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## Introduction to this issue

In this issue of *THE BLACK NATION*, there is some focus on Africa. Not the fantastic, never never land Africa of the cultural nationalists, but the Africa of today, still beset by imperialism in the form of colonialism and neocolonialism or superpower hegemonism or harassment of progressive states.

We also begin our focus on graphic artists, in this case the popular and progressive artist, Tom Feelings. We hope to make such interviews and reproductions a consistent part of the magazine.

We continue our stress on new poetry (and many

new poets) so that we also carry the deepest resonance of a nation struggling for liberation whose majority is but one part of a whole multinational working class whose ultimate goal is socialism.

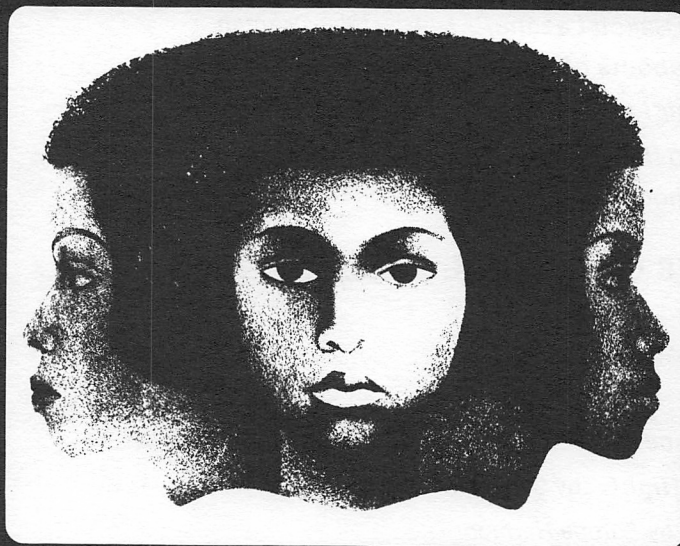
In the future we will put more stress on music and book reviews and perhaps other literary forms (short story, drama) but we will also continue to carry essays and articles that speak directly to the Black Liberation Movement but also the African Liberation Movement, the Caribbean peoples' fight for genuine independence and liberation as well as the need to unify these struggles with the worldwide struggle against imperialism.

— Editor

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## POLITICAL ESSAYS



# Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Theory: Its Relation and Application to the Third World and African Americans

AMIRI BARAKA

*(The following paper was delivered at a forum held at State University of New York Stony Brook.)*

Karl Marx is honored by those who understand his contributions to human progress because he made the first wholly scientific analysis of capitalism and also put forward a scientific method for destroying it. There were many other attempts before Marx's to propose an alternative to capitalist society, because although capitalism as it first emerged was progressive in as far as it had to eliminate feudalism and many

forms of absolutism, it was not long before it became obvious that capitalism itself was exploitative and oppressive, and finally the major obstruction in the path of human development.

But the earlier proposals for alternative social systems to capitalism were utopian, nonscientific. With Marx and Frederick Engels' development of Dialectical and Historical Materialism the first wholly scientific analysis of capitalism and an alternative to it was put forth. Marx's philosophy was materialism, that what was fundamental and essential in the world was its materiality. That matter is principal and that ideas are a reflection of matter. This was a direct refutation to philosophical

idealism which posits just the opposite, that principal is ideas and that the material world is just a reflection of those ideas. In essence this is just a defense of religion.

With his dialectic, Marx had achieved a methodology that could speak of real development in a clear, comprehensive and accurate way. A way which reflected the actual development of nature. And by applying this dialectic to human society, i.e., Historical Materialism, we come to understand that ultimately the most critical and defining aspect of any society is the mode of production, how that society gets its food, clothing and shelter; society's *raison d'être* and its reasons for chang-

ing became crystal clear.

It was Marx who showed us how and why primitive communalist society changed to slave societies and how feudalism grew out of slavery and capitalism out of feudalism.

It was Marx who also identified and explained how class society was formed and how the various classes, basically groups of people with the same relationship to the production process, how they formed and how and why ultimately the motive force of history is the struggle between those various classes, i.e., *class struggle*. In exact reflection of the dialectical process itself.

Marx's doctrine was drawn from the most advanced theories of English political economy, German philosophy and French socialism. Marx also showed us why the proletariat, the industrial worker, was the most advanced class and the only thoroughly revolutionary class under capitalism.

But one of the most impressive aspects of Marx's teachings was the way by which he revealed the fundamental secret of capitalism, *Surplus Value*, which can be defined basically as all the wealth which the workers create but do not get.

Marx was also a staunch and thoroughgoing internationalist, saying about the communists' role in the *Communist Manifesto*, "in the national struggles of the proletarians of different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the proletariat independently of all nationality."

It was also Marx who pointed out

that in order for class society, capitalism, to move to socialism, which is a transitory stage on the way to Communism, i.e., classless society, this could only be achieved by going through a stage in which society was dominated by its working class, i.e., the dictatorship of the proletariat. Marx said that recognition of classes and class struggle was not enough, that a communist was one who also upheld the dictatorship of the proletariat!

#### Lenin's contributions

Lenin's contributions to the treasure house of Marxism are immeasurable. It was Lenin who used Marxism to define and analyze the period of history that followed after Marx's death. Leninism is the Marxism of the era of imperial-

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**Lenin showed that national liberation struggles did not have to stop at capitalist states, but could proceed unstopped to socialism.**

ism and proletarian revolution.

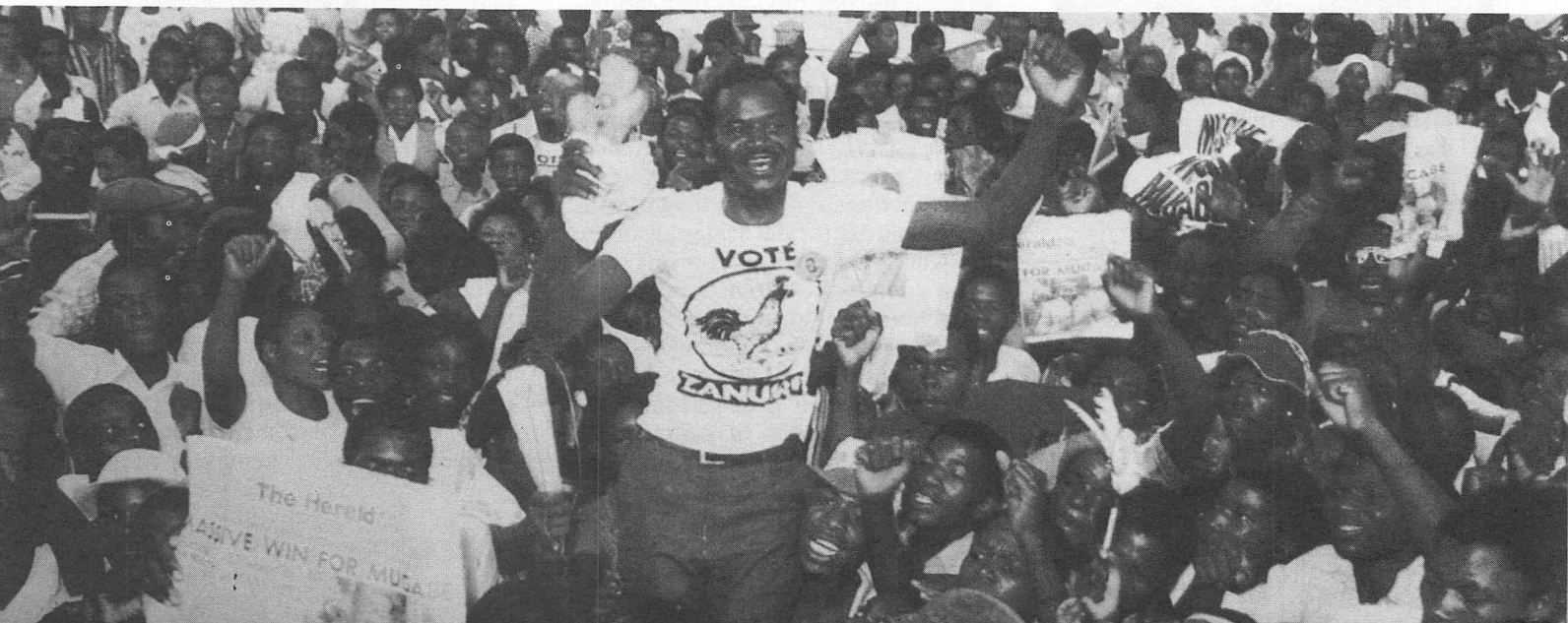
Marx died before capitalism turned into imperialism. Imperialism is monopoly capitalism, capitalism which has erupted past the boundaries of one country and which now seeks surplus value all over the globe. It is monopoly capitalism, which, based on the combining of industrial capital with the banks, has produced finance capital, which already arisen out of "the concentration of production" in its own country, rapaciously seeks the seizure of raw materials, markets, new areas to invest capital and new spheres of influence all over the world.

Imperialism is also the transformation of the old 19th-century colonial policy in which European colonialism had barely begun to insert itself into Africa to the post-1890's period when colonialism had seized and dominated nine-tenths of Africa.

Imperialism is the stage at which finance capital has seized and dominated the whole world and indeed the imperialist interests have begun to quarrel (repeatedly) and make war over the redivision of the world, particularly their colonial possessions in the third world (Asia, Africa, Latin America). This was the basic cause of World Wars I and II!

Lenin's brilliant analysis of this phenomenon is contained in the book *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. In describing imperialism as capitalism in decay, already parasitic, Lenin goes on to lay out that because of the high degree of monopoly imperialism represents, that it has linked the im-

The victory of ZANU in Zimbabwe's elections (below) pushed forward that country's struggle for independence from both superpowers.





perialist trusts and countries and those whom they oppress together into a single "world economy." A worldwide system in which there was already a rising degree of crisis. Crisis, not only internally as a result of the added burdens imperialism puts upon workers inside the industrial metropolises, but a sharpening and intensification of oppression within the colonial outposts of imperialism. Since imperialism has split the world into two camps, a handful of industrialized exploiter nations and the vast majority of colonized, nationally oppressed and dependent nations must wage national liberation struggles against imperialism in order to free themselves!

In Lenin's theory of proletarian revolution, therefore, he saw three fundamental contradictions of capitalism turning into imperialism, all of which meant that imperialism was not only moribund or dying capitalism, but itself an inciter of crisis within itself and revolution. These fundamental contradictions were (and remain) the contradiction between labor and capital in the advanced industrial countries, which imperialism so intensifies that it brings the workers of the industrial metropolises to revolutionary positions; the contradiction between the imperialist cartels and interests themselves which eventually leads to imperialist war in order to redivide their spoils, mainly in the third world; and the contradiction between imperialism and the colonial and dependent nations and peoples mainly of the third world (Asia, Africa, Middle East, Latin America). It was because Lenin's theory of proletarian revolution was correct and indeed all these contradictions could be found in Russia, and Lenin as leader of the most advanced party of the proletariat in that country led the first successful overthrow of capitalism, that a fourth contradiction could be added to the other three, namely the contradiction of imperialism vs. socialism!

One of the most important aspects of Leninism is in how Lenin completely connects the question of revolution in the Western industrial countries with the question of the liberation of the oppressed nations and peoples of the third world. It was Lenin who transformed the so-called national question from a question largely of the oppressed nations of Europe to include

The complete elimination of Black people's oppression in the U.S. will come about through the revolutionary struggle for self-determination and socialism.



the colonial and dependent nations that comprised the great majority of people in the world. Lenin took Marx's line on the Irish revolution, where he chides the English workers that "no nation can be free as long as it enslaves another nation," urging the English workers to fight alongside the Irish workers to overthrow the English rulers of Ireland and applies it to the great masses of colonial peoples that imperialism oppresses as well. Lenin made it clear that both the victory of proletarian revolution in the industrialized countries and of the liberation movements in the colonial countries were interconnected struggles against imperialism and that there must be a united front of these movements against imperialism in order for either movement to succeed.

Lenin took the question of Self Determination from out of the narrowly juridical and reformist view that the social democrats had, and still have, and saw it as a part of the question of proletarian revolution. In other words the struggles for democracy in the industrialized countries which bring the workers to

revolutionary positions that enable them finally to overthrow monopoly capitalism must be linked up with the essentially revolutionary and democratic struggles of the peoples and nations of the third world for liberation!

The revolutionary nature of the third world struggles for democracy against imperialism was one of the key questions that split the old Second International along with the general question of whether communists should support their fatherlands in an imperialist war. It was consistent that the social chauvinists of the Second International who upheld the imperialists in the first imperialist war should also not see the essentially revolutionary anti-imperialist character of the national liberation struggles of the great majority of the people on the planet! This is why Lenin organized the Third International and left the Second International, a so-called world organization of socialists, to its chauvinism and reformism.

It was Lenin who, in the meetings of the Third International, added to Marx's classic slogan "Workers of All



Genuine Marxist-Leninists in the U.S. fully support the right of self-determination for the Afro-American Nation. (photo: UNITY newspaper)

Countries Unite!" so that, in the spirit of revolutionary struggle against imperialism it became "Workers of All Countries and Oppressed Nations Unite!" Lenin saw the revolutionary potential of the developing national struggles in the third world, saying that these struggles must be measured by their opposition to imperialism. Often such national struggles against imperialism were in fact more militant and revolutionary than many of the self-styled socialists of the Western industrialized countries, many of whom had become opportunists.

Lenin also, in his work, *Statistics and Sociology*, pointed out that in the United States, the Afro-American people comprised an oppressed nation, since the democracy and equality promised by their participation in the Civil War had been destroyed with the destruction of the Reconstruction. Marx also had long before pointed out the progressive character of the struggle against slavery in the U.S., in his articles for the *Herald Tribune* which are collected in the book *The Civil War In The U.S.* Marx had also analyzed the place of black chattel slavery in the building of capitalism, the industrial revolution and world trade. Lenin, carrying his analysis past the period of the destruction of the American Reconstruction and the emergence of monop-

oly capitalism in the U.S., as the system and the monopoly capitalist/imperialist class as the chief oppressors of the African American people, correctly summed up the new phase of the black struggle as a revolutionary struggle for Self Determination in the same way that the struggles for Self Determination among the oppressed nations and colonies of the third world were.

In fact it was Lenin through the Third International who influenced the *then* revolutionary Communist Party USA (CPUSA) to take the correct line on the Afro-American national question in 1928, along with the Comintern, in upholding the position put together

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**T**he black struggle for Self Determination is part and parcel of the struggle of the majority of American workers against the imperialist class.

by a group of American communists upholding the Leninist line on the national question and calling for Self Determination for the Afro-American Nation in the Black-belt South! This is still a correct line and it was held by the CPUSA until just before it became a revisionist party in the '50's. The black struggle for democracy and Self Determination is part and parcel of the struggle of the majority of American workers against the U.S. imperialist class. And Self Determination and full democracy for the African American nation can only come with the destruction of the U.S. imperialist class and monopoly capitalism itself.

Because Lenin saw the revolutionary potential of the national liberation movements, it was he who proposed that these movements not be called "bourgeois democratic" movements but *national revolutionary* movements to emphasize their revolutionary potential. And the fact that after the socialist revolution in the U.S.S.R., the masses of the world had seen the way past capitalism and led by the proletariat these national liberation struggles did not have to stop at capitalist states but could proceed unstopped to socialism.

### Mao Zedong

This brilliant thesis of Lenin's was concretely proved with the victory of the Chinese Revolution led by Mao Zedong. Lenin's correct revolutionary line first put forward in the work, *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, about the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, was also proved concretely by Mao Zedong and the Chinese Revolution.

The older social democrats, unlike Marx, had only focused on the proletarian revolution that was to be made in the European industrialized countries. Many, like Trotsky, could not even understand the revolutionary relationship of the proletariat in these societies with the peasantry. The failure of the 1905 Russian Revolution must be attributed in great part to this lack of understanding of the revolutionary potential of the peasantry. Lenin's theses on the revolutionary potential of the peasantry and the national movements in alliance with the proletariat was of such critical importance because the great majority of people in the third world were not only involved with



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# Imperialism split the world into two camps, a handful of exploiter nations and the vast majority of colonized and oppressed nations.

national movements but were non-proletarians, mainly peasants.

Mao Zedong adapted Marxism-Leninism to the concrete conditions of the Chinese Revolution. As Lenin said, "the concrete analysis of concrete conditions." Mao took Marxism-Leninism "not as a dogma, but a guide to action." He thereby disproved the social democrats who saw little revolutionary potential in the peasant-dominated country of China, but then even Marx had thought that the first fully executed socialist revolution would be in Germany and not "backward" Russia. But armed with the teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin's great works on the national question, Mao developed Marxism, by making a concrete analysis of Chinese conditions. Understanding that China was a mainly peasant country he could see that the main force of the Chinese revolution must be the peasantry, contrary to what reactionaries like Trotsky or other dogmatists said. And although this massive peasant force was led by its most advanced class, the small but revolutionary class of Chinese workers, Mao Zedong made new contributions to Marxism-Leninism with this living application of the revolutionary science.

Mao also opposed the dogmatists who believed, because of the Russian Revolution, that the revolution must begin in the cities and then proceed out to the countryside. Mao first captured the countryside by means of a largely peasant, but worker-led army, and then proceeded to capture the cities.

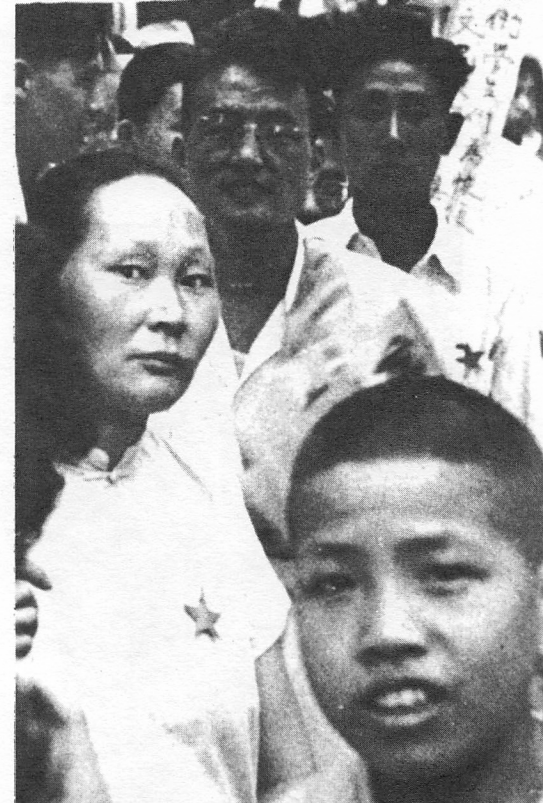
Because China was a semi-colonial country, where feudal relations still

predominated, the Chinese struggle was seen by many dogmatists as merely a bourgeois struggle and not genuine proletarian revolution. It is obvious that such dogmatists had actually not even fully digested the revolutionary teachings of Comrade Lenin! But Mao had fully absorbed Lenin and had even made fully scientific innovations on Marxist theory. This is why frequently we refer to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought!

