

**ROLLAND
SNELLINGS**

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THE many problems—personal or otherwise—which preoccupy me today, revolve around the readiness and preparedness of my “New Breed” generation to replace its elders in racial leadership. My concern is primarily within the areas of values, overall maturity, and last, but not least, ideological clarity. Too often—in many nations, I’m afraid—do young intellectuals and activists satisfy themselves with oversimplified solutions to vastly complicated problems which involve the destinies of countless peoples. (I emphasize this because, until recently, I too had been guilty of these same mistakes.)

In the current African-American freedom struggle, we are witnessing the epic rise of a people to national consciousness, identity and self-respect; along with concrete, historically justified aspirations for self-determination. Needless to say,

THE most pervasive trend for today’s young Black intellectuals is their vigor and degree of self-consciousness about being Black. In short, the dynamics of American assimilation have backfired and given rise to an unintended revolution. Black people have an increased sensitivity in reacting to the institutionalized nature of racial bigotry and are developing a more positive regard for their Black culture and community.

For the older Black generation this has meant an escalation of the traditional pattern of negotiating for progressive changes, while for young Blacks the revolution means reconstituting the basic processes of U. S. American life as they affect Black people. Only by grasping this central theme is it possible to understand the brooding anger, hostility, and danger of Black attitudes

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and actions.

These generalizations are based
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on a rapidly growing number of actions being undertaken by Black people to combat racism, such as: legal changes sought by the NAACP; militant resistance as displayed by Robert Williams; mass marches and negotiations as directed by SCLC; and Northern urban riot-rebellions. Rather than attempt an analysis of some collection of these actions (and in so doing spell out how I agree and disagree with aspects of each), I will offer a sample of pointed personal reflections as evidence for such generalizations. In other words, by pointing out which people I feel are saying/doing significant things and outlining some issues of considerable importance, hopefully the general theme will be made more concrete.

The two men most clearly embodying the essential character of the Black intellectual (rebellious freedom, courageous integrity, wisdom, and social consciousness) are Malcolm X and W. E. B. Du Bois. Malcolm X presented Black manhood as a possibility, not *via* the normal white-orientated status channels but by emerging from the Black community. He possessed a style of life and rhetoric around which a movement of decisive proportions could have been assembled. His published autobiography is a modern classic destined to supplant *Up From Slavery* (which is still quite in demand) as

the Negro life study to become familiar with.

His life shows at least three reactions to the American scene. He was a *nigger* of the ghetto with little hope of escaping crime and a life of fear. After becoming a Muslim, Malcolm emerged as *the* spokesman for a position of total Black alienation from American whites. Malcolm grew in stature. He then began developing a view which focused on the problems, appreciating the problematic nature of whites and heading toward a more differentiated dynamic view of American society. This latter development in the thought of Malcolm X presents a challenge for someone to continue it, while already constituting a fresh perspective from which to program a new Black self-consciousness.

Du Bois is the one outstanding Black intellectual-activist who continued trying to promote changes in the American society without compromising the interests of Black people. He joined an unrelenting scientific career with a spirit of communalism for the folk culture of Black people. The regrettable fact is not that we have lost him by death, for his was a full and productive life, but the popular misuse of his life and work by ideological groups of small significance and polite *bourgeois* Blacks with short memories.

Albert Camus serviced all men

by discussing the man who rebels, the one who has the courage to say no. By not being Black, he broadens the horizon and presents the possibility of an international revolutionary spirit.

But there are many who are in the process of creating, who are still reaping the influence of such men as Malcolm, Du Bois, and Camus. When summarizing the most relevant writers of today it would be important to cite the penetrating insights and critical precision of Ralph Ellison, the cathartic quality of Leroi Jones' expressive tragedy, the brutal surrealist truths of Chester Himes, and the colorful poetic symbols of Melvin Tolson. These men are creatively interpreting the Black experience in American life.

The question of what these and other writers are saying must remain for reading them or their critics. Interpreting these writers must be a dynamic process because the Black-white problem is so explosive, and consequently, in need of constant reevaluation. Nevertheless, it is possible to undertake a general formulation of issues faced by them.

One major issue is the managed illusion and destructive impact of certain popular U. S. American concepts and norms. An example of this is the blind worship of political citizenship, a practice which falsely categorizes issues into foreign and domestic, and at the same time denies existing socio-political categories of American life. The

consensus and conflicts of race, religion, nationality, and social class are what dominate American life. Each of these is grounded in the peculiar development of American history, but at the same time is linked to an international pattern of a similar nature. The issue involves the need to face problems with a more concrete, less naive, view of social and political reality.

As an example: the fact of poverty in India, Mississippi, or Haiti presents the same constellation of problems for which we must begin to think of the same programs for their solutions. People are hungry. The people are colored. The land has been raped by corrupt and oppressive political regimes. The same forces are at work promoting overt racism in Rhodesia, South Africa, Angola, Mississippi, Watts and Harlem. And we cannot promote change unless we follow the advice of Claude McKay, "And for their thousand blows deal one death blow!" And similarly, the barbaric death game of the Viet Nam war.

A second major issue concerns the nature of the goals of the Black community. With the increased potential of technology and mechanical efficiency reigning as the supreme value, Black people must reassess, and thereby reconstitute, their values. In light of this, Baldwin has rhetorically asked, "Who wants to integrate into a burning house?" Black people on the streets of many cities gave their answer with the rioters cry, "Burn, Baby,

Burn!" Who can say, perhaps there was no other way for those Black People to express themselves and feel confident that they were heard. However, if we remain on this level, the depth of the problem will cause everyone to "burn." The problem demands that we find and cultivate a basis on which to save ourselves, and hopefully everybody, in the midsts of anti-human values and anti-people institutions.

This leads us to the last major issue I'd like to discuss. As every major social analyst has reported, America is controlled and managed by power. If this be true, then a man or a people without power is a ward of those in power, for possessing power makes one an autonomous agent from the immediate control of others with power. People need power. Black people need Black Power! The central point is that the Black community, in order for Black People to survive and develop a positive standard of life, must develop social, economic, and political power autonomous from the immediate control by outside forces.

In addition to the obvious material results of such a development, even the use of the term has meaning. Too long the images and concepts held by Blacks have been projected in the interests of others. The communications media made the term "Black Power" into a fearsome cry, a veritable war whoop. Well, that's exactly what it is. But

the really frightening thing is that the war is not going to be a Nat Turner or Mau Mau affair; the frightening thing is that nobody knows what it's going to be like. The dictums of a systematic ideology are no longer relevant. The dictums must now come from (hopefully) serious dialogue between the intellectuals' use of scientific knowledge and the experience of the people, or the experience of the people will speak for itself, ergo, Watts!

Even in light of these (and other) problems I can turn to the future with some optimism. This results from my faith in human beings to rebel and also from the degree of brotherhood I have experienced. Yes, the future of Black people must be understood with this in mind: We, an ever growing number of Black intellectuals, are committing our lives to the Black Community in hopes of surviving, of everyone surviving. Our version of the national anthem is being wailed by such as John Coltrane and Archie Shepp. Our soldiers are organizers for SNCC and other such organizations. Our Armageddon is fast approaching. In sum, as put by Black poet laureate of Harlem, Langston Hughes,

O, Let America Be America
Again—

The land that never has been yet—
And yet must be—
The land where every man is free.