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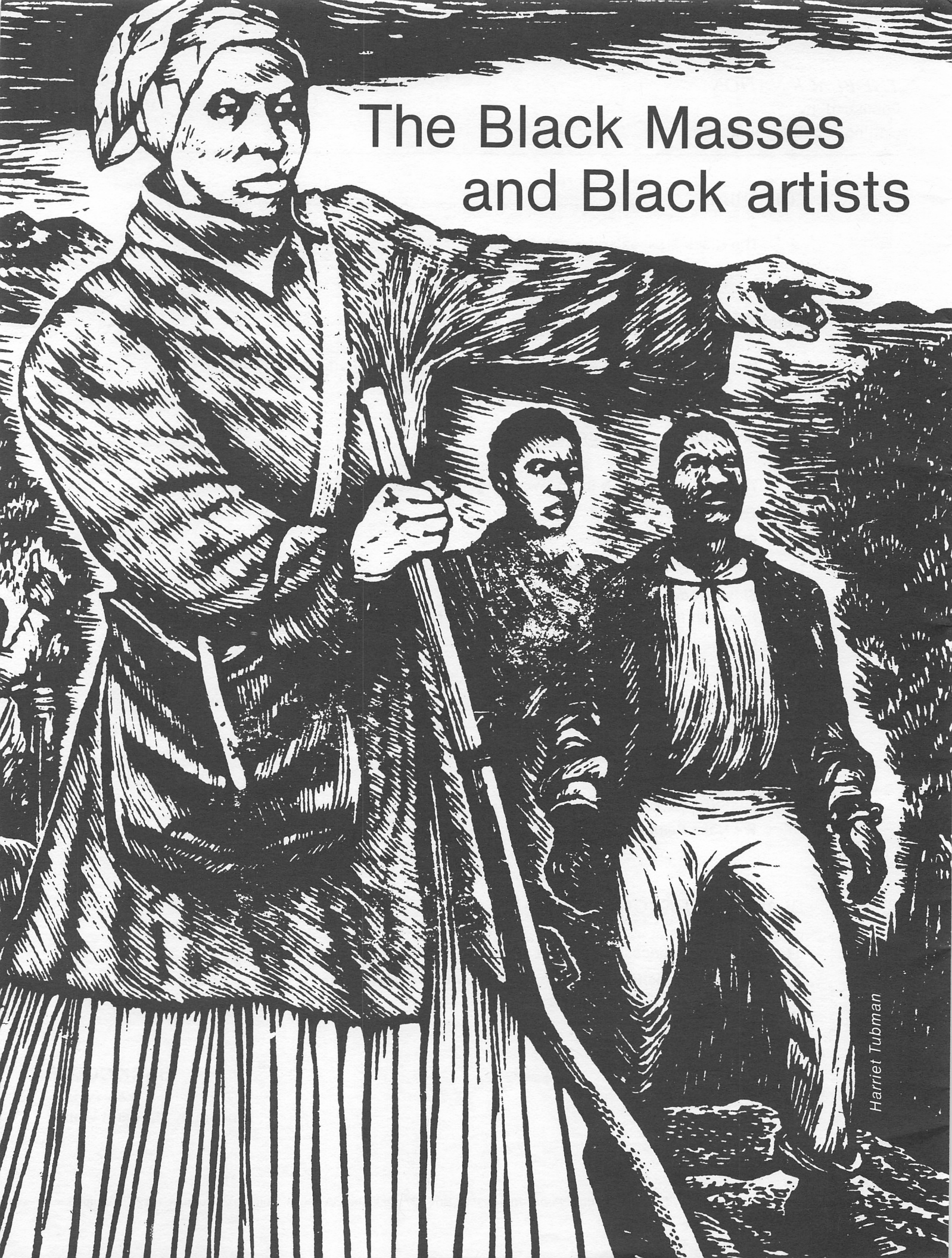
BLACK LIBERATION STRUGGLES

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*For My People,*  
a poem by Margaret Walker

# The Black Masses and Black artists



Harriet Tubman

**D**uring any mass political upsurge, there will be a reflected outpouring of art that is tuned in to the social rise. The appearance of an original African American literature, the *slave narratives*, created by the black slaves fleeing the south and slavery coincides with the peoples' intensified efforts to smash slavery itself. The writings of the "freed" blacks in the north coming out of the *black convention movement* of the early and middle of the 19th century also reflects and is a part of this same upsurge.

So that the writings of Frederick Douglass, Moses Roper, Henry Bibb, Linda Brent, H. Box Brown and the other authors of the narratives as well as David Walker, Henry Highland Garnett, C.L. Redmond, C.H. Langston and free urban blacks of the convention movement and whom Bill McAdoo has described as the "pre civil war revolutionary black nationalists" were all part of the total social upheaval by the black masses that culminated in the civil war.

In the early part of the 20th century, 1920's, again a black political motion forward, in this case the appearance of the Garvey movement and African Blood Brotherhood as well as other forms of mass resistance to the intense oppression that had been put on blacks since the destruction of the reconstruction (1876-1915) was accompanied by a major explosion by African American artists, The Harlem Renaissance.

So the writings of Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer and the others, the consummate artistry of Duke Ellington or Aaron Douglas, all were part of a total black social movement.

The 60's are the most recent case in point. The Black Arts Movement that saw people like Larry Neal, Henry Dumas, Mari Evans, Carolyn Rodgers, Sonia Sanchez, Ed Bullins, Askia Toure and hundreds of other young black artists burst onto the scene, was obviously linked very closely to the high level of struggle evidenced by the Black Liberation Movement. These writers, as well as musicians, painters, dancers, photographers, wanted to make artistic statements as profound and important as the Malcolm Xs and Martin Luther Kings. They were even linked directly to some of the many different organizations struggling in the Black Liberation Movement, e.g. CAP, Black Panthers, Republic of New Afrika, Revolutionary Action Movement, Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, etc.

Today, in the editors' opinion, we are emerging from a lull in the BLM. A "lull" caused by the obstructions that had to occur as a result of the BLM's internal contradictions, the lack of a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party and the frenzied attacks by the state.

But there are signs everywhere of the peoples' begin-

ning to re-mobilize, signs of a new determination to heighten the struggle against the national oppression of the Afro American Nation and oppressed nationality.

Many things that we fought for in the 60's and 70's were eliminated in the 80's with the stroke of a pen e.g., affirmative action and the assault on it that the Bakke decision represents, Reagan's attack on voting rights and elimination of a wide variety of social programs.

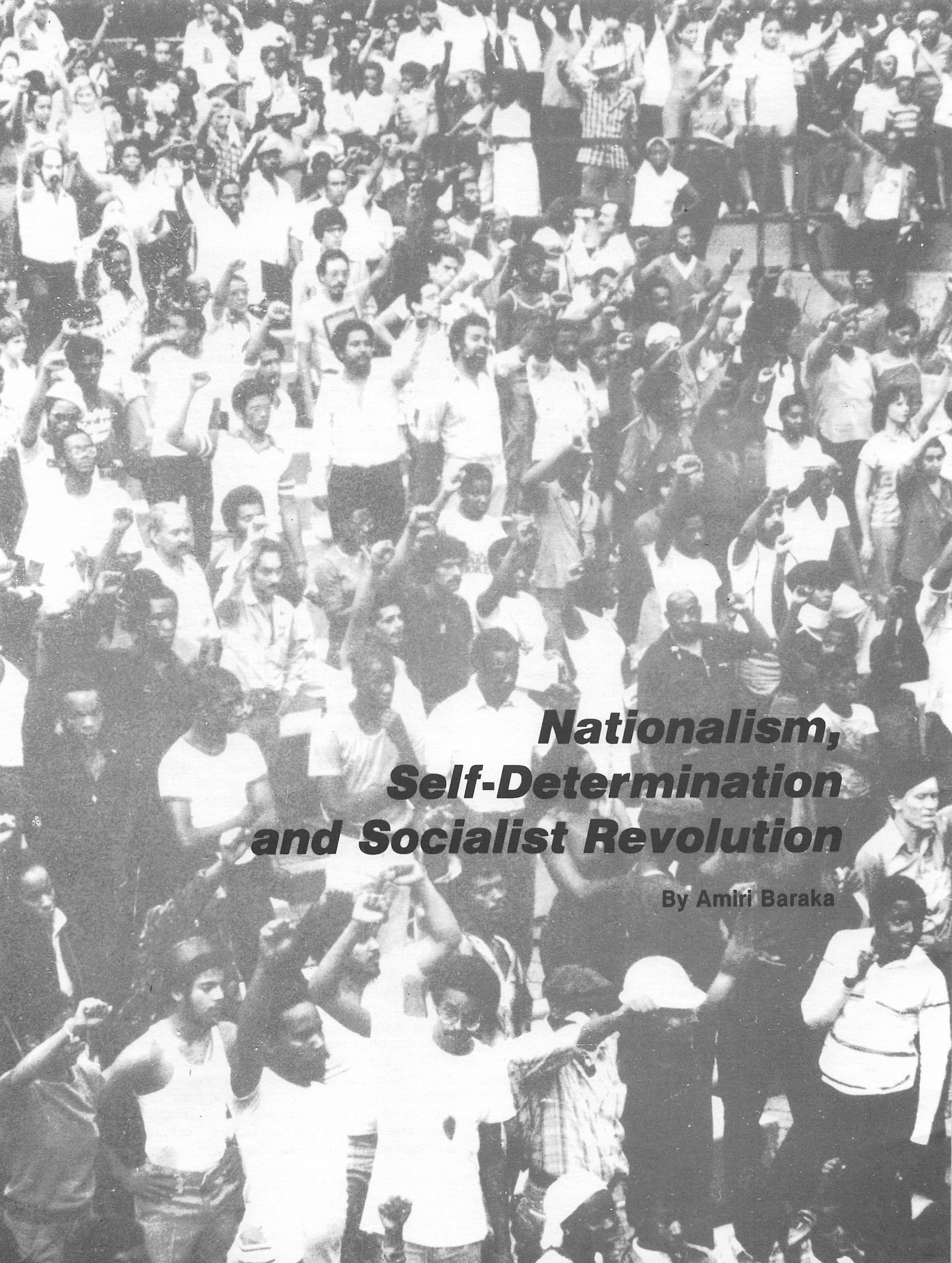
But every day there are more signs that a new upsurge, not only by the BLM, but the whole of the multinational working class, is in the offing. People are fed up and backed against the wall. Each day Reagan and co. insult and humiliate the majority of U.S. citizens to an even more unacceptable extent. Counterattacks against the Klan, the spread of the Black United Front, increased activity by the National Black Independent Political Party, recent conferences for a new National Black Workers' Organization and around Self Determination, are all good signs.

The artists too are beginning to counterattack. The Black Writers Union, National Association of Third World Writers, Southern Conference of African American Writers, are some recent examples of black and third world writers organizing to struggle. The huge (some 3000 writers) Writers Congress in New York City sponsored by *The Nation* magazine and the discussion there of the need to put together a writers' trade union, indicates how deep and widespread the rising motion of the masses is, and how artists reflect it in their own attempts to organize. A great deal of writing is also showing this sensitivity to new mass movement and reorganization. We intend to put all of it we can find (and fit) into our pages.

We are saying that we are already experiencing the first stages of a higher level of popular struggle that we believe will exceed even the 60's. We will discuss it and document it. We will have the artists sensitive to this reflect it.

We also want to reprint some of the older artists (and do new works by them) whom we feel have been purposely obscured by bourgeois design because their works are too militant, too supportive of black Self Determination. Margaret Walker is one such revolutionary Black artist. Langston Hughes' 30's works are censored for the same reasons.

We must link our present efforts with earlier examples of the revolutionary and progressive tradition of African American art, so that we all might come to understand more clearly that the tradition has always been one of resistance and struggle. Not only have our major artists always reflected these qualities in their work, they have even made "high art" out of them.



***Nationalism,  
Self-Determination  
and Socialist Revolution***

By Amiri Baraka

**A**lthough the right of Self-Determination is a democratic demand, a political *reform*, obviously it must be upheld by people calling themselves Marxists. Lenin said, social democrats who refuse to uphold the right of Self-Determination should be denounced as social imperialists and scoundrels.

The reason for this is that how can one be fighting for socialism and not even uphold democracy? But also it is part of the approach of building all around proletarian unity, upholding democracy for all nations and nationalities; so that proletarian unity is embodied by the joining together of workers of all nationalities in order to smash imperialism and monopoly capitalism, and all the ills these scourges bring with them such as national oppression, racism, the oppression of women and the like. This is what we mean by proletarian internationalism.

Marxists are internationalists. And even if they are Marxists of an oppressed nationality, they seek to join with workers of other nationalities in smashing their oppression and all oppression and exploitation even with workers of the oppressor nation! Ultimately genuine Marxists know that “no nation can be free if it oppresses another nation.” They also understand that national oppression cannot be ended until the elimination of class exploitation and that their own national oppression is just one particular aspect of the outrages of monopoly capitalism and imperialism.

Marxist revolutionaries understand that the national oppression of the African American Nation, for instance, is based economically on the system of monopoly capitalism (that is its material base), and that the only beneficiaries of this oppression is that minute percentage of the U.S. population that makes up the white racist monopoly capitalist class, plus those relatively small sectors of the working class and petty bourgeoisie who have been bribed with some of the spoils of

imperialism, particularly the robbery and denial of rights of the African American masses.

A Marxist is an internationalist, but also as Mao pointed out the Marxist of an oppressed nation must also be a *patriot*. The fight against that nation’s national oppression is “internationalism applied.” Marxists cannot be so involved with theoretically upholding

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## To talk rationally of internationalism, one must understand and fight for the freedom of all nations!

internationalism that they dismiss their own nation’s concrete national liberation struggle — that would be a caricature of Marxism. This is precisely why Mao wrote this essay, to counter those people disguised as Marxists who wanted to “liquidate the national question.” Lenin fought the same battle with Rosa Luxemburg and the Polish and Dutch Social Democrats, among other Marxists in the early 20th century who wanted to deny the right of Self-Determination as an exercise in reformism or nationalism.

