

CHAPTER 3

FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO BLACK LIBERATION

(1964-8)

Say it loud, I'm Black, and I'm proud.

-James Brown

One of the most disturbing things about almost all white supporters of the movement has been that they are afraid to go into their own communities - which is where the racism exists - and work to get rid of it. They admonish blacks to be nonviolent; let them preach nonviolence in the white community. They come to teach me Negro history; let them go to the suburbs and open up freedom schools for whites. Let them work to stop America's racist foreign policy. Let them press this government to cease supporting the economy of South Africa.

-Stokely Carmichael

NATIONAL BLACK POWER MOVEMENT AND SNCC

Despite the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, civil rights activists were facing increased violence. This contradiction led to disillusionment with the federal government and with the doctrine of nonviolence. Then came the mass uprisings of blacks in urban ghettos from 1964-8; over 100 major riots occurred during this period, resulting in 142 reported casualties and over 20,000 arrests. Black youth were a major force in the uprisings. Black power was articulated by spokespersons such as Malcolm X as an assertion of black pride and a reaction against the entire system of racism; blacks denounced white culture, institutions, behavior, and liberal racists.

Blacks asserted that "black is beautiful," that they could be proud of their appearance and their culture. Part of black consciousness was the predominant belief that power would not be given to blacks, but that it must be taken by a powerful, organized black community. Thus, an emphasis on self-determination for black communities. Blacks began to fight back "by any means necessary," as Malcolm X preached.

In late 1964, Malcolm X told a group of black students in Mississippi:

You'll get freedom by letting your enemy know that you'll do anything to get your freedom; then you'll get it. It's the only way you'll get it. When you get that kind of attitude, they'll label you as...a 'crazy nigger.' Or they'll call you an extremist or a subversive, or seditious, or a red or a radical. But when you stay radical long enough and get enough people to be like you, you'll get your freedom. (Zinn, 1973, p.210).

The students in SNCC became disillusioned with King and SCLC following the Selma campaign in 1965. SNCC had been organizing in Selma, Alabama for two years when King decided that a march would help speed passage of the Voting Rights Act. SNCC opposed the idea because of King's lack of knowledge of the people there and because the people of Selma were not participating in decision-making; they felt that King was a leader too far removed from the people. Although SNCC went along with the

march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, the group privately began to distance itself from King and the SCLC, especially after hearing that King was cutting deals with President Johnson.

SNCC began to turn away from nonviolence at this time. It continued its activities in the South and became interested in transforming the energy of the black slums into organized political power. SNCC denounced the war in Vietnam in 1965, recognizing that blacks disproportionately represented among the soldiers sent to fight white corporate America's wars.

In 1966, Stokely Carmichael, chair of SNCC, wrote the Vine City Project Paper in which he defined the role of whites in the movement against racism:

It must be offered that white people who desire change in this country should go where that problem (of racism) is most manifest. That problem is not in the Black community. The white people should go into white communities where the whites have created power for the express purpose of denying Blacks human dignity and self-determination.... This is not to say that whites have not had an important role in the Movement... It is meaningless to talk about a coalition if there is no one to align ourselves with, because of the lack of organization in the white communities.... There is in fact no group at present with whom to form a coalition in which blacks will no be absorbed and betrayed...(Cohen and Hale, 1967).

Carmichael went on to discuss the past and future direction of SNCC. He wrote that the problem was much deeper than the right to sit at a lunch counter or to vote and that blacks could not relate to SNCC because of its unrealistic, nonracial atmosphere:

We cannot be expected any longer to march and have our heads broken in order to say to whites: Come on, you're nice guys. For you are not nice guys. We have found you out.... Integration today means the man who 'makes it,' leaving his black brothers behind in the ghetto as fast as his new sports car will take him.... Any program to end racism must address itself to the two problems that Black Americans face: that they are poor and that they are black.... The creation of a national "black panther party" must come about. There must be reallocation of land, of money.... We hope to see, eventually, a coalition among poor blacks and poor whites.... The society we seek to build among black people, then, is not a capitalistic one.... We are just going to work, in the way *we* see fit, and on goals *we* define, not for civil rights but for all human rights (ibid.).¹⁸

The Black Panther Party (BPP) was founded that year in Oakland, California. It would be two years before the BPP would be able to focus the energies of the black ghetto rioters. SNCC and the BPP formed alliances with the SDS activists despite efforts by the FBI (Operation COINTELPRO) to break up their communication and mutual

¹⁸ SNCC had decided to work with whites only in coalition. The problem sprung from an inability on the part of white students to conquer their own racism. Sad though the division was between black and white students, it was necessary and has remained so to the present day. Blacks and other minorities are denied self-determination when they become part of a larger, multi-racial group. The mirroring within the leftist organization of the racism of American society prevents a merger and necessitates a separate struggle on the part of blacks. Ideally, the groups can form alliances thereby retaining self-determination on the part of the ethnic group and maximizing the power of opposition to the status quo.

support. The black power focus and these alliances did not develop immediately but over a period of several years. The period of 1964-8 was a period of transformation from civil rights to black power on a national as well as a local level.

