

THE WHEN OF IT IS NOW:

ART AND REVOLUTION FOR THE BLACK MAN

BY

ABDUL HAKIMU IBN ALKALIMAT

FISK UNIVERSITY

AND

PEOPLES COLLEGE

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, U. S. A.

1973

This paper is a position on the role of art in the midsts of a colonial war of national liberation. This must be viewed as a peoples re-birth, because a new culture can only result from the toil of the peoples work, and the work of a colonized people is national liberation. We consider the question of art essential because in our struggle it has too often been attacked and dismissed, or exaggerated into sect elitism. We need scientific analysis that provides theoretical guidelines for action, a total process all inclusive of a peoples life, including intellectuals and artists.

This article will deal with two major aspects of cultural decolonialization:

- (1) How does Art contribute to the liberation struggle of a colonized people?
- (2) How does a colonized people generate a post-colonial revolutionary culture?

As a colonized people (Africans captured and colonized in the west) we have suffered the total perversion of our culture -- especially our art. In its most meaningful sense art includes every activity people engage in when it is raised to the highest level of execution. Art involves definitions of good (Beauty) in as many forms as are available to the senses and imagination of a people. It is the highest expression of a peoples culture. Since colonialism moves to subordinate and totally control a group, the perversion of a peoples art is a **major key** to the total subversion of the peoples culture.

Traditional African Tribal Art has been dealt with in the typical two-faced manner common to colonialism. The material artifacts have ended up in the colonial capitals (Berlin, Paris, London, New York) providing the opportunity for white art to imitate its genius (Picasso, Modigliani, etc.). On the other hand Africans were tortured until they swore allegiance to the white western cultural gods (or were killed), thus setting in motion the suicidal urge of two forms of culture for the

colonized: (1) The native Bourgeoise who aped white ways and served whites as aides in colonial rule (house niggers), (2) the uncivilized natives who were forced to become existential camelions of white culture (pork, Jesus, and bad liquor). But for most of the colonized, both of these opposites were internalized and set to war against each other permanently maiming the individual colonized personality.

So we can see quite clearly the real impact of colonization is enforced when this double negative is internalized and functions to control a native culture- the assimilationist drive vs. suicidal escapism in the face of existential despair. We were so messed up we policed ourselves (dig the attacks on Nat Turner, DuBois, Martin, and Malcolm). Note that most so called "Negro" crime occurs in the segregated Black Community. And the Black middle class embraces the beast's oppressive ways championing Black capitalism to exploit Black people using colonial segregation for monopoly markets (dig the Baptist church treasury, Negro Insurance companies, and Ebony).

We must understand that colonialization means disease, poison, and death, and a colonized people are the walking dead. Amos Mor is the truth when he calls us to first understand death, then life.

The important question is how to treat the illness of colonialism, how to de-colonize the colonized culture of captive Africans (Black culture in the United States). Fanon describes three historical stages for the Black artist-intellectual:

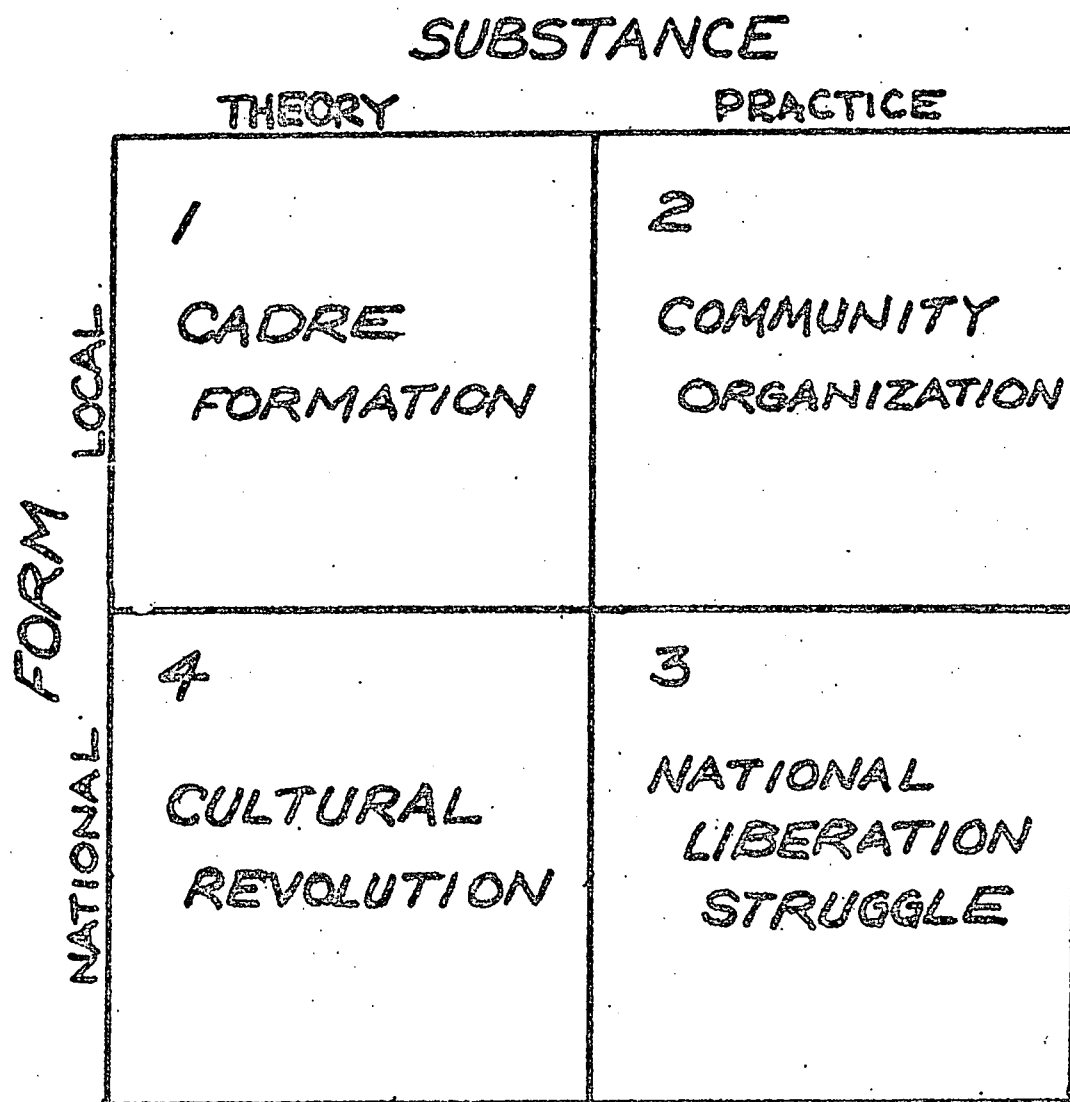
- (1) establishing proof of a people's capacity to assimilate;
- (2) establishing the rich heritage of traditional culture; and
- (3) establishing the cultural values of the people's colonial war of liberation. The struggle of Black people in the United States of America has been characterized by the first two alternatives. And these are the alternatives that have both betrayed the true realities of our people and the truths necessary to escape the colonial mark of oppression.

The first stage was characteristic of the 1920's Harlem renaissance in which the major thrust was to demonstrate that Blacks could deal all artistic forms. This was carried to a higher level during the WPS 1940's in which art was tied to the social conditions of the masses in the cities. These two periods make an historical stage, the first period more petty bourgeoisie, the other being more proletariat.

Traditional culture has been present as an influence among us Blacks but only in the recent period has it gained such a dominant influence. Traditional Africa has become a significant reference for cultural nationalists. It is a useful first stage because it is the negation of a negation (assimilation) based on a historical analysis. Cultural nationalism helps African people regain their identity vis-a-vis the alien Europeans (white people). However, it is important that two dangers are avoided: (a) that we take precaution not to re-tribalize Black people in the west, and (b) that we give people the identity of a positive future of life and not resign folks to reliving a dead past. Whether it is fraternities and sororities, different islamic groups, or teen (some say gang) nations, the problem is that we might be really talking about social, religious, or warrior tribes that are emerging to wage the same intense fratricide that is plaguing the African continent. Also, the only traditional culture is an ancestral tribal one; the all African culture is only to be found in the future. All of Africa has never been united, and so it must be, for only then will we have a culture that is really Pan-African.