But to talk rationally of internationalism, one must understand and fight for the freedom of all nations! In the U.S., one of the main deterrents in really multinational communist organizing has been incorrect political positions on the national question, particularly the Afro-American National Question. For a long time the liquidationist and chauvinist positions held

sway in the CPUSA, and actually it was Lenin and Stalin and the weight of the Third International, plus the agitation and struggle of correct comrades including several Afro-American cadre, that forced the CPUSA to take the correct position upholding Self-Determination for the Afro-American Nation in the Black Belt South.

The question of Self-Determination is a question of the extension of all around democracy to all nations; it is not Marxists winking at nationalism. Marxists oppose nationalism, a bourgeois ideology which promotes the privilege, primacy and exclusiveness of the nation. Nationalism is not the same thing as patriotism which Mao said was applied internationalism in the case of oppressed nations, and is not the same as national consciousness which we will talk more of later. Lenin said that even the bourgeois nationalism of an oppressed nation has elements of democracy in it, to the extent to which such nationalists fight against imperialism. So Marxists support “the nationalists in the sense of a negative support,” that is we support nationalists to the extent to which they fight imperialism, but there is no support whatsoever for nationalism, *per se*!

It would seem obvious to any advanced observer of a society like the U.S., for instance, that nationalism has been one of the greatest assets the U.S. ruling class has possessed. The class struggle inside the oppressor nation that the imperialist U.S. is, in relationship to the African American or Chicano Nations, is consistently repressed, diverted, fragmented and held off by the white racist monopoly capitalist ruling class having infected sectors of the white working class with the drug of white supremacy. Chauvinism, Lenin called, opportunism in its most developed and finished state, where the bourgeoisie could use “its workers” to fight against the workers of another nation! Such chauvinism has the same economic base as opportunism, the bribe of a small section of the workers



The class-conscious African American workers must fight not only for Self-Determination of the Afro-American Nation, but for the victory of the entire working class. Here, workers at the Oneita textile mill celebrate winning union rights in 1973. The Oneita union victory set an example for all workers in the South.

and petty bourgeoisie with the spoils of imperialism. And in the U.S. those spoils are literally ripped off the Blacks and other oppressed nationalities. This is that sector which is paid for collaborating in the superexploitation of African Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, Asians and so forth.

It is nationalism that can divide the workers so that the workers of one nationality are struggling against the workers of another nationality for a few illusory crumbs the rulers throw out exactly for that purpose! It is nationalism that can pit groups of workers against each other with the most hideous rage, while their mutual oppressors skip off with both their purses for a little sun and fun.

Nationalism is a bourgeois ideology which developed with the emergence of nations and the rise and development of capitalism. Nationalism serves the bourgeoisie in the sense that they are seeking a market for their goods, and their national market is always primary as capitalism develops. And nationalism serves to help that bourgeoisie secure its national market. Joseph Stalin writes, "The market is the first school in which the bourgeoisie learns its nationalism." (page 31, *Marxism and the*

#### *National Question*)

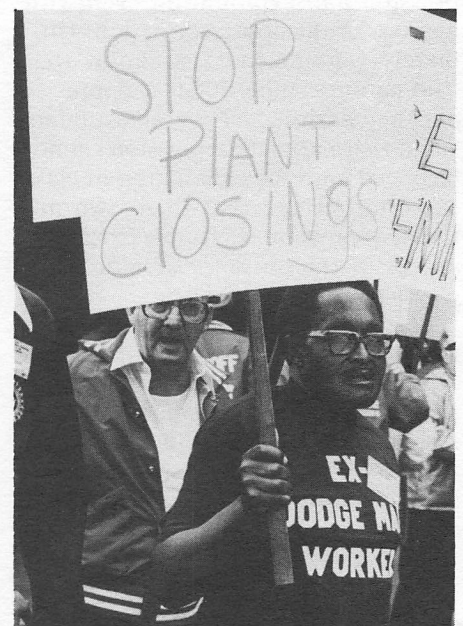
Black national oppression, based as it is on the slave trade and the enslaving of African Americans, has created an obvious and even "justifiable" ground for Black nationalism. The fact that white supremacy has been the most easily defined instrument in that national oppression creates a situation where Black nationalism can flourish. But even so, the majority of African Americans are not nationalists. In fact, part of the struggle to strengthen the BLM must be in creating a stronger *national consciousness* among the African American people, *i.e.*, an awareness of the Afro-American Nation and of the political necessities of Black survival and development.

The BLM, the national liberation struggle of Black people in the U.S., must include the heightening of national consciousness, identity and self-respect. But these are *not* the same as *nationalism*, an ideology, a world outlook, promoted by the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie that advocates the primacy, exclusiveness and privilege of "their" nation.

The masses of the oppressed peoples want national equality, democratic rights for their nationality equal with all other nations. This is why in essence

the Black struggle, the struggle of the African American Nation for Self-Determination is a *national democratic* struggle, the struggle as an oppressed nation for liberation.

Nationalism, though, means exclusivism and isolation. Any nationalism finally implies that those people are



Black auto workers demand Dodge Main stay open.

UNITY newspaper

better than all others. The Black struggle is for equality, in essence, not "superiority." We are the victims of a nationalism that preaches superiority and inferiority. We have seen its obscene terror and oppression. We are not fighting so that we can put these on somebody else.

And further. Bourgeois nationalism ultimately does not serve the real interests of the masses of that nationality. As ironic as this sounds, nationalism does not ultimately serve the nation. This is true and has been proven correct time and again. Bourgeois nationalism after a certain point isolates the oppressed masses from their mass allies and delivers them into the hands of the exploiters and reactionaries of their own nationality. In today's world, imperialism must be destroyed to destroy national oppression and certainly this couldn't be more true than here in the heartland of the U.S. superpower.

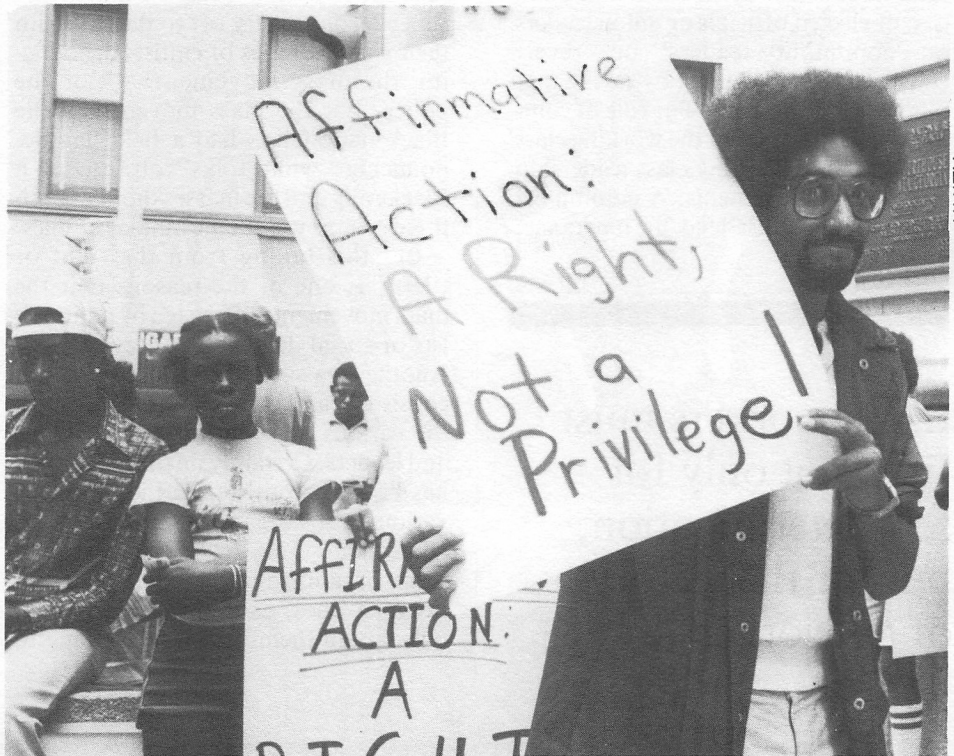
Zionism should teach us at this moment more forcibly than anything else, how even the most "justifiable" nationalism, taken to its logical conclusion, can end up justifying the slaughter of almost anybody else outside the nation. Certainly, the slaughter of six million Jews by Nazi fascism (rule by the most nationalistic sector of finance capital) made Zionism seem attractive and reasonable to many people who had never taken it seriously before. Now we see the Israelis, themselves turned into fascists, slaughtering the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples, justifying it with Israeli nationalism.

Within the BLM, the nationalist sector is small, but admittedly very vocal and active. There has also emerged from out of that sector some of the fiercest fighters against Black national oppression. (The fact of white supremacy and chauvinism even on the Left, made multinational organizing difficult and kept Black fighters in organizations isolated, contributes to this fact.) However, in the mid-70's a great many of the younger generation of erstwhile Black nationalists and Pan-Africanists took up Marxism-Leninism in a stunning development created perhaps by more exposure of their generation to an atmosphere of international struggle against imperialism made more familiar by modern communications media and the fact that some of the leading African revolution-

## In today's world imperialism must be destroyed to destroy national oppression . . . .

Detroit, Los Angeles and Atlanta, where Black activists had to go up against Black political infrastructures with many of the same characteristics of neo-colonialism in the third world.

Unfortunately, since that incendiary crossover of many of the most active and informed members of the BLM into the M-L movement, that movement generally has bogged down and been victimized by a general move to the right of U.S. society. The anti-revisionist M-L movement is a young movement,



UNITY newspaper

The movement for Black Self-Determination must be supported by class-conscious workers of every nationality. Here, an Atlanta community demonstration in support of affirmative action at Sears.

aries like Kwame Nkrumah, Amilcar Cabral, Samora Machel, Mangaliso Sobukwe, Augustino Neto, Nelson Mandela and liberation organizations like the PAIGC, MPLA, PAC, ANC, ZANU, SWAPO did not take bourgeois nationalist lines and were often heavily influenced by Marxism.

Plus struggles in Black communities had in quite a few cases risen to a level where some aspect of partial political democracy was won and the electing or appointing of Black politicians to office quickly revealed that nationality is not the same as political correctness. This was made clear in places like Newark,

but it has had to survive the shallow, often idealistic enthusiasm of the mid-70's and its virulent "left" and right opportunism, just as it has to survive the wave of disillusion and right opportunism that now beset it. The large number of petty bourgeois cadres in the U.S. Marxist-Leninist movement help account for some part of these extremes and political vacillation.

But what is obvious is that the M-L movement has not given leadership to the mass movement in the U.S. as it must if a genuine M-L communist party is to be built. Certainly this is true in the BLM. Too often, not only is the M-L

movement not giving the overall guidance and leadership that the mass movement needs, it is tailing the various sectors of the mass movement whether it is the Black Democrat sector or the Black nationalist sector or the Black Christian sector.

In the same way that the old RU (Revolutionary Union, now RCP) tailed the most reactionary sectors of the white working class movement, screaming “smash busing” along with the racists, we also have would-be M-Ls tailing cultural nationalists or Christian nationalists, or elected officials or union leaders or “community leaders” or “reverends” and legitimizing it by saying that this is their mass work. The role of communists is to represent the working class and to ensure working class leadership in the mass movements. A communist organization must lead by its stance,

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**Black workers must fight not only for self-determination, but for the victory of all workers.**

viewpoint and action.

One example of what I would call “a militant tail” is when the so-called M-Ls like the RCP and CWP showed up at an NBUF (National Black United Front) rally in Brooklyn called to protest the murder of Luis Baez by police. These two “super” revolutionary groups then staged separate little demonstrations off to the side of the main body of people, because they said the leadership of the NBUF was reformist. So the NBUF calls the rally, organizes the people, and then the RCP and CWP show up being super revolutionary off to the side with their small coteries of cultists denouncing the mass movement — not the police, but the mass movement. The Black nationalists had a field day denouncing “white folks” obstructing a Black rally and the masses thought both these groups were some kind of hippies.

But this tailing from the right or “left” is one of the reasons that the mass movement is often led by nationalists or social democrats or revisionists. Another reason is the failure to mount consistent and principled struggle with the various non-Marxist organizations and leaders. Certainly, in the BLM there has been no consistent criticism of the various Black organizations by M-L organizations. They have usually treated these organizations, certainly the nationalist ones, as if they didn’t exist, only to tail them in real life. Going to

you’ll find all kinds of M-Ls there, but their rallies, programs, conventions, and not taking the lead in organizing these events themselves.

Too many so-called M-Ls even think the mass movement is the nationalist sector of the BLM. Certainly RWH revealed this in their recent pamphlet on the Afro-American national question. But go to any large program or event given by nationalists and so forth and where are the forums and the rallies and the marches and the mass movement organized and led by the M-Ls?

Tailing the mass movement, “everything through a united front” as Mao put it, failing to struggle principledly with various trends within the BLM only supports the less advanced sectors of the movement, such as nationalism. These are clear right deviations and instead of “winning the advanced to communism” too often the M-L movement, through its own present right errors and some “left” errors as well, leave the leadership of the mass movement to the nationalists and make them stronger than they would be if we waged consistent and principled ideological struggle against them. The relationship of Marxists to the mass movement is unity and struggle, not just unity!

The BLM for democracy and Self-Determination exists in the U.S. not only alongside other National Liberation struggles, e.g., the Chicano and



Black workers played an important role in fighting for their rights and the rights of all working people. Here Black and white workers demand government relief in the 1930's.





The enemy of Black people is the enemy of the multinational working class: the white racist monopoly capitalists. The strike of poultry workers in Laurel, Mississippi, in 1980 drew wide support from the Black community and trade unions.

Native American movements for Self-Determination, there are other oppressed nationalities (not necessarily nations in the U.S.) fighting for equality and against racism, such as the Puerto Ricans and Asian Americans. Yet, at the same time the masses of African Americans and these other oppressed nationalities are also, along with white workers, members of the multinational U.S. working class.

