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Looking Back/ Ahead

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By Nathan Hare

On February 21, the anniversary of the day Malcolm X was assassinated, I sat down alone and listened to a recording of his "Last Message." Then I heard Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" again. I saw that it may take a Martin Luther King to light the fire of hope and generate a sense of triumph, of impending victory, with the resonant ring of truth; then a Malcolm X to begin to say: "You're out of your mind—let's get ourselves together and organize for full human rights"; and then a Stokely Carmichael to shout to the masses "We Want Black Power." Of course the street people, as in Harlem, Watts, or Newark and Detroit, also played a part in raising the cry; and, in their way, so also the intellectuals who must try to explain the new developments to their white colleagues and the other receivers of their learned notions.

However, Malcolm, Martin and Stokely were merely the superstars who captured the imagination of the slowly awakening Afroamerican masses, building on the work of many unsung or not so well sung catalysts. It is probably not by accident that both Martin and Malcolm were religionists. We are a spiritual people and that is good. Yet, it would seem sometimes that we are too ecclesiastical. By the time of Stokely and Black power—bridged by the variegated Adam Clayton Powell and the evangelical LeRoi Jones (aka Amiri Baraka) and Maulana Ron Karenga—we had grown more secularized (indeed Malcolm appeared to mirror that metamorphosis). But even then we held to a new Black revivalism and could not shake the chains of the rigid ecclesiastical.

It is popular to put down the sixties these days, especially among new members of the bourgeoisie, who reaped token jobs and positions, resulting from the Black rebellion, but who themselves—having failed to fight—are burdened by gnawing pangs of guilt.



ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES A. DAVIS

The Future

We know we gained more concessions from the oppressor then and, above all, we boosted our collective sense of competence and esteem. Not that we made no mistakes at all. I took up that cudgel in an article, "What Happened to the Black Movement," which appeared in *Black World* before it folded. Now I am more concerned with the future. A conservative is preoccupied with the past; a revolutionary looks to the future. Besides, the only mistake an oppressed people can really make is to do nothing to oppose oppression. Everything else is merely a part of the process of experimentation and the exhaustion of spurious possibilities on the road to the correct solution.

But we are too ecclesiastical. Let me summarize some ways in which that trips us up. To begin with, it too often masks a devastating poverty of true commitment. Accordingly, we latch on to some conspicuous objects or beliefs (often not well thought out or, worse, unknowingly copied from white establishment molders of opinion) as a superficial sense of militant enthusiasm and concern. This mentality not only led too often to a do-nothing blacker-than-thouism in the sixties; it also hung us up on specious dilemmas, preventing us from coming to grips with the inevitable duality of human existence. For instance: ultra-assimilationism versus messianic separatism.

Integration and separation are both promising means to the ends of elevation and empowerment of a people, but they may lose their effectiveness when they become full ends in themselves. Too often we search out tactics instead of concentrating on the clarification of our goals—who we are, what we want to become and what stands in the way of that. The first level of awareness is awareness of conditions; the next is awareness of solutions. We must evolve a clear ideology and an accurate picture of our goals, knowing that a strategy is but an approach to achieving a goal while a tactic is merely an instance or a variation of a strategy.

It will be an irony of history that the establishment used segregation in the first half of the 20th century to hold Black people down, and integration—or its tokenistic ideal—in the second half.

Another irony, by contrast, is that the separatist cry for Black studies brought more Black students and professors to white campuses in three or four years than three or four decades of integrationist pleas had been able to accomplish.

We also spend excessive passion debating such polarities as the internal-external dimensions of the locus of personal control, the relative priority of issues versus action, and the old king of the hobgoblins, class versus race. It's got us going in circles.

Several years ago, I noted that much of the ideological conflict then rocking our movement, the bickering between instant Marxists and ultra-nationalists was spurious and eventually would pass away, that somehow there would emerge a metamorphosis in Black thought which would transcend the narrow dictates and interpretations of both these cults. If there is racism we must have race struggle; if there is classism we need class struggle. If there is both race and class oppression, it is obvious enough we need both.

In any event, we must begin to understand that—even while ceasing to shrink from our historic role of shaping the new society in its panoramic entirety, that race is the entity that cuts through everything else in our oppression. We must have unity of struggle—even when there is, or can be, no unity of opinion. Toward that end, we must begin to come together at every opportunity to iron out differences and learn to love one another again. We already know how to hate one another.

Male-Female Unity

Today, a new and ominous menace threatens Black people's indispensable need for unity—unity between male and female. There can be no unity of the race without unity of male and female, the most intimate and basic of all human entanglements and the very thing the oppressor

must destroy in order to dehumanize and continue to subjugate. There is no need now to dwell on the disruptive kidnapping and enslavement of the African in America or a past that has gone forever. But I have in mind, for this analysis, the bourgeois white women's movement.

Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique*, founder of National Organization for Women, and generally credited with launching the women's liberation movement, once forecast: "The Blacks had the sixties; women will have the seventies."

We already knew, or should have, from Frantz Fanon, that whenever an oppressed people begins to develop a revolutionary consciousness, the liberal oppressor comes over to introduce the duality of women's liberation. This of course is a good and noble idea, but the oppressor presents it according to his own agenda. What we must do is to incorporate the idea of Black women's liberation inextricably into the Black movement itself—and that is increasingly being done—but not so as to take the place of it.

The white woman's solution is simple. She has only to raise herself to the level of her man. If the Black woman moves up and the Black man does not move up accordingly, the plight of the Black woman is intensified and she will move up and look around to find that she is ever more isolated and alienated from her man, that she will long for a strong Black man to stand beside her.

The white race has a woman problem. The Black race has a woman problem *and* a man problem. The enemy of the Black race stands at the opposite end of the racial polarity. The white woman's oppressor is her father, her brother, her husband, her son, her lover. For better or worse, her oppressor loves her. The white man may be the common oppressor of the white woman and the Black race, but the white woman sleeps with the enemy. Hence, the future of the Black woman is with the Black man just as the future of the Black man must be with the Black woman.

This is all too obvious, and we are getting sidetracked. Indeed, in a larger sense, we have lost the revolutionary initiative.

They even took our rhetoric and our symbols—our natural hairdos and our Black power handshake.

In their neo-racism, white radicals think they can chart the course of freedom and the new society. In their own way, they too wish to control and dominate us. They thrashed about in the sixties for some alternative to our Afroamerican rebellion—stop the war, organize the workers, hold down the population, save the ecology. Then, one glad day, they found it—white women's liberation.

Of course women have the right to full equality, to be proud and in control of their own bodies, to exist as full human beings without, as many feminists appear to believe, having first to become men or more and more like men. So now we have it, as the family continues to crumble and decay. Observe the solutions held out by the white radical to save and correct the family institution, as he wails about the passing of the extended family and the evils of the nuclear family. Such correctives, including feminism as currently projected, merely represent unconscious adaptations to the demands of a post-industrial society. We note the advocacy and proselytizing of unisexism and unisexualization, ultra-permissive childrearing with its alienation of parent-child relationships and family and kinship loyalties, the elimination of gender identity, anti-male and even anti-maternal feminism, the rationalization and glorification of unstable relationships and single parenthood.

True, many of these diversions represent justifiable and honorable individual rights and freedoms. But this compensatory focus on the individual is at the heart of our current apathy and immobility, when an oppressed people—feeling too weak to fight—turn away from social combat and social change to patching up individual injuries in a plethora of feel-good maneuvers.

Sex and Race

Western society has always been prepared to grant individual rights and freedoms in place of collective or social transformations. Still, there is nothing wrong with being a Black female single parent, for instance—and one rightfully makes the most of any situation in which she finds herself. But there is something wrong with why an Afroamerican woman is so much more likely to experience the single parent situation, why one race can freely imprison, send off to military duty, unemployment, underemployment and otherwise destroy the Black woman's eligible male supply. There are more Black males in prison than in college, though it costs more to keep a man in jail than to send him to Harvard.

So white feminism is a threat to Afroamerican unity and uplift. As a matter of fact, the relative median year-round full-time earnings for white women actually decreased by comparison to white men between 1963 and 1978, while Black women made tremendous gains compared to their men. In other words, the feminist movement enabled the white male to keep his act together, to retain his position of superordinance to his woman, while further decimating the Black male's ability to prevail and compete in a perpetually patriarchal society, thus aggravating the alienation and disunity of Black male and Black female.

Computations from census data additionally reveal that the white male did not alter appreciably his participation in the labor force since 1963, nor that of the Black female (who has always had to work to make up for the relative psycho-socio-economic suppression of her man). But almost to the exact extent that the white female has entered the labor force the Black male has been pushed out of it, with obvious consequences for sexual/family relationships.

On top of this, the white woman as a whole, though not in the professional class as such, faces an eligible male shortage of her own and, accordingly, slips over to further deplete the vanishing Black male

supply. For even when the white female is not a college person, she prefers to marry the college level Black male.

Let us make no mistake about sex and race. In a patriarchal society, which is both sexist and racist, it is the male of the oppressed species who, in the ruling male's mind, conceivably could take his place. From the moment of his first encounter with the darker races, the white male has feared exclusion and inadequacy in any unrestrained sexual interaction of the races. Historically, he has used the white female as an object and a force, simultaneously and variously extended and withheld, according to his purpose, as a distraction to the aspirations of the Black and darker races. The Black male has been the more forthright object of this spidery lure, but it has been the Black woman who has been left to bear the acute emotional brunt and the social trauma of the destruction and diversion of the Black male's collective thrust.