The peoples war of colonial liberation is the only other alternative, one that we are undertaking at this very moment in history. As Malik Shabazz (Malcolm X) said so clearly, the Black revolution must be about land (all of it) and it will be bloody. Our colonial war of liberation will be about gettin down in a very funky way. All of the people will participate in it if we are to have a nation, and it is only thru this struggle by all of the people that we will survive. Struggle is the only way that colonize people can cleanse themselves and move toward the day of a New Man. This is the inevitable course of history that Nrumah learned from the

# MODEL OF STAGES FOR CULTURAL LIBERATORS



Ghana experience, one that Black people in the west had better wake up to as soon as possible.

We will be concerned with art and culture as reconstructed through struggle, specifically revolutionary national liberation struggle. So while our model focuses on those traditionally called artist, we shun the term artist because of its bourgeoisie elitist connotation. The term "liberator" rather than actor comes from the National Black Theater Workshop in Harlem. It is far more fitting for the real job at hand. So we will use the term Cultural liberator to indicate those people who seize hold of cultural activities to move toward the struggle for national liberation.

The model presented here is based on two different dimensions: (a) whether the activity is primarily theoretical or practical; and (b) whether the activity is within a dominant or secondary geographical arena. The first dimension contrasts the formulation of verifiable truths for our people with efforts to bring about their verification among the people. This means that the theoretical stage always implies a practical test of the theories. The second dimension focuses on structural organization within the colonial context, and contrasts the building of local bases of power with the national struggle for liberation and decolonialization.

The model contains four basic stages that develop from a lower level to a higher level

(1) CADRE FORMATION: This stage involves a small group of people (The size being subject to the activities of the group) that develops and maintains intimate involvement with each other. The cadre is most important unit for the cultural liberator second only to his blood family (if not identical with or inclusive of the family). This is the first arena for cultural innovation for the cultural liberator must serve his people by reconstructing his own life according to struggle against oppression. The essence of the cadre of cultural liberators is individual group interde-

pendence, each member being fully capable of making a total statement, though reaching full realization when moving collectively with all other members.