The working class recognizes and supports all the various struggles against National Oppression, but the struggle that unifies that class completely must be the struggle to smash monopoly capitalism forever. Therefore the class-conscious African American workers must fight consciously not only for Self-Determination for the Afro-American Nation but for the victory of the whole working class. Such a class-conscious worker must support all the just struggles of the various oppressed nationalities, but also see as *primary* the collective struggle of the multinational working class.

Actually, the Afro-American struggle for Self-Determination is fought against the same enemy that the multi-

national working class fights against, that is, the white racist monopoly capitalist class which rules the U.S. and is the chief beneficiary of U.S. imperialism. So that a well-organized and fighting multinational workers movement must attack the same chief enemy of the Black Nation — the white racist monopoly capitalist class — the U.S. imperialist class.

This is why the *strategic alliance* between the multinational working class and oppressed nationalities is so critical. It is the creation of a *conscious* fighting unity, a revolutionary unity, that monopoly capitalism cannot withstand. This is also why nationalism is so divisive and destructive and ultimately only serves the bourgeoisie.

The successful national liberation movement, unless it is led by the working class, only defeats foreign domination, it does not eliminate class exploitation within that nation. We've seen liberation movements defeat foreign domination only to become neo-colonial states governed by a domestic bourgeoisie who are absolutely in collaboration with the ex-rulers (see M. Babu, *African Socialism or Socialist Africa*,

Zed Press).

A national liberation movement led by the working class not only will take the revolution through to the end, it then continues without pause into the phase of eliminating class exploitation and building socialism.

The struggle for Black Self-Determination, objectively, is a struggle against the U.S. imperialist class — its monopoly capitalist state has *always* been based on Black slavery. It would be a caricature of Black concerns to say, "All right, the multinational working class is fighting the monopoly capitalist class for a socialist society but we Black people are fighting for a Black capitalist society." The Black bourgeoisie and the less advanced sectors of the petty bourgeoisie might co-sign such a statement, but Black workers would not willingly remain the doormats for yet another exploitive regime. Our struggle is to end exploitation — ours as well as everyone else's.

Even such a fantasy Black capitalist state would see civil war as item number one on the workers' agenda (or have you read the news from Kenya, Zaire, recently?) Black people are not fighting

white imperialism so they can find themselves under the brutish rule of domestic Arap Moi's, Mobutu's and Amin's, and believe me, brothers and sisters, we have quite a few of them telling us how bad white folks are — but ask them do they want to smash class society and capitalism forever? Some of these nationalists already exist in organizations whose narrow, oppressive structures and ideologies are chilling projec-

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**To push nationalism in the 1980's is to narrow our struggle rather than broaden it. Genuine revolutionaries need allies to strengthen their fight.**

tions of what they have in store for all of us.

The BLM is not directly a struggle for socialism, it is a struggle for democracy. But it's just these struggles for democracy, in all areas of U.S. life that will bring the masses of all nationalities to revolutionary positions. In the 20's, Lenin pointed out that after the Soviet socialist revolution the national liberation struggles should no longer be termed "bourgeois democratic" struggles but "national democratic" or "national revolutionary." As these struggles aided the proletariat's struggle against imperialism and led by the working class, these struggles did not have to create a capitalist state controlled by a domestic bourgeoisie but could move uninterruptedly to socialism. The first socialist revolution had pointed the way past capitalism! The victory of the People's Republic of China proved this thesis brilliantly.

In a multinational state, such as the U.S., to isolate the African American people or their liberation movement is to do the imperialist bourgeoisie's work for them. Segregation has, in the main, been the way that the rulers have kept people outside the mainstream of democratic struggles in this country. Segregation has enabled us fewer allies, fewer links with the collective workers movement and other oppressed nationalities. To push nationalism in the 1980's is to narrow our struggle rather than to broaden it. Genuine revolutionaries need allies, and they must have allies to strengthen their fight. The Israeli fascists prefer to fight the Palestinians with as few allies as possible — keep the struggle narrow with all information hard to come by — with only the modern U.S.-supplied Israeli war machine in state power versus the less well-armed and stateless Palestinians. The fact that the Palestinians are fighting a national liberation struggle is unquestionable, to

suggest that they become narrow nationalists pushing some metaphysical and exclusivist Palestinian "superiority" would not only be bizarre, but Israeli foreign policy. The Israelis would love it. So too, any movement to give the BLM fewer ties with other advanced and fighting forces would be made in Ronnie Reagan's heaven.

*The movement for Black Self-Determination must be supported by class-conscious workers of every nationality.* That must be the strategic line in the BLM. Nationalism is opposed to this. The BLM is part of an unbreakable fabric of anti-imperialist struggle. Black liberation can only genuinely exist with the destruction of monopoly capitalism. The destroyer of monopoly capitalism is the collective workers struggle, the victory of the multinational working class in alliance with the oppressed peoples and socialism!

The principal task for advanced forces, revolutionaries and class conscious workers in the U.S. is the creation of a multinational revolutionary M-L communist party. A party that can tie the various national, democratic and workers movements together and give them collective leadership. In many cases, nationalist movements among the various nationalities will oppose the creation of such a party. Communists working in the various mass movements must fight for such a party and they cannot do this without consistent criticism of and struggle against nationalist forces within the mass movement. Not only struggle against nationalism but against every deviation from revolutionary theory and practice — not in the spirit of Pharisees, critical but abstract, but with the spirit of living Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-Tung Thought, criticism and struggle for the sake of creating a higher level of unity. It is just this kind of class struggle that makes the movement go forward!



**BLACK NATION**  
interviews  
**Margaret Walker**

*MARGARET WALKER. Her classic For My People first received wide acclaim with the publication of the book of poetry with the same title in 1941 as part of the Yale Younger Poets series. She is also the author of the great novel Jubilee. Two new publications of Ms. Walker's are due in the fall, a book of poetry, This is My Century, and a long awaited work on Richard Wright. She was interviewed earlier this year by Michael Simanga.*

**Black Nation: As a Black writer, would you make some initial observations on what you see in the country today for Black people.**

**Walker:** Well, I feel very pessimistic and very concerned. We have a new form of government in the country today, and I don't think it is especially friendly to Black people. I think that the arch-conservatives, very much to the right of center, are actually taking us into a hard form of fascism. I think that we have always had tendencies in this society for fascism, and never had an ideal democracy. What we are looking at now is an oligarchy, which is government by the monied few, buttressed by force of the military. And this cannot be good for anybody, it's not good for white people, much less Black people. But, Black people have always been on the bottom of the economic ladder. We've always suffered the most, because we've always been exploited the most. And what we face today is a very serious form not of repression or even depression so much as oppression, depression and repression. All three of these are eminent. I don't know if in my lifetime I will see this trend turned around. It's not just the government that's in power, it's the general consensus of opinion of a large section of white America.

**Black Nation: What do you see as being the resistance to that? I know, for instance, in your poem (one of the most celebrated) "For My People," you call for a new generation to rise. Do you see today amongst Black people resistance to the conditions?**

**Walker:** No, really I do not. I don't see it even in our young people who are always the vanguard of revolutionary change. Perhaps in the '60's and very early '70's you saw some of this. We saw a large rising up of Black nationalism, and it was revolutionary. And you had two revolutions in the '60's, one led by Martin Luther King, Jr. and one led by Malcolm X. Both of those revolutions

were quite liberating in their intentions, and insofar as they went, they were very good, they just didn't go far enough. King's revolution brought very definite social change because it brought social legislation that outlawed segregation. Malcolm X's revolution was a more internalized thing of changing the attitudes of Black people towards themselves. Of recovering a sense of manhood and womanhood for Black people. A sense of pride and of unity and power. But, that was purely on a moral and aesthetic, and shall we say, a kind of sociological level. It did not quite seriously deal with economic and political problems which of themselves determine our lives.

**Black Nation: How would you assess the acquisition of various political offices and appointments?**

**Walker:** Well, I think that insofar as that goes, it's alright. But (and I have many friends who have believed that the way to power for Black people is through political office) I'm not so sure that we can hope for much from that. What we have happening there is not just tokenism, which it is in part, but really it's an individual matter of personal achievement which doesn't mean change on the mass level.

There's got to be some radical change in the economic system. The system, as we know it, for the past seven years to a decade has really been broken down. It isn't just the economic system of capitalism in this country that has been broken down for about seven to ten years (and you can list the evidences of this), but it is a breakdown in the western world and there is a crisis in western world capitalism. Despite all the haranguing we hear from our government or from western governments, whether it's Great Britain or France or West Germany, the U.S.A. or Canada or even certain countries like Mexico, no matter what they say, the financial condition of the western world is in crisis. And this is seen in so many ways, not only rising unemployment and in-

flation, the devaluation of the dollar, the end of the American gold supply, the problem in the banking world, the instability not only of currency, but of the banking world and the manipulation by the Federal Reserve System. All these are indications of a very sick economy and that economy isn't going to get any better. As a matter of fact, it was falling when Watergate was partially exposed. The Oil Embargo of '73 and the end of the gold supply as a result of sinking all that money in the Viet Nam War and trying to bolster up peace in the Middle East and investing in South Africa, those three things have been disastrous for the economy of this country.

**Black Nation: In face of this growing economic and social crisis (and I think that is very accurate when you say we cannot see this government in any way bringing it out) it is not about to get better even though they're promising it every day in the news . . . .**

**Walker:** Can't get better, it's no way. They have no method! No means by which they can improve it! The conservative supply-side economists think that by inflating the economy and increasing the unemployment rate, and by actually throwing hundreds of thousands of people out of work that the system will automatically, of itself, rejuvenate itself with fresh investments of capital and a balanced open market, which is ridiculous to expect. And their chief arbiter and architect, David Stockman, says it's not coming off; can't come off.

**Black Nation: Given there seems to be a growing activity amongst the traditional organizations, do you think that they can reshape a massive movement such as you mentioned as led by Martin Luther King and Malcolm X?**

**Walker:** We've had five great mass leaders. Frederick Douglass and DuBois never had the kind of mass marches that Garvey and King had, but then they were mass leaders just as Mal-

colm X. I don't think that we have anybody on the scene now with either the charisma or the philosophy or the following to achieve that kind of thing. I look at three or four people. Your own associate, nobody is more knowledgeable from the radical point of view than Baraka himself. But with all due respect to him and in his present condition, I don't see that he can lead a mass movement. He might have a few years back when he was working with the formation of a national political party, but that failed. A man like Jesse Jackson has charisma and is knowledgeable, but aside from a small segment of Black people, his own people there in Chicago don't trust him. They don't believe he is sincere and honest. They suspect that he has been coopted like Stokeley Carmichael and the King family and like Farmer was. They cannot see him as being disconnected from the system. The same thing is true of our very good friend and marvelous person Andrew Young. He is certainly a brilliant man and was brilliant when he worked with King. He is a marvelous politician and tactician, but he has chosen the political role and it is within the system. It is perhaps a hope to reform, but not to revolutionize, and what we have to have is a complete change of the system.

**Black Nation: I can understand your pessimism right now.**

**Walker:** Yes, it's nobody on the horizon, there is nobody on the scene who has the strength, the charisma, the knowledge and the power.

**Black Nation: Do you think that this generation of young Black men and women can produce that?**

**Walker:** I don't know. I would not say no, because there is a law of life and nature that the rather racist Arnold Toynbee, the historian, understood. It is that every time mankind, or humankind, is faced with a challenge from nature, the response is invariably there. Every time Black people have been faced with a crisis or mankind in general, as he has had various revolutions and energy and power and his concepts of the universe have changed, he has responded to the natural crisis and the natural challenge. The challenge of nature, of humanity, of the social forces, of the social order. And



Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X symbolize the intense level of struggle reached by the Black Liberation Movement in the 60's.

**W**ell, we have always had a very great tradition, a humanistic tradition, of personal freedom, truth and beauty and social justice and human dignity and peace. These are part of all Afro-American literature for more than 200 years.

whether we know it or not, those leaders will come forth because there will be always a human response to the challenge. Do you follow me?

**Black Nation: Yes, I do, and I think that is a very eloquent statement. What do you see then in this situation as the direction of Black literature today?**

**Walker:** Well, that's a serious question and a difficult one to answer. I know the direction my work seems to be taking, and I'm not at all sure it will be welcomed in the society. I just completed a first draft, in fact I'm revising and working hard toward deadlines with a book that I've sold to Howard University Press on Richard Wright. Richard Wright was in a way a prophetic and brilliant political tactician. He understood a great deal, not just from Marxist analysis, but from his understanding of Pan-Africanism and Existentialism and Freudianism and Einsteinism, all the great ideas of the 20th century, which he understood. He knew that certain things are inevitable and he was seeing them over and over again. But,

Black writers today fall in, shall I say, two or three categories. There are first those who may have something to say and may even know how to say it very well, but can't get an audience to sell their work, can't get published and probably never will. Then there are those who are lucky enough to get a publisher, Black or white or whoever it is, and put the stuff out. In this group they break down into two types. Those who write to acquiesce with the system and with whatever their white publishers and agents and editors want them to say. And those who are diametrically opposed and may have their works deleted and criticized and sometimes not even published, pushed aside on the shelf. Then, of course, there are those who, like Baraka, have dared for a long time to say what they thought. He may have changing philosophies and changing points of view and he may have changed color many times, but he's always been outspoken. You have those kinds of Black writers. There are some of us whom nobody can hush. There are some of us whom all kinds of persecution and oppression cannot keep quiet, not unless we are dead itself. And that's a possibility. But then there are those who want to be published so badly and are so conceited that they acquiesce with anything in order to be heard. They may be heard but they will not be followed. Have I answered you?

**Black Nation: Yes, you have. I think there is a lot of debate around the direction of Black literature today.**

**Walker:** Well, we have always had a very great tradition, a humanistic tradition, of personal freedom, truth and beauty, and social justice and human dignity and peace. These are part of all of Afro-American literature for more than 200 years. And we have always had people who were seriously devoted to the art of writing and who were committed to learn the craft. They have always existed and I presume as long as the universe exists, they always will. But, I do not see Black literature taking many very different and new directions.