One such innovation, particularly applicable to the oppressed nations and peoples of the third world, was the development not only of the party of the working class, which had been brought to perfection by Lenin in the U.S.S.R., but the utilization by this party of two weapons as its principal means of struggle in making the Chinese Revolution: viz the united front and armed struggle. Mao understood that in a colonial country oppressed by imperialism the greater part of the nation, the majority of its classes, are oppressed to some degree by imperialism, foreign domination. Mao proposed that not only must a proletarian party be developed but that the entire nation, the majority of its classes, would struggle to some extent against foreign domination. But led by the party of the proletariat such a struggle against imperialism would not stop at the stage of bourgeois democracy but would proceed without stopping to socialism!

Mao made it clear that the national liberation struggle of the Chinese people against foreign domination must be led by the Chinese proletariat, because they alone would carry the struggle all the way to the end, not only driving out imperialism, but then setting up a socialist society. A liberation movement led by the petty bourgeoisie or bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation would stop that movement after foreign domination had been ended, but then a capitalist society ruled by a domestic bourgeoisie would be set up and the working people, the majority of the country, would continue to be exploited, but now in a more "advanced" way, as in the industrial "democracies" of the West!

The United Front was absolutely necessary so that the entire oppressed nation, all of its classes willing to oppose imperialism, would help drive out foreign domination. But the party of the proletariat and the working masses



The 1949 victory of the Chinese Revolution (above) showed concretely that there is an alternative to neocolonialism: socialist revolution.

finally must lead such a revolution, so that it did not stop at bourgeois dictatorship.

Armed struggle was the main form of revolution in China. And this is true with many of the liberation struggles in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. But in too many cases the national liberation movements in the third world have not been consistently led by the proletariat and the revolution has not been carried out to the end, and in many cases, we have seen foreign domination driven out, but now we are confronted with a *neo-colonialism*, in which a domestic bourgeoisie still linked with the old colonial powers continues to oppress the people!

The need for the fundamental Marxist weapons of class analysis and proletarian organization are critical in the national liberation struggles raging all over the third world as well as in the struggle of the African American people here in the U.S. Too often the united front structure that is one basic weapon of national liberation is not led by the proletariat. Often this is because the proletariat is very tiny in many third world countries. This is particularly true in Africa and the Caribbean and for that reason many of the liberation



Haitian dictator "Baby Doc" Duvalier carries a pistol, even to ceremonial events, to protect himself from the wrath of the people.

movements have been petty bourgeois or at least with petty bourgeois or bourgeois leadership. It is therefore very significant that in the United States and South Africa there are found two of the largest classes of black workers in the world. This bodes extremely well for the eventual domination of those liberation movements in the USA and South Africa by the black proletariat. In the United States, the Black Liberation Movement is part of the whole struggle of the people to make revolution, the great majority of the black masses are workers and indeed most of the lower strata of the U.S. multinational working class is comprised of oppressed nationalities, Afro Americans, Latinos, Asians and Native Americans. In South Africa, because it is a white settler colony, a national liberation struggle led by the black proletariat could go uninterrupted into socialist revolution, so that the means of production are finally in the hands of the working class as well as its black majority. So that it is no longer enough to say that political power must be in black hands in Africa and the Caribbean, such power must be in the hands of the working class based on a revolutionary alliance of the workers and peasants.

It is far too late and there have been

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**N**ow we are confronted with neocolonialism, in which a domestic bourgeoisie continues to oppress the people. Class analysis and proletarian organization are critical in national liberation struggles.

far too many betrayals for the masses of black and third world people to continue to fall for the shallow cries of a domestic black or third world bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie for national liberation which turns out to mean Mobutu in "Zaire" or Arap Moi in Kenya or "Blind-aga" in Jamaica or Baby Doc in Haiti or the various neocolonial reactionaries in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East or the black world.

The struggles in the third world are still principally against imperialism, because even where neocolonial governments rule, it is essentially, as Amílcar Cabral pointed out, "imperialism ruling through native agents." It is imperialism that props these neocolonial governments up, and the fundamental strength of imperialism is still in its ability to superexploit the peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, condemning its own workers in the industrial metropolises to lower and lower standards of living. In the industrialized West however, too often the would-be revolutionary political parties have been rendered sterile by opportunism. That is, by the so-called revolutionaries settling for short-term gains at the expense of long-range revolutionary goals. The economic basis of this opportunism is the superprofits imperialism has gouged out of the third world through superexploitation which are used to bribe sections of the working class and middle class.

Lenin warned that the struggle against imperialism could not go forward militantly unless it was accompanied by an uncompromising struggle against opportunism. (Chauvinism, Lenin pointed out, was opportunism in its finished form — where the bourgeoisie can use "its" workers against the workers of another nation!) This is why today in the U.S. there is no genuine Marxist-Leninist revolutionary party and this is extremely dangerous at this time with the strong right-wing trend led by Ronald Reagan, especially as the two superpowers, the U.S. and U.S.S.R., pursue the catastrophe of nuclear war.

The importance of spreading revolutionary theory and organizing communist forces throughout the third world and in the Black Liberation Movement in the U.S. should be ob-



vious. No amount of metaphysics or cultural nationalism will free the oppressed and superexploited masses of the third world and the Afro-American nation. Only revolution, led by the most revolutionary class in society, the working class, can bring about the end of national oppression, neocolonialism, racism, Zionism and all forms of reaction, including the oppression of women. In the U.S.A., the principal task of revolutionaries must be party building, the building of a single, genuine Marxist-Leninist revolutionary communist party to smash white racist monopoly capitalism and build socialism under the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. The Black Liberation Movement is one key aspect in making such a revolution. Just as democratic and ultimately proletarian revolution in the third world will help spell the end of imperialism forever.



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## Warriors

*The War Continues  
And we must not forget  
How to sharpen our spears  
To order them like lasers  
To "Know and not only Believe"  
The rebels are still in the fields  
Hear our voices raising resistance songs  
We did not leave/  
Look into the Truth of the Youth  
And see us coming  
No, we never die  
For life is our inheritance  
The Revolutionaries are here  
We remain  
The sweat of the first morning dew  
Grains of wheat  
Arrows of living gods  
Constant images in the yard  
Conspiracies of dark old men  
The route to Revolution  
In the tradition of always readiness  
Siempre, returning to the source/*

*We are the progeny  
Of the People's cries  
The answer to their anguish  
The function for their futures —  
Oye!  
The high tree says he sees far  
The walking seed says he sees farther.  
I tell you,  
Behind the mountains  
  are mountains growing —  
These are the themes to remember  
This is the thing to know —  
Iron Will Cut Iron.*

— Lasana M. Sekou  
© 1982

LASANA SEKOU is a student at Howard University law school; he has two books of poetry, *Moods for Isis* and *For The Mighty Gods (House of Nehesi)*.

# Africa: Discard a false

## There is no

ABDUL RAHMAN  
MOHAMED BABU

In trying to discover why it is that our leaders continue to pursue policies so obviously inimical to our interests, it may be instructive to have a brief look at the forces which influence our thinking, especially that of our leaders who, as we have seen, have been put on the defensive by imperialist propaganda on the important question of socialism. Colonialists had to justify colonialism by propagating the concept of racial superiority and, in consequence, inventing the obligation of the civilized white man to civilize us, the savages. As a reaction to this obnoxious propaganda, petty-bourgeois intellectuals in both Africa and Asia countered by idealizing our past. Some of these intellectuals worked very hard to produce evidence to prove that we do in fact have a past and that this past was just as glorious as anybody else's, if not more so. As soon as they succumbed to this kind of polemics, they placed themselves in precisely the position in which the colonialists wanted them to be — a position of having to argue their case permanently from this side of apartheid.

Like any dying phenomenon, capitalism has only the past to look back to; it has no future. Its terms of reference, to be meaningful, must relate to the past, so uncertain are they about the future. Socialism, on the other hand, being the system of the future, has no







# approach!

## alternative to socialism

time to idealize the past indiscriminately. It views the past only as a way of investigating historical development through the conflicts of opposing forces, especially historical conflicts which are rooted in the mode of production. It looks into history as it reveals itself in class conflicts, class contradictions. It looks at the present as the continuation of these class contradictions in a different setting. And it organizes and prepares for a future in which class conflicts will disappear, not spontaneously, but as a result of the conscious activity of the proletariat to free itself from class estrangements.

With this socialist outlook there is no room for arguing defensively around the ridiculous question of whether we have a past or not; or whether our past was more or less glorious than anybody else's. While perhaps these questions may have relevance for "national" self-confidence in the conventional sense, the true glory of the people lies in their struggle against tyranny and oppression, whether by local rulers or by foreign powers. Trapped within the imperialist frame of reference, our petty-bourgeois intellectuals strain their imagination, with the help of Western "Africanists", in an attempt to produce our own Napoleons, sometimes going so far as to idealize local tyrants and despots as heroes. For socialists the people are the makers of history and their struggle against tyranny is the expression of that history. Our task as socialists is to carry on the struggle from where our oppressed ancestors

left off and carry it through to the end. The ideological and social systems which oppressed them, whether communal or feudal, have their place only in the museum of history. To idealize the "equality" or "right", "freedom" or "democracy" of that past is to play right into the hands of our imperialist oppressors; it is to idealize tyranny and oppression. Most of what took place in the past, apart from the people's struggles, is now obsolete and cannot be applied in the world revolutionary struggle in which Africa is a part. That struggle has not ceased with the attainment of independence, nor will it cease even when eventually the whole of Africa is freed. The revolutionary struggle will continue as long as the world is still divided into classes.

Some of our intellectuals want us to look backward, not forward, just as their bourgeois mentors prefer to do. But the bourgeois have strong reasons for preferring to look backward; they have no future to look forward to. Only socialism has introduced to the world new vistas for the people, a new and dynamic future. By looking backward, our petty-bourgeois intellectuals idealize our backwardness, for example communal life. They recommend it as a desirable way of life, needing only minor adjustments. Yet when our bourgeois mentors talked about their "traditions", they were talking about a past which was almost drowned in the blood of the oppressed people; and their past "glory" was the glory of the powerful destroying the weak. When

our petty-bourgeois intellectuals in their turn seek to establish our glorious past to counterpose it to that of our bourgeois mentors; when they dig out our cultural past to confront our mentors with the evidence of our past existence as a people complete with its own way of life; when they exhibit our past artistic, technological and other achievements, what they are doing in fact is to grant our mentors, the imperialists, the initial justification to challenge our right to exist as nations. What they are saying to the imperialists in effect is this: "You accuse us of being backward, of having no past. We are going to show you that we do have a past, just as glorious as yours, if not better. We have a way of life with the same values of freedom, duty, right, equality, and the same ethics as yours, though ours is somewhat different because our respective backgrounds are different; but qualitatively they are identical. We therefore qualify for the status of nation-states with traditions to look back to with the same pride as you look back to your own traditions. You see, we are equal to you!"

This is the argument of the child who wishes to assert his right to adulthood, as if that right were questioned. If his guardian is a bandit by whose standards the child wishes to assert his adulthood, he will use the arguments of a bandit to assert his adulthood. Our petty-bourgeois intellectuals' efforts to resuscitate our own Napoleons, our own repressive institutions as evidence of our past culture is no different. For

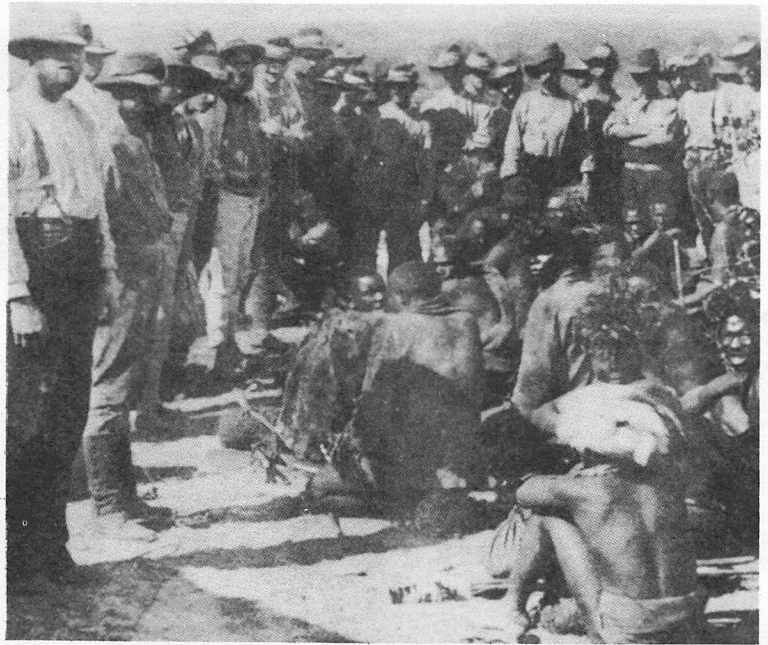
the glories of our bourgeois mentors, the imperialists, are the glories of bandits, pirates, slave raiders; and their culture, their art, is the idealization of those "adventures". If *our* history is free of these disruptive, degrading and plundering activities, then it is a history of which we must be proud; if *our* history is a series of struggles against these activities then it is a glorious history. Our petty-bourgeois intellectuals do not bother to show us in this light. What a pity! They write from a different outlook. The history of man anywhere, in Africa no less than in Europe, Asia and elsewhere, is the history of struggle against obstacles to human freedom whether these obstacles are natural or instituted by man; whether by local or by foreign tyrants.

To safeguard ourselves against being carried away by bourgeois sentiments, we must be selective when our petty-bourgeois intellectuals recommend to us the values of the past; we must be selective on the principle that what was right in one historical epoch may be wrong in a different one. When our petty-bourgeois intellectuals talk about the collective landownership system of the past and proceed to use this as evidence of equality resulting from the type of social ownership, it is clear that they are not giving a complete picture of the situation. They are only describing one aspect of social development, an early stage of development, and want us to generalize from there to a whole series of conclusions about the entire culture of the whole race, past and present. This is not only unscientific and superficial, it also encourages illusions which may endanger the progress of the people.

### The traditionalist view of Africa's past

Let us try and summarize what the traditionalists recommend as values to be emulated by modern Africa. On the cultural front the traditionalists say that African culture differs from European culture in that, whereas European peoples organized their societies on the basis of safeguarding "rights", our African ancestors organized their society on the basis of invoking "duties". Our culture, unlike that of the West, had the strength to restrain the community from succumbing to disruptive forces by suppressing their free and un-

The history of Africa is a history of resistance and class struggle. Here, Africans protest a land seizure by white South African settlers in the 1890's.



bridled sway. Our culture like any other, was founded on three basic elements: (a) the material element, which includes property relations and technology; (b) the institutional element, which includes customs, rituals, political as well as social institutions; and (c) the element of social values, which includes ethics, religion, literature and art, the latter two reflecting social aspirations and judgments. The intervention of Western culture subverted the traditional aspects of our culture; for example, by introducing new relations such as those between town and country.

As the material culture of the West directly disrupted our material culture, it in turn disrupted the other two aspects of our culture, namely, the institutional aspect and the aspect of values. As a result of this, our social institutions underwent considerable changes; class differentiations appeared, social mobility was encouraged. Old ranks and positions of prestige were replaced by new ones based on the criteria of new skills. Education was now designed so as to encourage the pursuit of material ends and to create individuals suitable for colonial administration. These new relations have created the new elites of administrators and businessmen, far removed from the masses, and even more isolated because of the absence of a middle class able to bridge the gap between the upper and the lower strata.

The old ruling class has become irrelevant or redundant, although more than 90% of the population still carry on the traditional African way of life, untouched by foreign influence. The introduction of industries has favoured the towns in infrastructure and other developments and created inequalities between urban and rural life.

To avoid future class conflicts of the kind experienced by the West, the new African governments are urged to make a choice: either they must remain as elites and become alien to their own people, just as the colonialists were, and complete the deculturalization of Africa started by colonialism and substitute cultures which have no roots in Africa; or they must ally themselves with the 90% of Africa's population whose roots are securely planted in the traditions of African culture. African politicians and statesmen are urged to avoid the development of class antagonisms by judiciously grafting new aspirations on to old traditions in an attempt at striking a harmonious social equilibrium. Class struggle as such is said to have no meaning in terms of African culture, and the conditions for its presence allegedly do not exist.

In early African societies, according to President Nyerere of Tanzania, there was an innate feeling of brotherhood within the community, sustained by the principle of love among men



(and women), and the right to work and to share equally the fruits of labour. These were the principles which kept the community (indeed the whole society) together and they must be safeguarded if the community is not to destroy itself.

People appointed leaders to power democratically on the principle that all were equal and that there were built-in ways within the community for restraining these leaders from abusing their powers. There was a moral distaste for private ownership of property, and although such private ownership did exist in a minor way, the dispossessed had expectations of sharing it on the principle of brotherhood. With the advent of foreign intervention, however, and alien concepts of individual ownership and the monetary economy, communal traditions were gradually subverted. Individualism encouraged the acquisitive instinct, which had hitherto remained dormant. This resulted in economic inequalities, which reduced people to master and servant relationships and thereby robbed them of their attribute of equality. This whole process poses a threat to the survival of society since it encourages the splitting up of family units and may well lead to social clashes and upheavals, and even wars.

Since these traditional principles (the argument goes), which kept the family and the community together, are thus demonstrably desirable for the maintenance of social order and the well-being of the community, they must be made part of the educational system of the present just as they were part of the educational system of the past. In consequence, as these values have thus become desirable in themselves, they must be presented as general aspirations as a matter of policy, and *any expression of opposite views to these principles must be suppressed*. For such opposition would be tantamount to approval of economic inequality, which destroys the sacredness of man. The danger to society if it abandons these principles is that it will degenerate into the pursuit of ends which undermine man himself. So we must seek our salvation in these principles, of course somewhat modified to suit the current situation.