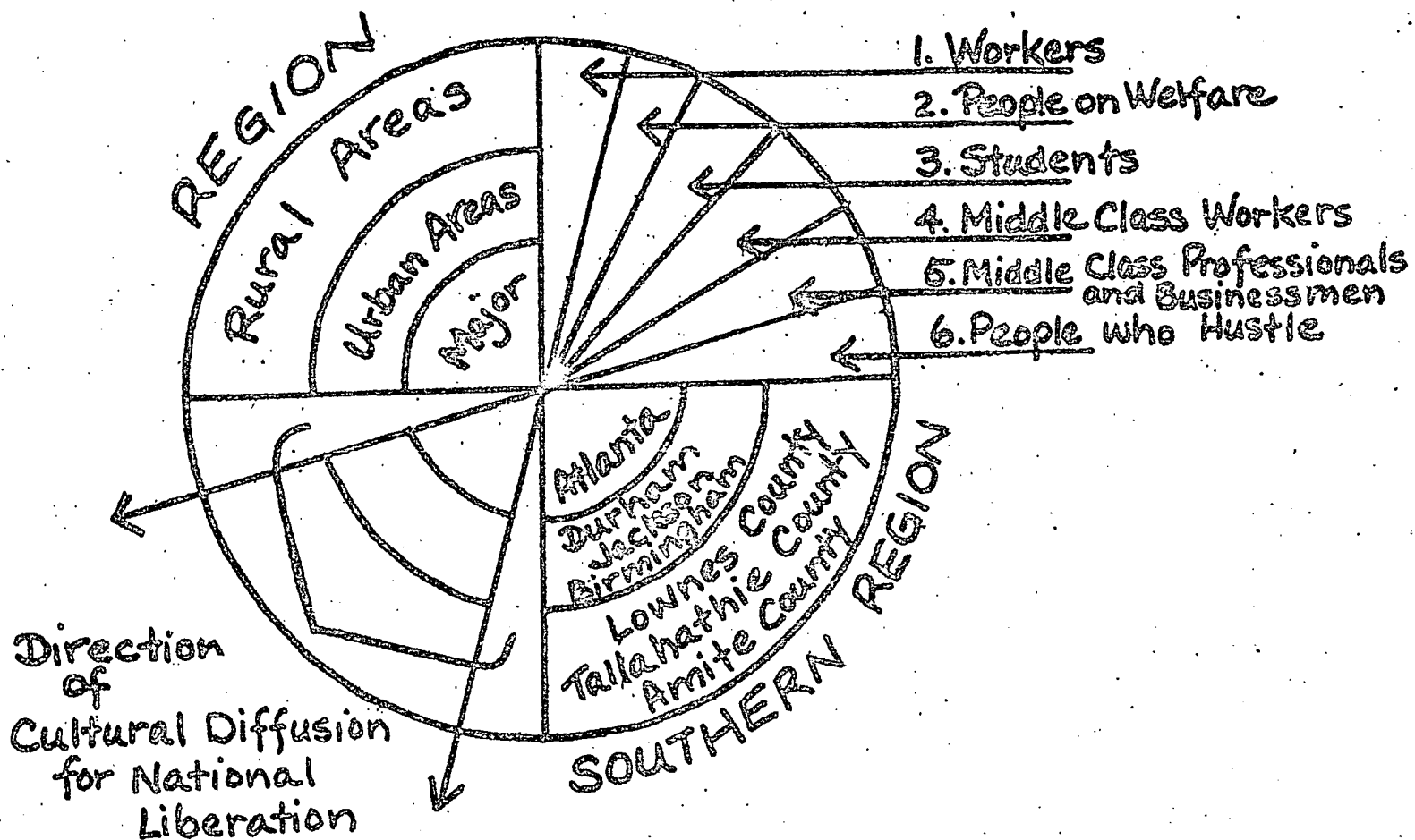
(2) COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION: This stage involves one or more cadres in the mobilization of people within a given area, e.g. a neighborhood or community. Some of the well known attempts, have included, community cultural Centers (Atlanta Center For Black Art, Afro-Arts thertre in Chicago), Community Theatre groups (Concept East in Detroit, or Lafayette Theatre in Harlem), community information centers (Timbuktu Market of New Africa in Atlanta, Nashville and Riverside and community schools (Learning house in Atlanta, Malcolm X Liberation University in Greensboro, North Carolina). The essential move is to engage the community in the activity to the point where the program is self-supporting, meaning staffed and funded by the community itself.

(3) NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLE: The struggle for National liberation is primarily a struggle to liberate an oppressed Black nation whost essential character is as an exploited working class.

As long as this struggle is led by the middle class it will be sold out to the highest bidder and turned against the people. Even though we have been brain washed against the masses, they are the true makers of history. So, all must be geared for their use. "Moreover" we can't urge a successful struggle unless we form a united front of all groups, led by the Black working class. All educators, ministers, artists, and other middle class types must follow the objective interests of the working class if we are to have a revolution.

(4) CULTURAL REVOLUTION: This revolution can only grow out of revolutionary power. We must see a connection between real and apparent truth. Apparent truth is subjective, emotional any myth while what is real is objective, political, and historical.

# Model of Structural Components for National Liberation Organization





So it is with culture. The day to day experiences of all the people is the truth of history, not what an "elite" feels about his own perceptions of that experience. We must understand that art must raise up millions and more and not simply draw an art lovers sect together. If art is to reflect and create for the peoples culture, then it must naturally flow within the everyday experiences of the people. We must therefore help start the motion for the people to rise up and change the structure of their everyday life. Only then can we have a real cultural revolution. We must define work as we are to define soul, we must know agricultural machinery if we are to know musical instruments, we must know architectural drawing if we know how to paint. Sekou Toure says: "To take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves."

Now that we have the basic four stages in mind we can look at the process of how it flows together and works. How can we get it on? The formation of a cadre involves a small number of people isolating and resolving as many contradictions as possible.