I look at a woman like Toni Morrison who is considered by the white press and white publishers as the leading Black writer. Her work is very much that of the symbolist. I find that

where she is most authentic to the Black experience, she is the least recognized. That when she takes us down paths of fantasy then the white literary critics are pleased. That is not the reality of our lives, however. And that is not what I think we ought to be about. I look at other Black writers, I wouldn't say they're different camps, they're just various individuals. There are many young women and men on the horizon and I'm sure they are going to be heard because they have something to say. But how much they will influence and affect the masses of Black people remains to be seen.

**Black Nation: What do you see as being the task of Black writers today, given the situation you've described?**

**Walker:** Well, I think the task has always been, the Black writer is supposed to be avant-garde. He's like the philosopher or the social scientist, he implements the new concepts of the universe. He seeks to inform the mass audience of his people for whom he writes of their human and spiritual destiny. He seeks to prepare them for the days ahead in which they may truly see a world of common humanity.

**Black Nation: What is your current work? You mentioned the book on Richard Wright.**



**T**here are some of us whom nobody can hush. There are some of us whom all kinds of persecution and oppression cannot keep quiet, not unless we are dead itself.

**Walker:** My book on Richard Wright is my most recent thing. I hope that it is going to appear by fall of the year. I hope I am going to live to see that.

**Black Nation: Are you still lecturing?**

**Walker:** Yes, I occasionally do. I have not accepted anything this month, because of the book. Next month, I may do two or three engagements. I do one or two things nearby, this month in the city, maybe. I refused to take anything for April because I thought I was going to be involved with a conference, but it's now cancelled. I think in May I may be in the Middle West, celebrating the anniversary of one of our small presses.

**Black Nation: What would you say to young Black writers today? As just a statement from Margaret Walker to young Black writers today.**

**Walker:** Well, I've often avoided offering advice. I don't think people want it. They don't take it even when you give it. People want sympathy and understanding, they don't want advice. Sometime, if you're a teacher, you tell students what they have to do. The first thing they have to do is think hard about the reality of our lives. The second thing is to read everything that they can find so that they have models on which to base their work, and to develop the craft and to work to develop the art. To make sure that there is something to their personality so that they have something to say and then to work hard to be able to say it well. That's about all I can say.

**Black Nation: Well, Sister Walker, I tell you this has been most enjoyable and I'm sorry that I could not do this in person.**

**Walker:** Well, I appreciate you doing it this way. Charles Rowell did this almost ten years ago, 1973. Just calling me from over in Tupelo. I was here in my house ill in bed, but that interview appeared in *Black World* in December of '75. And I look at it and I'm still quite pleased and satisfied he got a good interview. Thank you very much.

**Black Nation: Thank you. And I hope that you continue to give us as much as you can. We need the work that you are producing, I'm looking forward to the book. Again, thank you.**

# The poetry of struggle

**A**rt is a reflection of life, simply said, a people's art is a reflection of that people. And of all the arts, certainly poetry is one of the most basic; speech musicked, speech raised to its highest level of intensity, rhythm and meaning. But also, poetry begins with sound itself, it springs out of the syllable, the *sound* even before it is words. So poetry carries a people's deepest meanings. Even "popular songs" are essentially a kind of poetry. And the most advanced poetry gives us both powerful forms and progressive content.

The *BLACK NATION* will always publish a great deal of poetry because progressive and revolutionary poetry carries a dynamic even catalytic significance and sometimes the poet moves in advance of the other arts, saying out loud the things that are ruminating in the backs of the masses' minds. In this way, it is "from the people to the people" paraphrasing Mao. What the advanced artist takes from the people, he or she gives back, hopefully with more form and feeling.

In any significant social movement, the people's artist must take the forefront of the struggle. In such situations, revolutionary and progressive poets are showing the way.



UNITY newspaper

Conference on "Afro-American literature and class struggle" held in New York City, June 1980.



Puerto Rico Independence Day Parade, New York, 1979.

## EL BORICUAN

para William Morales  
& los compañeros de FALN

*Columbus the punk of such much spanish lace  
& reeking of isabella's favor . . . "neither  
peacock nor sparrow" . . .*

*a roulette wheel spinning in his head where  
the antilles current spat him into history's  
material gaze —*

*Columbus — con artist turned conquistador  
the invader pats her ass . . .  
the island aloft like flying fish against  
the sea*

*spread eagled and a running brook of doves  
in flight cascading from her nimbus shrouded  
womb . . .*

*puerto rico — in the crook of history's arm  
shipwrecked where the head thumps like a  
violent river's even odds against backlash  
and hispanic flesh on the auction block/*

*An ocean of seaweed afloat in their eyes —  
the women set — poverty's accent in place  
& monotony sea-sawing on the edge of a time  
card*

*fingers bone weary and backs bent to study  
a piecework fringe —  
from Loiza Aldea to El Barrio  
a sweatshop bobbin & castinet melee caught  
in rows of sewing machines —*

*el rio grande  
drop by drop — a tear on the cheek  
land . . . not this plundered archipelago  
of subsistent wages blessed by yanki  
corporate boards . . . land & now a tear/*

*You can tell the manner of suffering by  
the saints that a man wears around his neck —*



roof top fire zone  
pitch & tar to patch holes burnt in the sky

the north star's flame so sharp  
that it hurts — but everything is war  
from birth to language  
rejoice at the ambush of rolled r's  
on the tongue . . .  
the malicious wounding of vowels &  
consonants/

Mira!

Cyclops with fine cross hairs  
my sniper's aim & muzzle flash  
is an alpha state.—  
oye mi morena!

I touch the teakwood of your thigh  
&

morning winces with forked lightning  
as a stream of electrons tumble like  
tears nurturing a regiment of sugar cane  
that quietly grows in my thoughts as  
shelter for comrades

who fight against this illegal settler  
state larceny  
posing as commonwealth pawning Boricuan  
independence for wall street profits . . .

y a liquidationists' peaceful co-existence  
will never win a peoples' war  
the cost of liberation is vesuvius  
flashing in the blood of freedom fighters —  
a religion of resistance winning converts

y  
William Morales — the magician  
pulls class warfare from his hat  
as a rosary of bombs splintered  
the flesh & marrow of his hands . . .

Morales awaiting state execution  
by mysterious causes  
the magician evokes shango rhythms  
to grind steel bars to dust

Y William Morales escapes into the world  
revolution with ghosts of hands  
to make ladders  
to shoot rifles  
to caress loved ones  
to sign puerto rico's revolutionary  
constitution/

Y William Morales the magician escapes  
while stiff pinkied J. Edgar Hoover  
turning tricks for hitler in hell  
pauses for the cause

removes his white gloves to dust for  
finger prints

Morales escapes  
walking on a carpet of thunder  
into the hearts of every jibaro  
campesino y mujere

too late  
ah huh  
too late

“I never go back to georgia  
I never go back . . .”

history has claimed William Morales'  
soul as legend/

— Baron James Ashanti

B.J. ASHANTI, author of Nubiana  
(Shamal Books). He is also a BLM  
activist.

*memories call to my mind  
 hot, warm, no breeze summer nights  
 & crowded colored streets  
 red shirts, orange skirts  
 suede pumps, & green alligator shoes  
 plaid cotton shirts, spotted Khaki pants  
 painted overalls, & house dresses  
 white bibbed aprons sitting on soda crates  
 cigars & cigarettes & sometimes a pipe  
 wagons drawn by horses hollering . . . . . waaaadermelon  
 jelly-roll women, and as they say stacked, big hips & big legs  
 tall skinny, short working women  
 kinky hair, straight hair, braided hair, no hair  
 husky men, small men, big men, bad men, black men, working men  
 big eyed kids, almond eyed, small narrow eyed children  
 some with great-big smiles, others with tears streaking their all-shaped faces  
 garbage odors  
 never forgotten odors  
 fried fish, fried chicken, fried shrimps, & sweet potatoe pie  
 & Jumping-Jive bar odors  
 the smell of church & homemade ice-cream & hallelujah sounds  
 & dreams  
 dreams that dress-up & parade in the heads of young boys & girls  
 to become doctors, lawyers, scientists, movie stars, anything  
 that would stop their mothers & fathers from working so goddamned hard  
 & dying so very young  
 polka games, street games  
 big band dances & monday morning blues  
 memories call to my mind  
 that people died of old-age early, dope & got shot down in the streets  
 got laid-off of work, & welfare is never enough  
 if you can get on it  
 & dreams that never came true  
 cause they couldn't finish school, not pregnant  
 or on drugs, or having to go to work to help make ends meet  
 & the police being a foreign occupation army on our streets  
 it comes to my mind  
 we are not by ourselves  
 there are poor white people, poor brown people, poor yellow people, poor red people  
 & they must  
 they must have memories & streets, & people, & lives, & crushed dreams  
 & they must know that imperialism can never be reformed  
 they must love their streets the way i love mine  
 & they must can see past skin color & look at real life  
 they must can see that the unity of class lovers is key!  
 they must know we have to unite not just for reform but revolution!  
 so our dreams will have fertile soil  
 to grow in the name of  
 all the people that ever died  
 fighting for FREEDOM*

— Amina Baraka

Tupelo, 1978



UNITY newspaper

## CLASS MEMORIES

AMINA BARAKA. Her first book was *Songs for the Masses (Rising Tide)*. She is looking forward to publishing a new book, *Black, Blue and Red*.

## SLAVE TRADE

*they didn't come looking for work  
those pepper & yam people  
with guber-nuts & watermelon seeds*

*they came shackled  
covered with blankets of blood*

*they came trying to return  
in their dreams they walked the water  
& grew wings  
trying to go back home*

*they hid chariots in their songs  
they stayed with guns in their backs  
& blues in their souls  
& escape in their bones*

*they were sold like dirt  
& bought like fertilizer  
& their sweat came like rain  
& the land grew white with cotton*

*their labor made their oppressors king  
they didn't stay singing songs  
& tap dancing in joy of their bondage  
they worshipped the night &  
stole away into the dark*

*they armed themselves  
with drums, & songs, & gods,  
& GUNS*

*they lurked around plantations  
looking for freedom*

*they didn't drop their heads  
& scrape their feet  
they didn't wait for Abraham*

*they took their passions & made wars  
wars that carried their freedom slogans  
& signs of promise*

*those sun-baked people  
with their red clay ways  
came from far & near  
spitting their fire  
& harboring their weapons*

*& always looking  
for freedoms way*

— Amina Baraka

## POEM FOR THE US BOURGEOISIE AND THEIR RUNNING DOGS!

*No, No gas chambers  
not even No concentration  
camps. No, none of that horro-ugly  
holocaust sympathy guilt future  
tv tears bullshit. Hail to Simon  
Weisenthal, the Nazi Hunter  
Hunt 'em down forever. Kill  
they shadow, stomp out they odor!  
No ovens. No bowed frozen cringing.  
No chattering teeth dulleyed cold deaths.*

*If death comes to some one of us  
It will be Hot Death  
Death on the fly. Wild crazy war death!*

*No silent lineup shuffle in a blanket death.  
No jail death. No poor death.  
No barefeet death from shiny boots.  
No predetermined carbon paper death.  
Our deaths will be in struggle  
& even then, we'll win!*

*You got the storm trooper non-blues ?  
Fuck you, We'll cure that right away  
A magnum chord between your eyes.*

*You like to dress up in white sheets  
and scare people? Scare your mama  
and hide the bitch, cause after we kill you  
we'll kill her, pour kosher salt on your fields  
burn down your house, and send your kids to reform  
school.*

*You wanna wear leather trench coats  
and broke down hats with vampire eagles  
wear em in your coffin, if some fool  
can find enough of you to bury.*

*You like big rallies where you slobber at the mouth  
and foam at the eyes, and talk about killing niggers!  
You aint havin' em, except in Monster Heaven  
The Great Big Concentration Camp In The Sky.*

*Dumb Motherfucker,  
Believe that shit and die happy.  
Light you up like a xmas tree!*

*Rightwing Ronnie open your nose.  
Hitler Haig make you pawn your clothes.  
Its too bad, them motherfuckers gonna  
get you killed!*



No, no firing squad  
No experimental death.  
No white supremacy musicals or  
sad twilight deaths in sepia-tone  
You like Wagner? Carry that shit  
wit you! You elite? Then outthink  
this heat.

No ghettos. No yellow stars.  
No futility, except for you.

You wanna play Nazi?  
Play the dead ones!

That fascist shit went out  
with European music  
the lonesome tunes of the 2nd Klan band.

All that Viking Valkyrie Stormtrooper shit  
will die in your head in a blaze of noon!

You goin away  
just like the day.

Your right wing shit  
will get you hit.

The further to the right  
the quicker we'll fight!

This aint no lie  
you gonna die.

Cause aint no Nazi bullshit  
going down over here!

You can take that garbage  
and shove it in your ear.

Keep goin to the right  
just make us fight.

The sicker you get  
the quicker you'll quit!

Follow Ronnie Boy  
on into the dirt

All the pain you cause  
will only get you hurt!

— Amiri Baraka



Decatur, 1979.