At the height of the struggle in Kenya in the 1950s, Elspeth Huxley, the one-

time arch-enemy of Africa's independence, used almost exactly the same kind of argument in order to woo the so-called "loyal Kikuyu" away from supporting Kenyatta. She accused Kenyatta of introducing "alien", "communist" methods in Kenya by forcing the Kikuyu into a war with the white man. In her campaign against Nkrumah, she wrote: "African tribes had evolved, before the European advent, an elaborate and most effective system of curbing the abuse of power by the rulers through councils, elders and priests," and so on, and so forth. Strange that this same argument should now be used by our own people in an attempt to curb the rise of the new generation by forcing them to abide by archaic customs totally unsuited to the present day.

The basic error in this approach lies in the one-sided petty-bourgeois world outlook. Deeply influenced by Judeo-Christian metaphysics, Western scholarship's view of the world is dualistic. Dualism is the philosophical concept which defines human nature by two opposing sets of qualities — good versus evil, egoism versus altruism, vice versus virtue. According to the Christian view man is inherently sinful, and only through religious salvation can he be saved from his sinfulness. Thus such attributes as egoism, evil, vice are always present in man and the slightest encouragement or temptation by evil forces is enough to bring them into free play. From this standpoint, our petty-bourgeois intellectuals view past African societies as having been innocent and virtuous, and foreign intervention as an evil influence which undermined their innocence and distorted their virtues. The task before each of us, according to this view, is therefore to struggle against these evil influences in order to return to our innocent and virtuous life. This is obviously an idealistic view of the world and has little relevance to the real world today as it exists outside our consciousness. It is a subjective outlook, not objective; and if it is not checked it may lead to serious social malpractices, not excluding tyrannical practices.

On the other hand, the objective world outlook takes as its starting point the real, factual external world, not the world of our consciousness. For "it is not the consciousness of men

that determine their being but, on the contrary, it is their social being that determines their consciousness" as Marx says. Man has both natural needs and natural powers for their gratification. As he is a social being, he produces conditions essential for his individual existence as well as for the existence of the society of which he is a part. To this end he evolves codes of conduct which will ensure his survival as a social being under conditions which make for an environment conducive to his producing for his needs and also for developing new powers to this end; and as a social being these are expressed socially. He transforms the world around him and establishes natural bases for his own conditions of life. He develops socio-economic institutions and organizes production within the framework of these institutions. For him the social activity of production is a precondition for his existence and "sociality" becomes his natural attribute.

The qualities which our petty-bourgeois intellectuals describe as essentially African are really *human* qualities which find expression when a community is at a certain level of productive capacity. When a community does not have the capacity to produce *social surplus*, there is simply no means of becoming unequal. The sense of *brotherhood* which is common under such conditions is essential for the survival of a community which is permanently being threatened either by natural forces, which they cannot explain, or by hostile invasion. A similar feeling of brotherhood may be manifested in times of war or natural calamity even today.

The development of towns and social classes is not simply an invention of the West imposed on Africa. Historically, the development of agriculture and increased productivity, either through increased fertility of the land (after man discovered the technique of allowing land to remain fallow for certain periods) or development of irrigation and other techniques, allowed for the creation of social surplus. This surplus was everywhere the basis for the social division of labour, for the separation of crafts from agriculture, of towns from country, and finally the division of society into classes. As long as there was no permanent social sur-

plus the community remained basically rural, basically insecure, basically equal. So when our petty-bourgeois intellectuals talk about equality in times gone past, they are merely describing the level of development of the particular community about which they are talking, and no more. There is nothing uniquely "African" about this.

Collective ownership of land in the past was not necessarily progressive or socialist any more than Hitler's nationalizations were socialist. At the time it was more progressive than earlier forms of subsistence. But to go back to that form of organization at this historical juncture would be to put the clock back. The politics and ideology of the past were the concentrated expression of their economics, the economics of the past, and have no relevance to the economics of the present or the economics of the future. The requirements of modern agriculture have no room for such backwards forms of organization; they are a hindrance to progress and perpetuate poverty. These backward forms of agricultural organization have no national, continental, or racial — i.e. African — significance; *all* human beings wherever they hailed from passed through such tribal phases, and only the development of the productive forces helped them to move to higher levels of production, simultaneously evolving new social codes, political aspirations and moral ethics.

If those early forms of social organization also contained elements of democracy, it was the democracy of that particular time, totally unfitted to the democratic practice of man in the present epoch. To say that an African can learn democracy simply by looking backward to see how our great-grandparents behaved is not only meaningless but downright reactionary.

As an economy develops, new socioeconomic institutions also develop with it and the people's outlook and aspirations also undergo changes. Extensive preceded intensive agriculture and the latter represented an advance in man's development. From then on there was no going back. Nor could there be an interchange of one form of social organization for another. Extensive agriculture ensured subsistence; intensive agriculture ensured permanent social surplus, which in turn made

non-agricultural activity possible; the division of labour then resulted in the development of towns which set in motion the whole process which we now know as civilization.

The growth in population which followed this evolution was not due to people's wickedness or shortsightedness, but was a necessary condition as the well-being of man improved. Our great-grandparents did not have large families not because they were superior

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## Whereas traditionalists talk of equality in poverty, socialists prefer to talk of equality in plenty.

in the wisdom of family planning, as the enthusiasts of family planning today seem to imply, but because the mode of production and the level of well-being were simply not conducive to the development of large families. There were more women than men, and the men were usually engaged either in distant travels or wars; or else the community was nomadic and their constant shifting would not allow extensive procreation.

### The socialist view

When our petty-bourgeois intellectuals talk of the old "equality", they are idealizing equality in the abstract, because in real life that equality was quite different. Here is Engels' interesting description: "Under tribal conditions the people chose their chief to safeguard their liberty, but before long the chief became a despot and an instrument of destroying that liberty in order to maintain himself in power. As a despot all were equal before him, simply because they were all ciphers. As Rousseau says, 'Here we have the most extreme degree of inequality, the final point which completes the circle

and meets the point from which we set out: Here all private individuals are equal, just because they are ciphers; and the subjects have no other law but the will of their master.'"

Whereas traditionalists talk of equality in poverty, socialists prefer to talk of equality in plenty. Whenever a surplus product occurred, the seed of inequality was sown. It is this type of inequality that socialists want to abolish by abolishing class; we have no desire to go back to equality in poverty. As long as there are classes, as long as there are differentiations between skilled and unskilled labour, there can be no equality. The fact that slavery was not extensively practised in Africa does not mean that our ancestors were a special type of people; it simply means, again, that the level of production did not entail the use of slave labour as the basis of the economy. Only when production expanded and there was enough surplus to feed war captives; only when large construction works like irrigation systems or the pyramids of Egypt, involving an accumulation of non-productive labour, were carried out, was slavery resorted to.

The ruling classes of ancient times appropriated all the social surplus produced by the labour of the peasants and the slaves and the struggle waged by these classes continues to this day. Wherever there are exploiting classes there is struggle. The survival of the human species as we know it today implies the production of social surplus (and with it exploitation) because the tribes which failed to produce permanent surplus invariably perished, through famine and other natural hazards, or through wars. When control of the means of subsistence passed from nature to man the production of a permanent surplus and the survival of man were ensured. In Africa, as everywhere else, survival entailed exploitation and class struggle; the greater the development of productive forces, the sharper the struggle. This is the natural trend of history irrespective of what the traditionalists say to the contrary.

As what follows has an important bearing on what we have just discussed and as this is rather important to the whole substance of these pages, let us briefly highlight some of the salient points before we proceed any further.



While a glorious history of the past may be important for national self-confidence (the basis for nationalism), as socialists we must discriminate between the glorification of tyranny just for the sake of establishing a past, on the one hand, and the — in reality — much more glorious struggle waged by the people against natural hazards and man-made tyrannies on the other. The latter struggle is of relevance to us as socialists because it enables us to understand the level of development a certain society has achieved and from there make a correct analysis of the contradictory forces at work, in order to arrive at conclusions which will help us push the struggle forward. We need not be sentimental about the past.

Since Africa, like the rest of the world, is subject to uneven development, it is not difficult to find, from its very rich past, evidence of various levels of social development. Indeed Africa has many “firsts” to its credit: the first man as we know him came from Africa; the first means of producing fire invented by man was in Africa; the first irrigation system was developed in Africa; the first separation between town and country (petty-bourgeois intellectuals please note!) was in Africa (to be followed later in Mesopotamia); the first university was in Africa; in-

deed, the first “marxian” thinker before Karl Marx (Ibn-Khaldun) was an African, and so on. To pick one aspect of African life and generalize it to represent the entire race is not only unscientific but it is to succumb to racism, to use the arguments of apartheid and of *Mein Kampf*. That is where imperialism wants us to be! All African institutions and codes of conduct of the past which our petty-bourgeois intellectuals present to us as constituting intrinsic qualities of African-ness are really *human* qualities and can be shown to be present in other communities at comparable levels of social development.

If certain institutions or codes of conduct are attributed to a certain area or tribe or community, the significance of that attribution to us is that it is a good indicator of the level of social development of that particular community at a given time. That is to say, it will indicate to us whether the community concerned was communal, or feudal, or some other type. Using that knowledge we can make the necessary analysis in an attempt to get a correct scientific picture of the present, which will help us organize our political or state institutions, in accordance with the historically concrete situation, and so accelerate our march forward towards socialism in a scientific way. Be-

yond that, the relics of the past have their place only in the museum of history for the more inquisitive amongst us to satisfy their curiosity. This is not to degrade history; rather it is to give it its proper role. Mao said: “Study the old culture, reject its feudal dross, and assimilate its democratic essence, which is necessary for increasing national self-confidence. We must respect our own history and we must not lop it off; but respect for history means giving it its proper place as a science, respecting its dialectical development, and not eulogizing the past at the expense of the present or praising every drop of feudal poison.”

### Could Africa have developed its own capitalism?

Some petty-bourgeois African scholars speculate whether, left to our own devices, without European intervention, Africa would have developed its own feudalism and later its own capitalism. If by “European intervention” they refer to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’ contact before formal colonial domination in the late nineteenth century, it would have been unhistorical for Africa to develop its own feudalism. By that time the feudal epoch was already relegated to the museum of history and the epoch of capitalism was in its ascendancy. It was impossible for feudalism to strike new roots anywhere; its epoch was over. It is interesting to note here that the United States moved directly from its feudal-slavery mode of production to capitalism without passing via formal feudalism as such. This was because the American Civil War was won when the epoch of capitalism was already beginning to flourish in the world and there was no room for a new feudalism, even if the leaders tended to have strong feudalistic aspirations. The British and other European bourgeois investors made sure that it was their mode of production, i.e. capitalism, that would establish its roots in North America. As far as we ourselves in Africa were concerned, our contact was with the already bourgeoisified Europe, although our relationship with it was feudalistic. Whether Africa could develop its own capitalism is the subject of discussion in the rest of the chapter.

The conditions for feudal development were not present in most parts of



While the people of Africa waged armed struggle for their independence from colonialism, the struggle for a genuine socialist revolution is still necessary.



Neocolonialism has replaced direct colonialism in much of Africa. Here, Kissinger meets with former President Kenyatta of Kenya.

Africa since the accumulation of social surplus was not large enough to spark off such a development. When contact with Europe was established and our gold and ivory acquired exchange value, all the surplus that accrued from the exchange of these commodities was appropriated by the European bourgeois, who paid low prices for what we sold and charged high prices for the otherwise cheap manufactured goods they sold us. Thus a long period of simple reproduction set in which did not leave us with enough surplus to develop any new forms of social relations, feudalist or capitalist, even if we assume that the historical epoch was ripe for the development of either. But the epoch during which our contact with Europe was established was no longer a feudal one, it was the capitalist epoch. Consequently, the relevant theoretical question is whether our contact with Europe hampered the development of African capitalism? And of course the answer is definitely *yes*.

For several hundred years Africa had contact with, and was influenced by, Europe through trade; and for more than 70 years it (except for the Portuguese colonies, which were more than 400 years old) came under the complete domination of Europe. Production in Africa was arranged to suit the production and consumption needs of capitalist Europe. But during this period, when our economies were so completely integrated with those of capitalist Europe, the latter prevented independent development of African capitalism, turning the continent instead into a supplier of raw materials and a market for their commodities. Our relation with Europe can be lik-

ened to that of a feudal lord with his serfs, in which the latter were completely integrated politically and economically with the interests of the lord. Whatever happened among the serfs by way of economic conflicts did not represent the main class conflict between the serfs as a whole, on the one hand, and the feudal landlords on the other. In Africa we had chiefs, traditional chiefs as well as those imposed by the colonial powers in the pursuit of their policy of "indirect rule". Their relationship with the people was like that of a favoured serf employed to supervise the rest of the serfs of the manor. If the people were in conflict with their chiefs, it did not constitute a class conflict, it was just a conflict with a tyrannical despot. Only in those parts of Africa where the mode of production was based on slavery did the conflicts assume class contradictions. The main antagonism, however, the antagonistic contradiction, was between the people and imperialism; not simply because the imperialists had robbed us of our freedom, but fundamentally because of the exploitative relationship of a capitalist economy with feudal links with its appendage; so this contradiction was a contradiction of a feudal type.

As a result of this feudal relationship of complete political and economic integration which survives up to this day, in spite of our formal freedom or "independence", we are still attached to the European economy by an umbilical cord, a purse string, as we noted in the previous chapter. If the contractual or legal break with imperialism had taken place in the pre-socialist epoch, that is before the Russian Revolution of 1917, it would have been natural for our countries to develop their own African capitalism as was the case with the U.S.A. after its war of independence, and also with Japan. With the emergence of the epoch of socialist revolution, however, it is now impossible to develop national capitalism on the pattern of the bourgeois democratic revolution.

Capitalism developed and flourished from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a natural historical development after feudalism. The bourgeoisie who ushered in the epoch of capitalism dominated the world without any chal-

lenge and put the entire world's resources under its control. World history became bourgeois history as capitalist relations of production were in the ascendant. The emerging Japanese bourgeoisie captured this moment to develop parallel with the Western bourgeoisie while the latter was still weak and had not yet developed their world-pervading monopoly capitalism, i.e. imperialism. Once imperialism was dominant under Western/Japanese bourgeois hegemony, no other "national bourgeoisie" would be allowed to develop independently; they had either to come under the economic and political dominance of the international bourgeoisie, or be crushed.

Imperialism, however, was the last stage of capitalism and October 1917 in Russia ushered in a new epoch, the epoch of proletarian revolution. With socialist uprisings and anti-imperialistic struggles becoming the dominant force in world history after 1917, the opportunity for the development of any independent national bourgeoisie in Africa and Asia vanished. Our nascent national bourgeoisies had the choice of either developing into comprador capitalists, i.e. serving the metropolitan bourgeoisie, or facing extinction as a class. What we see emerging in some parts of Africa, e.g. Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, the Ivory Coast, Egypt, is a mish-mash collection of comprador capitalist states — the weak appendages of a dying imperialism. Supported by their foreign masters only to the extent of their being compliant and useful to them, and despised and hated by the broad masses of the people whom they help to suppress, these capitalists are only a transient phenomenon and have no long-term historical significance or function. Their class will either die with imperialism or slowly atrophy with the coming of new, socialist relations of production in the various countries. With the emergence of the epoch of socialist revolution it is impossible, as historical evidence abundantly proves, to develop in Africa national capitalism on the pattern which followed the bourgeois revolutions in Europe, North America and Japan. D.C. Osadebay, in the following poem, sums up the pathetic plight of an African entrepreneur in the era of monopoly capitalism:



*I tried my hand at imports  
But monopolies frowned;  
I then exported produce,  
Once more they played me  
down.  
Big Business never loves*

*The bold determined investor;  
You must become their clerk  
Or buy your goods from them;  
This is the burden I bear.\**

The main thrust of our struggle is necessarily against imperialism, as this remains the principal antagonistic contradiction between us and the metropolitan bourgeoisie. This struggle against bourgeois imperialism includes the struggle against its local agents in our respective countries.

The capitalist mode of production as manifested in Africa is European or American or Japanese, capitalism extended to Africa; it is not African capitalism, even if its supervisors are African. The basic contradiction still remains that between us and Western capitalism, i.e. imperialism. This is the principal contradiction, and other contradictions, which can be identified and analysed within our societies, such as those between forces of production and social relations of production, small-scale production and large-scale production, production for export and production for local consumption, the emergence of African compradors and the nascent proletariat, will remain merely as "aspects of contradictions". Without successfully resolving the principal contradiction, our feudal relationship with imperialism, there is no chance of our resolving aspects of the contradiction; and without their successful resolution, there is no hope for us to move forward rapidly in the historical direction which the epoch of socialist revolution entails.

Since we have not developed a capitalism of our own, we suffer from all the ills of world capitalism, from the receiving end. Any crisis in capitalist Europe is immediately exported to Africa as a result of our appendage relationship and also because our capital-

\* From "The African Trader's Complaint", in *Poems From Black Africa*, ed. Langston Hughes (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 100.

ism is American/European capitalism, not African capitalism. The struggle among the multinational corporations is now being waged in Africa as well. As this relationship skims off most of the cream derived from our economic activity, and as what is left goes into the high-consumption spending so typical of all developing countries, African economies do not retain enough of the social surplus necessary for accumulation and productive investment, which is so essential for expanded reproduction. As a result, most African countries can be described as being in a state of "simple reproduction" — the kind of production which was common before capitalism became a predominant mode of production. Simple reproduction is so called because the European feudal lords consumed all the surplus that the economy produced in enormous extravagances of consumption, such as building of castles and luxurious cities. There was no surplus left for

Conditions in Tanzania (below) show that the class struggle for liberation and socialism continues.



accumulation and productive investment to take the economy forward to a stage of "expanded reproduction". Although superficially there was an appearance of economic hustle and bustle, and society reached its peak in the arts, culture and glorious warlike exploits, actually the economies remained stagnant, and were mostly supplemented by foreign loot, either directly through out-and-out piratical adventures, or indirectly through foreign trade.

For hundreds of years these economies remained stagnant and it was not until the advent of the age of bourgeois revolution after 1789 that Europe got out of the rut and moved towards booming capitalist development. Those countries which were late in their bourgeois revolutions, such as Turkey, Spain, Portugal, and Greece, although they enjoyed the unprecedented feudal glory of the pre-capitalist epoch in much the same way as any other feudalist European power, nevertheless stagnated and before long were overtaken by capitalist Europe. They have remained to this day, especially Turkey, the sick men of Europe. When the Turkish petty bourgeois came on to the scene, after the Kemalist Revolution in 1923, they found the road blocked for indigenous capitalist development. Thus although the Turkish economic system is capitalist, it is a capitalism of underdevelopment; it is not Turkish capitalism, but British, German or American capitalism in Turkey. In other words, the Turkish bourgeois democratic revolution took place at the wrong historical moment. Had the Turkish workers at the time transformed the bourgeois revolution into a socialist revolution, Turkey would today have been one of the world's important industrial nations. However, having chosen bourgeois capitalist development, it is still an underdeveloped country, in spite of her imperialist past. Exactly the same thing is happening in Africa where foreign capitalism is booming at the expense of the African masses. There is no road to African capitalism.

