

## "BLACK POWER" IS BLACK PRIDE

"Black Power" is a phrase which embodies the idea of how to achieve equal rights and equal opportunities for black people in America. It is not a new idea nor is it one which is likely to diminish in intensity any time soon. Black Power is race pride. It provides the psychic lever through which dignity and self-respect can be attained, and through which black people are able to fully realize a sense of themselves--their cultural achievements, their beauty, their abilities to create and develop to the same degree as any other people.

"Black Power" is a phrase which symbolizes the movement of black people in their efforts to attain the basic freedoms that white America takes for granted. It is a movement in the same sense that the Protestant Reformation and the Jihad were movements. Or the many religious movements of the Jews, past and present.

"Black Power" as a moving force has not reached the apex of its development. It is a force that reaches and drives black people who feel themselves to be in bondage; black people who economically, politically, psychologically and spiritually feel the painful sting of white oppression. It was and is the desire to gain power for the blacks which drove people like

Marcus Garvey, W. E. Dubois, Malcolm X, Whitney Young, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Dr. Kenneth Clarke, Roy Wilkins and many others.

"In politics, Black Power meant independent action-- Negro control of the political power of black ghettos and its conscious use to better slum dwellers' conditions.....The basic belief was that only a well organized and cohesive bloc of Negro voters could provide for the needs of black masses.

"In economic terms, Black Power meant creating independent, self sufficient Negro entrepreneurs, but also by forming Negro cooperatives in the ghettos and in the predominantly black rural counties of the south. In the area of education, Black Power called for local community control of the public schools in the black ghettos."<sup>1</sup>

Many among the middle class--black and white--have responded to the idea of Black Power with uneasiness. "There are today a considerable number of Negro Americans among the middle class, but a measure of the price which they pay for this achievement is that it takes, on the average, three persons working in a Negro family to bring home as much as a sole white breadwinner does.

"Moreover, 80 percent of Negro American families earn less than the national median family income. And for many, it

is getting worse in relation to the white majority. The recent surge of general affluence has heightened that disparity. For virtually all Negro Americans, regardless of economic conditions, the malignancy of racism is still palpable, whether buying a house one wants, getting a decent education, finding a job that's going somewhere or confronting the boundaries of social contacts."<sup>2</sup>

What, in effect, this suggests is that "the fundamentals of racism--inadequate housing, lack of jobs, insufficient medical attention, inferior education--remained basically unchanged throughout black communities, whether in Mississippi or in New York. Thus the call for Black Power drew sustenance from the reality of the lives of black people across the nation."<sup>3</sup>

The intense and widespread articulation of the concept of Black Power, especially by Stokely Carmichael, struck a responsive chord internationally as well as domestically. When in 1967 SNCC Chairman, H. Rap Brown, suggested that "if America don't come around, we must burn her down", black resistance took a more violent form. Newark, Detroit, and the razing of 57 other cities was attributed to the black revolution, black resistance and Black Power.

We saw the effects of this phenomena again when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated; but there was



also a demonstration of restraint and control which in the minds of many suggests a much more formidable type of Black Power. Ron Karenga and his California Group were able to maintain absolute order in the face of the tragedy and in the face of the widespread violent reaction which spread across the rest of the country.

The California reaction was consistent with the idea of the Black Revolution. Theirs is a program of education. They explain the difference between riot and revolution, pointing out that in a revolution "we have got to be together in our thing. We have got to know who and what we are, what we are trying to get off of us, what we are trying to build, and how we can best assume roles that will enable us to make our own best contribution.....". This is as much an expression of Black Power as has as yet been articulated.

Implications for the future as I view it should focus on facilitating this sense of Black Power--getting people to enter into dialogue about it, for it is only through discussion the positive facets of Black Power will it become a positive force in the development of the country.

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1. Kerner Commission Report, p. 232
2. "Natural Purpose and the Need for Community", Lesle C. Carter
3. Ibid