UNITY newspaper

# WAILERS

(for Larry Neal and Bob Marley)

*Wailers are we  
We are Wailers. Dont get scared.  
Nothing happening but out and way out.  
Nothing happening but the positive.(Unless you the  
negative.) Wailers. We wailers. Yeh, wail. Yeh, wailers.  
We wail, we wail.*

*We We could dig Melville on his ship  
confronting the huge white mad beast  
speeding death cross the sea to we.  
But we whalers. We can kill whales.  
We could get on top of a whale  
and wail. Wailers. Undersea defense  
hot folk*

*Blues babies humming when we arrive. Boogie ladies  
strumming our  
black violet souls. Rag daddies come from the land of  
never say die.  
Reggae workers bringing the funk to the people of I. We  
wailers alright.*

*Hail to you Bob, man! We will ask your question all  
our lives.*

*Could You Be Loved? I and I understand. We see the  
world*

*Eyes and eyes say Yes to transformation. Wailers. Aye,  
Wailers.*

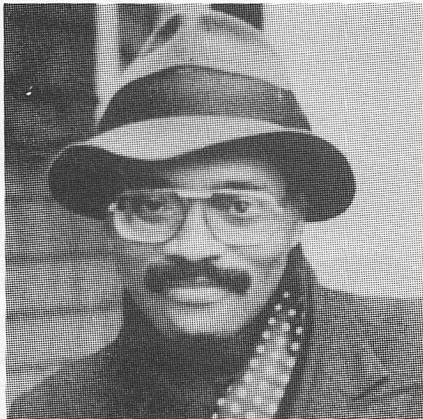
*Subterranean night color Magis, working inside the soul  
of the world.*

*Wailers. Eyes seeing the world's being*

*Hey, Bob, Wail on rock on Jah come into us as real vision  
and action*

*Hey, Larry, Wail on, with Lester and the Porkpie, wailing  
us energy*

*for truth. We Wailers is all, and on past that to say,  
wailing for all  
we worth. Rhythm folks obsessed with stroking what i  
with our sound  
purchase.*



Larry Neal



Bob Marley

*Call Me Thelonus, in my crowded Wail Vessel, I hold the  
keys to the  
funk kingdom. Lie on me if you want to, tell folks its yours  
But for real wailing not tale telling, the sensitive know  
who the Wailers be.*

*Be We. Be We. We Wailers. Blue Blowers. The Real  
Rhythm Kings.*

*We sing philosophy. Hambone precise findings. Image  
Masters of the*

*syncopated. Wailers & Drummers.*

*Wailers & Trumpet stars.*

*Wailers & Box cookers.*

*Wailers & Sax flyers.*

*Wailers & Bass thumpers.*

*Wailers and Hey, wail, wail. We Wailers!*

*Trombone benders. Magic singers.*

*Ellingtonians.*

*The only Tranes faster than rocket ships. Shit.*

*Cut a rocket in our pocket and put a chord on the wall  
of the wind.*

*Wailers. Can you dig Wailing?*

*Call Me Bud Powell. You wanna imitate this?*

*Listen. Spree dee deet spree deee whee spredeee whee  
deee*

*My calling card. The dialectic of silence.*

*The Sound approach.*

*Life one day will be filled even further with we numbers  
we song*

*But primitive place now, we wailing be kept underground.*

*But keep it in mind. Call me something Dukish.*

*Something Sassy.*

*Call me by my real name. When the world change*

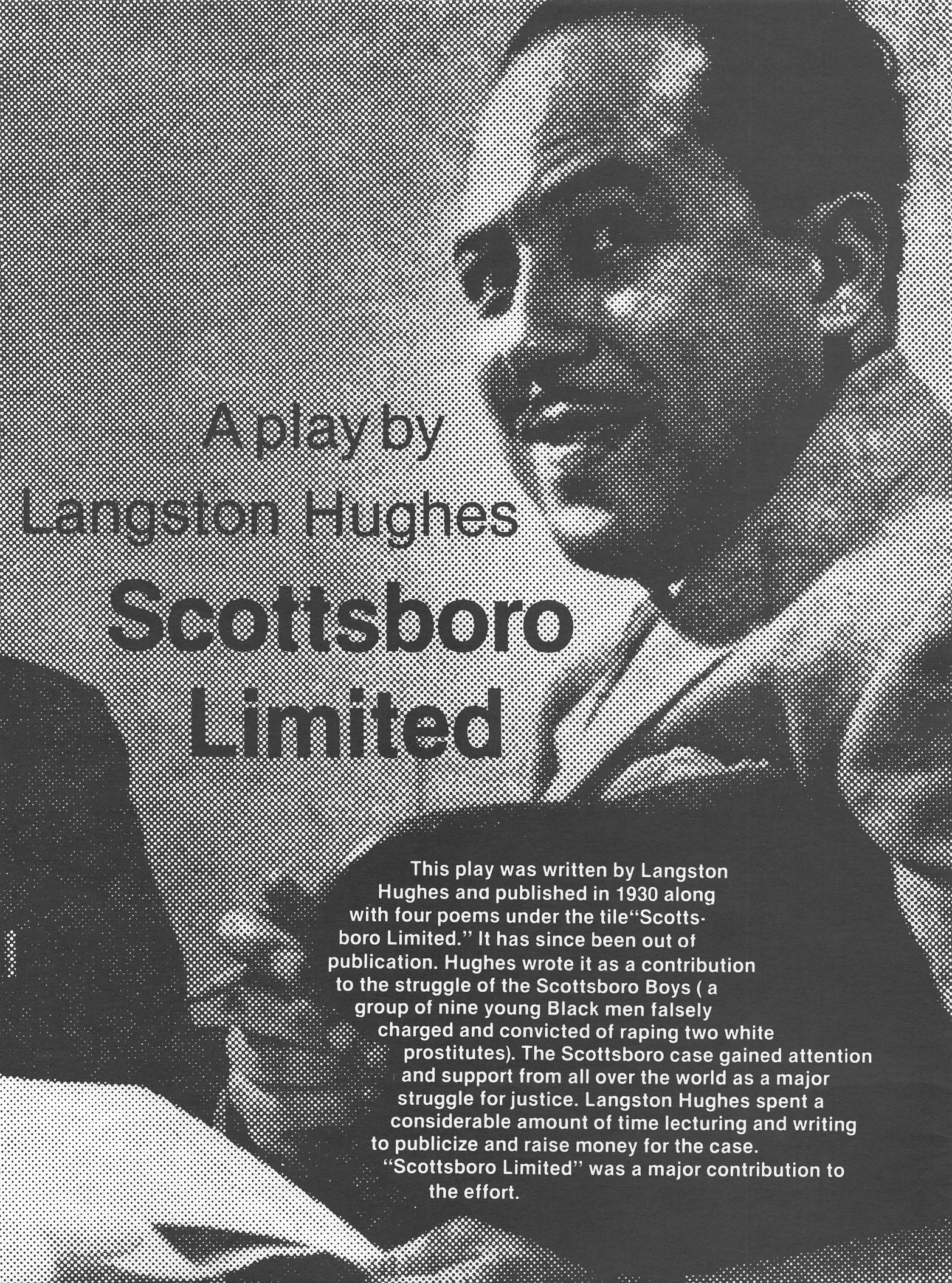
*We wailing be in it, help make it, for real time.*

*Call Me. I'll call you. We call We.*

*Say, Hey Wailers. Hey, Wailers.*

*Hey hey hey, Wailers. Wail On!*

— Amiri Baraka



A play by  
Langston Hughes  
**Scottsboro  
Limited**

This play was written by Langston Hughes and published in 1930 along with four poems under the title "Scottsboro Limited." It has since been out of publication. Hughes wrote it as a contribution to the struggle of the Scottsboro Boys ( a group of nine young Black men falsely charged and convicted of raping two white prostitutes). The Scottsboro case gained attention and support from all over the world as a major struggle for justice. Langston Hughes spent a considerable amount of time lecturing and writing to publicize and raise money for the case. "Scottsboro Limited" was a major contribution to the effort.

# BLACK WRITERS SERIES/PLAYS

## Characters

*Eight Black Boys*                      *Two White Women*  
*A White Man*                          *Eight White Workers*  
*Voices in the Audience*

## Setting

*One chair on a raised platform.*  
*No curtains or other effects needed.*

## The Play Opens

*The eight Black Boys, chained by the right foot, one to the other, walk slowly down the center aisle from the back of the auditorium. As they approach the middle of the house, there is a loud commotion, and a White Man rises in the audience.*

*Man: (To Boys)* What are you doing here? (*The Black Boys continue marching without turning their heads. The Man shouts louder, and more sternly.*) What are you-all doing in here? (*As the Boys mount the stage, the Man rushes up to them threateningly.*) What the hell are you doing in here, I said?

*1st Boy: (Turning simply)*  
We come in our chains  
To show our pain.

*Man: (Sneeringly)* Your pain! Stop talking poetry and talk sense.

*8th Boy: (As they line up on the stage)*  
All right, we will —  
That sense of injustice  
That death can't kill.

*Man:* Injustice? What d'yuh mean? Talking about injustice, you coon?

*2nd Boy: (Pointing to his comrades)*  
Look at us then:  
Poor, black, and ignorant,  
Can't read or write —  
But we come here tonight.

*Man: (Sitting down jauntily on the edge of stage)* Not supposed to read or write. You work better without it.

*1st Boy: (Shrugging his shoulders)*  
O.K. Chief,  
We won't argue with you.  
Tonight there's  
Too much else to do.

*Man:* Now that you got the public eye, you want to show off, heh?

*2nd Boy: (Seriously)* Not show off — die!

*5th Boy: (Earnestly)*  
So the people can see  
What it means to be  
A poor black workman  
In this land of the free.

*2nd Boy: (Harshly)*  
Where every star in the flag  
Is stained with a lie!

*Man:* Do you want to get arrested for treason?

*8th Boy:*  
We're already in jail.  
Have you got a darker cell  
Any worse than this here  
Southern Hell?

*7th Boy:* Can a man die twice?

*Man:* You-all ain't dead.

*8th Boy: (Defiantly)*  
No, but we will be dead  
If we stay quiet here.  
That's why we come tonight  
To lift our troubles high.  
Like a flag against the sky.

*2nd Boy:*  
To show that we're living —  
Even though we die.

*3rd Boy:*  
To let the world see  
That even in chains  
We *will* be free!

*4th Boy:* Watch this play for our misery:

*The chains break away, and the Boys find themselves on a moving freight train. They sit down in a haphazard line on the stage, as though they were seated on the top of boxcars, rocking back and forth as the train moves.*

*6th Boy: (Happily)*  
Man this train sho is speedin'!  
Look a-yonder at de Sunny South.

*4th Boy:*  
I wish I had some sugar cane in ma mouth.  
I'se hongry!

*7th Boy:*  
Well it's sho too bad  
How when you ain't got no job  
Things get sad.

*5th Boy:*  
I ain't got no job.

*1st Boy:* Neither is I, but I wish I had.

*2nd Boy:* Looks like white folks is taking all de work.

5th Boy: Is niggers got *exclusive* rights on work?

3rd Boy: Shut up, boy!

4th Boy: He ain't joking, Perk.

2nd Boy:  
All them little town jobs we used to do,  
Looks like white folks is doin' 'em now, too.

1st Boy: Just goes to prove there ain't no pure nigger work.

6th Boy: (*In wonder*)  
Look a-yonder you-all, at dem fields  
Burstin' wid de crops they yields.  
Who gets it all?

3rd Boy: White folks.

8th Boy: You means de rich white folks.

2nd Boy:  
Yes, 'cause de rich ones owns de land.  
And they don't care nothin' 'bout de po'  
white man.

3rd Boy:  
You's right. Crackers is just like me —  
Po' whites and niggers, ain't neither one  
free.

8th Boy: Have to work like a fool to live and then you starve  
dead.

4th Boy: Man, this country is sho too bad! (*The train stops  
and the rocking motion of the Boys ceases. One or two  
of them get up and stretch.*)

3rd Boy: Uh-O! This train done stopped. Where is this?

7th Boy: Well, wherever it is, I'm gonna take a —. (*Turning  
his back*)

5th Boy: No, you ain't. Can't you see this is a town?

Man: (*As sheriff, at foot of stage, with a police star and a  
club*) Come on, you niggers, and get down.

6th Boy: Uh-ooooo! Yonder stands the sheriff!

2nd Boy: Ha-ha-ha! Uh!

3rd Boy: Fool, this ain't no time to laugh.

Sheriff: Come on and get down off that train!

6th Boy: Yes, sir, Mister Boss Man!

4th Boy: Soon's we can. (*The boys climb down.*)

Sheriff: (*To boys who line up before him*) What you-all  
doin' on that train?

Boys:  
Just tryin' to bum our way on through  
To Memphis where maybe there's work  
to do.

Sheriff: (*Yelling up the line*) Get everybody off this train,  
deputy. (*To Boys*) Stand over there, boys. (*Shouting to  
deputy*) What you say? Some girls getting off dressed in  
overalls? White girls? (*To himself*) Whee-ooooo! (*To the  
Boys*) What you-all doin' on the same train with them  
white women there?

Boys: (*In wonder*) Where?

Sheriff: There!

Boys: Where?

Sheriff: (*Fiercely*) You'll see where! Get back and let these  
white ladies by. (*While the succeeding action goes on  
the Boys get behind the chair, four on each side in a line  
— convicts already.*)

Mob voices in audience: (*Murmuring and muttering*)  
Damned niggers . . . white girls and niggers riding to-  
gether . . . nerve of them niggers . . . had no business in  
there . . . etc.

Sheriff: (*As the two white girls enter left, powdered and  
painted, but dressed in overalls.*) What you doin', girls?  
Out for a ride?

1st Girl: Yes, sir.

Sheriff: Where to?

1st Girl: Goin' home, I reckon.

Sheriff: Where?

2nd Girl: Huntsville.

Sheriff: And these niggers on the train with you?

1st Girl: Ain't seen 'em before.

Sheriff: Ain't these black brutes been botherin' you?

Girls: No, they ain't been near.

Sheriff: Is that true? (*Sternly*) Ain't they had their hands on  
you?

Girls: (*Wavering*) Well, they . . . er . . .

Sheriff: (*Positively*) I knew it! Which one of these black  
apes touched you?

Girls: Why . . . er . . .

Sheriff: We'll have a trial and burn 'em up. And you'll get  
paid for testifying, and your pictures in the paper.  
Which ones?

1st Girl: That two there.

Sheriff: Two? You sho it wasn't more?

2nd Girl: No, we ain't sure.

1st Girl: It might-a been all of 'em.

Sheriff: All of 'em? A trial's too good for black bastards  
like that. (*Pompously*) But we owe it to the state.