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Interview with Black South African journalist

# Revolutionary protagonist:

CORBIN SEAVERS



Zwelakhe Sisulu

*Zwelakhe Sisulu is a Black South African journalist and political activist who has been writing about and working with his people for many years. Sisulu, son of jailed African National Congress leader Walter Sisulu, was active in the Union of Black Journalists until it was banned in 1977, and was president of the Union of Black Journalists' successor organization, the Writers Association of South Africa (WASA).*

*In 1980, the journalists who formed WASA decided to form a union that represented not only Black journalists but all Black media workers, and the Media Workers Association of South Africa (MWASA) was formed with Sisulu as its first president. Barely two weeks later, MWASA staged its first*

**Z**welakhe Sisulu helped lead a 1980 strike of virtually all Black journalists in South Africa. Today he is under a vicious form of house arrest.

*strike — affecting over a dozen newspapers and magazines and pulling out virtually every one of the 130-odd Black journalists in South Africa. The striking workers eventually won recognition of their union, and shortly thereafter Zwelakhe Sisulu won his own special sort of recognition from the South African apartheid government — they served him with a three-year “banning” order, a particularly vicious form of house arrest.*

*Sisulu can no longer work as a journalist, serve in MWASA, or be quoted in any publication inside South Africa. In January 1981, four other MWASA activists were also served with banning notices by the apartheid government in an effort to crush the union.*

*In South Africa there is no functional freedom of the press. Certainly there is a critical press that complains about government actions, but even this liberal press practices its own self-censorship. It is the Black press and Black journalists who face the real brunt of the state's repression. Any observer who believes the press is free in South Africa need only be reminded of the string of Black papers that have been closed down in the past 20 years. Black journalists know what it means to be Black in South Africa, and the very writing about this objective situation places them in danger.*

*MWASA in fact has continued to function inside the country and, in spite of repeated threats of further repression, the union has continued to actively fight for the interests of Black media workers in South Africa despite the banning of five of its members.*

*Yet even the banning of Sisulu did not satisfy the apartheid government, and*



# Zwelakhe Sisulu

*in July 1981 Sisulu was arrested and charged under the country's notorious Terrorism Act. After eight months the government released Sisulu, but he remains banned and unable to continue his work. Corbin Seavers, a Black American journalist, interviewed Sisulu in late June. What follows are excerpts from that interview.*

**Black Nation: How do Black South Africans generally look upon Black Americans?**

**Sisulu:** One, I think there is a personal

affinity. Black South Africans still regard Black Americans as brothers and sisters in the real sense of being from the same tradition and the same culture. On the other level, to Black South Africans, Black Americans represent Black advancement essentially and this is at two levels.

One, you have the sporting and musical grace in the United States, and at the other level you have the professional advancement that has been obtained by Black people in the United States.

In essence oftener or not Black South Africans do look up to Black Americans because of their achievements. In fact they also see Black Americans as proof that, given the opportunities, Black South Africans can equal or even surpass what has been obtained by white South Africans.

**Black Nation: How do Black South Africans react to Black American personalities like Millie Jackson, Stephanie Mills, Mike Weaver and others that come to their country?**

**Sisulu:** Now oftener or not Black South Africans find themselves in a very painful situation. Where they admire a Black American for what that individual has obtained but at the same time they feel that that Black person has betrayed the cause. This happens of course when you get visiting Black



South African police brutally attack a demonstration of Black people in Cato Manor, Durban, South Africa in 1959.

Americans. I do not know what might happen for instance if Muhammad Ali were to decide to come to South Africa. He is held in high esteem by Black people in this country. People are obviously torn between but they know their priorities.

This is why Millie Jackson, Stephanie Mills and Mike Weaver have been such a disappointment. The Weaver case is a typical example. The same for John Tate. When they came here just prior to their fights there was absolute and complete hostility towards them by Black people. But as soon as they had won their fights, they were very popular. This is not because they had won their fights. It was yet further proof that Black people are capable. So this is the contradiction that Black people find themselves in this country.

**Black Nation: So although many Black South Africans respect Black Americans for their perceived accomplishments and look upon them as fellow Africans, they are asking us to stay away as an act of solidarity?**

**Sisulu:** In fact by not coming here that is acting in solidarity with the people. Because the coming here of Black American personalities, these are the people who perpetuate the lie that there is harmony and change in South Africa. This is the problem with them. We do not begrudge them their success. We are not asking them too much to say to sacrifice a few thousand dollars.

So if you do not come here and you publicly state that you are not coming here because of apartheid then that is to act in solidarity with the people's struggle.

**Black Nation: Do Black South Africans take any notice of political activities or actions taken by Black Americans?**

**Sisulu:** There are two levels of consciousness. The first consciousness are the people who see themselves in the capitalist mode. Always admire the Black middle-class American way of life — flashy clothes, flashy cars, etc. That is at one level. At another level you find the more politically advanced people, mostly high school pupils, university students and professionals. I think this is where Black Americans have had the strongest impact. I say this because for instance if you study the history of the Black Consciousness



Movement, you are in fact studying the history of the Black Panther movement in the United States. Stokely Carmichael had a very strong impact on Black South African student circles. He made such an impact because he came out with a pro-Black attitude without necessarily being anti-white. This was the same stance the Black Consciousness Movement was to adopt later. Stokely also had a big following if for no other reason because he could stand up and dare the system. The same can be said of Angela Davis. It may be sheer coincidence she is a Marxist. But the fact she being a Black Marxist could stand up and dare the system is the important

thing. Call it heroism or whatever, this is the thing that has a lot of impact on the community.

**Black Nation: Do you see a common bond between the Black American people's struggle and the Black South African struggle?**

**Sisulu:** Yes, undoubtedly, because both people are an oppressed people and their oppression is based firmly on the two evils of capitalist exploitation and racism. It is important to recognize that our tactics to obtain our objectives may differ but we are fighting basically the same struggle to assert Black dignity, culture and values.



**Black Nation: In your opinion do Black Americans have a special responsibility in being actively involved in the anti-apartheid solidarity movement?**

**Sisulu:** When the South African government brutalizes Black people it does not brutalize just Blacks in South Africa or southern Africa, it brutalizes the dignity of Black people universally. They do not oppress us merely because we are Black people in South Africa. We are Black people who sell our labor. So this means we are in an identical position with Black people in the United States. In fact we are one people, one class oppressed by the same people, the same class. And for this reason I think it is important for Black people both in the United States and South Africa to recognize that they are one people. And being one we should show solidarity because it is only through solidarity and revolutionary ideology that we will actually be able to change our situation.

**Black Nation: Does the Black press suffer more harassment from the apartheid government than the white press?**

**Sisulu:** There is general repressive legislation against the press in South Africa. There is no press freedom in South Africa simply because it is impossible to have press freedom without freedom of the individual.

But there is yet a finer and subtler form of repression aimed specifically at the Black press. In fact several apartheid ministers have complained to newspapers with extra-editions. Extra-editions are those editions aimed at Black people. Now some ministers have actually complained that whereas there is no problem in using certain stories, problems arise if those stories are used in Black editions because those stories tend to incite Black people. So if your audience is white you can happily write about Black grievances and police shooting down Black people like dogs, but if you use that same story in a Black edition you are guilty of incitement. This is one example. There is a lot of harassment of Black journalists. If I could attempt to give you figures on the number of Black journalists that have been detained without trial and banned!! Since 1976 at any given time there has been a

Black journalist detained. As I speak to you today, there are six in detention and fifteen banned (including myself). I do not recall a white journalist being held in detention without trial.

**Black Nation: Why such drastic action against Black journalists? What is it that these journalists are saying or doing that causes the government to react in such a repressive fashion?**

**Sisulu:** Essentially the reason why the Black journalist has been victimized is that he is seen quite wrongly as an agitator or instigator by the South African government. The South African government has always maintained that Black people in South Africa have been a contented lot. The events of 1976, and even before, burst that bubble.

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**T**here is no press freedom in South Africa simply because it is impossible to have press freedom without freedom of the individual.

The apartheid government knows what the real problem is, but it is intentionally refusing to see the problem. Consequently it is refusing to resolve the problem.

Now the role the Black journalists have played was to air the grievances of the people in an objective and very constructive manner. Previously newspapers, white newspapers, never used any Black copy. They never use the views of the authentic leaders of the people. Their newspapers were merely a vehicle

for government propaganda. Their newspapers were there to retain the status quo and work in the interests of capitalism. The irony is here that to maximize their profit white newspapers felt it important to get into the Black market. Not because of any moral commitment but because it increases their revenue. Now the main problem here was that being the case.

You had committed Black journalists who had their eyes opened by the events of 1976. They could witness at first hand the brutality of the system. When you are in that situation you are actually seeing people dying, your own brother, your own sister dying. That does something to you.

It was because of this firsthand experience, this exposure to blatant brutality, that actually got Black journalists so committed. So that you can see this common thread running.

Because white newspapers need a lot of money they get involved in the so-called Black market. Because of their exposure to this brutality the eyes of Black journalists are opened, consequently, they are able to highlight and dramatize the general brutality of the status quo. And because this happens the government must take action against the Black journalist.

**Black Nation: You have publicly stated that South African journalists must make a choice; they either support the revolutionary forces or the reactionary forces. Does the posing of such a choice violate journalism's cardinal rule about objectivity?**

**Sisulu:** No, it doesn't, but, in fact, I see it as an advancement of objectivity. Now one of the great debates that is waging in this country is "What is objectivity?" Indeed, what is objectivity? I am in a Black situation. What is objective to me or what I see objectively is not necessarily what a white journalist sees objectively. So we differ radically on that. For years white journalists were objective as they want to believe. Their being objective meant being collaborationist propagandist. Giving the people what the government was saying.

Now to me, being objective is to highlight the views of Nelson Mandela and other leaders and to highlight the views of the people. To me this is what objectivity is. In short, when you talk of objectivity, you have bourgeois ob-

jectivity and you have proletarian objectivity. Now ours, I want to state, is proletarian objectivity and the two cannot meet.

**Black Nation:** Many people hold the view that the African press is in serious trouble. That no free press exists on the African continent. In your opinion as a professional journalist, what direction must the African press take?

**Sisulu:** My view is that first and foremost the press must work for the interest of the people. If the interest of the people and the interest of the government coincide that is very good. In fact ideally this is what it should be — the interest of the government should be that of the people and vice versa.

The role that the press has to play in Africa is a role that informs and educates the people. Now the critics of the Black press in Africa . . . the reason why they are so critical is that, again, our situation is different. As we have seen already in the different interpretations of objectivity.

You have got to extend that difference of interpretation to include even interpretation what the freedom of the press is. Now (in) capitalist or generally Western European countries the press is said to be free because there is free comment in it. The newspapers can be critical of the government.

To me that is not the only criteria one uses for a free press. In Western countries the people who get into the newspaper are captains of industry, people in government, people who are in the hierarchy of society. This is what they mean by the freedom of the press.

Now in Africa the interpretation of the freedom of the press will have to differ radically, in that you have got to reverse the process. Whereas in Western countries the people who are dominating newspaper pages are those who are top in government or whatever. Africa will have to reverse the process so that the person lowest on the ladder has the opportunity to air his views. This is the essence of the freedom of the press. I mean we shouldn't take it for granted that freedom of the press means being critical of your government. If the need arises, fair enough, but that is not the only criteria.

**Black Nation:** There is a continuing debate between the third world and the industrial capitalist nations on the issue



Whites live in privilege,

**of the new international information order. The capitalist nations oppose the new international information order, among other reasons because it is viewed as an excuse to bring the press under government control. Third world nations generally support it as a means to break the enormous monopoly the West holds over the spread of news and information. As a journalist, how might you place the South African press into this controversy?**

**Sisulu:** I would definitely support the concept of the new international information order. If you look at the South African press, for instance, one of the particular things about the South African press is that if you take a newspaper in South Africa and start reading, you will probably think you are somewhere in Europe or somewhere in the United States. It does not relate to the reality of Africa. South Africa is in Africa first and foremost. But if you read the newspaper today, any newspaper, you will think you are in some British town. The press in South Africa as it exists is not African. It is European at the most.

What happens in Africa is not covered objectively at all, or if it is covered, it is so biased as to be meaningless. South African press coverage of Europe

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**M**y view is that first and foremost the press must work for the interest of the people.

is more than South African press coverage of Africa. And the little that they cover of Africa is not done objectively. They themselves violate their own interpretation of objectivity. If you read the South African press today: there is going to be a coup in Mozambique next week, three thousand people were massacred in Angola last week and there are going to be three more coups next week. This is the type of coverage you get. This is not objective covering, it is just the





while Black South Africans are forced to live in poverty.

manipulation of news. And this is what will change if you got this new order coming in.

**Black Nation: As a professional journalist, what is your opinion of the news coverage on South Africa by magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek*?**

**Sisulu:** I am very disappointed generally with magazines like *Newsweek* and *Time*. When *Newsweek* writes about South Africa, it's got to be sensational so *Newsweek* can sell. But *Newsweek* has got no interest at all for the situation of people in South Africa for instance. So that an important event might occur in the life of the people, but because it is not a sellable commodity it will not see the light of day. (In other words), *Time* and *Newsweek* select what they know will appeal to the buyer of the magazine. This is the whole tragedy of the Western press. You can afford to write about June 16 in Soweto, not because of any concern. Because it will sell. This has always been their policy.

Their reporting is not only inadequate, their perspective is totally wrong. I think if *Newsweek*, for instance, wants to write about the Black situation in South Africa; who is best qualified to describe that situation? Go

through your copies of *Newsweek* and *Time* magazine, try and compare the people who are used as spokespersons. How often do you get the authentic leaders of the people being interviewed or even quoted? Why is it oftener or not the people that get into these magazines are P. W. Botha, Gatsha Buthelezi and Helen Suzman. When in fact these are the people putting brakes on change. Why is it the people who want the change, the people who are leading the struggle for change (Motlana, Tutu, Tambo, etc.), are not consulted or even interviewed?

**Black Nation: People outside South Africa are becoming a little bit more familiar with strategy and tactics utilized to overthrow the apartheid regime. A harder question though is, what type of society do you want after the revolution?**

**Sisulu:** Now you have come to a main talking point in our struggle at this stage. We have always been committed to the overthrow of the white apartheid regime. But I think for a very long time we did not articulate what alternative society we wanted. We somewhat articulated it in the Freedom Charter and other documents but I do not think that was concrete enough.

For myself, the type of society I envision is a socialist society. It will borrow a lot from Marxist-Leninist teachings on the basis of what Mozambique did, Angola did, and what Zimbabwe is doing.

**Black Nation: In America when most people hear the term Marxism-Leninism the first thing that might come to mind is the persecution of the Church. Do you think that might happen if Marxism-Leninism is used by the new government?**

**Sisulu:** When one talks of Marxism-Leninism, you do not implement it in a vacuum. You implement it in a culture with people's traditions. Now one of the things you have in Africa, fortunately or unfortunately, is that the church is so firmly entrenched that it has become part of the culture.

Look at Zimbabwe for instance. According to the Western press, Robert Mugabe (ZANU leader and Zimbabwe's socialist prime minister) was expected to come in and start destroying churches. It has not happened. In fact, he will tell you that the church should be a socialist institution. In the new South Africa the progressive church will definitely play a leading role.



Tom Feelings

## REVOLUTIONARY CULTURE

# Tom Feelings: A People's

### AMIRI BARAKA

You head for Tom Feelings' loft in New York City, it's up in the 30's among the commercial buildings and offices, just out of reach of the garment center. An elevator building, Feelings' loft is very large, and in it now there are long tables laid out with various works: prints, slides, posters, originals, papers and books. And all around the loft are the signs that there is a mighty graphic artist on the set. There are small drawings and large ones, gorgeous paintings, critical realist, sensuous, direct, subtle, mostly powerful.

For years now Tom Feelings has been one of the painters associated with "the movement." He was one of the few painters associated with the *Umbra* organization, which published a magazine of the same name and was a

group of mainly black writers living on the lower east side in the early '60's. As such it served as a partial prototype for later black arts organizations.

Born in "Bed-Stuy," the most famous black part of Brooklyn, New York, he went to a vocational high school there and majored in art, receiving a scholarship later to the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. He has illustrated many books, both for young adults and children. He has had many shows and exhibitions and been in still more all over the U.S. as well as Africa and the Caribbean. He has lived in Nkrumah's Ghana and was in Guyana during the early days when many black intellectuals saw great promise in the post-colonial government before the disillusion of neocolonialism.

He says he is "a story teller, telling a story in pictures," and whose "first function is to reach a large amount of

people."

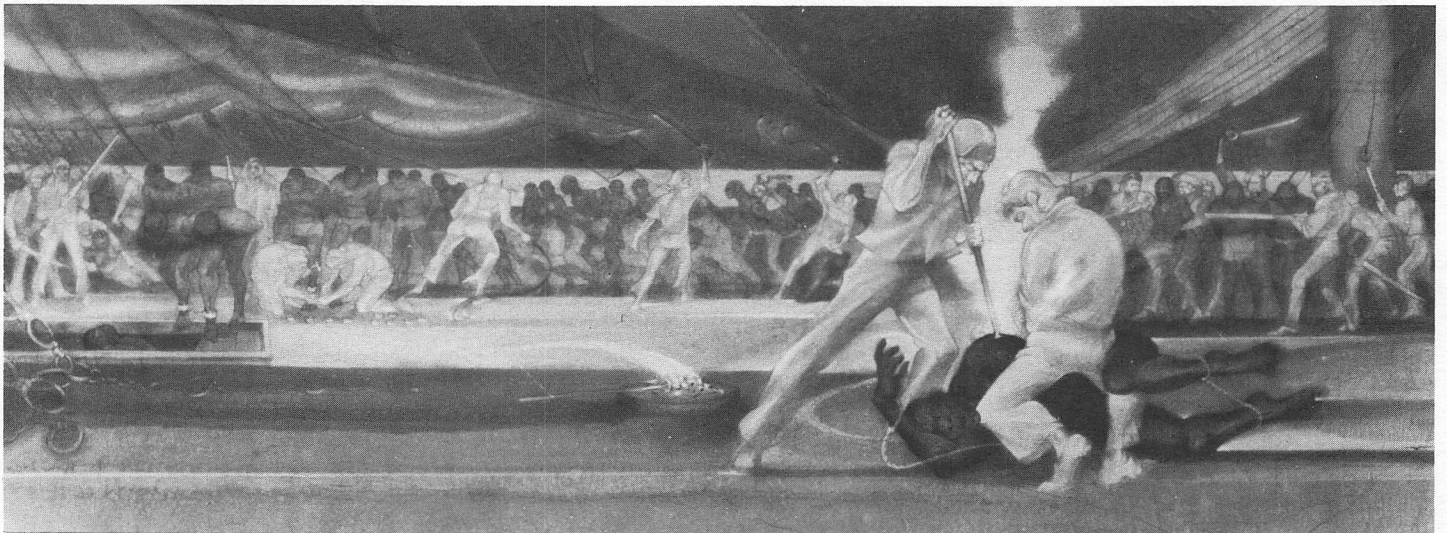
Feelings worked for awhile for the old *New York Age*, a rather short-lived black newspaper, doing a comic strip, *Tommy Traveler in the World of Negro History*, between '58 and '59. It was a political cartoon as much as anything else, for which he was paid the great sum of \$25 a week.

