

Throughout the period, 1968-1969, Black students waged intensive struggle around the issues of Black studies. Also engaged in this struggle were Black and Puerto Rican students at City College of New York. Speaking there on the assassination date of Brother Malcolm X, James Forman delivered the following address which opens our section on political education. Certain themes - the nature of our colonization, the fight against imperialism, armed struggle and internationalizing the struggle-are stressed again and again.

MALCOLM X RALLY

City College, New York
February 24, 1969

JAMES FORMAN

And on this occasion, the anniversary assassination of Brother Malcolm, I think that we should consider that there have been many other black people murdered, assassinated by the United States government. And; while we remember him, let us not forget those seven thousands that they record who were lynched since Reconstruction, the many numerous people who have been killed by the police in the rebellions, not to mention those others that we can call by name: Mack Harper, Emmett Till, Sammy Younge, Jr., Frantz Fanon (who died of leukemia, fighting the imperialists) and many other people. And we have to keep in mind, of course, the revolutionary from Latin America, the black person Che Guevara, who was fighting for the liberation of man.

I would like to start by saying that the history of the black student movement is the history of resistance as is the history of all our people in this country. And it becomes extremely important that we understand that

resistance was the order of the day when our people were captured in Africa and that resistance has had several stages throughout the history of black people in the United States. Throughout the sufferings of the slave trade and the Middle Passage, the era of the plantation and the auction block, the periods marked by the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the vast migrations from South to North, black people carried out an unending resistance, resistance to a process of colonization. Ordinarily, when we think of colonization, we think of a European power going into Africa and occupying that territory. But we as a people suffered the most unique colonization experience known to man. There is no other parallel. Colonization in Rhodesia, South Africa, and West Africa all had similar patterns. But the colonization of black people in the United States has no other pattern. Because black people were brought from one territory, from their continent and forced to work in political captivity, not slavery, in political captivity in another land, our colonization is unique, but it is colonization nonetheless. And it has similar parallels to all colonization experiences around the world.

And as Brother Fanon points out in "Wretched of the Earth," and as Brother Brown touched upon this morning, one of the main props of colonization is the educational system. One of the main props of colonization is the educational system, for it is designed to make the colonized into servants for the colonial masters. And that is basically, we all know what institutions inside the United States are designed to do—to make us part and parcel of the capitalistic system of this country. Therefore, the struggle that brother Reed, Dr. Carter, Sister Cook and all of you are, waging to re-shape the educational system of City College and as our Brothers are doing across the country must be applauded, and I applaud it very heartily.

For, in a sense, this is a fight for a Black and Puerto Rican Studies, but in the larger sense it is a fight against colonization. I happen to look a little brown today because I just came back from Puerto Rico, but Puerto Rico is colonized. And the worse form of colonization that you could receive is there. It is so colonized that if you want to see colonization, if you want to understand our own colonization, sometimes it's worthwhile to take a trip to Puerto Rico and understand what the Man is doing thru the colonization process. And in one way I am not here to be a critic, but in one way it is a misnomer to call it a Black Studies and a Puerto Rican Studies because Puerto Ricans are black! If you are Puerto Rican, you are black! If you go to Puerto Rico this even becomes clearer. Now, most black Puerto Ricans don't come to the United States because of overt racism. But if you walk around in Puerto Rico, you see Africans who are Puerto Ricans. And, therefore, we should keep the programmatic thrust for

Black and Puerto Rican Studies, but we must understand that Puerto Ricans are black people, that they are not white people, that they were colonized by the Spanish-European as we were colonized by white Anglo-Saxons.