STUDENT STRUGGLE AGAINST SEGREGATION CONTINUED

Integration occurred slowly in Austin. Roy's Lounge on the Drag had become the scene of civil rights picketing in the spring of 1965. The lounge maintained a policy of segregation against blacks as well as known members of the Student Interracial Committee (SIC). Hundreds of students picketed the lounge. In May of 1965, the SIC steering committee decided to work on other symbols of segregation such as UT's policy of maintaining segregated university-approved housing. The SIC held a rally against this policy in early May despite objections by Dean Holland. Also the SIC presented a resolution to the Faculty Council later that month.

In an October 1965 *Daily Texan* editorial, black students on campus gave some definition to black power as "being together to secure power for people," "to instill 'somebodiness' into the Negro community," "a racial consciousness," and "much like Hook 'Em Horns for other groups." In 1966, the Negro Association for Progress (NAP) was formed. They brought Rev. F.O. Kirkpatrick to campus to speak in February. Kirkpatrick, the Texas coordinator for SNCC, said: "this is our black power hope - that we can rise from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of equality for all," (Duren, 1979). The following year, Stokely Carmichael came to campus to speak. He was greeted by a demonstration by NAP. Carmichael spoke about the black power movement and criticized the "white racist press" for its unfair reporting.

During the spring of 1967, NAP focused on the lack of black participation in university athletics. Members converged on the office of the athletic director and the head football coach Darrell Royal to find out why UT was not accepting or recruiting black athletes. Coach Royal responded that blacks did not have the talent, nor the grades, nor the desire to attend UT.

During the fall semester, 40 black NAP members marched into the end zone seats of Memorial Stadium while the Longhorns were playing football. They displayed cards saying, "Bevo needs Soul," and "Orange and White (school colors) Lack Black." One demonstrator recalled, "we waited until halftime and got the cards up about two times - we were plenty bold." The UT police asked them to leave and eventually they did (Duren Papers).

The increasing militancy of NAP was apparent in October when NAP held an illegal demonstration for black student rights. No one was arrested, although the administration discussed levying disciplinary punishments against those involved. In November, NAP successfully urged the Student Assembly to pass a resolution for "the Department of History to initiate a course in Negro history" and another to withhold blanket tax monies from Texas Student Publications should it not reinstate its nondiscriminatory advertising policy statement for the *Daily Texan*. The administration ignored the students' resolutions.

In the spring of 1968, NAP was replaced by the Afro-Americans for Black Liberation (AABL). The transformation from civil rights advocacy to black consciousness among black UT activists was completed.

In 1968, the university denied funding to a provisional admissions program - the Program for Educational Opportunity (PEO) for undergraduates and CLEO, a similar program for law students - which had brought in many minority students who did not meet all the school's admission requirements. Black students were outraged by this action. During 1968, the program was financed through grants from the Hogg Foundation and the federal Office of Educational Opportunity. The students who succeeded in the program were not given any financial aid from the school (Duren Papers, Barker Texas History Center).

Many students voted to donate 20% of their University Co-op (bookstore) rebates so that PEO might continue, but the regents interpreted that gifts as well as appropriated funds and revenue from other funds could not be accepted under the 1964 non-discrimination rule.

Ernie Haywood, a black vice president of student government, then founded Project Info. The program's purpose was to disseminate information to minorities on UT, but it was forbidden by the 1964 rule to conduct recruiting efforts. The program was funded by donations from Co-op rebate money and administered by student government.

KING ASSASSINATION SPARKS INCREASED PROTEST

In April 1968, following the assassination of Martin Luther King, students, both black and white, participated in a march to the Capitol and in a campus memorial service sponsored by the Austin Council of Churches. Two weeks later, in an increasing display of black awareness, the AABL sponsored a Black Arts Festival in the East Austin black community as a memorial to King.

Following an increased mobilization of black and white students on campus for civil rights, the Austin City Council finally passed a resolution banning segregation in the Austin business community and a fair housing ordinance which outlawed racial discrimination in the selling, renting, or financing of housing.

In May, an incident of racial violence led to picketing by SNCC, AABL and others. The owner of a Conoco station - Don Weedon - had attacked a black musician; he had been brought to court on a misdemeanor charge of "simple assault," convicted and fined a mere \$20. Larry Jackson of Austin SNCC and Grace Cleaver, chair of AABL, called on all persons opposed to racism to picket Weedon's station on May 3 and to boycott it in the future. In a leaflet they circulated, they stated:

We can no longer afford to see black people mistreated by honkies without retaliation (*Rag*, May 1968).

Jackson requested that SDS participate in the action and the group agreed. The students held several sit-ins at the gas station. City police arrested about 50 in the demonstrations charging them with various misdemeanor offenses. The charges were dropped against all but four of the protesters who were eventually convicted and given varying sentences of fines and probation. That fall AABL won two new academic programs in Afro-American Studies. One course dealt with Afro-American culture while the other was a 10-part lecture series on Afro-American history taught by different guest experts from around the country.

In October, a SNCC activist from Houston spoke at an SDS meeting mentioning "by any means necessary" when asked what tactics should be adopted by Texans. The

crowd consisted of blacks and whites who discussed the black freedom movement and revolutionary movements within the U.S.

Black students, militant and proud of their heritage and culture, continued to make demands on the racist UT administration. Soon Mexican-American students would also develop a similar racial pride which would lead to their own demands for change. Further developments in the fight against racism will be discussed in the following chapters.