He has been drawing consciously since he was four. He remembers it was about that time that his teacher was taking him around showing other teachers his works.

At 12, he was going to the PAL (Police Athletic League) where he met a black art teacher who took him in hand, encouraging him "to draw out the window." That is, to document the rich life his young eyes saw all around him.

It wasn't until after a sojourn in the Air Force, between 1953 and '57 that he

### *Branded and Chained*





# Artist

really got down to serious art again. In 1958 he went to the School of Visual Arts, stimulated as well by the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement of the time. He started going back into the neighborhood. He felt that what he wanted to do “had to be original. There didn’t seem to be much to copy. My art forced me to take a good look at stuff I saw all around me, stuff I saw all my life. At first I was just a reporter, seeing something and putting it down. Then I began to interpret. And that’s important — what you see, feel, what you want to see.

“For a long time I didn’t talk about it. I just drew and built up my skill.”

In fact it was through art that Feelings got to Africa. He’d been working on comic strips that were designed to reach the masses as a method of raising the level of black national consciousness. In 1964 he sold the strip to the



Young Woman

black-owned Golden Legacy Series. The strip was called Crispus Attucks and the Minutemen. From this he received \$600, and took off for Ghana.

“In art school I was going crazy, like a lot of other blacks. Because you got the skills in school but we knew we weren’t going to get any work drawing or illustrating,” in this racist society.

“I went to Africa because I wanted

to go somewhere where it would be normal for me to be doing something. Where it would be normal for me to be an artist.” Feelings came back from Ghana when he felt that it was time for him to get back to the struggle in the U.S.

He was contributor to *Liberator* magazine beginning in 1962, during the time that magazine was a focal point of

Section from *The Middle Passage*.





black liberation theory. He also began contributing to *Freedomways* since its inception in 1961.

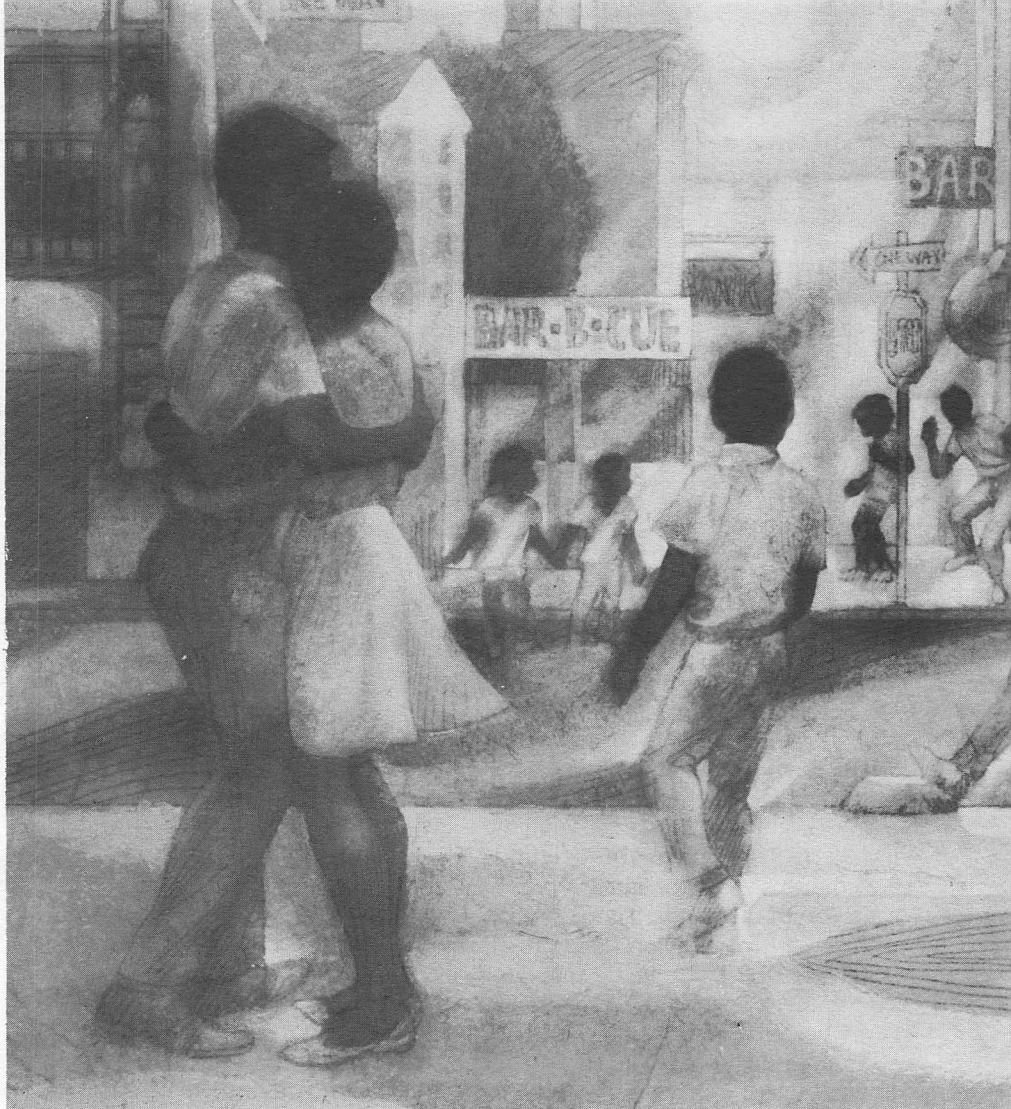
"There was always dialogue going on at these magazines. All the questions were being talked about and I was exposed to it . . . questions about the commitment of the artist to the struggle, about the freedom movement. These were some of the questions being thrown around. There was not much money but it was exciting — throwing these ideas around, back and forth."

It was around this time that Feelings began to work with the poets at *Umbr*a and develop his unique approach to black subject matter in the pages of *Liberator* and *Freedomways*. One important concept to this progressive artist is how an artist's "interrelationship with people and skill have to be equal i.e. dovetail," so that you can "develop skills and concentrate on what you want to say." It is like Mao Zedong pointing out that the progressive artist must be artistically powerful and politically revolutionary! It is no wonder that Feelings cites one of his major influences as the great Charles White.

Feelings went to Guyana in 1971 and stayed there until 1974 because the government asked him "to help train illustrators so that they could illustrate the first set of books they were doing for children — to get rid of the English-oriented books." So that the new children's literature could better reflect Guyanese history.

For the last few years Tom Feelings has been working on many projects, but also on a *magnum opus*, which he calls *The Middle Passage*. He conceived of the project about 1969 and then began it in 1974. He first imagined the series as line drawings, but then began to conceptualize about creating 70 tonal drawings, as some observers have said that Feelings is "making drawing into painting."

The work is about the grimmest days of the slave trade, when Africans were ripped from their homelands to serve the piteous maw of rising capitalism. Anyone looking at the seemingly endless studies for the work and the tonal drawings he has already finished (using black ink, white paint, washes and new techniques) cannot fail to come away stunned by the agonizing depth and riveting detail and great artistic skill of the huge project.



*Bed-stuy on a Saturday Afternoon*

Feelings says he wants the pieces "to come off the page" and reach "below the page." He was moved to do a kind of "tonal drawing" because the simple "line doesn't use the complete dynamism of dark to light." He uses line drawing, map board, white tempera as well as wet tissue on board. The ink runs into the white tempera creating an "unknown quality," an exciting new texture and depth of image. For instance, as Feelings says, "Sometimes the white becomes sinister, sometimes it becomes light."

Feelings was moved to do the project while working with Julius Lester on a book about slavery. He also felt that he wanted to do some of the pictures he'd seen in the history books over, because they were "too stiff." He saw a black woman being branded by the slavers and thought the image was too stiff and unrealistic. He used photos of real struggle, as for instance a 1958 photo of a black woman assaulted by a white policeman, who has his foot on her

neck, as a prototype to capture the detailed essence of real life oppression. He saves '50's and '60's clippings of the recent highpoints of the BLM as reference materials for his realistic images.

In 1973 he thought the whole of *The Middle Passage* would be 15 drawings, but when he went to Guyana he took a huge number of books on slavery and began to notate the significant events chronologically in the process of the "peculiar institution." And it was then that his conception of the work expanded. But, like many progressive artists, Feelings has never had a full year to work on the paintings, he is always having to stop and do other books or other projects in order to pay the bills.

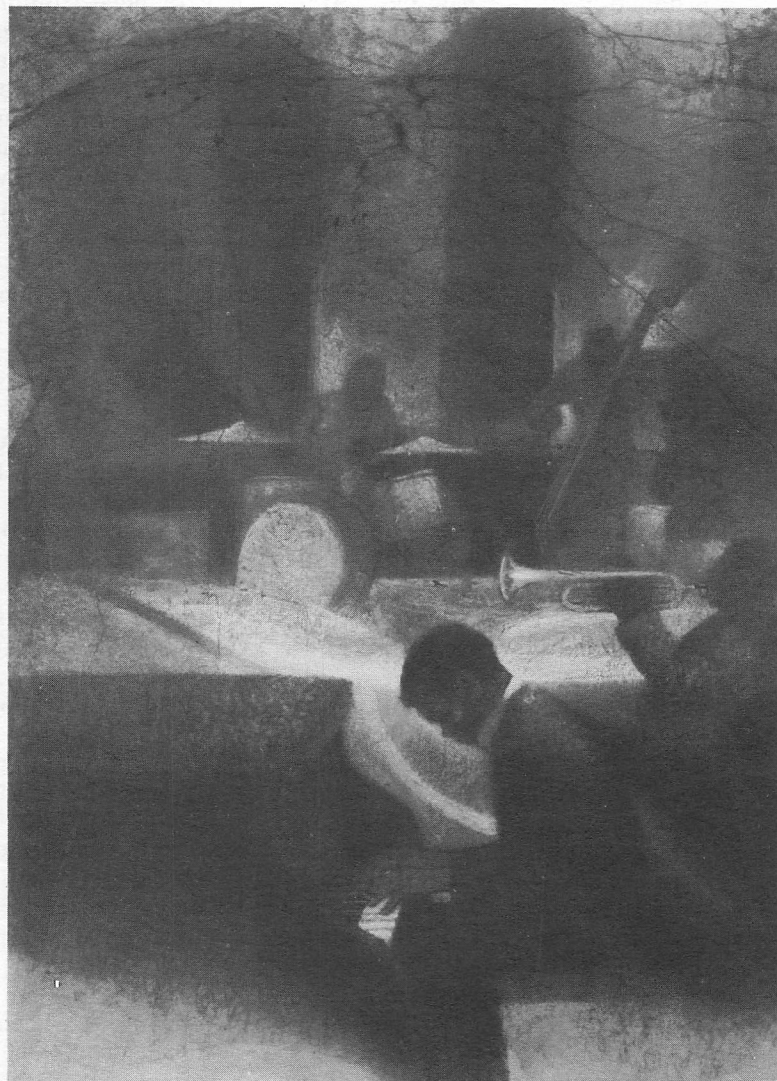
As now conceived, and in the act of trying to push forward toward completion, Feelings has projected the work to the period of Emancipation, saying he thinks other artists would be needed to complete such an ambitious project past then. Certainly we cannot expect the





*The Crossing*

*Sonny's Blues*



normal bourgeois foundations to give out money for this work's completion.

Feelings insists he is "telling a story" with his art, and there is little doubt that that is why his painting has such a large mass following. "The people," Feelings says, "want a story . . . but they want you to sing it. They also want to know that the person telling it . . . loves them." In this line, it is clear how Feelings sees his work as rendering a concrete, yet critical, reality, but also his commitment to the people and their struggle. But because of this stance the big galleries on East 57th St. in New York or in the other U.S. metropolises rarely ask him to show. Feelings works out of his studio and make a living illustrating books and selling reproductions and posters.

He says most of his work "is bought by blacks who see it and buy it . . . it's usually the first time they've bought art work. It's like buying Stevie Wonder . . . they just see it and buy it."

— A.B.

# Dramatist protests Kenyan repression

**Statement by Ngugi wa Thiong'o on the Kenyan Government's refusal to grant a stage license to Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre theatre group.**

Ladies and gentlemen of the Press, I have been asked by the management committee of Kamiriithu Theatre Group and those responsible for the production of our new play, *Maitu Njugira*, to express the following observations regarding our efforts to obtain a government stage licence for the Kenya National Theatre.

First I must express our extreme disappointment and even much anger at the grossly irresponsible manner which the authorities concerned chose to deal with our application for the licence, normally a quick routine administrative procedure, unnecessary in most countries, but introduced in most British colonies as a method of vetting and censoring native cultural expression.

Dutifully we applied for this licence in writing on 2 November, 1981 to the Nairobi Provincial Commissioner. We then followed this up with a reminder on 12 November, 1981. We got a letter from the Nairobi Provincial Commissioner's Officer asking us to do something that no other theatre group has ever been asked to do, that is, to go back to the District Commissioner, Kiambu, to ask for a recommendation, this on the pretext that the physical address of our Group was in Kiambu. Still we went ahead and on 23 November, 1981 we wrote to the District Commissioner, Kiambu, asking for a recommendation. We have never received a reply from the D.C. of Kiambu but throughout December 1981 and January 1982 the chairman of our Group Mr. Ngugi wa Mirii, kept running between Kiambu and Nairobi trying to get a reply and the result of our applica-

tion. On 3 February, 1982 we wrote a second reminder to the Nairobi Provincial Commissioner. On 16 February 1982, three days before the scheduled opening of our performances at the Kenya National Theatre, we wrote a third reminder, which we even copied to the Chief Secretary.

To all these letters and reminders, the Government, through the Nairobi Provincial Commissioner, never responded in writing. Instead the management of the Kenya National Theatre were given secret instructions not to allow our group into the theatre either for the technical rehearsals starting on 15 February or for the opening night of 19 February. The police must have also been given instructions to harass us, for on 19 February, the police kept patrolling the grounds of the Kenya National Theatre where our Group sat singing, waiting for a last minute reply to our application for the stage licence.

After 19th February, our Group resumed rehearsals at the Theatre Two of the University of Nairobi where we had been rehearsing. But once again on 25 February, the University authorities were instructed by telephone not to allow us the use of their premises. I would like to make it clear that up to now the Government has not formally written to us about the fate of our application.

By so doing, the government denied us one of the most elementary human and democratic rights: the right of every human community to cultural expression. The administration's handling of the matter showed total insensitivity to the sheer amount of labour, effort and money, put up by a village group over a three months' period. By refusing us a licence, the administration denied Kenyans the right to an entertainment of their choice. The fact



Reprinted  
from "Race Today"

that the rehearsals attracted over 10,000 people was an indication that they wanted the show. The play which drew heavily from the songs and dances of different Kenyan nationalities showed practical possibilities for the integration of Kenyan cultures. And as brilliantly directed by Waigwa Wachira and Kimani Gecau, the play suggested a whole new basis for Kenyan theatre. It now looks as if Kenyans, especially peasants, are not supposed to dance, sing and act out their history of struggle against colonial oppression.

The play *Maitu Njugira*, the draft of which was written by myself and subsequently enriched by the cast, is what may be called a dramatized documentary on the forced labour and "Kipande" laws in the colonial Kenya of the twenties and thirties. It shows the attempts in one community to repulse these and other injustices and to survive as a unit despite tremendous official intrigue and brutality. It shows indirectly the genesis of some of our peoples' subsequent political movement and the seeds of their defeats and partial triumphs.

This play is unlike our earlier effort at communal drama, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* whose staging was stopped without explanation by the Government in 1977 after a highly acclaimed brief run and





whose basic theme revolved around present day Kenyan society. Understandably, the wealthy who control the government did not like the stark realities of their own social origins enacted on the stage by simple villagers. As a result, we were harassed, even some of us detained as you know. We did not apologise. We still believe in and stand by the content of that play. The spirit of the Centre (that is, Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre) was not killed or even impaired.

*Maitu Njugira* by contrast addressed itself to the rulers of a previous, albeit related, era and it came to us as curious that the ghosts of the settler colonial regime of the thirties should in 1982 come to haunt the same tiny circle of wealth that *Ngaahika Ndeenda* so terrifies. It now seems, despite constitutional safeguards, that any public examination of Kenya's society, its history or future cannot be done without raising the nervousness of the authorities.

We consider this attitude undemocratic and extremely dangerous. It is our right to represent our art and culture from our own viewpoint so long as in the process no extant law is broken. We have sought to act strictly according to law and with complete legitimacy in all aspects of our work. We have followed the unnecessarily difficult

and frustrating due process of registering ourselves, applying for permits and all the other now commonplace prerequisites of self-expression in Kenya. We have been very patient.

In return we have received official lies, ping-pong tactics from office to office, authority to authority, Ministry to Ministry, never so much as a word of hard decisions, only indirect instructions as for example the administration's last minute letter to the National Theatre not to permit us entry on 15 February, 1982. There has been no courage to address decisively or conclusively to our countless communications over a period of three months. Instead only monumental indecision and a farrago of verbal excuses to frustrate us.

The manner in which the refusal of permission to stage the play was carried out reveals a very serious element in Kenya today. The fact that the government conducted their instructions verbally or by telephone without ever writing to us directly so that no written record exists reinforces a dangerous trend. Thus acts are carried out without any officials being held accountable. Under such an atmosphere, anything can be done to any Kenyan or group of Kenyans by officials without written documentation or accountability.