Now, I don't want to trace it, I don't have the time to go into a lot of details about the origin of the black student movement, but we can say this: that by and large the black student movement in this country started February 1, 1960 when there were four students at the University of North Carolina A & T in Raleigh, North Carolina who sat down at a lunch counter. Now, many of us do not accept non-violence as a way of life. I don't either, but we cannot deny our history. And the history produced by those four people who decided that they were tired of segregation, which is a modified form of slavery, and that they were going to put a thrust for their own dignity by sitting down at those lunch counters has in fact produced much of the revolutionary activity which is going on in this country. And, if you understand what they were doing was not trying to integrate, not trying to sit by a white person, but in fact were struggling for their dignity, which is the struggle of all oppressed people. And because of that particular action certain things got set into motion.

Now, this black student movement in this country can be characterized by various stages. The first stage, of course, is the sit-in stage and during that stage we saw many, many attempts to desegregate public accommodations within this country. Unfortunately, it was usually touted as an attempt to integrate not necessarily by the students themselves, but basically by the United States government, because the United States government had to explain what in fact was going on in this country. The United States government had to explain to the Third World, and especially in Africa, what students were doing inside this country. And they began to say that the United States (this is the overseas propaganda, not the crackers down South and Lyndon Baines Johnson), the United States government overseas began to say that what is happening is an attempt to integrate themselves into the main stream of American life. And, we inside the United States allow dissent as opposed to the Soviet Union or as opposed to China. Now, that was the game they ran down. And, of course, we began to interpret, unfortunately, some of the things happening in this country as an attempt to integrate, but in actuality, it was a struggle for dignity and a struggle against colonization.

The second stage, of course, was the political action stage, which involved voter registration activities—a stage which I am very familiar with. And, what was happening was that there was an attempt to build a mass movement inside

the country. I don't know how many of you remember what you were doing in 1960 and 1961, but I remember very vividly there was no mass movement of black people in this country. There was no mass consciousness that we as a people must rise up and thrust against our own oppressors. Now, this is a result of the colonization process itself, because what the United States has done through slavery was to so debilitate, to so destroy the dignity of black men and black women, that people felt it was hopeless. And those of us who were on the streets in '57 and '59, know that black people were saying, "Niggers can't stick together. Everytime one of us rise up we pull the other one down." This is only an example of the need for mass consciousness that we as a people can do things together. And this is one of the things that came out of the whole student movement thrust, namely that we as a people had to do things together because people on the streets saw it. Now, there was a positive, negative philosophy to this, and let me explain to you what I mean. The positive was that we as a people, we began to learn, could do things together. There were certain negatives about it, and that negative was the suffering and the brutality that people underwent during that entire process. But when in fact you're struggling against colonialism and you're struggling to shake the minds of people free from the shackles of colonialism, many times you have to engage in what is called positive negatives. That is, for the long range benefit to mankind, sometime people undergo certain experiences which have negative effects. And I think that the heroism of the early part of the black student movement lies in the fact that there was a conscious group of people who understood that in order to develop a mass consciousness, in order to fight segregation, to fight the dehumanizing process of black people in this country, they would have to "put their bodies on the line" and begin to develop certain forms of suffering among themselves. I don't deny that; I think that it is a part of our history which we should not be ashamed of, but in fact which we should hail with pride.

The next stage comes the political action program in Mississippi and especially in Lowndes County, Alabama where the Black Panther Party symbol, where the symbol of the black panther was developed as a symbol of the resistance struggle of people in Lowndes County, Alabama in '65 and '66. That's where the black panther originated, and it originated because the segregationists had a white rooster. The Democratic Party of Alabama had a white rooster which was its symbol. And so the black people of Alabama decided, "well we will get a panther which will eat up the rooster." There's no question about it -- emerging from the Black Panther Party comes the period of "Black Power." In its early formation Black Power was an extremely revolutionary concept, but the administration of the United States Government tried to co-opt the revolutionary thrust of Black Power by getting the various "Toms" to say we're

for black economic power, and the latest form of co-optation, as Brother Brown has pointed out, is to try to make black capitalists. And, unfortunately, a lot of dudes who run around talking about Black Power are talking about black capitalism. So, we can put them in a theoretical context. There is revolutionary Black Power and there is reactionary Black Power. And we must begin to examine which is revolutionary and which is reactionary.

