes there is no response to their arrest. This is not the case with respect to visible symbols of leadership. Stokely Carmichael, Rap Brown and so forth and so on and maybe even myself. It must also be true for the man behind the mimeograph sheet or the one who is taking care of business. In other words we have to work to eliminate the class bias that is often apparent in many of our organizations and efforts.

And now brothers and sisters I must depart from the written script. I had some other notes but they are not here. As I said I am very tired and I have had to read this paper because I do not trust myself, my ability to be very coherent without leaning on the paper. I repeat it is very important that we begin to write down our thoughts. We must get away from the oral tradition. It is extremely hard to pass on to future generations ideas and information if it is all in the oral tradition. For six years as I served as the Executive Secretary, I would make speeches and none of them would be written. That means if something had happened to me, if I had been an-

nihilated in battle; then whatever ideas I may have had would not have been transmitted for they would have been lost. That is the problem with the Period of Reconstruction in our history. There were many strong black cats who were sheriffs and who were other lawmakers; but there is not much, if anything written by them; nothing that we can read and many of them could write. But as a people we have the oral tradition and they employed that; but for the future generation we must write. We must write from our own experience, for only we have all the insights into what we mean.

However, now I want to discuss about five points, or several things that we must do to counteract possible reactions and attempts to destroy us by the man. The first thing we must do is to stop all this loose talk, to keep our mouths shut. Because cats are sitting around doing loose talk and the man is gathering information and intelligence. The man is piecing together all this loose talk and making up conspiracy charges and what have you. This very well may have been what happened in New York because there were police informers involved in the charges. I don't know, but certainly they were framed.

I know this is what happened with the Statue of Liberty case because Policeman Woods was the man who conceived of the idea; pushed the brothers into it by making them feel guilty because they weren't militant enough; arranged for the dynamite; took a brother to pick it up and then testified against them in court. The result was they served three and one-half years and Woods is still free. That is a fact and you'd better read about the Statue of Liberty case before you go out every night talking about the revolution with any and everyone. The second thing deals with these research programs. I have been gathering some intelligence on them and I have discovered in one city, Detroit, that three researchers with some money talked to over 250 brothers who discussed details of the rebellion, plans and stages for future activity. The researchers have taken the material back to the foundation. What do you think that it has done with it? Obviously the man has it. This has happened all over this country. Immediately during and after the rebellion you see brothers talking to television cameras saying what they're going to do soon as the National Guard pulls out. They are just selling wolf tickets and giving out information on themselves. The man has an intelligence file on everybody. And he has gotten that information in part because we have been running off at the mouths cooperating with some research project about a rebellion. You don't make a rebellion and describe it until after its all over. The third question deals with rumor mongering. For the last two or three weeks I've gotten telephone calls with people saying that this person or that person is "the man" and when I check it out, there doesn't seem to be much basis in fact for the kinds of rumors that are spreading. Such evidence as "this chick looks funny or she talks funny." I am not saying that there are not informers. There are enough FBI and CIA agents, even in this room, that we don't know about. We do not need to make the situation worse by spreading rumors that have no foundation based on facts and reality. One must check out these things

before fingering a person.

What is the danger of rumor spreading? The danger is that the man uses this as a devisive technique. He puts the finger on cats. He wants to create suspicion; he wants to divide and conquer; he wants to put the finger on cats by spreading ill-founded rumors. This has happened all over Africa. Liberation fighters have had to combat suspicions placed on them by the finger of the man. And if we give in to this type of rumor mongering, we are contributing to that type of activity. We cannot expect favourable coverage of our activities. We must have our own papers. The fifth thing which is extremely important deals with splitting activities. As Brother Snelling said, "Everybody's black." Blackness is granted; it may not be sufficient, but certainly it is granted. But the reality is that the man is wearing Afros today; he is wearing dashikis. You dig it? He's wearing them. I've seen them in crowds. When we were in Philadelphia on the so-called dynamite frame-up case, a cop, of whom we were suspicious and had not seen for weeks, came around in a dashiki and a turban identifying with the masses. The brothers easily identify with me because I'm wearing a buba, the other brother is over there clean and taking care of business. See, we're in a trick. We have to watch out for this kind of activity because it is happening all over. That is why the man has so much intelligence in Harlem, because he has gone in there on that kind of basis and he's doing it everywhere else and we have to watch out.