Hence it was altogether ludicrous, even if cute and cunning, when the white feminists of the 1960s and 1970s sought to exploit the spirit, the metaphor and the rhetoric of the Black movement but refused to face up to their own racism.

The Rape Scare

A salient case in point is the current rape scare perpetrated (according to an analysis reported in *Social Problems*, the journal of the Society for the Study of Social Problems) as an opportunistic appeal to press coverage and sympathy for the feminist movement, despite the fact that the incidence of rape had not mushroomed. Available figures show about 8 out of 10 rapists and rape victims to be Black. Rape is a problem in Black male-female relationships, but the Black woman is getting raped while the white woman is doing the screaming. More white males in absolute number rape Black women than Black males rape white women. Indeed as far back as the 1940s, when the white male's exploitation of the rape-scare

smokescreen clearly soared, the Southern white liberal Lillian Smith reported in her famous book, *Strange Fruit*, that a white woman's chances of getting raped by a Black man are about as great as her probability of being struck by a bolt of lightning.

A recent issue of the *APA Monitor*, the official organ of the American Psychological Association, reports that a \$21.7 million research boost recommended by President Carter's budget commission, and requested by Carter, includes \$6 million for rape. This equals the amount allotted for all minority mental health, and is greater than the mere \$4 million advanced for urban mental health problems.

The quietly kept secret of the Black race's *man* problem has been a thorn in the side of the white women's liberation movement and a reason for the opposition and resistance to an honest appraisal of the systematic destruction of the Black family. Thus white scholars fell in behind America's number one sociological theorist Talcott Parsons (who expressly wished to calm the Black "stir") and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, after they met under the initial auspices of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, in a movement to hoodwink Black intellectuals into denying Black family "pathology" and to search out and extol elusive strengths. When once they had engaged the Black intelligentsia in this happy-Negro, I'm-okay-you're-okay, Norman-Vincent-Peale power-of-positive-thinking defense mechanism of denying and overlooking Black family destruction while hunting down and showing off salvaged "strengths," the white feminists, aided and abetted by their male scholars (including of course those who most conspicuously harped on Black family strengths), were left free to stress pathology in the white family.

This conspiracy of silence about the destruction and oppression of the Black family, this shortsighted and gross intellectual dishonesty, was necessary because a forthright analysis of the Black family would inevitably point to the rela-

tive suppression on the Black male and a contradiction of the implicit anti-male theme of white feminism and that there were more white women in a position to exploit Black men by far than Black men so situated to oppress white women.

An honest examination of the Black family would reveal perhaps the most painful problem of the Black woman—that somebody is depleting, alienating, stealing and otherwise threatening the extinction of her male. The Black woman's greatest cry, if you will only talk to her sometimes and listen, is that she too often lacks a strong Black man to stand beside her. She feels impelled too often to serve as the "backbone" of her family and to fulfill the formidable obligations of "both mother and father" to her children. This predicament—and the denial and denigration of her beauty—has resulted from efforts to defeminize her as the white oppressor simultaneously struggled to emasculate (lest we forget) the oppressed Black male.

A New Awakening

We may have lost the revolutionary initiative, but we're going to have to begin to hit the streets again and get right back where we started from.

I can see flashes of a new awakening, a systematic repetition of the signs that foretold the 1960s rumble to everybody but social scientists. I see the same clouds rising, and I hear thunder and throbbing rain. This time we will be ready, and we will hold on to the revolutionary initiative.

Throughout the sixties, but even to this day, we seem tripped up by the desire to gain recognition from the master, preoccupied with talk of "survival." It is not enough. Survival is necessary but not sufficient. It is the first phase of struggle, but then comes also resistance. So long as we are here we have survived, but we remain to face the task of resistance.

If we merely survive, then we will have failed our great historic mission.

Afroamericans must seize back the revolutionary initiative. But first we must de-Europeanize the world and ourselves.

The Western mind excels in technology, holds out progress as an ideal in the technical and scientific sphere, while clinging to outmoded norms and modalities in the social realm. Reason has been stripped of intuition, which by now is denigrated. Europeans were in fact quite late in discovering the unconscious.

So today we face a grave ecological and energy crisis with which the West appears persistently unable to cope. The over-industrialized Western world cannot reverse itself. For it is bankrupt and mechanized and concentrates on solving the physical and chemical environment, the smog and the landscape or vanishing animal species. Afroamericans suffer more stringently from the physical and chemical factors, but we also suffer a polluted social milieu—of racism and oppression, low-grade occupational contexts, the crowded conditions and the psychological consequences of all of that. Hence our solution by comparison must be more social, and therefore more human.

We are not soon likely to outstrip the white man in shooting the moon and other human beings, nor in the production of machines; but we can participate in—indeed we must lead the transformation of human beings to become once again less like machines. Our contribution will not be so much in our sameness to the white world as in our difference. We can provide the lost intuition, the soul, and the re-vamping of the spiritual and the ceremonial in the world to come. □

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Meeting the Challenge

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