Now, the student movement today is in a new phase. And that phase is that students are beginning and experimenting and seizing and holding power. That's precisely what's going on throughout the universities of this country. Black students are beginning to seize and hold power, experimenting with seizing and holding power. You're excused today from classes because students seized and held power for a few hours or a few days at this particular campus. And we must make a mortal cry to seize and hold power, because it is only by seizing and holding power that we are going to get our demands met in this stage of our struggle. It does not matter whether or not we can seize and hold power permanently, because that's the next stage, but however we hold it, however long we hold it, the experience and the experiments are extremely valid.

Now, beyond the part of stage seizing and holding power comes the next stage which becomes revolutionary struggle in this country, which will become armed struggle. And that's going to occur. There's no doubt in my mind. I can't predict exactly -- well, fact of the matter is, it's already started. It has already started. The rebellions of Watts, the rebellions of Newark, the rebellions of Detroit, the Harlem rebellion of '64, were forms of armed struggle inside the United States. But that armed struggle will escalate. And ultimately, what we as black students must be working for is a total revolution inside the United States. A revolution where we are part of the vanguard process that seizes and holds power, takes the wealth of this country, redistributes it, says there's no more Rockefellers, no more DuPonts, no more Ford Foundations and no more of the other kinds of administrations.

This is important because we suffered from three twin causes or three triple causes: racism, capitalism and imperialism. There's no doubt about it that our lives are hemmed in -- boxed in by racism, by the capitalist structure of this country and by imperialistic powers. Now, we were listening just before we started to the record of Brother Malcolm, who was talking about imperialism

when he was talking about the United States and Africa and the United States and the Congo. And we, in this country, are in a very fortunate position because we live in the most imperialistic, most hideous monster in the world, and that if we wage revolutionary struggle inside the United States, as we're doing, this automatically helps revolutionary struggles throughout the world, which are linked up in a fight against the United States, and a fight against imperialism, and a fight against this capitalistic structure, and a fight against racism. So, then it seems to me that our education, our digging into the books has to prepare us for a revolutionary struggle in this country where we seize and hold the reins of power. We, as black students are very, very fortunate because in one sense, not in one sense, we are in fact the most oppressed group in this country -- black people. Now, as the most oppressed group (and I will try to take it slow, I'm rushing because of time) that we have a revolutionary responsibility. It is from us that the revolutionary thrust will continue to come, because we are the most oppressed group suffering from racism, suffering from capitalism, suffering from colonization and all of its magnitude of slavery and political servitude. This means that we have a responsibility. And we have a responsibility as a revolutionary vanguard to give revolutionary leadership, that we have that responsibility and we must direct the forms of struggle which are going to occur. And this is, of course, what is happening at City College whether you understand it in that context or not. You're saying that the revolutionary thrust of education at this particular school should be in such and such a manner. And you're saying that because you are the oppressed group in this school. Nobody else is basically oppressed in this school, except the Black and Puerto Rican. Now, that's not to say there isn't oppression among the whites, I mean because they're oppressed by the imperialistic structure, too. But I'm talking about the revolutionary vanguard and how that oppression strikes.

Therefore, it seems to me, in conclusion, that there are five things that we have to keep in mind: that all roads should lead to revolution. Everything that we do in our lives that leads to revolution because it is impossible for us ever to be free men, it is impossible for our children to be free children, if in fact the United States does not fall as the most imperialistic power in the world. And I will give you proof of that. All of us hailed Ghana when it got independence in 1956. All of us hailed the other emerging African nations when they got independence. But, that was political independence. That was political independence. The economic power was still held by the European powers and by the United States. And that is why Nkrumah fell because the economic power was held by the United States government. That is why Modibo Keita in Mali fell. That is why we've been having other coups in Africa. And, so, we have to understand very thoroughly that political independence without the right to

control the economic institutions of a society means absolutely zero, basically, in the long run. And therefore, as long as the United States exists with its military might, fighting as it does in Viet Nam, Santo Domingo, Latin America and elsewhere, then it is impossible for humanity to be free. It is impossible. That is why we say, "all roads must lead to revolution," because without revolution in this country, without a change of the power structure, change of economic system, nobody ultimately will be safe. China's not safe today. It's preparing for war with the United States because it recognizes the power of this country.

