



A JOURNAL OF AFFAIRS OF BLACK ARTISTS

**Where has the Black Artist in America  
been all this time?**

**He's been in the streets in Watts,  
in Roxbury and Chicago.**

**He's been in his body. In hard times.  
He's been in the eyes of people who love him  
and in the eyes of people who hate him.**

**And he's been putting it all down.  
On canvas. In stone. Out of wood.**

**Affairs of Black Artists  
a new journal devoted to the life  
and times of Black Artists, takes a good look  
at where the Black Artist in America has been,  
where he is, and where he's going.**

**It's beautiful. It's enlightening.**

**It's about time.**

# Notes on Art and Liberation

By Abdul Hakimu Ibn Alkalimat

Our struggle for peace and freedom must be waged on a higher level if we are to survive the repression of incipient fascism. There is a sinister scheme behind the selective assassination of Black leaders (Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, Martin L. King, Ralph Featherstone, and Fred Hampton); military suppression of "legal" protest (massacres of Orangeburg and Jackson State College); legislation to sterilize welfare mothers with more than one illegitimate child (proposed bill in the Tennessee Legislature); and Black Capitalism. This represents an attempt to subvert political movements, increase exploitation of poor unemployed Black people, and buy off the Black Bourgeoisie. So it is necessary for all progressive Black people, especially artists-intellectuals, to understand this growing fascism and carefully organize to struggle against it. Not to struggle against fascism is to commit suicide.

This brief article is intended to deal with two questions for the Black artist-intellectual. (1) *Where are we now?* This question can be answered only if we understand our historical development. Franz Fanon has described the ideological dialectic of African artist-intellectuals as consisting of three goal orientations:

- A. to establish proof of our capacity to assimilate
- B. to re-establish our traditional culture
- C. to articulate the development of values in the peoples colonial war of liberation.

All of these alternatives reflect a historical progression, although they currently coexist among African people today.

These three stages fit our history, especially the 1960's: (a) Civil Rights Movement for Democratic Reform, (b) Cultural Nationalism, and (c) Revolutionary Nationalism. Specific examples

of these are the three most well known chairmen of SNCC: 1) John Lewis, now director of the Voter Education Project, an affiliate of the interracial Southern Regional Council; 2) Stokely Carmichael, now married to Miriam Makeba, living in Guinea and proposing a back-to-Africa version of Pan Africanism; and 3) H. Rap Brown, political refugee in the underground, sought by state and federal forces.

All of these positions have support as alternatives for the 1970's, and include many sub-types. The first alternative is no longer on the lower levels, but has manifestations in the U.S. Senate, on the Federal Reserve Board, on every major University faculty, and with thousands of elected officials. Major spokesmen for assimilationism are Prof. Martin Kilson of Harvard University, Bayard Rustin, of the A. Philip Randolph Foundation, Kenneth Clark of M.A.R.C., and Roy Wilkins of NAACP.

Cultural Nationalism, the second alternative, has moved beyond "race pride" to "Black is Beautiful", from "New Negroes" to the affirmation "We Are an African People". And there is an increasing thrust behind these trends with organization like the Congress of African Peoples, African Heritage Studies Association, Student Organization for Black Unity. The major spokesmen for this position today include Imamu Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), Don Lee, and Jesse Jackson.

And last, Revolutionary Nationalism. This position brings together the notion of national liberation for an oppressed people, and revolution of world society for everyone's freedom. The spokesmen for this are, Robert Allen, James Foreman, Huey Newton, Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, and Amilar Cabral; and the International Black Workers Congress. The Black artist-intellectual must

be knowledgeable about these three alternatives and systematically work through them. You can dig on Malcolm's life and see how he did it. Malcolm Little and Detroit Red were on opposite sides of the law, each caught up in the alternative of assimilation, Malcolm X. is alternative two, Cultural Nationalism, and Malik Shabazz alternative three, Revolutionary Nationalism. These are the stages of Black development that we must understand if we are to struggle on the highest possible level.

(2) *What must be done?* There are four critical questions that must be dealt with. a) *What have we gained since 1954, and how can we hold it?* As Black artist-intellectuals we are in key organizational positions that give us access to resource, we have community facilities and growing publication outlets. The key is to protect this, but not at the expense of our peoples needs. If there is to be a community gallery, then it should also serve for community meetings, free breakfast programs, etc. If we publish it should deal with the realities of Black exploitation and not simply the Beauty of Black. b) *How can we more effectively build for the future?* The key word is study, collective study. We are in the process of building a new movement for change in the 1970's, and for this we need a network of study groups who are developing revolutionary theories of change while beginning to initiate small local programs. Build small study groups to generate community programs around the concrete needs of Black people. c) *How to fight and destroy negative forces?* This task identifies the principal antagonistic contradiction as racism and capitalism. In other words we must get to a basic understanding by probing beyond symptoms to the real enemy. Just like the Vietnamese people must understand that

# Meeting The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition

By JoAnn Whatley



General Ky is a puppet of the USA pentagon, the Black community must understand that the Black Bourgeoise and the police work for the same man, Mr. State Monopoly Corporate Capitalism. d) *Who are the most progressive people and how to support them?* This must be an objective question you can answer with facts and not conjecture. In struggle each time you can accept a Brother, you are doing it to save your life. The same is true if you are analyzing an entire community, and accept a group of people like workers, welfare recipients, and students. And when you know who, the only reasonable support combines material goals and funds, with political support for the struggles purpose.

So each Black artist-intellectual must understand the historical struggles of his people if he is to be in the struggle today. Political understanding of our oppression and liberation must be a necessary mental environment for artistic creativity if we are to have a flowering of Revolutionary Black Art.

The value of (an) art(ifact) is not its price or praise, it is the number of people exposed to it and its effect on those people.

Art must not be sold, it must be free.

Art must not be private, it must be public.

Art must not be stored, it must be used.

Art must not become our reality, it must help us find a better way to deal with our reality.

#### References:

- Mao Tse-Tung, *On Literature and Art*  
 Robert Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*  
 Harold Cruse, *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*  
 Franz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*

At 1 P.M., January 12, 1969 – a fair but piercingly cold day – a predominantly black group of about 35 persons began walking in formation before the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. They were carrying picket signs and chanting “Soul’s been sold again”.

This was the first manifestation of a group of black artists and art experts who had organized ad hoc the week before to protest the Museum’s forthcoming exhibition entitled “Harlem on My Mind”. This exhibition encased the Museum’s ambitions of making a sweeping statement on the cultural history of the people whose enigmatic world lies on the periphery of the Museum. (The Museum is located at 5th Avenue and 82nd Street.)

The pickets were expressing their outrage before what they saw as the Museum’s brazen omission of black expertise in setting up the show – which they felt had deteriorated into a white man’s view of Harlem, emphasizing socio-economic aspects at the cost of all esthetic considerations. They were especially outraged that such a show had not included the work of a single black sculptor or painter.

The group called itself the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (often written Black *Emergency* Cultural Coalition, and currently referred to as the B.E.C.C.). The abundant critics of that show helped chalk up a stoney victory for the B.E.C.C. But most of its members came away from that confrontation – which they had thought would be their last – with deep scars. The Museum had used the roughest tactics in dealing with the presence of this group of black artists who dared contest the legitimacy of Museum procedure. –And those tactics seemed to have gotten silent consent from the decision-making chambers of other City museums. The B.E.C.C. had to face the reality that the tip of a great iceberg had been forced to surface: that iceberg, racism in the museum system.