The kidnaping in Washington was supposed to have happened because the brother wasn't black enough and some of the same people involved in the kidnaping put out a newspaper charging that there was an internal Communist conspiracy to kill black people at the demonstration at the Pentagon. It was admitted in the newsletter that there had been conversations with the police department, admitting there had been discussions about how this organization could keep down a rebellion in D.C. Also in the newsletter there were words to the effect that Robert Williams, Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown were associating with governments that bring repression on black people in the United States. And yet this organization called itself the Black Man's Volunteer Liberation Army. I am not even saying that those who put out that newsletter were the man. Maybe they didn't put it out, but they didn't disown it. It is obvious, however, that the effect was the same. The Black Community in Washington was terrorized. They did not know what was going to happen that day. Certainly, they did not want to be involved in gun fights between blacks. When we fight like this among ourselves, only the man stands to gain. He got his peace and quiet in Washington at our expense. Black people were split and we must realize that blackness is going to be used more and more as a splitting tactic.

Remember this government will use any means to control the upsurge of insurrectional activity coming from the inner city and we must not help him. This happened here at this conference. Those cats out there were trying to terrorize this conference.

They had said they were going to do that. But they were stopped. When we have to fight among ourselves we don't have time to deal with the man. We just do not have the time to fight among ourselves. The masses get bewildered and they are not willing to go out on the streets if they feel they have to fight with brothers. It is difficult enough to get any of us out on the streets.

It's bad enough to deal with a hunky. Nobody wants to shoot a brother. In Washington the people who went to see about the newsletter and other matters did not want to shoot these cats. As a matter of fact it is my contention that the man was waiting for them to start something.

There is no better help we can give to the man than to fight among ourselves. In Washington it was a perfect set up. If the brothers had mounted their stairs to take care of business they could have been easily blown away.

So we must understand brothers and sisters that this is going to happen time and time again. Situations where we will be unnecessarily provoked will occur.

Brothers and sisters I am going to close. But I want to emphasize that we have brought a lot of information in papers to this conference and we urge you to go back to your campuses and get this material distributed. Get your student activities office to stencil this material and you pass it out. Do you realize that most books don't sell over 10,000 copies? When we mimeograph 15,000 copies of something we are beating Random House. What difference does it matter if it is not copyrighted and printed by one of the New York publishing houses before it has some value?

The point is that we want the material read. Now you are hip enough to get all those Afro-American organizations started on your campuses. And I know not many of you on the West Coast go to all black schools. There aren't any. So you ought to be hip enough to get those mimeograph machines rolling and copy this material. If you do this we can have a distribution of 100,000 copies of the material printed and distributed in a month. We talk about alternative methods of communication. Well, we can do something with this material. If you don't like it, give it to somebody else to read and ask them to mimeograph it.

It is imperative that we do this, but to do it we have got to work. I am old and I know that, but I also know that most cats are shucking and jiving. They simply do not want to do any work. They simply do not want to do any work. They want to sit down and talk about how black I am and how bad the man is, but they will not even get up and raise a quarter for a black organization.

Now I ain't going into no cultural historical analysis of that. It ain't nothing but out and out laziness.

Finally we must be concerned about the future. It is a trap to think in terms of our lives . Do you think that if those North Vietnamese soldiers were worried about their lives that they would put up the fight they do at Dak To hill? And if you are too worried, you are expressing again individualism. You are not concerned with the future. When you are worried about your life and you are concerned about the future, concerned about all the unborn Huey Newtons; all the unborn Emmett Tills and Charles Mack Parkers and Sammy Youngs and Doris Robinsons, and when you are concerned about your own children, then you are ready to take care of business. And you ain't got no business having any children if you ain't gonna fight for their freedom.

Thank You.

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