*The Man parades sternly up to the raised chair. He is the  
judge now and, as he mounts the legal bench, he puts on  
a black gown that has been lying there. The Girls slip off  
their overalls, displaying cheap loud dresses under-  
neath, and powder their faces tittering. It is the court  
room, and the black prisoners come forward before the  
judge. The trial is conducted in jazz tempo: the white  
voices staccato, high and shrill; the black voices deep as  
the rumble of drums.*

Mob voices: (*Murmuring*) Imagine a trial for niggers . . . a  
trial for niggers . . . a trial for niggers . . . etc.

Judge: (*From the chair*) The State of Alabama versus Andy  
Butler, Willie Johnson, Clarence Bates, Olen Jones,



Ozie Jenkins, Roy Perkins, Ted Lucas, and Haywood Lane. (*The Girls sit, one on either side of the stage, grinning and pleased.*) You raped that girl? (*Pointing at each boy in turn.*)

1st Boy: No.

Judge: You raped that girl? (*Pointing from one girl to the other in rotation.*)

2nd Boy: No.

Judge: You raped that girl?

3rd Boy: No.

Judge: You raped that girl?

4th Boy: No.

Judge: You raped that girl?

5th Boy: No.

Judge: You raped that girl?

6th Boy: No.

Judge: You raped that girl?

7th Boy: No.

Judge: You raped that girl?

8th Boy: No.

Judge: (*To Girls*) How about it girls?

1st Girl: They lie!

2nd Girl: They raped us in a box car underneath the sky.

Judge: You niggers lie.

Boys: (*In slow wonder*) We lie . . . White man always says we lie . . . Makes us work and says we lie . . . Takes our money and says we lie.

Judge: Shut up. No talking back in this court. (*Pointing at each one in turn*) You had a gun.

1st Boy: No.

Judge: You had a gun.

2nd Boy: No, sir.

Judge: You had a gun.

3rd Boy: (*Shaking head*) Not one.

Judge: You had a gun.

4th Boy: Not nary one.

Judge: You had a gun.

5th Boy: We didn't have none.

Judge: You had a gun.

6th Boy: No gun.

Judge: You had a gun!

7th Boy: No, sir, none.

Judge: You had a gun.

8th Boy: No gun.

Judge: How about it, girls?

1st Girl: They lie.

2nd Girl: They all had guns.

Judge: (*To Boys*) You all had guns. (*To Girls*) And they raped you one by one. (*Girls nod heads*) How long did it take? How long was it?

1st Girl: Why they didn't even let us up to spit!

2nd Girl: It was rough!

Judge: To spit what?

Girls: Snuff!

Judge: You hear that, Jury? This court is done.

1st Girl: Convict these brutes. (*Smiling at audience.*)

2nd Girl: Every black one. (*Also smiling.*)

Mob voices: Convict 'em! Every damn black one!

Judge: Don't worry, folks, 'tis done.

Mob voices: Kill the niggers! Keep 'em in their places! Make an example of 'em for all the black races . . . etc.

Boys: (*Rising and circling round and round the chair echoing the angry mob*) Kill the niggers! Keep them in their places! Make an example of 'em for all the black races, for all the black races, for all the black races.

Judge: (*Descending from the bench, to audience*) Don't worry folks, the law will take its course. They'll burn, and soon at that. (*He and the Girls exit, talking and smiling.*)

Mob voices: (*Applauding and shouting*) Make it soon. Kill the niggers. Let 'em die.

Boys: (*Echoing the Voices*) Make it soon. Let us die. Make it soon. Soon. Soon.

6th Boy: (*Breaking away from the dumb circle*) No, no, no! What do they want to kill us for?

3rd Boy: I'll break free!

*The Boys divide up into groups of two's now, in a row across the stage, in the cells of the death house, some of them sitting down, some of them weeping, some of them pushing against the bars with their hands.*

2nd Boy:

But how you gonna git out o' here  
With these iron bars and this stone wall  
And the guards outside and the  
Guns and all?

8th Boy:

There ain't no way for a nigger to break  
free.  
They got us beaten, and that's how we  
gonna be  
Unless we learn to understand —  
We gotta fight our way out like a man.

5th Boy: Not out o' here.

4th Boy:

No, not out o' here.  
Unless the ones on the outside  
Fight for us, too,  
We'll die — and then we'll be through.

*Mob voices:*

You oughta be through —  
Oughta be through.  
In this white man's land  
There's no place for you.

*Murmur of Red voices: (In audience)*

We'll fight for you, boys. We'll fight for  
you.  
The Reds will fight for you.

*6th Boy: (Moaning)*

We'll die, and then we'll all be through —  
Through livin', through lovin',  
through lookin'  
at the sky.  
I don't wanta die.

*8th Boy:*

Who does want to die?  
That's why free black men  
Have got to fight,  
Or else we'll all die in poverty's night.

*3rd Boy:* You're right.

*Red voices:*

We'll fight! The Communists will fight  
for you.  
Not just black — but black and white.

*3rd Boy:* Then we'll trust in you.

*Man: (Become the Prison Keeper now, marching across the  
front of the cell-row with a long stick in his hand.)*

Shut up in there, with your plots and  
plans.  
Don't you niggers know yet this is a  
white man's land?  
And I'm the keeper, understand.

*8th Boy:*

We ain't half as low as you!  
Paid to kill people, that's what you do.  
Not just niggers — but your white brothers  
too.

*Red voices: (Stronger now)*

That's true! True!

*Prison Keeper: (Striking boy) Shut up! (He exits punching  
his stick into the cells.)*

*8th Boy:*

I won't shut up.  
I've nobody to talk for me,  
So I'll talk for myself, see.

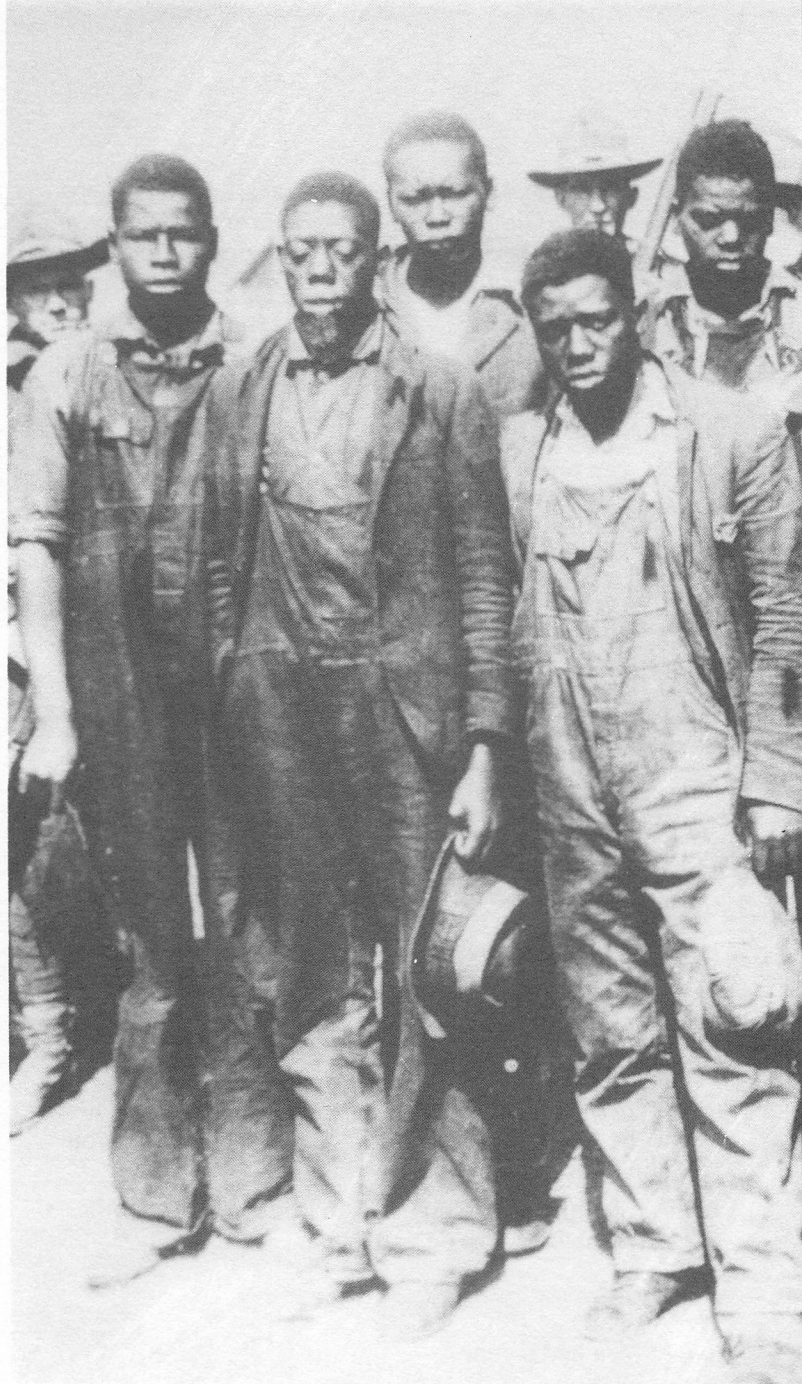
*Red Voices:* And the red flag, too, will talk for you.

*1st Boy:*

Listen, boys! That's true — they've sent a  
lawyer  
To talk for me and you.

*6th Boy:* But they told us not to bother with a communist.

*8th Boy:* But who else is there will help us out o' this?



The Scottsboro boys in front of the jail in Scottsboro, Alabama in Wright, Willie Roberson, Eugene Williams, Roy Wright, Charlie

*3rd Boy:*

And not just us, but help all the black  
South  
Hungry for freedom, and bread, and new  
words in  
their mouth.

*Man: (Entering this time as a Preacher, sanctified, with a  
Bible in his hand.)*

Ashes to ashes and dust to dust —  
If the law don't kill you then the lynchers  
must.  
(Piously) I've come to say a little prayer  
Before you go away from here.

*3rd Boy: (Questioning)*

A prayer to a white God in a white sky?



1931. (Left to right) Clarence Norris, Olen Montgomery, Andy Weems, Ozie Powell and Haywood Patterson.

We don't want that kind of prayer to die.

6th Boy:

I want a prayer!  
(*The Death Bell rings*)

8th Boy:

No prayer! No prayer!  
Lemme out o' here.  
Take me on to the chair  
With no God-damn prayer.  
(*To the Preacher*)  
May they choke in your mouth,  
Every praying white lie!

Preacher: (*In horror, hurrying out*) Let the niggers die!

Mob voices: Let 'em die!

8th Boy: (*Starting on the march to the chair, walking across the stage to the center, then turning, straight back to the Electric Chair, where he seats himself, unafraid, slipping his hands into the cords that bind him to the arms of the chair.*)

Because I talked out loud, you kill me first.  
Death in the flesh is the fighter's curse.

Mob voices: Yes, you must die! Let the nigger die!  
Let all of 'em die!

8th Boy:

Let all of us die:  
That's what the mobs cry.  
All I've ever known:  
Let the niggers die!  
All my life long:  
Let the niggers die!

Boys: (*Helplessly crouching back at the foot of the death chair.*)

Let us die! Let us die!

Mob voices:

Let 'em die!  
Beat 'em! Shoot 'em!  
Hang 'em with a rope,  
Burn 'em in the chair.  
Let 'em choke.

Boys:

Burn us in the chair!  
The chair! The chair!  
Burn us in the chair!

8th Boy:

Burn *me* in the chair?  
NO!  
(*He breaks his bonds and rises, tall and strong.*)  
NO! For me not so!  
Let the meek and humble turn the other cheek —  
I am not humble!  
I am not meek!  
From the mouth of the death house  
Hear me speak!

Red voices: Hear him speak! Hear him speak!

Mob voices: Shut up, you God-damn nigger!

Red voices: Hear him speak!

Boys: Hear us speak!

8th Boy:

All the world, listen!  
Beneath the wide sky  
In all the black lands  
Will echo this cry:  
*I will not die!*

*Boys:* We will NOT DIE!

*Mob voices:* (*Snarling*)

Quick! Quick! Death there!  
The chair! The electric chair!

*8th Boy:*

No chair!  
Too long have my hands been idle  
Too long have my brains been dumb.  
Now out of the darkness  
The new Red Negro will come:  
That's me!  
No death in the chair!

*Boys:* (*Rising*) No death in the chair!

*Red voices:* (*Rising in audience*) NO DEATH IN THE CHAIR!

*Boys:* NO DEATH IN THE CHAIR!

(*They circle platform and lifting the electric chair up, they smash it on the stage.*)

NO DEATH IN THE CHAIR!

*Mob voices:* (*Roaring helplessly*) Aw-w-w-w-ooo-aw!

*Red voices:*

No death in the chair.  
Together, we'll make the world clean and fair.

*8th Boy:*

Too long have we stood  
For the whip and the rope.

*Red voices:* (*In a deep chorus*) Too long! Too long!

*8th Boy:*

Too long have we labored  
Poor, without hope.

*Boys:* Too long!

*Red voices:* Too long!

*8th Boy:*

Too long have we suffered  
Alone.

*Boys:* Alone!

*8th Boy:* But not now!

*Red voices:* No, not now.

*8th Boy:*

The voice of the red world  
Is our voice, too.

*Red voices:* The voice of the red world *is* you!

*8th Boy:*

The hands of the red world  
Are our hands, too.

*Red voices:* The hands of the red world *are* you!

*8th Boy:*

With all of the workers.  
Black or white,  
We'll go forward  
Out of the night.

*Boys:* Out of the night.

*8th Boy:*

Breaking down bars.

*Boys:* Together.

*Red voices:* Together.

(*The Red Voices of the white workers come forward toward the stage.*)

*Boys:* (*Breaking their bars and coming to meet their white comrades.*)

We'll seek the stars!

*Red voices:* Seek the stars of hope and life.

*8th Boy:* Not afraid of the struggle.

*Boys:* Not afraid of the strife.

*Red voices:* Not afraid to fight:

*8th Boy:* For new life!

*Boys:* New life!

*Red voices:* New life!

(*The white workers and black workers meet on the stage.*)

*Boys:* Comrades!

*Red voices:* Comrades!