This is not just simple irresponsibility and heavy-handed use of authority. The government seems mortally terrified of peasants organising themselves on their terms and their own initiative.

We wish to denounce in the strongest possible terms the government's increasing intolerance and repression of the Kenyan people's cultural initiatives. Secondly we now question fundamentally the seriousness of the government's commitment to Kenyan culture. If, as we are told, the economy has slowed down for "external factors" of recession, inflation and petroleum prices, we ask is Kenyan culture to slow down or stagnate for the same reasons? If we had chosen to do often mindless and always irrelevant pieces as the foreign groups we probably might not have met with such official hostility. Foreign theatre can freely thrive on Kenyan soil. But there is no

room for Kenyan theatre on Kenyan soil. During the Emergency, the British colonial regime introduced severe censorship of Kenyan theatre particularly in detention camps like Athi River and employed African rehabilitation officers to do their dirty work. The similar tactics are being used in Kenya today! We now call for an end of censorship of Kenyan people's cultural expression.

Finally, as you are now aware, we had secured independently a fully sponsored invitation to Zimbabwe to perform during the month of April as part of their rural cultural project. The invitation of the Zimbabwean Ministry of Education and Culture dated 2 December, 1981 and which we accepted on 21 December, 1981, was a tremendous boost to our morale and was an important recognition of the contribution of the Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre to rural community based theatre and was very much in the spirit of intra-African cultural exchange. In our letter of acceptance, we asked our prospective hosts to formalise this invitation, if only for single protocol, through the relevant authorities in the Kenya Government. We believe this they did in writing. We too have written to the government through the Ministry of Culture about the visit but we have had no reply.

We now fear that the same forces which worked against our getting a stage licence to perform *Maitu Njugira* at the Kenya National Theatre will now work to prevent the visit of our Group to Zimbabwe during April.

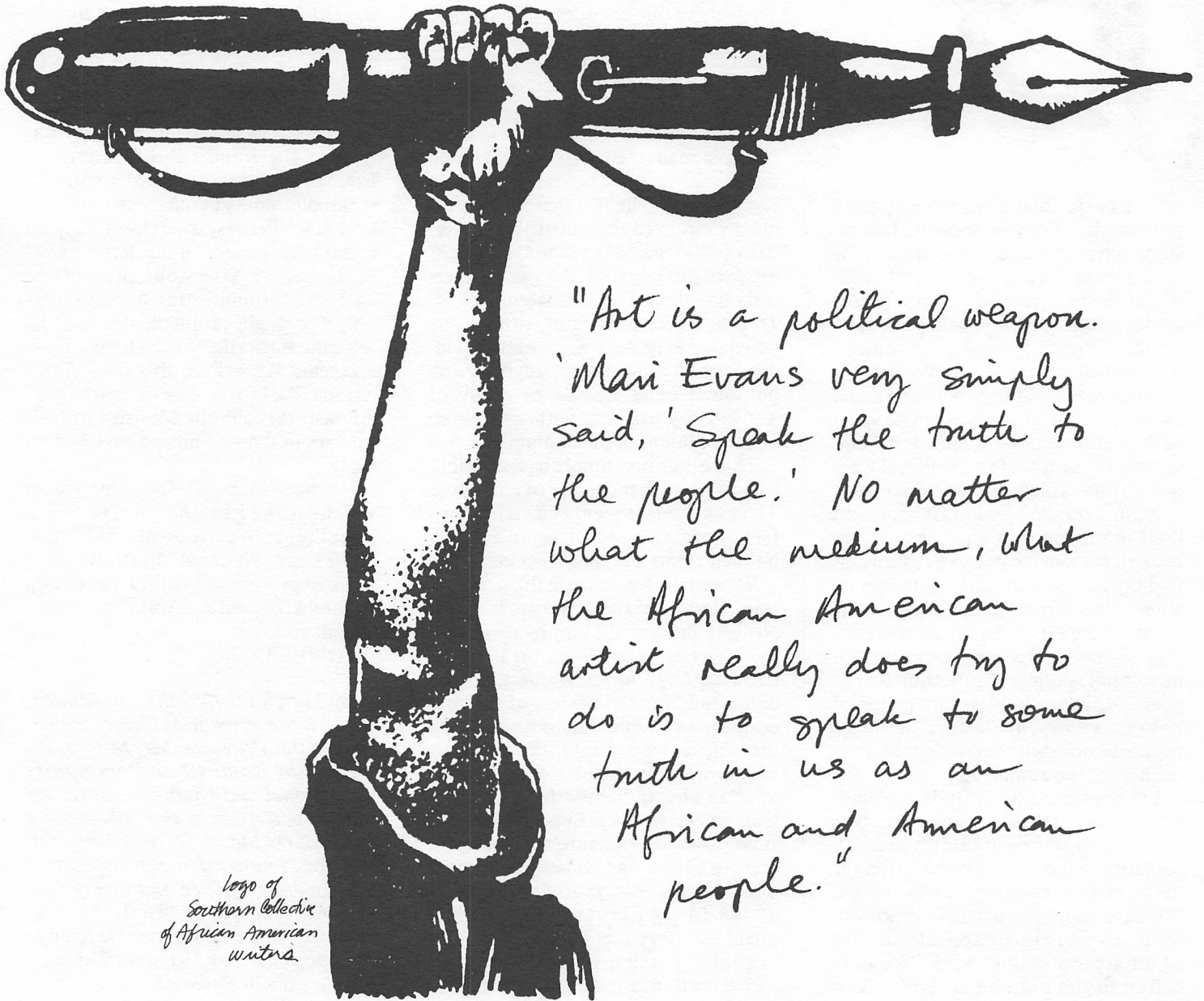
Thank you.

March 10, 1982.

*On March 11, 1982 the government, through the Provincial Commissioner for Central Province, Mr. Musila, de-registered Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre. All theatre activities in the village were stopped. On March 12, the District Officer for Limuru led three truckloads of heavily armed police and demolished Kamiriithu people's Open Air Theatre. The cultural group was unable to go to Zimbabwe. Today Ngugi wa Thiong'o lives in exile in England.*

THE BLACK NATION interviews

# Alice Lovelace



"Art is a political weapon. 'Mari Evans very simply said, 'Speak the truth to the people.' No matter what the medium, what the African American artist really does try to do is to speak to some truth in us as an African and American people."

Logo of  
Southern Collective  
of African American  
Writers



*Alice Lovelace is a published poet, produced playwright and journalist; her works have appeared in journals, magazines and newspapers throughout the South. She writes a weekly column, ATLANTA ARTS, which appears in the Atlanta Community Bulletin, and the Columbus Times. She is a wife and mother of five — three teens and two pre-teens.*

*"Hers is a future voice anchored in a proud past," writes poet Ebon Dooley in the introduction to her latest collection of poetry, "A Voice in the Wilderness." Alice's recent works also include a play, "When You Sleep with the Devil. . ." (scheduled for an Atlanta premiere in 1983) and the book, The Kitchen Survival Almanac, a reference guide for getting the most from your food dollars and creative uses for food.*

*Alice is a founding member of the Southern Collective of African American Writers, located at the Neighborhood Arts Center, 252 Georgia Ave., SW, Atlanta, GA 30310.*

**Black Nation: How did the Southern Collective of African American Writers (SCAAW) get started?**

**Lovelace:** A call came out from the Neighborhood Arts Center, from the writers-in-residence here, Toni Cade Bambara, Jim Lee and Ebon Dooley in late '77 and early '78 for writers to come together to form an association. Every week it built and built, to 30-35 people. Out of that was formed the Southern Collective of African American Writers. The name was chosen very carefully. Not all of us are from the South, but we are a part of the history of the South, a part of the struggle here and would influence it. And being African American writers, which was always stressed we never abbreviate "Afro," because that is a hairstyle and not a continent — we stand for a cross section between a continent, Africa, and American writers.

Then came the idea to do the first southern regional writers conference in 1978, which drew 125 writers from around the region — we were amazed. Some very good people came and donated their time for workshops: the editor of *Black Enterprise*, Toni Cade and others.

We jumped off and became an association of professional and community writers as well as emerging writers. We were able to lean on each other and offer each other assistance.

In the first few years, we were very active and had a newsletter that went out regionally six times a year. We hosted readings with Sonia Sanchez, Maya Angelou, Ishmael Reed and on and on. Nobody came to town that didn't have a reception and gathering by SCAAW. A lot of collaborations were going on then; a lot of work was being done because writers were feeding each other. We did conferences, ongoing workshops, as well as publications. We became a vehicle for information to pass through us back into the community of writers.

**Black Nation: How has being housed in the Neighborhood Arts Center (NAC) as an independent Black institution contributed to the development of SCAAW?**

**Lovelace:** Having the Neighborhood Arts Center is definitely a plus. We had an organization dedicated to Black arts and support of Black artists that we could immediately plug into. It had positive programming and we got substantial backing that first year out.

The life came into the Neighborhood Arts Center in 1975. Atlanta was ripe; we have one of the largest Black populations in the South and a wealth of artists, people like Joe Jennings, Ojeda Penn, Frederick Taylor, Tina Dunkley and Ebon Dooley.

The Neighborhood Arts Center is unique; it's the only center like itself in the South. Having an institution behind us, we could speak our own voice. We never had to worry about anybody

else but ourselves and the people we served — African American people and artists.

We have had a lull, there wasn't a conference last year. CETA was cut. We lost power in the city because the leadership changed. But the center endures. Now NAC has become an artists' collective. We mix business with art and pay our own bills. SCAAW's core group of revolving leadership has continued.

And in the last year there has developed a lot of excitement in the Black arts community. We're glad to be there for this new voice that is coming.

**Black Nation: What are some of the future plans of SCAAW?**

**Lovelace:** There's a whole new rededication, a new vitality. People are writing more. People have been asking when is the next conference? We're trying to get major people, like Alice Walker, people of that stature, for readings. We are coordinating a conference in late October with IBW (Institute of the Black World) on how it looks in the 1980's for Black writers.

The conference goals will be two-fold, skills building and also a lot of theory. We'll be arming artists with tools through hands-on projects. Plus we'll be looking at what are the artists' responsibilities, how do you really make a living at writing by being a community service person.

Then there's the consortium. We want an administrative umbrella to service all the writers groups. Besides SCAAW, there's Pamoja (a writers' group), Phoenix Writers Group and Atlanta Association of Black Journalists. We want to develop a resource room and library with copying facilities here at NAC so information on grants, awards and contests can be at writers' fingertips. Ultimately we want to organize a small press. We believe you write in order to be published.

We've developed the Paul Robeson Playhouse. It's named for Paul Robe-



Alice Lovelace.

son because he's recognized internationally for his art. He understood the brotherhood of artists, particularly for the view that artists must use their voice in service. When artists took over the center, there was a Paul Robeson lecture series, set up by Tom Jones and Marsha Jackson to bring national and international lectures and performances. We've renovated the theater space for regional touring companies, to introduce new influences. We've had Latinos, Nigerian students, and the Odomankoma Kyerema children's dance troupe from Ghana performed here recently. One of the white theater companies got its start here, Theatrical Outfit. While people tend to classify us as an African American arts center, I think what we are more so is an arts center that caters to progressive and progressive-thinking artists — who understand the brotherhood of artists.

**Black Nation: How do artists serve the people through their art? What do you see as the relation between art and politics?**

**Lovelace:** Art is a political weapon. Mari Evans very simply said, "Speak the truth to the people." No matter what the medium, what the African American artist really does try to do is speak to some truth in us as an African and American people. Even the things that we don't quite like so much, and those things that we celebrate, and the things that point us in the right direction toward the future.

The messages that Black writers have been writing historically have been strong. I've just been rereading Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen and Claude McKay, poets of the Harlem Renaissance. The '60's were not so phenomenal; it was restating some old ideals. Somehow it got to be labeled political poetry, when you were asking for something or when you no longer were asking but saying I am now about the taking of something — life, liberty, land, freedom and justice.

I cannot see a separation between politics, between myself as a woman, as an African American, as an artist. As an artist, I believe everything is political and that comes out in your poetry. The first thing Black writers have to do is purge the idea of being rich or famous or making it on Broadway, Sonia Sanchez said at a conference on Black World writers and human rights issues. Because you do work in service and having a core group of people around you to lean on makes it easier. Your work becomes not a job but a lifelong avocation.

**Black Nation: What is the significance of SCAAW's symbol, the power is in the pen?**

**Lovelace:** The power is in the pen because with the pen you create images. The one thing that has damaged us most in this country is the images that they have drawn and painted of us. In the early stages, the pen was in their writers' hands. They drew us as buffoons, as clowns; they drew us as Stepin Fetchit, or we wanted to be so much like the master, we rejected our own people. And now that the pen is in our hands, we need to be speaking about what kind of images we want our children to focus on for the 1990's and

the year 2000 and the year 2020.

No matter what medium you're dealing with, whether it's commercial ads in a magazine, whether it's journalism, if you're dealing with television, visual commercials or sitcoms or films, somewhere behind there sits a person with a pen in their hand.

**Black Nation: The artist has an awesome responsibility; and when the artist speaks the truth well, guides the people in the right direction, you are put down. Some are put in jail and not able to write.**

**Lovelace:** Yes, there's the beautiful poet Dennis Brutus, who is being subjected to a lot of harassment in America now. Here's a man who has already been shot once in the streets of South Africa, because his powerful poetry and prose acted as a voice for his people. And now the American government wants to ship him back for stripping the veneer about who's investing in South Africa, where the money is coming from to support the apartheid system. Sending him back would mean certain death. People need to support him as part of our extended family. Black Americans need to reach out and embrace our people all over the world, some in worse conditions than us.

**Black Nation: You're involved in a struggle right now about the Piedmont Arts Festival?**

**Lovelace:** We have a history of exclusion here in Atlanta from the Piedmont Arts Festival. We have 400,000 African Americans, not to talk about the African students from the continent who live here. There are 100,000 Asians in Atlanta, and Latin Americans. And the Anglo Saxons want the Arts Festival to be a mirror of them. In 1983, that's not acceptable in a major exhibit, like the Piedmont Arts Festival, largely funded by national, state and local groups out of public funds. Yet, you see no reflection of African American culture. They don't understand the aesthetics of the Black community. We create art for people's sake — not for art's sake. SCAAW is involved with the festival, and at the same time we're doing a protest letter campaign against their exclusionary practices and we're also developing a festival of our own, an African marketplace on the NAC grounds every weekend this summer.



Review of the album

# *SPIRITUALS*

*Spirituals*

A. Grace Lee Mims,  
Vocalist

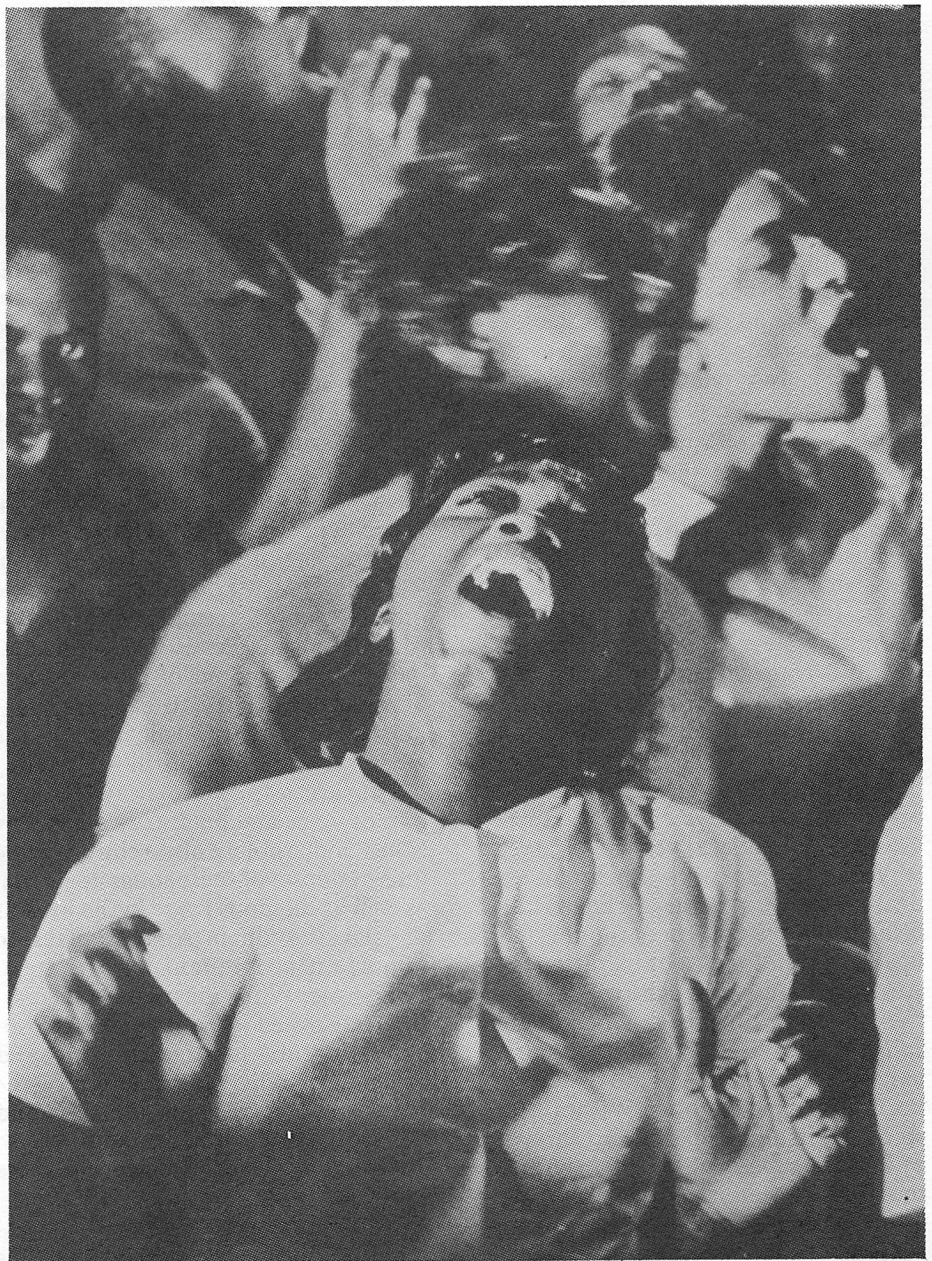
William Appling, Piano

DONALD P. STONE

In 1926 James Weldon Johnson, in referring to the black spirituals asked these questions: "What is to be the future of this music? . . . And . . . is it to be a force in the musical art of America?"