The logic of Black identity is:

(accept personal self)	I am Black	I am Black
(accept collective self)	Black is Beautiful	Black is African
(affirm self)	I am Beautiful	I am African

This is the internal preparation. And as Carolyn Rodgers aptly put it "ultimately one's life-style is his point of view." So our self-development must involve changing our lives in the way we relate to people, where we go, how we utilize time, etc. All art must be verified by the everyday life of the one who creates it, then it has validity in stage one and is the work of a cultural liberator.

The members of the cadre must work together like "fingers on a hand" must always move within the same ideological frame-work. There can be no grand standing we must all play defense and offense, (note our sometime inclinations in athletics)

to the contrary). The "great man" theory of history is an elitist lie. Our only hope is thorough concerted efforts grounded in cohesive units of liberators moving toward revolution. This is the first test of a revolutionary: honesty, trust, respect, selflessness, and SECRECY.

A cadre can be formed to do one or more of three things: (1.) form a study group for systematic analysis of issues and problems; (2.) form an expressive group to create concrete expressions of how each member views the world, e.g. a writers workshop or drama workshop for use as forums for group therapy from colonized Negro to Revolutionary African; and (3.) as a more advanced activity, the cadre can assign each member to an external activity (like a certain job or membership in a certain organization) to secure more information to be analysed for the growth of the cadres potential action. The cadre must always know that in pulling together a few, it is preparing for the many to unite and rise up.

Once the cadre has reached a common identity and analysis it is possible to begin to program. The danger to avoid here is that even if everyone knows himself and his people as African (common identity) and views the structure of societies and history with a common analysis, it is necessary to program on the level of everyone's real commitment so that when the deal goes down everyone can be fully accounted for (i.e., there must be organizational accountability)

As the flow chart indicates, one stage is linked to the next stage. So the development of one or more cadre groups in a given area, leads to community organization through the transformation of identity and conduct. This is a very difficult process to clarify since it has been formulated incorrectly on so many occasions. The cadre of cultural liberators must understand that they serve the people. A cadre must avoid three major problems; (1) self interest (2) subjective sentiment and (3) reactionary nationalism. No matter what the cadre thinks by itself, what the people think is more important.

As Mao would say; the artist must first understand the people, then serve the people who would make the revolution for all the people. A cadre must have collective interest.

A second danger reflects ones disposition toward action. If one is blindly tied to the passing moment of the present it is possible to get trapped into subjective views based on sentiment. This is contrasted with the cultural liberator who bases his activities on objective strategy which takes into account the realities of our peoples struggle. So the cadre never makes decisions based on personal friendship, social cliques, family ties, or tribal loyalties--rather the cadre moves as the objective analysis dictates, never once flinching from disciplined revolutionary work.

Reactionary nationalism, as the third danger, is the nation of salvation for the few; consider Chang Kai Shek on the small island of Formosa, in contrast with Chairman Mao and the Peoples Republic of China, or General Ky versus Uncle Ho, or Puppet Busia versus President Nkrumah. One is reaction the other, revolution.

There are three basic forms of action community organization. The first is for the cadre to develop a cultural base. This will be of value only as it serves the people. The level of consciousness among the people reflects objective history. It is the job of a cultural center to diffuse the cadres knowledge, morality, and purpose throughout the community. This can be a center, an agency, a school, a store, etc. There must be concrete programs to meet the peoples physical needs as an alternative to what a colonized person is forced to do. Secondly, the cadre of cultural liberators must seek out other cadres functioning in different areas--most importantly, political cadres and pull together a broad based community organization addressing itself to all of the peoples reality. This includes doing something about the problems, getting physical about struggle by fully participating with the people.

Cadres operating in the same community must link up, or betray the interest of unity for sect and self.