(*They clasp hands and line up in a row of alternating blacks and whites.*)

*Boys:* Joining hands to build what is right.

*Red voices:* White and black!

*Boys:* Black and white!

*8th Boy:* To live, not die!

*All:* To fight! To fight!

*8th Boy:* (*To audience*)

In the heart of a fighter, death is a lie;  
O, my black people, you need not die!

*Red voices:* All the down trodden — you need not die!

*Audience:* We need not die! We need not die!

*8th Boy:*

Black and white together  
Will fight the great fight  
To put greed and pain  
And the color line's blight  
Out of the world  
Into time's old night.

*Boys and Reds:* All hands together will furnish the might.

*Audience:* All hands together will furnish the might.

*Red voices:* Rise from the dead, workers, and fight!

*Boys:*

Together, black and white,  
Up from the darkness into the light.

*All:* Rise, workers, and fight!

*Audience:* Fight! Fight! Fight! Fight!

(*The curtain is a great red flag rising to the strains of the Internationale.*)

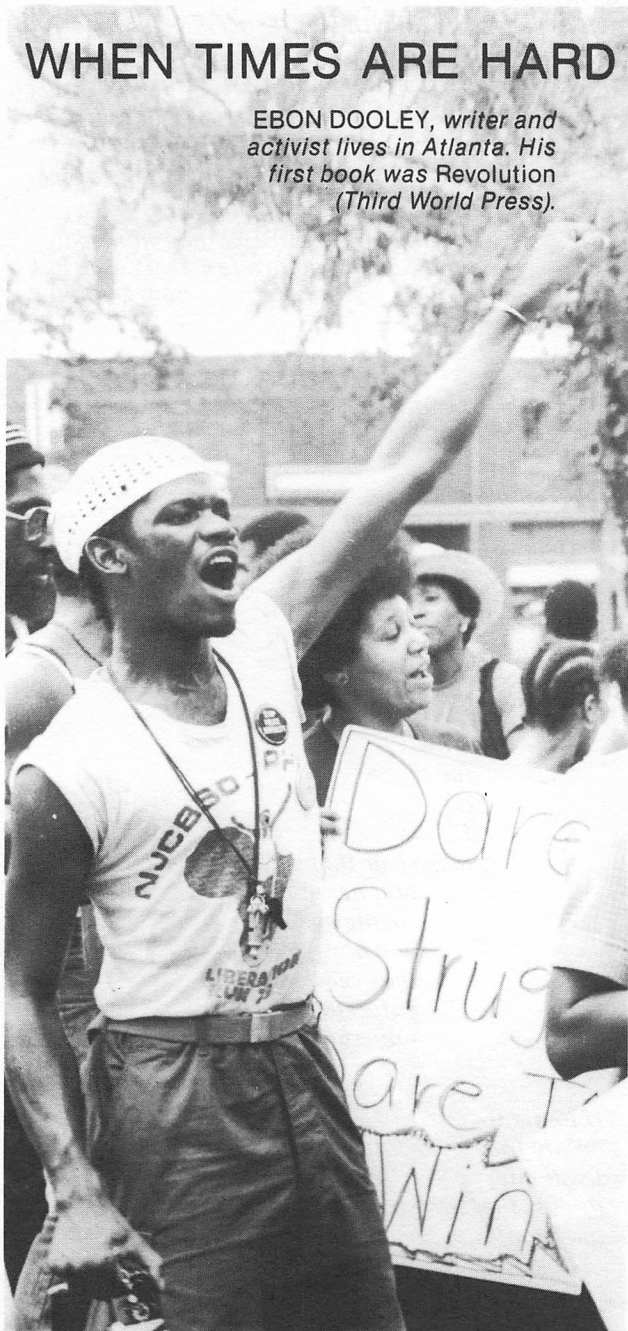
This poem was written for the freedom fighters in Wrightsville, Ga., and a mass march held there on September 20, 1980, pictured below.

Wrightsville is like any other Southern town: dirt roads, wooden shacks, and Jim Crow — where many Black people have lived for decades. In Wrightsville, Jim Crow can be seen everywhere in the Black community — the bad water, the bombing of homes, a 30% unemployment, and mass arrests and beatings by white racists. This system has been ruthlessly enforced by Sheriff Rowland Attaway and his Ku Klux Klan henchmen.

This poem tells part of the story of Wrightsville, of the freedom fighters in Wrightsville.

## WHEN TIMES ARE HARD

EBON DOOLEY, writer and activist lives in Atlanta. His first book was *Revolution* (Third World Press).



*When times are hard  
the people are hard*

*Wrightsville, Wrongsville,  
we'll march in our  
thunderous thousands  
trampling down the tyrants  
who thrive on threats and terror*

*We're fired up! Ain't taking no more!  
WE'RE FIRED UP! AIN'T TAKING NO MORE!*

*When times are hard  
The people are hard*

*We'll bow to no law  
We'll smash the outlaws  
the petty thieves  
who hide behind the badge,  
hired hands  
who protect property  
and profit . . .*

*Attaway? Attaway?  
He went that-away (thumbs down)*

*We're fired up! Ain't taking no more!  
WE'RE FIRED UP! AIN'T TAKING NO MORE!*

*When times are hard  
The people are hard*

*No more soft songs  
sweetly sung  
about we shall overcome*

*We're fired up! Ain't taking no more!  
WE'RE FIRED UP! AIN'T TAKING NO MORE!*

*With every woman and man  
We'll take a stand  
against the Klan.  
We'll snatch the sheets  
twist them into ropes . . .  
Put the light  
to the riders of the night.  
Lynch the lynchers!*

*We're fired up! Ain't taking no more!  
WE'RE FIRED UP! AIN'T TAKING NO MORE!*

*When times are hard  
The people are hard*

*Our time has come  
We rise as one!  
We are the switchblades of history  
slicing through the belly  
of the beast!*

*The world is ours for the taking!  
Tomorrow is ours for the making!*

*We're fired up! Ain't taking no more!  
WE'RE FIRED UP!*

*. . . . ain't taking no more . . . .*

1980

## PORTRAIT OF AN EX-REVOLUTIONARY

*The once clenched fist lies limp  
Uninvolved and impotent  
No longer coiled in concentrated power  
No longer ready to strike at any hour.*

*The once clenched fist indolent  
The former salute has fallen.  
Fallow fingers tap endlessly independent.  
Tapping on the surface of issues.  
They tremble and tentatively trace  
outlines of illusions and importance  
They clutch for crumbs  
They straighten the tie  
They smooth the hair.*

*The once exploding hair cut close now  
Uninspired and non-descript  
no longer springing free  
Heralding the eminent victory.*

*The once clenched fist covers the eyes  
Smothers the yawn . . .  
Fingers dangle over the dreary edge of boredom.  
Palm down, occasionally another's hand is slapped  
For something cleverly said.  
The extent of energy this useless instrument can spend.*

*The once clenched fist forgot the hour.  
A former salute shot cannon high. Power.  
For all to see what strength was there collectively.  
What you get now is a weary what-else-is-new wave  
To those who dare raise voices against its apathy.*

— Imani Humphrey  
1981

IMANI HUMPHREY has worked in  
the BLM for quite a few years. She is  
from Detroit.

## BONES RUN DEEP

*Space in time  
Wait for train  
I ride three stops backwards  
before I think to ask:*

*“How far will this be taken?”*

*If I include/or give back a decade  
I would venture  
it has taken  
western gloom  
500 years just  
to bury the  
skin off my  
surface so long  
entrenched that  
I can't help but  
learn these other things:*

*Two generations to wipe out single language.  
One tri-semester to mis-in-shape a wave.  
Less than twenty days to starve  
and barely three to freeze to death.  
24 hours after one good blast  
guzzled down to forget  
there ever was a lynching  
Pocket hole full of moments to slime my  
way from out a fight.  
One lonely instant to leave my sanity home.*

*And/but/yet  
as I sit along a  
summer's window sill  
(night sky wide and free)  
this entire span of sparkling  
suns opened before me NOW  
I can gaze beyond memory's  
checkpoint:*

*How  
far  
do  
I  
take clear thought  
taut nerve  
roving eye  
and always  
the ever  
enforcing  
imperative/*

*If he steps  
on my foot  
I will not  
discuss the  
question!*

*If he helps  
me to pass  
we will raise  
up off the  
ground!*

— Louis Reyes Rivera

## CONSTANT

*Little  
know  
I  
how this cane I carry  
(carved from a solitary wish  
for a bit of extra chicken  
in the pot)  
has come to be in my possession.*

*What connection do I have?*

*This piece of wood  
cut from the stalk  
of an aching swollen thought  
painted and glossed the color  
of earth by a carver whose  
household craves a bigger share.*

*How much was he paid?*

*How come the gift shop rakes ten fold?*

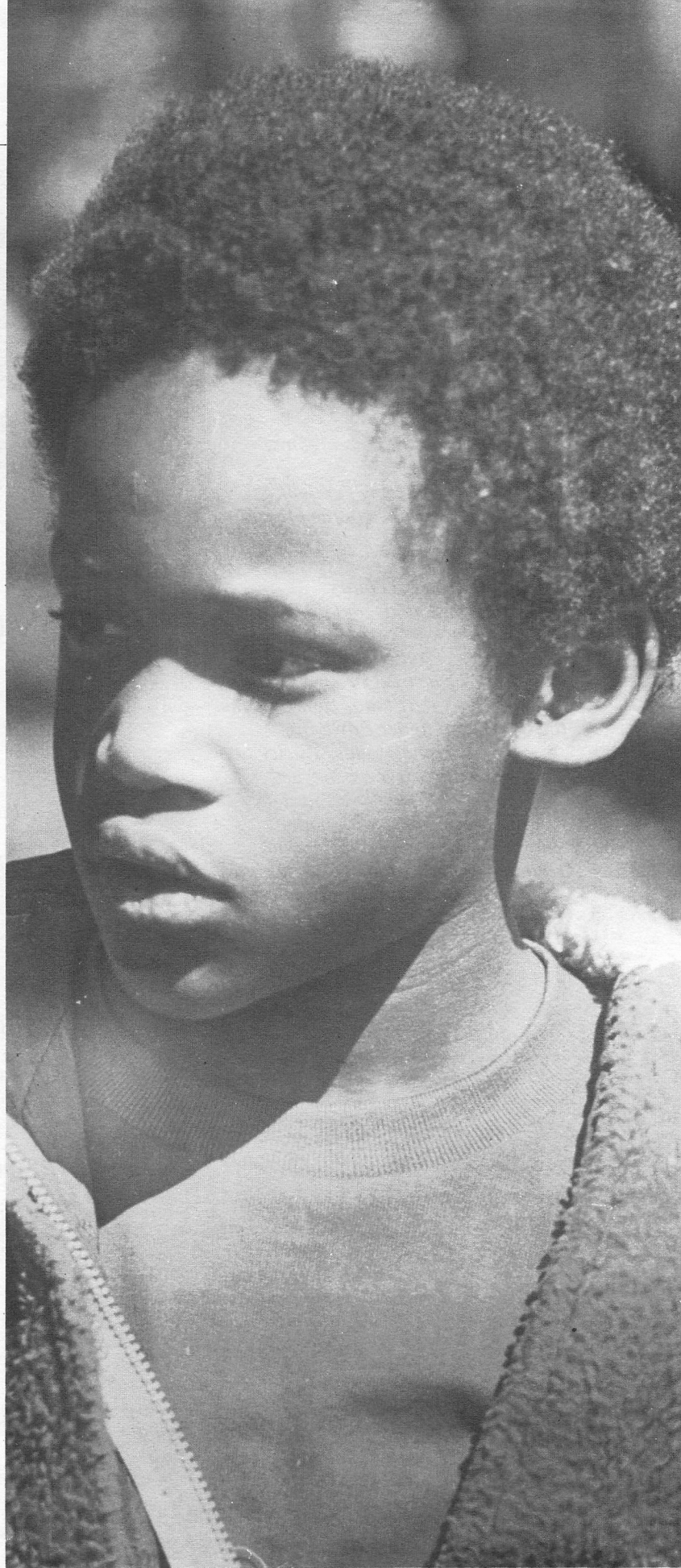
*If we knew better  
the ax might swing  
a fuller bowl of rice  
for his children to indulge themselves once  
and having met  
the taste of feeling full  
they may grow to demand what*

*is theirs  
is theirs  
what  
is yours  
is ours  
what*

*I hold here/a daily reminder.*

— Louis Reyes Rivera

L.R. RIVERA, author of *Who Pays the Cost* (Shamal Books) and publisher of Shamal Books.



— for Comrade Assata Shakur

I. *Houri (The Beautiful One)*

A portrait  
of you  
in Black Star, <sup>1</sup> so  
softly alluring: fond image  
of  
that special woman, the  
Beautiful Companion  
of every brother's dreams.  
Afrikan woman  
in shimmering sunlight,  
indigo shadows dance in the breeze.  
Highlight  
it all  
with tropical colors:  
the reds, golds and greens  
of Black  
imagination.

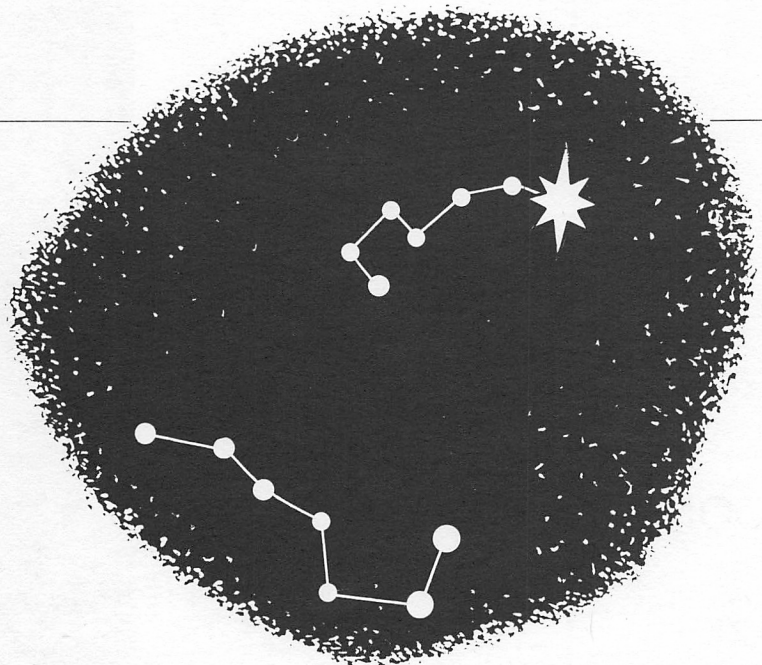
Could this be a street in Birmingham,  
Atlanta, New Orleans? —  
the Southland under flowering  
magnolias; a sister  
bending over a backyard  
garden,  
gathering plants with patient  
affection.