This issuance of the album *Spirituals* by A. Grace Lee Mims and William Appling in 1982, fifty-six years later, speaks volumes to both those questions. They have perceived the spiritual in a certain artistic, historical and sociological manner, and have proceeded to give us through *Spirituals* their aesthetic renderings on the most neglected form of Black music. The effect achieved is expansive, is as large as life (which is what the spirituals were about as perceived and developed by the slaves — Life). Coming forth with this album says that the spiritual is still one of the most powerful forces in the cultural history of Black people.

Perhaps the time is now for us to rescue the spiritual from its artistic neglect by coming forth with a much more dialectical view of the spirituals. What we mean to say is that the most general interpretations of these songs is that while some of them were code songs for



resistance, etc., for the most part they speak of life after death as their release from slavery, and it is generally thought that these songs are overwhelmingly religious. We are deeply indebted to John Lovell, Jr. for an interpretation that, in a general sense, says that the dominant aspect of the spirituals is their "social implications," i.e., their social content. He credits Sterling Brown with this ideological breakthrough but further develops this thesis himself. (We are indeed indebted to Ms. Mims and this album for bringing Mr. Lovell before us and raising him to an honored place as a musicologist and social historian.)

The dialectical view poses the question in a manner which says that there are two aspects of and to the spirituals as developed by the slaves. One aspect posed the slaves' response to his environment as a strictly religious one. That is to say his deliverance would come in the life after death. In keeping with this view, it is postulated that these songs concerned themselves with otherworldliness, submissiveness, humbleness and obedience in the face of the slave conditions. This was the perverse view of religion that the white slave master attempted to foster upon the slave. Regrettably, a number of modern-day Black theologians, scholars, educators and political activists have echoed this view and it may be because of this interpretation that we have had a contemporary turning away from the spiritual and have not plumbed their lyrical and musical depths for current cultural and historical impact and significance.

How else to account for the fact that few artists utilize them, record them, or base artistic efforts upon them in relation to their historical significance? The blues, yes. Jazz, yes. Gospel, yes. Rhythm & Blues, yes. Spirituals? A deafening silence. Listen! The spiritual is the first development of the continuing spiral of Black contributions to American and world culture. Without the spiritual, no blues. Without the spiritual, no jazz. Without the spiritual, no gospel, no R & B, no dixieland, no ragtime, no be-bop. Without the spiritual, in all likelihood, no survival of Black people, without the spiritual the silence would indeed be deafening. The existence of the spiritual and the survival of Black people is dialectically

linked. The spiritual as a cultural vehicle was able to speak to all facets of Black slave life; his religious life, his life of oppression, his resistance to that oppression, his hopes for a better world, his aspirations for freedom, etc. However long any list may be, something will always be left out. That is how broad our understanding must be of what the spirituals were all about.

So then, our deepest reflections on this aspect of our cultural history seem to suggest that we should make these songs, this culture, this history more a part of our present lives. *Spirituals* achieves this objective by bringing us these religious songs, these social songs, these songs of the life and times of Black people created in a time of dark desperation. These songs form so much a part of the unity of the slaves' religious and social life that their lyrical duality has sheltered their awesome power.

A great portion of that power is captured through the poignancy of "Done Foun' My Los' Sheep," the lilting, dancing and joyous "Bles My Soul An' Gone," the martial, thunderous and triumphant "Ride On, King Jesus," the discordant, mournful, funeral song, "Take My Mother Home." In these spirituals and all the others included in this album, Grace Lee Mims brings a sensitivity, expressiveness and grasp to these Black life/songs that places her in the company of Roland Hayes, Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson. The quality, depth, strength and range of Ms. Mims' voice leads to accurate aesthetic interpretations of these songs as witness her ability to capture what must have been the poetic intent of the creators of these beautiful songs.

The successful interplay and integration of voice and piano as achieved by Mims and Appling also reinforces the interpretation of these songs as a social as well as religious force in the lives of the slaves. William Appling plays an important accompanist and improvisatory role. While the piano is successfully integrated with the voice, Mr. Appling is still able to forge a sensitive and brilliant melodic interpretation of the Black slave songs. This album should be heard by any who would desire to understand and get beyond cliché in the spiritual.

To appreciate Ms. Mims' understanding and grasp of the spiritual, it is

necessary to know that in her early youth she was influenced musically by her mother, Alberta Edwards Lee, who was a product of Snow Hill Institute's "Golden Age." This was the period in the life of Snow Hill Institute, Alabama, when that institution functioned as an intellectual, cultural and agricultural center for Blacks in the most depressed section of the Black Belt in Alabama. From this relationship came Ms. Mims' earliest reflections of the spiritual. The three Black schools where the spirituals occupied more of an honored place were perhaps Fisk, Hampton and Tuskegee. Ms. Mims attended Hampton where she further honed her interest in and command of the spiritual. That Hampton, Tuskegee and Fisk occupied these positions was due to the arduous work and efforts of R. Nathaniel Dett, William Dawson and the Work family at Fisk; giants responsible for upholding and keeping alive these songs among us.

For a number of years Ms. Mims has been active in the cultural life of the city of Cleveland as a vocal artist, lecturer and hostess-producer of the radio programs "The Black Arts" and "Artslog." Additionally she performs as a member of "The Descendants of Mike and Phoebe," a jazz-folk group. William Appling is also an important artist in the Cleveland community.

The Afro-American form of music known as the Negro spiritual is a complex, rich, beautiful and dynamic cultural contribution that our slave ancestors have bequeathed us. As powerful and profound as jazz is, it cannot match the power and depth of the spiritual. As full as the blues are with man's sorrow and woe, they cannot match the spiritual's deep feelings of wretchedness in their musical and lyrical representations. As fervent as black gospel music is, it cannot match the fervor of the spiritual in its appeal to otherworldly forces for liberation from oppression. Mims and Appling honor our "black and unknown bards" by coming forth with this album. Further they address themselves to the task of freeing the black aesthetic from its mystical shell by presenting these songs as a social as well as religious force.

*Spirituals* may be purchased from: H&GM Records — P.O. Box 12457 — Cleveland, OH 44112. \$10.00 Postpaid.



# REVOLUTIONARY CULTURE

## Looking in the West

*I don't know what happened to America  
as a child I looked for it  
all I ever found was the stillness of  
a history forged on will & wicked reason  
a monotone humming shell game & stone  
the dryness in that voice that comes eyeball  
to eyeball with pillars of salt that wear  
away sanity and make it all a madhouse of  
rational crazy men, sober in body  
stupidity dragging the mind.*

*Once a wide-eyed drunk told me America  
twisted itself mad on petrified philosophy  
and a call to name that they were God's chosen  
but he was belching blood hanging on by a  
thread in the stairwell of a mental ward & had  
been certified insane by chain smoking fools.*

*In another time a five dollar girl said America  
force-fed itself on the hypocrites' code and  
while vomiting flesh & bone strangled on mushroom  
clouds and ash but she was a five dollar painted  
lady who stood with her nipples bare at the dark  
end of a street they said she would go with  
anybodys' money as long as the room was clean.*

*And in my cell a con has left a note  
scrawled in piss & blood it reads America  
is a prison camp an amnesia victim looking  
for the short way home and if I ever find it  
to leave it where it lay or do the most decent  
thing — bury it in a potter's field the deadhouse  
of weeds and brimstone.*

*Now in this space of the chained lady  
double stars and cosmic dust  
the reaper blows down doors  
I've grown old looking and even God says  
she don't know what happened to America.*

## All the News from the Front

I

*This is a news brief  
America  
thrives on mediocrity  
story at eleven.*

II

*Accused by various segments of  
the population of being the Anti-Christ  
old number 666 answers the critics.  
An exclusive, in depth confession on  
nightline — tonight.*

III

*Good evening, this is news all night  
there have been reports, rumors that  
the poor & downtrodden are holding certain  
shady institutions and their front men hostage.  
We'll have the story  
just as soon as they release us.*

IV

*This is all the news from the front  
President Reagan stated today  
read the bible  
especially the last chapter  
it makes a nice sandwich, a nice sandwich.*

— Gary Johnston

GARY JOHNSTON is managing editor of Blind Beggar Press. An essayist, dramatist and performing poet, Johnston is a founding member of The Unity Brothers, a music/media group. His first book is Making Eyes Thru Morning (Shamal).

## For the Women

*For the women  
who bear children  
and nurture them with truth  
for the women  
who cook and clean  
behind thankless men  
for the women  
who love so hard so true so pure  
for the women  
with faith in God and men  
for the women  
alone with beer and rum  
for the women  
searching for a man  
at the club, college, church, party  
for the women  
independent of men  
for the women  
searching their souls  
for the women  
who base and freak  
for the women  
who play and run and never show  
for the women  
who rise in revolt  
in hand with men  
who say never, never, never again  
for the women  
who suffer abuse  
and cry for justice  
for the women  
happy and free  
of maternal madness  
for the women  
who study and write  
for the women  
who sell their love to starving men  
for the women  
who love to make love and be loved by men  
for the women of Afrika who work so hard  
for the women of America who suffer the master  
for the women  
who turn to God in prayer and patience  
for the women  
who are mothers of children and mothers of men  
for the women  
who suffer inflation, recession, abortion, rejection  
for the women  
who understand the rituals of men and women  
for the women  
who share  
for the women  
who are greedy*



*for the women with power  
for the women with nothing  
for the women locked down  
for the women down town  
for the women who break horses  
for the women in the fields  
for the women who rob banks  
for the women who kill  
for the women of history  
for the women of now  
I salute you.  
A Man.*

— Marvin X



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## Poor People

*We are poor people  
Kidnapped, dispossessed  
we are poor people  
chattel slaves  
wage slaves, no slaves  
we are poor people  
we survive on love  
we survive on hate  
we hunt, we prey  
we sell our souls, we sell our bodies  
we sell our minds  
just to eat, to feed our children  
we are poor people  
having nothing, never starving  
often on the brink  
sometimes we feast  
get drunk, get loaded  
fight Saturday night  
fuck Sunday morning  
we are poor people  
in our ignorance  
we know something is wrong  
something stinks  
we call on God, we call on Jesus  
we call on Allah, we call the doctor  
we call our mama  
to help us understand why  
we are poor people  
Why we have no land, want no land,  
why our leaders are dead or silent  
crucified by the police, starved  
by the politicians  
our leaders  
why we birth them  
but do not protect them  
we are poor people  
we visit the rich  
we stare in wonder  
the plush life  
we know we don't belong  
we excuse ourselves  
return to the ghetto  
now we feel at home  
now we feel a man  
even with nothing  
a man  
not a smiling buffoon  
a man  
no master charge  
a man  
no 30-year mortgage  
a man  
no winter in Jamaica  
a man.*

— Marvin X



MARVIN X' latest book is *Liberation Poems for North American Africans (Al Kitab/Sudan P.O. Box 12583, Fresno, CA 93778)*. He is one of the founders of the modern black theater movement, having helped organize theaters in San Francisco and New York, both with Ed Bullins (*Black Arts West and New Lafayette*). His plays include *Flowers for the Trashman, Come Next Summer, The Name of Love, etc.* Other books of poetry include *Fly to Allah, Son of Man, Black Man, Listen and Selected Poems*. He has taught at Fresno State University, University of California at Berkeley and elsewhere.

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## Night Refrain (for Bilal Sunni Ali)

*They would take your song  
replace it with a funeral dirge.  
remove the spirit notes.  
leave a dead thing walking  
call it you.*

*But you are a strong  
progression of new notes.  
Spirit Song,  
you live  
where clouds meet earth &  
water sleeps.  
ancient/future truths  
dance through your horn  
as you unleash the  
resistance song  
raining  
blue red upon the earth.  
When blue rains red they'll  
hear your sax scream  
the resistance song.*

*The song they would  
yank from your throat  
cut from your fingers  
murder in the smile  
of dreadlocked sons &  
roundeyed daughters of  
warm laughter.*

*They would sever the song  
from your spine  
rip the chords from each  
inch of bone  
peel away scales  
from bars  
with no anesthesia.*

*They fear the equilibrium song  
wife as partner  
co-builder of shelter  
to house dreams  
this warrior woman  
of night sounds.*

*They would have this gone  
from you.  
No welcome chorus  
only departure wails.*

*They would have the  
C sharp scream through  
your children's dreams &  
B flat steel clank across  
Fulani's face.*

— ©Malkia M'buzi/Linda Moore

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## Spirit Women of Rock & Warm Part IV Maria

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*Sun set in her face  
and some call her Negrita  
with a sneer but she doesn't care.  
She likes the night that rests  
so softly on her skin.*

*Maria is a transplanted Ashanti doll  
born between plaintain and coconuts,  
dancing under sun and taking grass  
as a given. Transferred to a place  
of bricks and charred glass,  
yellow the color of impending disease.*

*Maria shuts the door  
on the trash that makes her movement  
in halls a feat. Makes the roof  
her patio and rum the 100% proof  
that she can still make laughter  
travel the length of her throat.  
The gap spread of her legs  
speaks of the distance  
between her youth and present.  
The fleshy underhanging part  
of her life is very visible.  
Even the conscientious sucking in  
of disappointments to create a lithe  
line don't hide the effects of  
untuned times.*

*Maria feels agitated.  
Removes her scarves and beads and  
bracelets and dances to the music  
made to conjure her gods but  
Maria's leaps don't always make her  
feel like she can fly. At those times  
she feels tied to this poverty  
that keeps her cleaning.  
Sometimes when Maria dances she  
feels the injustice Orozco painted  
and the chains Mel Edwards sculpts  
and they scream through the apartment  
and lash across her face.*

*Maria calls on the welfare  
for release and they give her stamps  
and check the lock on her chains.*

*Maria is in love.  
With a man who is just passing through.  
They share food and frolic because  
he speaks English but he's smart.  
She knows she can teach him Spanish  
but until then they talk with  
their tongues on plates*

*and earlobes but he's just passing  
through. His books are just one more  
thing to dust and the picture of  
Marx looks just like her uncle  
Hermanes Allegro the III. She knows  
he's leaving — to free her he says  
but she wants to fold into the cuff of  
his pants and go with him. He  
tells her she's too heavy and can't  
walk with her down there. He says  
he's going to help her and everyone  
like her and she gets jealous  
'cause she don't want him helping that  
bitch Juanita down the street. She  
always smiles too wide at him.*

*Maria is in love.  
So she curses him in the name of all  
that is unholy in 2½ languages and she  
gives him all the pain she stores up  
from the dog that bit her son's face  
and the boy who got her 14 year old  
daughter pregnant and the school that  
left her oldest boy back again and she  
curses him and cries with the pain that  
wrenches her mouth from her face and  
falls at his feet. He picks it up,  
puts it back, kisses her hard one  
time and leaves quickly  
afraid to look back. Maria goes to the  
window and decides she will put  
polish for chains on her shopping list.*

*Maria listens  
to Teddy Pendergrass as she shines  
her oppression and lets Marvin Gaye rock  
her to sleep with the pillow that  
cushions her pain and pads her fury.  
But after the held note dies,  
where does the song rest?  
Does it reenter the gone from place  
and snuggle against chords & changes  
waiting for a player?  
After the held note dies where does  
Maria find her peace, where does  
Maria find her freedom?*

— ©Malkia M'buzi/Linda Moore

MALKIA M'BUZI is a poet and freelance writer. Ms. M'Buzi worked as head of Publicity and Public Relations for Afrikan Functional Theatre and was a co-editor of "Benin Art Notes," a newsletter produced by the Benin Gallery. She held a series of workshops for MenWem Writers Workshop in Brooklyn. She also conducted a poetry workshop at Bennington College and held a series of writing/drama workshops in New York City for senior citizens. Ms. M'Buzi has attended the writing workshop of John Oliver Killens and is currently a member of the Harlem Writers Guild.



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## Detroit . . . (for Sekou Lasana)

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*they call it "Ren Cen,"  
it stands 3-towered  
blind glittering against the sun.  
no renaissance here,  
no phoenix, only  
lingering questions,  
("Riot? or, Black Rebellion?")  
tv talk of cities rising  
from history'd ashes,  
here. but people look tired,  
here. descendant sons and daughters  
of ex-sharecroppers turned ex-workers  
at Mr. Ford's plant slaves;  
time weary'd people,  
their children  
"ghetto" existenced,  
here . . .*

*i h/ear the warm blood  
of my brother, returned home,  
bend rivering round  
60s battle scars;  
angry people, here;  
two decades have passed  
obscuring 43 frustration gutted  
lives, here; 12th street  
now Rosa Parks Blvd  
flattened lots and bullet proof  
liquor store windows,  
city hall'd with limp renaissance  
promises; promises of more  
Rockefeller money  
to recycle the negroes, here,  
where ashes are urban renewal'd  
chunks of decaying cement.*

— Mwatabu Okantah

MWATABU OKANTAH is a student  
living in Cleveland Heights, Ohio.



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## On the Whereabouts of Assata Shakur

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“When people refer to me as a warrior, it makes me smile because of all the things I want to be, a warrior is not one of them . . . what kind of person would want to be a warrior? It is another thing altogether to have to be a warrior . . . If I had the choice of doing what I wanted to do, I would be laying under the hot African sun, feeding babies, tilling the soil and painting pictures and writing poems about pretty things like making love and being happy. I became a revolutionary not because it was something I wanted to be, but because I felt it was something I had to be.”

(from *Assata Speaks . . .*, “Assata’s Two Cents,”  
June 1976.)

Assata Shakur (slave name JoAnne Chesimard) is a member of the Black Liberation Army. She describes herself as a Black woman and a revolutionary nationalist. She is currently on the FBI Most Wanted List as a result of her escape from prison on the eve of Black Solidarity Day, 1979. As of June 1982, Assata Shakur is working and living underground.

