

BLACK POWER & BLACK PRIDE

It is evident that we can be improved and elevated only just so fast and far as we shall improve and elevate ourselves.

—Negro Abolitionist Frederick Douglass in 1848

AFTER the slogan "Black Power" was chanted on a Negro march through Mississippi in 1966, it came to signify a new spirit of defiance at one edge of the campaign for civil rights. Among whites and moderate Negro leaders alike, the concept inspired fears of a procession of hot summers, a raging Negro separatist movement—and perhaps in the end a costly showdown between black and white that might send U.S. race relations all the way back to the post-Reconstruction period. The new movement quickly developed its list of fanatical leaders: Stokeley Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Ron Karenga and, in his special way, Cassius Clay. It fed largely on the despair and disaffection of the poor, the uneducated, the slum-bound Negro who had nothing to lose but his life.

As the months have gone by since Black Power burst thus violently onto the scene, there has been a slow, subtle but steady shift in the attitude of Negroes—even the moderate Negro leaders—who were desperately opposed to the violent and separatist nature of the new crusade. What has clearly developed from this change is a Black Power movement set on a more respectable base, which at its best is in the spirit of what Frederick Douglass was advocating more than a century ago. The most intelligent spokesmen for the new attitude think of it in terms of Black Consciousness—or, more completely, of Black Pride.

Like Irish Power

The attitude is producing a wave of Negro organizations and movements—on campuses, in professions, in local communities and also on state and national scales. All this can be rather grandly described as a case of the Negro's looking to himself for salvation—and there discovering strengths that he never knew he possessed. There is indeed evidence that black pride is nourishing the new Negro's determination to take over his own destiny and accept no definition of blackness but his own. This kind of Negro is not anti-white; he is pro-black. As one direct consequence of his attitude, America's most visible minority is more visible than ever. It is projecting a positive new image that makes more sense, even to Negro frustrations, than the shadow of violence falling on ghetto streets.

In that most effective of democracy's equalizers, the voting booth, the Negro is now voting black with an assertiveness that has impelled many white politicians to assess with new respect the black bloc's gathering strength. Some of the Negro's political leaders have said that what they want is something like the Irish Power that has been evident in Boston or the Jewish Power that has shown itself in New York City. By now, almost everyone in the U.S. knows that Gary, Ind., and Cleveland installed Negro mayors last month. Negro bloc voting was indispensable to both victories. But so was the small proportion of white votes that went to Cleveland's Carl Stokes and Gary's Richard Hatcher, and that surely would have been withheld if either man had taken a radical Black Power stance. If they had lost, it would have been a big boost for the symbols of the extremists' Black Power—which in its most radical expression rejects all coalition with and any need of whites.

Even more heartening to black pride were the election of a Negro sheriff in Virginia and of the results in Mississippi, where the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, organized by Negroes, elected six candidates out of a statewide slate of 32. This modest triumph has encouraged the party to try once again to unseat the state's white delegation to

the 1968 Democratic National Convention—a strategy that failed four years ago.

Because the Negro is a member of a minority constituting some 11% of the U.S. population, he can never expect to register more than modest victories in the ballot box unless he wins white adherents to his cause. Here, also, black pride is dictating the new posture, which is not that of a needy supplicant begging for white assistance, but that of an equal who proclaims his self-sufficiency and his value as any man's ally. Many facets of Negro community life now reflect this concerted effort on the part of the Negro to elevate his own status and self-esteem.

Variety of Goals

The effort varies wildly in scope and purpose, from Detroit's Central United Church of Christ, which worships a Black Messiah, to New York City's National Economic Growth and Reconstruction Organization (NEGRO), which has raised enough money selling bonds—for as little as 25¢ each—to acquire a hospital, a chemical firm, four clothing factories, a construction company, and a transportation line so expansion-minded that it recently sent a fleet of twelve buses across the country to Watts, the Negro district of Los Angeles. Bad weather and other difficulties reduced the arriving field to three, but further help has been pledged.