Ordinary things done with pleasure  
on timeless summer afternoons.

And yes! it's  
immensely important  
that the people see this, Assata:  
images of you —  
a warm soul-woman,  
in the day to day  
rhythms of life: working  
in the soil,  
waiting for  
her man, storing up  
love energy  
beyond  
the thunder of deadly  
confrontations.  
A Black Rose blooming in  
Blackbelt sunlight, beyond  
Holocausts, in  
Tomorrow's  
victories.

II. *Myth and Rebirth:  
Harriet Tubman  
Returns*

North Star:  
Archipelago  
of light,  
what dreams and fervent



## TOMORROW THE WHIRLWIND

passions rush through  
hallowed corridors  
of light?

(Hound dogs bell in  
the vast night.

Pattyrollers,  
shotgun rich, rednecked and  
liquor-breath-ed, lynchroped and  
ready, stand  
to murder the beauty of her  
legendary flight.

— To murder the beauty of her legendary flight.

North Star:

I  
gaze into the  
cauldron of these days of rage  
and see her image moving  
guerilla swift  
speeding like a Black Pantheress, a  
lioness hunting her prey.

She  
is reborn — from lost plantations  
into urban reservations, where  
modern contraband  
dry rot and  
crumple into snowfilled coffins  
nodding in the winds of history.

North Star:<sup>2</sup>

Arch Angel of Douglass,  
Citadel of Delaney. Lovesong  
of Sojourner, Blackhearts  
followed  
your Drinking Gourd<sup>3</sup> up  
from Red Clay Homelands



*to fester in Infernos more  
terrible than the Klan's  
blazing Crucifix.*

*Slavechains clash in neon night.*

*Ghosts*

*moan in the fascist  
glare of spotlights  
against battered brick;  
battered faces:  
the nightstick  
chants*

*its rhythmic beat across the  
cranial continent.*

*Bonecrush!*

*spattered brains and  
scarlet jets spurt against  
the chains of our  
agonies.*

*Chains of cellblocks  
linked in boogie dreams  
across the rabid wounds  
of the nigger's  
horror.*

*Siren screams and shattered  
glass: another*

*manchild murdered, maimed  
in the shadows of  
the Atticas . . .<sup>4</sup>*

\* \* \* \* \*

### *III She Calls (Assata Speaks)*

*North Star:*

*Archipelago  
of light.*

*A shadow falls across  
the Pyramids.*

*A warm breath whispering  
of tropics, calls:*

*"Come Ride My Train!"<sup>5</sup>*

*It is calm like a river  
of flowers, flowing into*

*honeysuckle  
dawns.*

*It is life-affirming gri-gri  
after*

*ice-storms of nordic  
apoplexy.*

*It is serenades of pushing  
your firm, brown hands  
into the*

*rich red clay of  
the Blackbelt earth . . .*

*"Come Ride My Train!" is  
spoken*

*in other words: the meanings*

*graphic, painful, electric:*

*She sings: "Malcolm X had his  
dream . . . Land. Nationhood. And  
his dream has become my dream.*

*She sings:*

*"Are you saying that  
we can't win?*

*I think we can . . .*

*We're the second largest  
aggregation  
of Blacks within the world . . .*

*Thirty million people . . ."*

*Final solo: "If the Palestine  
Liberation Organization*

*can go before the U.N.*

*and talk about their*

*right*

*to land,*

*then the Black Liberation Or-  
ganization can go before the*

*U.N. too . . ."*

*— "Come Ride My Train!"*

— Askia Toure

ASKIA TOURE. *His play Tomorrow the Whirlwind was performed at the NBUF convention in 1981, directed by Amiri Baraka with music by Bilal (William Johnson).*

1. *Black Star* — Black revolutionary nationalist newspaper, organ of The Afrikan Peoples Party. Author is the editor.
2. *North Star* is a complex double allusion. Not only is it the actual star, but it was the name of the radical Black abolitionist newspaper published by the great Black leaders, Frederick Douglass and Martin R. Delaney who served as the editors.
3. *Drinking Gourd* — The Black slave name for the Big Dipper.
4. *Atticas* — Reference to Attica Prison, scene of the bloodiest rebellion in U.S. history, 1971, and U.S. prison system.
5. "Come Ride My Train!" — Code for the Black-led "Underground Railroad." It is said when "Moses" (Harriet Tubman) would enter the slave quarters, she would whisper this to her people.

# Important concessions in Amiri Baraka frame-up

Mass pressure forced New York courts to make important concessions in the case of Amiri Baraka. The world-famous poet, playwright and revolutionary was convicted on trumped-up charges of resisting arrest and sentenced to 90 days at New York's infamous Riker's Island. But two and one-half years of demonstrations, packed courtrooms and pressure from prominent people forced the courts to allow Baraka to serve his sentence on weekends at a halfway house. Baraka began serving weekends on January 9 and has now almost completed his sentence.

On June 8, 1979, Baraka and his wife Amina were confronted by police in New York's Greenwich Village. Yanked from their car and beaten by police, Baraka was arrested and charged with six misdemeanors and felonies.

"I didn't have a chance to say anything to the police," Baraka said later. "I was just yanked out of the car and hit with a stick in my stomach." Both Amiri and Amina Baraka were arrested, leaving their four children unattended in the car.

It became clear almost immediately that the government had a weak case. The grand jury dropped all charges, but District Attorney Morgenthau had the discretion to bring a defendant in such cases to trial for resisting arrest. A grand jury indicted two of the cops involved in the incident, although they have yet to actually face trial. The government even offered to forget the case if the Barakas agreed to drop their civil suit against the city and police. The Barakas refused, preferring to fight for justice in such an overtly trumped-up case.

On November 6, 1979, Amiri Baraka went to trial. There was only one Black juror. The District Attorney "lost" crucial evidence and produced a knife to implicate Baraka as a dangerous Black man — although the knife was not allowed in as evidence. Baraka was convicted on the racist frame-up and sentenced to 90 days.

Baraka commented on the political nature of his trial and harsh sentence.

"Obviously in any other situation of some college professor and fairly well-known writer, if the person were white

(but also a non-activist), the case would have been thrown out. But Paul Robeson summed it up succinctly when attacked by the House Un-American Activities Committee. The two things the state doesn't like about me (are) my nationality and my opinions."

From the day of his arrest through his last court hearing, Baraka won broad support for his case. Hundreds of people picketed, rallied and packed the courtroom for each appearance. Support demonstrations took place in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Detroit, St. Louis, Cleveland and Chicago.

Scores of political figures and prominent people in the arts came to his defense. The Black Congressional Caucus issued a statement in his support, as did poet Allen Ginsberg, actor Ossie Davis, actress Ruby Dee, Broadway producer Joseph Papp, writer Norman Mailer, novelist Toni Morrison, Georgia State Senator Julian Bond and many others.

Benjamin Hooks, president of the NAACP, issued a public statement saying in part, "The charge (of) resisting arrest . . . is suspicious at best . . . We of the NAACP strongly urge that sentence be suspended and that Mr. Baraka be immediately placed on probation."

The two and one-half-year-long campaign in support of Baraka had its effect on the New York judicial system. While they had wanted to railroad yet another Black man on trumped-up charges, they were not able to do so. There was no justice in the Baraka case. But mass pressure forced the courts to back down and modify the sentence. Of most importance, Baraka is able to work, continue writing and participating in the revolutionary movement. □

Demonstration to support Amiri Baraka. New York, 1981.



UNITY newspaper

# Reagan intensifies attack on Black Liberation Movement

With the splitting of a jury recently deliberating on the trial of BLM activists Anthony LaBorde and James Dixon York, two former Black Panthers who were accused of killing a police officer in Queens in 1981, the recent attempts by the Reagan Right to "clean up" some of the long sought after black militants of the 60's has reached its most current impasse.

For one thing, open rebellion among the jurors, at least three in this case, pointing out that the state is simply trying to railroad some more blacks, threw a roadblock in the state's attempts to frame York and La Borde. Certainly the great majority of black people agree. But the news media is pushing the distortion that somehow the jury was split because of the predominance of black jurors, so the local bourgeois press is saying that racism on the part of the black jurors caused the split verdict!

What must be clear by now to any close observers is that most of the people the government has arrested, assaulted, character assassinated and even murdered, since the Brink's armored car robbery attempt on October 20, 1981, have been jumped on by the government simply because they were black activists or had been members of militant black organizations of the 60's.

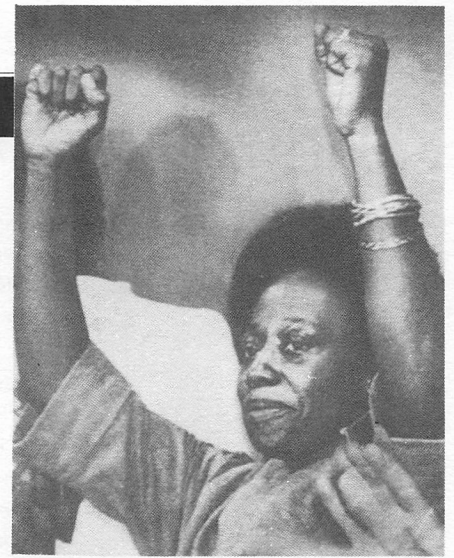
The sweeping arrests and grand jury harassment since the Brink's incident make it clear that the government is trying to take the rest of the Panthers, Weather People and Republic of New Afrika (RNA) members off the streets.

They've been trying to lock up most of the people they've now framed, for the last 10 or 15 years. There have been no convictions on any charges since their sweeping arrests. Most of the people locked up are there for refusing to cooperate with a gestapo-like grand jury, which has been demanding samples of peoples' hair or trying to piece together non-testimony which has been gathered in most cases after torturing prisoners.

In most of these non-cases there is not a shred of evidence, even circumstantial. LaBorde, the father of five children, is also charged with the Brink's attempted "appropriation" supposedly by the Black Liberation Army (BLA). Now all black activists are connected to the BLA, according to the FBI, even the white Weather Underground. But for all the millions of lying words published in the media to the effect that the state had busted the BLA, there is no evidence, not one firm case, and no convictions.

Meanwhile, the government can swoop into Mississippi and arrest Fulani Ali, a longtime RNA militant. They can lock up Weather People and RNA and ex-Panthers simply because of the hysteria the Reagan Right is creating to enable them to lock up what they see as the last revolutionaries from the 60's.

It is all part of the rush to the far right led by Reagan under the mistaken idea that somehow open repression can crush not only the BLM but major dissent in the U.S. The growing resistance to the government's Brink's ripoff of



Cynthia Boston (Fulani Ali), Republic of New Afrika member.

activists shows the lie in this idea already.

It is absolutely critical that all progressive people oppose the quasi-legal lynching of this sector of the BLM. And it should be clear that this opposition comes even though as Marxists, for instance, the editors of *THE BLACK NATION* could not support the kind of putschist, "foco" theory, "terrorist" line of instant revolution that some of the organizations attacked by the state in this situation are identified with. There can be no real revolution unless it erupts out of the peoples' determination to be rid of their oppression. We favor no small group "conspiracies" to make revolution, echoing Lenin's opposition to the Blanquists and terrorists who thought that only their isolated actions against the state would make revolution, opting for opportunism and dismissing the patient, often tedious long range method of organizing the masses favored by Marxist revolutionaries.

And, of course, we are no nationalists. Yet we support the nationalists to the extent they attack imperialism and we oppose the state's attack on them. We support anyone who attacks imperialism, to the exact extent to which they attack imperialism, regardless of their ideology. But of course, that does not mean we uphold the various ideologies in the broad united front against monopoly capitalism that objectively exists in this country. We are Marxists. We stand for the multinational working class and Socialist revolution! □

## WE HAVE BEEN BELIEVERS

*We have been believers believing in the black gods of an old land,  
believing in the secrets of the seeress and the magic of  
the charmors and the power of the devil's evil ones.*

*And in the white gods of a new land we have been believers believing  
in the mercy of our masters and the beauty of our brothers,  
believing in the conjure of the humble and the faithful  
and the pure.*

*Neither the slavers' whip nor the lynchers' rope nor the bayonet  
could kill our black belief. In our hunger we beheld the  
welcome table and in our nakedness the glory of a long  
white robe. We have been believers in the new Jerusalem.*

*We have been believers feeding greedy grinning gods, like a Moloch  
demanding our sons and our daughters, our strength and  
our wills and our spirits of pain. We have been believers,  
silent and stolid and stubborn and strong.*

*We have been believers yielding substance for the world. With our  
hands have we fed a people and out of our strength have  
they wrung the necessities of a nation. Our song has  
filled the twilight and our hope has heralded the dawn.*

*Now we stand ready for the touch of one fiery iron, for the cleansing  
breath of many molten truths, that the eyes of the blind  
may see and the ears of the deaf may hear and the tongues  
of the people be filled with living fire.*

*Where are our gods that they leave us asleep? Surely the priests and  
the preachers and the powers will hear. Surely now that  
our hands are empty and our hearts too full to pray they  
will understand. Surely the sires of the people will send  
us a sign.*

*We have been believers believing in our burdens and our demigods  
too long. Now the needy no longer weep and pray; the  
long-suffering arise, and our fists bleed against the bars  
with a strange insistency.*

— Margaret Walker