The third form of action is dispatching cadre members to infiltrate existing institutions, organizations, group, etc. These liberators will be like invisible drops of poison well placed in the veins and arteries of the colonial monster. When the action begins to kill the beast it will be possible for the cultural liberators to manage all aspects of the community, even to the point of total replacement of leadership on all levels of community decision making. The struggle must have ears and eyes everywhere. We must come to know the ways and habits of this system if we are to have our revolution; we must do our homework on them as they have done us. Our ethics are based on revolutionary utility; nothing but our revolutionary liberation struggle serves as the basis of right and wrong. The writers must become journalists, the poets must sing from the juke boxes, the actors must be politicians, the musicians must play in churches and schools. We must do the jobs that get our message to the people. Note that the arrows indicate a back and forth flow.

This signifies the validation of a cadres foundation in the context of community mobilization. But, we must always remember, that historical truth is finally what the collective experiences, so the revolutionary truth is based on the people, not the cadre.

The level of action possible on the community level should be measured in concrete terms and not left to symbolic goals. We must not merely be concerned with how "bad" our music is; we must move to transform all of the "sounds" in the community according to the direction toward revolution. We must make images to help the community see its reality more clearly. Every work of art must be programed on the community level, so that its essence, is absorbed into the living reality of those who will make the revolution, and not an elitist group of "patrons or sponsors"

When we think of a national liberation struggle we must know that we are millions strong in potential, then work to reach the multitude. First we must use the experience gained from the local community, so our analysis must be objective. During the second stage it will be possible to understand the class nature of different groups as a basis for action:

1. People who work
2. People on welfare
3. People who go to school
4. People who are middle class workers
5. People who are middle class professional and businessmen
6. People who hustle

These groups have been formed by the historical forces of oppression and exploitation, capitalism and near fascist police forces. The basic force is the Black worker, he is the hero of our struggle. Art for the Black working class is really art for those who must make the revolution.

Next it is necessary to think in terms of geographical area and structural organization, i.e., regional areas and urban-rural organization. We must begin to diffuse the new cultural explosion to all of the people--especially those who will be most inclined to become totally committed to and involved in the struggle. Once the cadre has spent time pulling together, it then diffuses throughout the community. Once the community begins to pull together, the cadres in the area must begin to leave the community ( or send others) and diffuse themselves to other cities and rural areas. The regional area must have a network of communities actively pulling themselves together. The cultural liberator goes to the people, and this means moving once a job has been taken over by local people. The cultural liberator must organize to have revolutionary units in every community, in every region, throughout the land.

# ART

(AESTHETICS)

SPIRITUAL  
VALUES

EXISTENTIAL  
NORMS

SELF-CONCEPT

SELF-CONDUCT

WE  
(COLLECTIVE)

