

May 17, 1985

Dear Cal,

Suddenly -- I don't know whether you would agree with that word, since it is way too late for any answer that was "in time" if you thought of your letter to Olga as the subject -- but suddenly in the context of what I am doing, which is a sharp critical analysis of Reagan at Bitburg, the whole idea of when a certain thing becomes a category made that letter of yours to Olga real to me. Here is what I mean: 1.) My first reaction was gee would I love to learn more about the Congo from his parents, but I do not want to get involved in the organizational questions he raises and Olga is not here and we are all too damn busy, so... 2) Now when the new youth activity on divestment dialectically polling at the question of fascism, whether its re Bitburg or the Congo as lodged in my mind, I decided to write you anyway on just that aspect because, precisely because, it is only when a word suddenly becomes a philosophic category that it has so absorbed historical development that it can find a philosophic expression that is action.

The Congo, once I met the first Black man I ever saw when I landed in Chicago, represented that new, other human dimension which was past any single discrimination even when it was the emotionally integral to one as the experience of anti-semitism was to me. There was absolutely nothing on the Black dimension from the mid 1920s on that was strange to me. America or Africa. Africa was that other world: I simply must explore every crevice of it. In the 1930s I began meeting Africans, Nigerians, the Gold Coast, Nyasaland, but never, never the Congo. And I hungered for that because that horrible chapter of the inhumanity of whites in the person of the King of Belgium devastating the Congo was beyond belief and imagination. Now skip all the way to the 1950s and the creation of the first independent country in Africa, Ghana, and the assembling of all Africans who could be to the opening ceremonies. In struts Patrice Lumumba. I believe I loved every bone in that man's body. I loved especially his little beard, and kept saying it is even more beautiful than Trotsky's goatee. I loved his voice. And out of that wonderfull mouth came poetry and the vision of the future of freedom. Did you read the poem by Lumumba I found in a Slavic publication in the '60s and published in N&L? Do you know that we were given a beautiful picture of Lumumba in recognition of what N&L did in that struggle against U.S., against UN, and against Tshombe and for Lumumba? Do you know I cried almost as much when he was murdered as when Lenin died and I was so so little then, which I certainly wasn't in the '60s.

When I read your letter of your parents in the Congo and felt I wanted to know everything they have experienced about it, I'll write him at once and ask, whereupon I was confronted with all the rest of the stuff in the letter and I reluctantly concluded that if Marxist-Humanism means so little to him that he wants to leave it, what's the use?

If instead I dare ask, you had made a category of Africa, especially in the contemporary world in which that question is turned up a new movement among the youth who are making no separation from the idiotic, reactionary, retrogressionist, Reagan visit to Bitburg and American massive investment in South Africa, could you have concluded what you did? Can you still ask your parents a lot of questions on the Congo?

15968

Yours, Cal

(handwritten on art-card)

6/5/85

Dear Cal --

Thank you very much for gifting me with that picture of yourself as a child in the Congo where you look adorable both as "laborer" with bricks and as "at home" with your African child friends. You look about the age -- 4 years -- which was the age I broke with God -- not that I was not raised as religiously by my Jewish family as you by your Protestant missionary family, but WWI had broken out and I hated it and the world. The double rhythm of revolution that was to be born 3 years later swept me into it. At 7 years, (being illiterate, illiteracy having been chosen by me as against the bribery needed to earn inclusion in the 1% of Jews permitted to go stand in the back of a "goyishe" (Gentile) school ) I can hardly claim knowing such "conclusive-sounding stuff" as dialectics of revolution and dialectics of thought. But the practice of overthrowing the old and creating the new human relations led me to "translate" that into love of the new Black Dimension I saw for 1st time in landing in the U.S. and being ~~as~~ at home here as in Africa -- be it in Garveyism or Zulu Rebellion or whatever poetry I found in African names even as I loved the music of philosophic abstraction in adult life.

Sorry I have no time as I begin thinking & working at Draft Perspectives for Plenum to answer your 16 pp letter I just got from you dated 5/29/85. I couldn't resist at least thanking you not only for picture but all the information of your parents and grandparents and the Congo 1985 which likewise seems to be your Africa year & is year of the new awakening of American Youth's struggle for divestment in South Africa AND do not forget Marxist-Humanism's contributions from the 1920s on. Perhaps we'll get a chance to talk if you come to Chicago for plenum which we have not kept separate from either our members or close sympathizer -- If you're watching both 3/21 tape at M-N Archives in Det & 4/18 tape in Chicago you'll see the continuing 2-way road between Am. and Africa --

Yours -- Raya

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