The assets of the Southern Consumers Cooperative, a Negro self-help agency launched on a shoestring in Louisiana, have risen from \$25,000 to \$200,000 in two years. Harlem's Freedom National Bank, which opened its doors in 1964 with an authentic black hero, Jackie Robinson, as chairman of the board, makes \$25.2 million available for loans to Negroes, whom white-managed financial institutions systematically reject as bad risks. Economic status is only one of many new goals. The Negro theater, yesterday nothing more than a dream, is a flourishing reality today, with black companies and stages all over the U.S. and more than a dozen Negro dramatic groups in Harlem alone. The new, all-Negro *Hello, Dolly!*, with Pearl Bailey and Cab Calloway, is a smash hit on Broadway—and it is played without any specific Negro overtones.

The Negro church, as well, is stirring to the responsibilities demanded of it by the new militance. "The era of welfare colonialism is over," said the Rev. Calvin Marshall, pastor of the Park Street A.M.E. Zion Church in Peekskill, N.Y., at a conference of 700 Negro clergymen in Dallas. The delegates formed a National Committee of Negro Churchmen with the declared purpose of helping black people win more control of their own destiny.

Manifestations of insurgent Negro pride at times exclude whites where they expect to be accepted. Last week in White Plains, N.Y., the Westchester County seat, 50 Negro community leaders met to analyze Negro faults and problems—and pointedly barred whites from the meeting. And at times a largely symbolic action seems to be self-defeating. The decision of 120 Negro students, among them some 65 athletes, to boycott the 1968 Olympic Games is a case in point. They considered their act a sign of protest against the denial of Negro rights in general. However, some Negroes among the many who have won fame and fortune in U.S. athletics thought that the youngsters had picked the wrong field. Said Jesse Owens, who won four gold medals in the 1936 Olympics: "There is no place in the athletics world for politics."

Among the most vital aspects of the new Negro mood is the proliferation of black student organizations on white campuses—one sure way to preserve Negro identity in an overwhelmingly white student body. "I've been missing symbols of black identity all my life," explains Constance Hilliard, 18, a freshman who joined the Harvard-Radclif

Afro and Afro-American Student Association this fall. "I came to Radcliffe with the fear that I still couldn't find them. But then I went to Afro meetings. There's a realization that you have so much in common with other black students, things that you can't share with whites. It's just a beautiful feeling."

Anguish in the Organizations

There are some who read this voluntarily segregationist spirit as an expression of the Negro's desire to separate from the society that segregates him. This same theory holds that Black Power is a self-destructive force, a prisoner of its own wrath, a rebellion that is against everything and for nothing. According to this interpretation, the Black Power movement has retired the civil rights movement, which from the beginning depended heavily on white strategy and leadership.

It is in this context that the expression of Black Power brought anguish to the moderate civil rights organizations. Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People called Stokely Carmichael's kind of Black Power "racism in reverse." He deplores the attitude of the black radical fringe, which has lost all faith in the democratic process, and is convinced that it must be scrapped. "I can't help viewing the unilateral black philosophy as being as open to question as the unilateral white system," he says. But Wilkins takes an entirely different attitude toward the more respectable approaches to black consciousness, pride and influence and points out that this is what the N.A.A.C.P. has been championing for decades. "Pride of race and history and the ridance of self-denunciation are good and needed," he says. "The thing to guard against is black arrogance."

The National Urban League's Whitney Young Jr. similarly distinguishes between defiant nihilism and the firm, orderly assertion of Black Power that, he maintains, has been an Urban League goal for all of its 57 years. He favors the formation of Negro unions and other organizations, partly to "give the Negro a sense of security that he can compete and organize," but mainly for the "mobilization of Negro political and economic resources into a significant bloc to achieve goals." He draws an elemental difference between the two opposing approaches to Black Power: "Where the builders differ from the burners is that we want to win victories within the framework of the system." Martin Luther King Jr., who began by counseling his people to "love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you," embraces the new Negro ethic in its most reasonable application: "Black Power is a call to black people to amass the political and economic strength to achieve their legitimate goals. No one can deny that the Negro is in dire need of this kind of legitimate power."