Second thing: internationalization of the struggle. Brother Malcolm stated that. Other people carried it on. And we ourselves have to understand the effects of internationalization of the struggle, because the struggle against racism, capitalism, and imperialism is indivisible. Everybody in the world is linked in a fight against these triple monsters. And we ourselves must obviously gear ourselves to an international fight.

Third point: education is for use. The brother has already stressed upon that. There should be no education which is for one's personal benefit. Education is for use of people to be put to work in the services of mankind. And we as black people, and I include Puerto Ricans in this category, have a tremendous amount of work to do among our people. And we must get educated and take it back. And remember it is an accident of history that some of us get an education and some of us don't. Most black people do not get an education, and so those of us who are fortunate to be enrolled in SEEK or whose mothers and fathers have a job sufficient to send us to school must ask ourselves, "what am I going to do with this education? Is it to make twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars and become a part of the American system? And all of you in this room have asked that question, I'm sure. But we have to stress consistently, consistently, consistently, that education is for use.

The fourth point is the question of organization. It is impossible, it is impossible to fight the United States government and all its little monsters, such as C.C.N.Y. and the Police Department and what have you, without organization. Without organization we will fail. Impossible to do it. One man can pick up one side of this podium, but fifteen men around it can pick it all up. And so it is with the world fight. And it doesn't matter about time. Don't get frustrated. If it happens in a thousand years, you have to ask yourself, "what have I done to bring it about?"

And the last thing I will like to close with is the concept of retribution.

I've outlined five things that we should try and keep in mind: (1) all roads to revolution, (2) internationalization of the struggle, (3) education for use, (4) organization and the last point is (5) retribution. On Malcolm's assassination date this is a good point for us to keep in mind, because it is a policy of an imperial power, of a colonizing power, to assassinate the leaders that people throw up. If you eventually kill enough leaders, you will eventually weaken the will of the people. Sometimes we wonder what was happening during reconstruction. Well, I'll tell you. One of the things was the Ku Klux Klan was going around in the community murdering and assassinating the leaders of the people. And people were frightened because they felt the Ku Klux Klan would be knocking on their door. That's why Medgar Evers was killed. That's why Martin Luther King was killed. That's why Sammy Younge was killed in Tuskegee, Alabama. That's why Reverend Lee in Mississippi and most black leaders are killed -- because they are leaders. And the powers know that if you kill off the leaders, then you eventually, as I said, weaken the will of the people. Well, no leader can prevent his assassination. But what a people can do is to say that if you assassinate our leaders, if you assassinate our leaders, then you must begin to pay a very, very heavy price in the retribution field. And, we as we're getting our education, we must not dull our sensitivity to retribution. See, there's a very tricky thing about education because sometimes the bloods from the streets who get education lose their guts to pick up a gun or to take a knife and to kill somebody with what they had on the streets. So, what I'm saying is, you know, in Cuba they have education and military training and what have you. But we as a people, as we get our education, must keep in mind the concept of retribution. And we have to be specific about retribution. We have to say it, and we have to say it loud, that we're not only going to have retribution against the Police Department but we must deal with the power stations, the telephone companies and if you say it loud enough. This is not going to stop the assassinations, but the time is here for us as a people to say to our oppressors that it doesn't matter if you kill us. But understand that we are on the road to liberation and liberation means revolution, ultimately, in this country. And, of course, the greatest tribute that we can give to Brother Malcolm, the greatest tribute that we can give any black leader who is assassinated is to carry out the revolutionary process and to destroy this country and raise our arms high, gun in hand and say REVOLUTION !!!