*I confess my knowledge  
of Assata Shakur  
to the government  
of these United States*

*They called her Patrice  
or Sandy when she was born  
She reminded them of something like a flower  
Essye Mae*

*A sweet and healing herb*

*Virginia Merle*

*She was*

*The Belief That Nothing Is Possible*

*Without The Help Or Approval of God*

*Olisa*

*The Daughter Who Returned Home*

*Andaye*

*The Wealth Of Dancers*

*Monifa*

*A Season*

*June*

*Life*

*Maisha*

*The Wrong Person To Be Calling*

*Out Of Her Name*

*Joanne*

*I confess my knowledge  
of Assata Shakur  
to the government  
of these United States*

*It was midnite and the doubling of things  
when last I saw her last  
She was waiting for the light to change  
and sure enough  
the longer it stayed dark  
the lighter it got  
the further into night she went  
the less of it remained  
That's what I mean about midnite  
and the doubling of things  
There she was and there she goes  
a modern day worker  
on the ancient production line  
making gestures to men  
in slow passing cars  
There she was and there she goes  
any wallet size photo of who you could possibly  
love  
of who you could possibly  
be  
working hard as any man  
can  
in labor long enough to birth a nation*

*I confess my knowledge  
of Assata Shakur  
to the government  
of these United States*

*When last I saw her last  
she left here going everywhichawhere  
She drinks She swears She fight She all night  
She would rather see you with it  
than see you do without it  
She looks out of the window as the moon passes by  
and wishes she could wear it in her ear  
She wants to make a difference when she walks into  
a room  
She thinks everybody's story is the same*

*On 125 Street  
when last I saw her last  
she carried a bag of string and cloth  
of leaflets and petitions  
of train schedules from Pennsylvania Station  
Another bag of wedding dresses nightgowns  
pin striped pants calico kerchiefs and silk bed sheets  
A bag of other bags  
of pocket books and purses  
full of almost diamonds and damn near pearls  
A gold necklace with a broken snap  
A ring for every runaround she got  
A marble and jade compact  
fit right in the palm of her hand  
Some lipstick  
the color of the sky  
as the Sun goes down in the Gulf of Mexico  
A hand mirror  
clear as that same water that swallowed that same Sun  
Letters of reference  
from the American School of Daydreaming  
and the Rose Morgan House of Beauty*

*I confess my knowledge  
of Assata Shakur  
to the government  
of these United States*

*She's too old to walk straight  
but she does  
Too poor to pay attention  
but she listens  
Too tired to stand  
but she can  
Too vain to be plain  
Too far to be gone  
Too near to be here  
Too many to be one  
but she is but she is yes she is*

— Sekou Sundiata



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## If You See Their Faces\*

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*They have trophies  
for sportsmanship and fair play  
medals for courage and honor  
public school citations  
with their names inscribed  
and stamped with mysterious seals*

*They are so old  
their eyes take you in  
and give you back  
So young  
they just don't know  
that slanting your hat to the side  
makes you a salty and particular self  
makes you free game*

*And when will the police kill them?*

*When the children should be sleeping  
unable to hear the business of the world  
shake like dice in a cocktail glass  
That special time of night  
when photographers are wide awake in darkrooms  
painting with light  
images of not-yet men fixed to life:  
drinking rum and coke  
running until their noses bleed  
counting smoke rings  
stretching*

*And when will they be murdered?*

*In the midnight hour  
when the time is right  
for love to come tumbling down  
When the solitary work  
of the photographer's dry iron  
presses too many prints  
of not-yet men flat  
glossy pictures  
of what street they come from  
their names painted on every wall  
telling who they love forever  
telling a woman  
twice their age  
how they float  
sting  
unforgettably*

*Maybe then  
the camera and the pistol's metallic eye  
will shutter*

*Maybe then  
the silver and lead particles  
of 35 mm film and .38 caliber bullets  
will make them negative  
and we will ask  
Are they warm blooded?  
Can they walk upright?  
Can they speak and reason  
and breast feed their young  
these men with guns who are done with us?*

*And when will we answer?*

*Maybe  
it will be the musician's hour  
when the clubs are closed and the patrons are drunk  
and nobody's watching the morning light  
out of night life  
uncover a different day  
When everybody is where they are going to be  
and nobody's where we want to be  
and moving things seem at rest  
between night and day  
Yet  
out of restlessness  
the Black veteran armies of the purple night  
step up to history and draw their guns  
like a unit of brass and reeds  
in a James Brown band*

*A mountain  
the bullets report to the target  
like a mountain  
A feather  
a policeman falls  
like a feather  
A call  
a call for help  
interrupts 3 minute jazz  
on a cab drivers radio  
Shadows of the deed break along the wall  
Footsteps run in the deep deep dark  
No one named Nobody  
never saw a thing*

—Sekou Sundiata

\* Title is based on a first line in an untitled poem by Fatisha.

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## Introduction to the Real Book

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*“something about the music  
it got into my head . . .  
it turned me on and on”*

*From “Knee Deep” by Parliament Funkadelic*

*Whose side is it on  
Will it kill at our command  
Is it so right it's Left  
Would it step in somebody's face  
Would it die for us  
Could it be love*

*Is it simultaneous  
Does it float can it sting  
Does it rock does it mean a thing  
steep and true and dread  
Explain please*

*Can it detect identify  
each one of our fingerprints  
from each one of us*

*Can it hit a straight lick  
with a crooked stick  
Does it force a surrender  
crack us open and say  
There that is who you are  
And we can see it cant resist it  
we can never forget it*

*Can it see is it about seeing  
Would it fall on its knees  
and plead with you  
not to go but to stay in my heart  
Can it paraphrase our greatest hits*

*Does it leave nothing else to be said*

*And speed  
is it fast automatic instant quick enough  
to make a new world*

*Can it defy gravity for sport*

*Is it most of all Art is it  
most of all ours?*

— Sekou Sundiata  
spring/summer 82

SEKOU SUNDIATA is a member of the Are & Be Ensemble, a performance collective of poets, musicians, dancers and actors. His first book of poetry was *Free* (Shamal Books). A good sample of Are & Be's work can be heard on their first album *Are & Be from Nommo* c/o The Company of Poets, G.P.O. Box 1746, New York, NY 10116.

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## The Neighborhood

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*111 st. & lenox ave. is  
like the Bowery & Delancey  
only co-ed*

*Frozen faces  
Drooped lips - curled  
familiarly at the ends  
A distant stare  
glassy eyes  
Hollowness  
No teeth or  
new teeth  
after a long absence  
still hollow*

*Frozen faces  
droopy eyes - steady red  
mumblin' grumblin'  
disgruntled - constantly*

*Frozen Faces  
A grayish hue  
holding no joy, no laughter  
evicted by drug merchants  
vacant from despair*

— Ted Wilson

TED WILSON is alive and well in New York City.





# Newark Artists Collective

serves the city and it's people

*The NAC is a fledgling artists group functioning out of Newark, New Jersey. Organized in 1982, the group has already sponsored several successful programs of literature and music. Its coordinator and co-coordinator are Halim Suliman and Richard Cammarieri. It is a multinational group, which has already opened a small office and a hall out of which to perform and organize.*

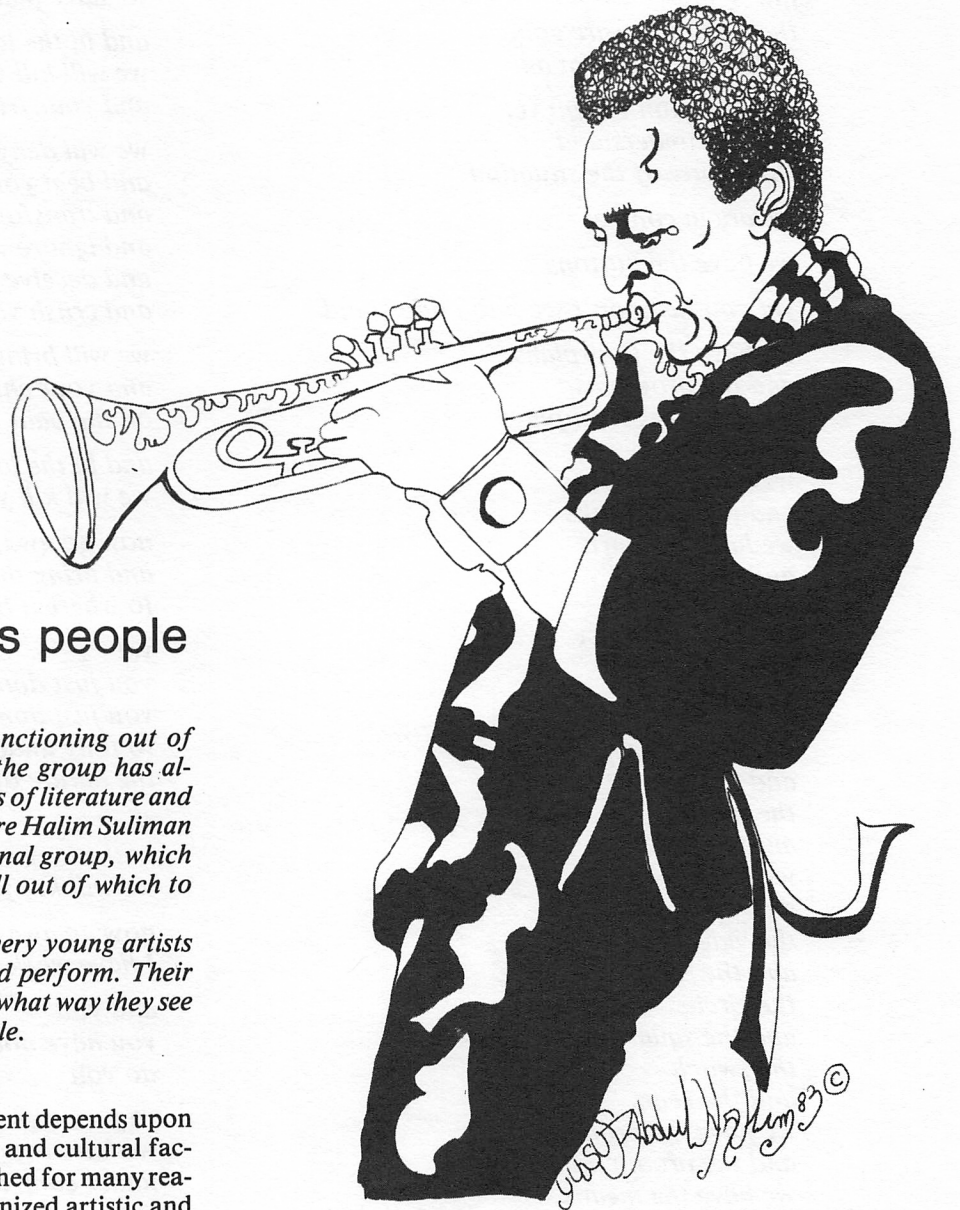
*The NAC, in the main, is composed of very young artists who are just starting to publish, exhibit and perform. Their statement of principles begins to indicate in what way they see their work as useful to the city and its people.*

## Statement of Principles

The quality of life in any urban environment depends upon a wide variety of social, economic, political and cultural factors. The quality of life in Newark is diminished for many reasons, not the least of which is a lack of organized artistic and cultural expression commensurate with the stature and the proven creativity of its community.

Culture is a crucial element in the viability of all people in any city. Cultural and artistic expression must be made once again a central element contributing to the quality of life in Newark, to the education, awareness and growth of all its people.

Therefore it is the purpose of Newark Artists Collective to develop, enhance, promote and support cultural and artistic expression as a constant, vital and vibrant feature of life and living in Newark.



*YUSUF is a visual artist involved in Black Liberation struggle and has contributed time and energy to National Black United Front and National Black Independent Political Party.*

## Killer

( — interoffice memo misplaced — )

*how did you get a hold of this  
but it doesn't matter  
not really  
the way things are going  
it doesn't matter at all  
you just don't seem yet  
to fully understand  
the nature of the situation  
we are in control  
we have the buttons  
yet you just don't seem to understand  
we have the floorplans  
and the programs  
we have the screenplays  
and the bylines  
we have the menus  
and the passbooks  
we have the parts  
and the tools  
the vehicles  
and the schedules  
the games  
and the make-up  
we have the keyboards  
and the beer  
the market  
and the magic  
we have the discs  
and the pages  
the video  
and the radio  
the circle  
and the square  
the switch  
and the gears  
we have the promotion  
and the production  
we have the means  
we have the laws  
and the loopholes  
the mix  
and the mindset  
we have your mind  
we have your mind  
and a method  
we have the world  
we have everything  
we have god*

*we have your mind  
we are in control  
and in the long run  
we will kill you  
and in the short run too  
when necessary  
we have plans  
and in the long run  
we will kill you  
and your friends too  
we will deny you  
and beat you  
and transform you  
and ignore you  
and deceive you  
and crush you  
we will bring you to tears  
and your children will choke  
on the pain we make  
and in the long run  
we will kill you  
now go away  
and bring this back  
to where it belongs  
yet  
you just don't do you  
you just don't seem yet  
to fully understand  
the nature of the situation  
that  
in the long run  
we will kill you  
now go away  
I have work to do  
and you  
you have nothing to do  
do you  
so just relax  
we have everything  
under control  
don't you understand*

— Richard Cammarieri  
© 1983  
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RICHARD CAMMARIERI is a poet, assistant coordinator of  
NAC and director of Newark Coalition of Neighborhoods.



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## People of the Night

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*They come, each with a story to tell.*

*I.  
A lady stands looking down a  
quiet street.  
This corner finds her every  
night.  
Hands rough and swollen  
Bags in each hand  
One filled with left-over goodies  
from Miss Rose's table  
Bread, a little stale  
Roast, a week old  
And miscellaneous garbage  
maybe the dog would eat.  
The other bag filled with clothes  
either too old or torn  
A needle here, a patch there  
Maybe the Salvation Army would  
accept.  
She waits  
Home so distant  
where children sleep  
Dishes call  
A place to soak her tired,  
aching feet.*

*II.  
A man approaches, fighting  
to maintain his equilibrium.  
He mumbles words  
To anybody who's gotta  
minute  
He drinks to forget  
The grog only heightens the  
disgust he feels  
for himself, his life.  
"Hey, lady, lady, ya gotta  
minute?  
Lady can I talk to you?  
Sorry, lady, I didn't mean  
no harm.  
No harm, lady, no harm."  
He's lonely, only wants to  
talk  
to somebody, anybody  
Disgust, sympathy, he'll accept  
anything.*



*III.  
A woman comes from the  
bar to wait.  
Heavily powdered face revealing  
the lines of living  
Hair much too black  
The weight of her pain  
cannot be masked  
By the tight smile that  
she wears  
She comes every night  
trying to live again.  
And every night, they come  
The babies that she's  
silenced.  
The lovers that she's had.  
The many times that she has  
been had  
All come, parading through  
her mind  
As she waits.*

— Sara Catanch

SARA CATANCH is a poet-mother-woman (not necessarily in that order), works in a community-based program, The Newark Pre-school Council, where she is an early childhood teacher.

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## Basic Blues

---

*I got the underpaid overworked Back Hurtin Blues  
Pay Day far away . . . . . Baby needs shoes  
I got the rent due I.O.U. BAD CREDIT BLUES!!!  
Landlord at the door . . . . . Funky attitude  
I got Utility Bill unpaid still, fear of darkness shakes  
Collection Agencies steady plaguing me  
Tryin to collect their take  
I got Fuel Bill OVERKILL — stick it to em Blues  
Empty cupboards even a Buzzard wouldn't want  
my shoes  
I got BELL TEL. on my tail tellin me no new news  
Did a month of moanin just this mornin  
Thinkin bout these Blues  
I got the underprivileged overtaken Belly Aching  
Blues  
Pay Day far away . . . . . Baby needs shoes*

— Europe Harmon  
© 1983

EUROPE HARMON is a poet/songwriter, native Newarker  
inspired by Life, his wife and daughter.

DONALD HOLMES' is a playwright-poet-actor and activist  
cultural worker.



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## I Got Your Hostage for Ya!!

---

*I got your hostage for ya  
In the slavequarters they call the ghetto  
In the concentrated camps they call the urban area  
Deteriorated, burnt out death traps  
Economic chains tied around poor folks necks  
Holding them in place against their will*

*I got your hostage for ya  
Junkies of all ages hooked on drugs of all kinds  
The living dead, killed by a diabolical force  
With genocide on its mind and methadone in its  
hand*

*In case you can't buy your own poison  
The zombie makers  
Suppressing your desire to achieve  
Suppressing your desire to be somebody  
Suppressing your desire to . . . . rebel*

*I got your hostage for ya  
Staring at T.V. sets that really stare at you  
Who's watching who . . . . . really  
They call a picture about the ghetto . . .  
"GOOD TIMES"  
And everybody laughed*





*John Wayne, the "you-better-get-tough-kid" killed  
indians  
By the thousands and everybody cheered  
T. V., sophisticated brainwashing with commercials  
Got you worrying about Ultra-Brite and your love life  
When you should be worrying about the  
Ultra-Right*

*And your whole life*

*I got your hostage for you  
At the voting booths that don't tell you that  
Every lever is for Rockefeller  
With a choice between nothing and less than  
nothing  
The democrats . . . ha and the republicans . . . ha, ha  
The donkey and the elephant which is real  
Cause the democrats will make a jackass out of you  
And the republicans won't let you for get it*

*I got your hostage for ya  
And I don't mean the ones from Iran  
We are being held hostage right here in the United  
States  
So burn the yellow ribbon  
And put up red, black, and green ones  
And maybe one day when we wake up  
We can take them down . . .*

— Donald Lewis Holmes

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## Swift/Soft/Slashes

---

*They was walking and talking  
swift/soft/slashes of dapper sound  
people came from miles around  
dug on brothas, they was gettin down*

*the beat caused a groove  
people began to move  
thru spaces of places  
with traces of a free/floatin rhythm*

*breezing thru a thing  
called swing*

*the royal court was in command  
the music of the Duke  
and the Count captured the entire land*

*The Queen spoke  
to the Lady  
and the Prez blew  
a tune so sweet  
the people had to stop  
they feet, grab a seat  
had to checkout  
the angry moans  
of nighttime madness  
that flowed thru Lady Day*

*Sassy Sarah from New Ark town  
said yea it was real  
easin down streets  
ahead of life  
past some man who'se forgotten how  
to feel*

*up to the top  
then along  
came bebop  
slippin, bopping, coppin notes  
DIZZY pushin MILES into a cool  
world*

*then the trane  
pulled in  
and we was off to East  
spinning West  
Into the mystical melodies  
of McCoy*



*Pharaoh proclaimed  
the creator had  
master plan*

*we kept movin thru  
the veils of this land  
inside the arms  
of the Queen Mother Nina  
Nina*

*pulled the coat  
off of Sam  
talking bout  
MISSISSIPPI GODDAM*

*but  
Sam had a nother program  
disco hustle  
and shake  
yo booty  
to  
computerized sound*

*even Sam  
can't keep  
the real music down*

*Cause  
as  
you  
can  
see*

*Wayne never  
got shorter  
and is still together  
stormin  
thru heavy weather*

*while  
the Wonder of Stevie  
guides  
a whole generation  
thru Pasttime Paradises  
in the Key of Life  
walkin and talking  
swift soft slashes  
of dapper sound*

© 1977  
— Halim Suliman

HALIM SULIMAN is a poet/playwright and coordinator of the Newark Artists' Collective.