Some of the more militant of the civil rights organizations, while still refusing to go all the way with the violent breed of Black Power advocates, take a stand that is a considerable distance from that of the older organizations' leaders. "Black Power," says Floyd McKissick of the Congress of Racial Equality, "is the control of black people exerted in order to bring about change and execute their own self-determination. Like in the schools—to hell with busing kids. Improve the school system where it is."

There are serious dangers of violence among the new approaches to Black Power. Still at work are extremists who could shatter every vestige of positive action. Street riots shook Philadelphia when a recent Black Power demonstration abruptly degenerated into a free-for-all with the police. The toll: 22 injured, 57 arrests. In the Oakland-San Francisco area, the Black Panthers, the Black Students Union and other young, activist, Negro organizations have prompted deep concern among both state and local authorities.

There are sporadic outbursts of violence and rumors of cached guns and ammunition. Investigators who have spent months inside the more violent wings of the movement say that some leaders are vowing "to put the whites on reservations like they did the Indians. We don't want integration

or segregation; we want the whole country. We are going to carry out total revolution, and afterward there will be only blacks, some Negroes, and no whites."

Very few of even the most militant leaders in the movement would care to see Black Power become black terror. In Milwaukee, where Negroes are caroling, "I'm Dreaming of a Black Christmas," the most publicized white leader in the new wave takes the position that peace, not violence, is the prospect. Says Father James E. Groppi, the Roman Catholic priest whose Negro followers call him "Ajax, the White Knight": "Black solidarity is a black identity to combat what is going on all around us. This is the prelude to real brotherhood and justice. Power is essential to black people in that with it they can move to a position to demand what is theirs. It teaches respect, and respect always precedes true brotherhood and love."

The fact is that the major part of the Black Power movement, at least now, is far more moderate than its reputation. In the main, it desires neither to shoot its way out of white America nor to enter a supremacy contest with the white Establishment. Its goals lie within democracy's permissive framework, which has stretched many times before to assimilate minority groups and which, as far as the U.S. Negro is concerned, must stretch again for him.

Toward Integration

What the Negro wants is far less revolutionary than what this country's founders demanded of England two centuries ago. The Negro does not want out. He wants in, and on terms that stand somewhat higher on the scale of reasonableness than the reaction to them in some corners of the white Establishment. As catalogued by the Washington Committee on Black Power, these terms include ten essentials, among them black pride ("which neither requests nor solicits; it demands"), black control of black communities, black economic productivity ("dignity through self-support"), black responsibility ("Black people themselves are responsible for their homes, their children, their schools, their streets"), black initiative, black excellence ("Let black people be the best"), black creativity and togetherness—and black self-defense.

Only human reason, black and white together, will decide whether the Negro gets what he wants. White America is only beginning to understand the new Negro mood, which is passing from the self-abasement that slavery taught to the self-sufficiency that lies still over a distant hill. The black is learning how to be black, rather than a carbon-copy white. And the pride, the new Negro institutions, the black cooperatives and the black student groups are all testimonials to his new spirit of independence. They will pass as the need for them declines, and as the Negro develops the respect for himself that will embolden him to demand the same respect from all of society.

At this difficult juncture, the omens are perhaps more favorable than otherwise. One of the more thought-provoking conclusions of a poll of the U.S. Negro community reported by Harvard Sociologist Gary Marx suggests that tolerance for the white man increases in proportion to Negro civil rights militance. The black to fear is the one who has not yet been exposed to the discipline of self-pride—the unawakened 75% Negro majority that lies outside the civil rights movement, and has felt almost none of its effects. This Negro has nothing to lose by venting his frustrations in violence. The new Negro knows how much damage violence can do to his own cause.

In the broad spectrum of the Black Power movement, there is indeed a regrettable taint of reverse racism. With this comes the risk of erasing much that has been accomplished in all the years of civil rights activity. Within the movement, too, are seeds of violence and destruction. Yet, at its moderate best, it can be a powerful force to develop the Negro's pride and the control of his own life. On those terms, and as a temporary phenomenon, it can be a power for good and can become a step toward the truly integrated society that must be the ultimate objective of black and white alike.