STRUGGLE

DECOLONIZATION

LIBERATION

REVOLUTION

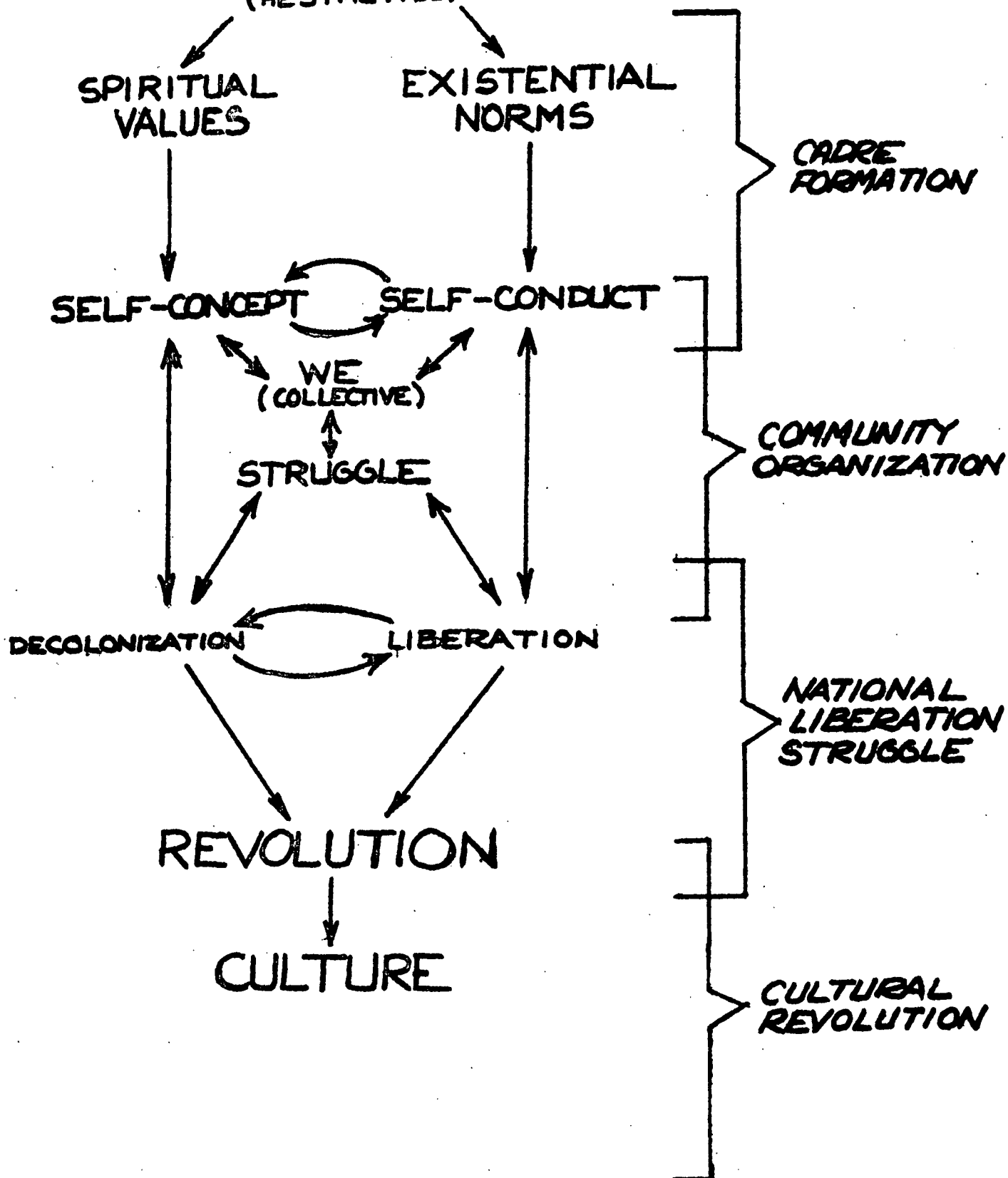
CULTURE

CADRE  
FORMATION

COMMUNITY  
ORGANIZATION

NATIONAL  
LIBERATION  
STRUGGLE

CULTURAL  
REVOLUTION



Regional priorities must include a communications link-up, a skills bank, and constant travel between communities. When one major breakthrough is made then the entire region reallys to consolidate the gain. An example of how this is not happening in Gary Indiana. Mayor Hatcher is a reform politician who can at best be viewed as a buffer force against colonial oppression. Cadres ought to be infiltrating every aspect of Gary getting the revolutionary message out.

The goal would be to use the current mayoral administration as cover to more easily organize cadre's and not necessarily to re-elect politicians. We want it all to come down and not just one of us to be up in it.

Our struggle for national liberation is only revolutionaly if it is totally re-jects colonialism and champions the thrust toward a new humanity. The revolutionary struggle gives birth to the culture of revolution. All activities change in the heat of struggle just as different metals change when subjected to certain levels of heat. Revolution is chemical. All values and practices must change. Revolution changes what you do, when, what you'll wear, and what is beautiful. Everyones work will change. Revolution is change.

Once the work day in the life of a newly liberated nation is done, then all the people will turn to new cultural expressions of themselves. People will dance to new music and wear colors that will make the sun proud. Buildings will celebrate with shapes and colors the families and work they represent and house. The schools will never close and health care will be a person right. This while some are actively moving to join others in their front on the continental colonial war of liberation. The African struggle is a struggle to liberate the African continent so that a new continental nation uniting all African peoples can emerge. We must always keep in mind the protracted war with the west to free the continent is a major priority for all African revolutionaries.

This is a model for the liberation function of Black art and cultural decolonization. It is presented to all who would be cultural liberators as a blueprint for how to get this shit on. The when of it is now!!